pós-lit

# PALESTRA

Prof. Dr. Bruce Stewart/UFRN

## Irish Literature and the Idea of the Nation

Debatedor: Prof. Marcel de Lima Santos

26 de maio de 2021
às 14:30 hs

Plataforma Zoom:

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7589272849?pwd=QUZCS1:J5ZHU0UklKRVJ4Q1B0dVdkQT09

Timothy Brennan - 'It was the novel that historically accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the "one, yet many" of national life, and by mimicking the structures of the nation, a clearly ordered jumble of languages and styles. Socially, *the novel joined the newspaper as the major vehicle of the national print media, helping to standardize language, encourage literacy, and remove mutual incomprehensibility*. But it did much more than that. *Its manner of presentation allowed people to imagine the special community that was a nation*.

——"The Longing for National Form", in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha, 1990, p.49).

James Joyce

— The soul is born, he said vaguely, first in those moments I told you of. It has a slow and dark birth, more mysterious than the birth of the body. When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.

Davin knocked the ashes from his pipe.

— Too deep for me, Stevie, he said. But a man's country comes first. Ireland first, Stevie. You can be a poet or a mystic after.

— Do you know what Ireland is? asked Stephen with cold violence. Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow.

—— *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Chap. 5.

IRELAND/EIRE

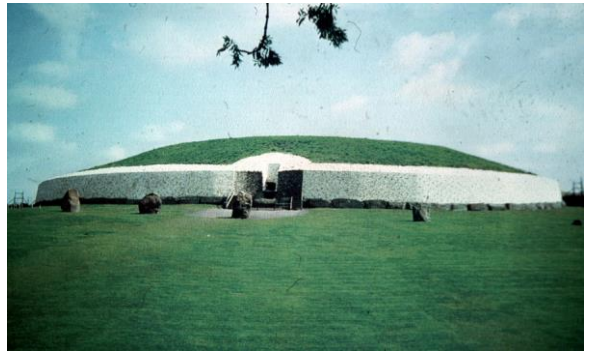

# "Nationality is a cultural artifact" – but *is* it?

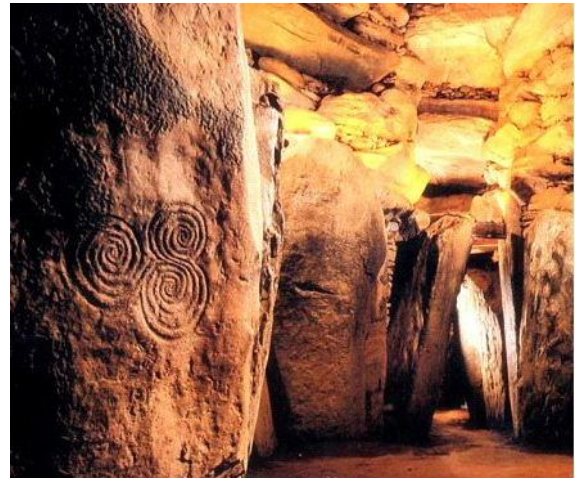
MacMorris – *'Of my nation! What ish my nation? Ish a villan and a bastard, and a knave and a rascal. What ish my nation? Who talks of my nation? I do not know you so good a man as myself.'* (Shakespeare's Henry V, Pt. II – 3, ii).

Benedict Anderson - 'Nationality is a cultural artifact … imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members [...] imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to died for such limited imaginings.' (*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of National-ism*, [rev. edn.] London: Verso 1991), p.7.

Homi K. Bhabha - 'Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths [*sic*] of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation - or narration - might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from these traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west.' ('Introduction: Narrating the Nation', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Bhabha, London: Routledge 1990, p.1.)

Note: In using the phrase '*myths* of time' [above], Bhabha is perhaps misquoting the common expression '*mists* of time' – here, in one of the very few places where his non-native grasp of English perhaps shows. Yet 'myths' makes definite sense in the anthropological domain and might possibly be intended as a kind of pun.





The megalithic burial mounds of Co. Meath in Ireland were built in 3,200 BC – before Stonehenge or the Pyramids – and function as an astrological calendar giving the date of the winter equinox to this day.

# Part 1: History Lessons

Yeats, by Ronan Gillespie (Sligo town)

The events of modern Irish cultural history crucially revolve around the English subjugation of the island-nation between the Norman Invasion of 1169 and the Act of Union in 1801 - when Ireland lost its Parliament - to the Home Rule Act of 1914, when that parliament was promised to return after World War I was over.

In 1916, the Easter Rising brought Republican separatism to the fore and in 1922 an independent Irish state (though still tied to the English Crown) was created by Treaty. From 1891, when the Irish Literary Revival and the Gaelic League were founded, Ireland was engaged in a process of cultural re-invention led by W. B. Yeats and others which turned to armed revolutionism with the addition of the Irish Volunteers in 1913 – answering the formation of the Ulster Volunteers by Protestants settlers in the North-East to defend the British Union against the imminent threat of Home Rule.

What follows here is an over-view of Irish history having bearing on the spirit of revivalism and revolutionism in the nation-building period from 1892-1922. The later date is that of the formation of the Irish Free State but also coincidentally that of the publication of *Ulysses* by James Joyce.

Joyce, by Milton Hebald (Fluntern, Zurich)

# History lessons (1/3)

7,000-500 BC — Ireland is populated by a Mesolithic people who created the mythology and built the *brugha,* or burial mounds (later regarded as fairy palaces).

?500 BC — Arrival of the Celts, a Bronze Age warrior-caste who established four provinces - each with kingships, legal institutions and poetic-bardic centres and a unified group of dialectics called Gaeilge (Gaelic) or Irish, using written records from c.400 AD.

432: Arrival of St. Patrick. Development of monastic-scholarly culture. European missions.
750: Viking Raids. Development of urban centres (as distinct from earthen *duns,* or forts).

1169 — Anglo-Norman Invasion; arrival of Henry II, 1170; submission of Irish chieftains to the English Crown.

Henry VIII creates Lordship of Ireland, 1542; centuries following the English Reformation to be marked by religious strife between the English Crown and the Irish chieftains/earls.

1601 — Defeat of Irish at Kinsale and Flight of the Earls, when Hugh O'Neill (Earl of Tyrone) and other hereditary Irish chief departed for Catholic Europe (Spain and Rome).

The effect of the defeat of the native Catholic-Gaelic aristocracy who supported the failed Spanish invasion was to deprive native society of its leadership and to enable the Plantation of English and Scots 'replacing' the troublesome Irish – a policy that lead to the formation of a Protestant enclave in Northern Ireland which remains there to this day.

1690 — Battle of the Boyne and defeat of the King James II by William III on Irish soil.

The defeat of the last Catholic king of England was followed by the introduction the Penal Laws and the suppression of Catholic religion, education, property-rights and admission to professions. Though much relaxed by 1760s these oppressive laws remained 'on the books' until 1827 when Catholic Emancipation was driven through Parliament by Daniel O'Connell.

# History lessons (2/3)

1798 — United Irishmen's Rebellion inspired by Catholic Jacobitism and French Republicanism (*jacobin*) and savagely repressed by British militia – then at war with France.

1801: The fright received by the Anglo-Irish ruling class ('protestant ascendancy') at the Rebellion resulted in the Irish Parliament – both Lords and Commons – voting itself out of existence and passing legislative authority back to Westminster (London), where Irish MPs would sit in future. The independence of the Irish Parliament, involving Trade as well as military rights, which had been won by the Protestant Parliament under Henry Grattan in 1782 was thus lost. The effort to regain it was known at first as Repeal of the Union and later as Home Rule.

1845-49 — The Irish Famine reduced the population by half – one-third through deaths by starvation and disease and the remainder through emigration.

The British government's mismanagement of the Famine served to demonstrate the principle of British Misrule and Home Rule thus emerged as the political goal for the majority of Catholics, and many Protestants too. Catholic Emancipation had been belatedly granted in 1827 by which date religious differences had firmly cemented into a form of national resistance to British Unionism.

After the Famine came the "uprisings" of 1848 and 1867 on the part of the Young Irelanders and Fenians respectively. Each was routinely followed by executions and/or deportations (chiefly to Australia) thus establishing the dominant pattern of 19th century agitation in Ireland. Meanwhile, the Irish Parliamentary Party continued to send MPs to London where their hostility to the British government became increasingly troublesome for English statesmen ..

1914— Home Rule passed. Outbreak of the European War (World War I). Home Rule deferred.

1891: The death of Charles Stewart Parnell, an Anglo-Irish landlord and leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party who joined with the Land League in the struggle to overthrow tenancy law in Ireland, created a space for a cultural movement sometimes called the Irish Literary Renaissance. (According to WB Yeats, "the wax was soft," awaiting a new stamp.)

# History lessons (3/3)


POBLACHT NA H EIREANN.
THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT
OF THE
IRISH REPUBLIC
TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND.

The 1916 Proclamation

## 1916 — An uniformed and armed Insurrection – the Easter Rising – was organised by the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and the Irish Volunteers

The rank and file of the Volunteers were also members of the Gaelic League and had learnt Irish as well as the use of arms. When World War I broke out, Ireland already had *two* volunteer armies representing Nationalism and Unionism. The executions of the Rising leaders by firing squad inflamed public opinion which, during the Rising at least, had been largely opposed to the use of violence in the capital city.

## 1919 — Withdrawal of Irish MPs from Westminster and founding of Dail Eireann (Irish Parliament) in Dublin

82 out of 110 Parliamentary seats in the country went to Sinn Féin [i.e., Ourselves] candidates who promised to remove to Dublin after the 1918 General Election. Only the Northern seats and two University seats attached to Trinity College, Dublin, remained Unionist. The formation of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) led to attacks on the police throughout Ireland – 400 officers were killed in the ensuing guerrilla war – causing the British to recruit the notorious Black and Tans.


FORTY-FIRST YEAR
BRITISH AND IRISH CONFEREES AGREE UPON SETTLEMENT
Peace in Sight After Ages-Long Dispute—Terms Submitted to Parliament

**6 Dec. 1921**: The Anglo-Irish Treaty established the Irish Free State in the south and the state (or 'statelet') of Northern Ireland in the north-east corner (roughly corresponding to the province of Ulster). Each of these rapidly became a sectarian state though broadly modelled on British democratic institutions. A Civil War in the south ensued between 'die-hard' Republicans and the pro-Treaty side which formed the new government.

## 1937 — Revised Irish Constitution of today introduced by Eamon de Valera, then Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and later President of Ireland.

1949: In this year the Irish government of the day unilaterally declared an Irish Republic thus bringing to completion the 'dream' of complete independence from British rule. In 1967 peaceful marches conducted by Civil Rights Movement of Northern Ireland were attacked by the Royal Ulster Police force and a new era of violence began in Ireland. These later "Troubles" formally ended with the the Belfast (or Good Friday) Agreement of 1998 which guaranteed equal rights and even dual citizenship for all residences of Northern Ireland. It left the question of Irish Unity open ....

# Gaelic Society and English Power

"Marriage of Strongbow & Aoife")

Irish nationhood dates from the Gaelic Period when Ireland was unified under the Gaelic Order stemming from the Celtic invasion(s) of the 7th-5th centuries before Christ which conferred a unified language, a legal code (Brehon Law) and an ethnological system of custom and belief on the whole island. By 400 AD the country was organised into five provinces (or *cuigí*), each ruled by the different tribal overlords of their resident clan or people (*tuatha*), with a 'central fifth' (*mide*) which was regarded as the ceremonial centre (or *omphalos*) of the island associated with druidic practices and located at Hill of Uisneach, near Mullingar in modern Co. Westmeath. Later a High Kingship was established further east at the Hill of Tara.

Pagan Ireland was peacefully converted to Christianity by St. Patrick, a British Christian who was enslaved in Ireland, escaped, and later returned to conduct his mission. (He record that he dreamt a dream in which the Irish called him to "walk with them again in the woods of Foglucht".) After his arrival in 432 AD, the Gaelic cultural institution of kingship and *filí* (or bards) quickly converted to the new religion and added distinctive tradition of Celtic Christianity which differed from the Roman Church chiefly in the central role of monasticism but also the date assigned for Easter which remained outside of the Julian calendar. Both classical learning and the shadow of pagan heroic traditions were apparent in Celtic Christian culture.

Such differences allowed the English Crown to win permission from Pope Adrian – an Englishman – to invade Ireland on the pretext of church reform and in 1169 a Welsh-Norman knight called Richard de Clare arrived with his small army at the invitation of the Leinster king Diarmuid MacMurrough who was involved in wars with his Western neighbours. Strongbow's successful campaign against the Irish chiefs ended with his marriage to Aoife, Diarmuid's daughter, and the assumption of a baronial rights in southern Ireland. Meanwhile Hugo de Burgh captured a large territories in the north. In 1172 King Henry II came from English to accept the submission of the nights and the Irish kings together. Thus was Anglo-Ireland born.

Henry VIII created the Lordship of Ireland, a separate feudal domain under the English Crown, and soon after began to impose the English Protestant Reformation on the country with himself as Head of the Church. The Irish nobles and (presumably) the people were unable to digest this idea in religious terms and likewise troubled by its political implications and a series of rebellions broke out known as the Tudor Wars. The Crown retaliated by forming "plantations" of Englishmen in Ireland – one of whom was the English poet Edmund Spenser whose castle at Kilcolman was burnt down in the Second Desmond Rebellion (1579-83).

In the next century the execution of King Charles I by Parliament in England led to the invasion of Ireland where his last allies fought on and the dispossession of most of the remaining Gaelic aristocratics and pro-Royalist land-owners soon followed. During this time Oliver Cromwell became the most hated man in Irish memory. Although Charles II was restored to his father's throne in 1660, the confiscated lands of Irish nobles were not regranted. The scene was thus set for a future history in which the idea of nationhood (*Gaelic*) and the faith (*Catholicism*) would become synonymous in popular thinking.

# Protestant Patriots and the ’98 Rebellion of 1798

The Protestant Parliament in 1782

The Battle of the Boyne (1690) – where William III of Orange defeated James I who had reverted to Catholicism, was fought on Irish soil near the megalith tombs of the pre-Gaelic kingdom of Meath, sealed the fate of Gaelic Ireland and heralded two centuries of legally-enforced oppression of Catholics under the notorious Penal Laws from 1700 onwards to Catholic Emancipation in 1827 – by which thing there was very little property in Catholic hands.

In the 18th century, however, the Irish Protestant Ascendancy – having established themselves as a propertied ruling class living in Palladian country houses with spendid town mansions amid the Georgian splendor of neo-classical architecture Dublin – began to dream of becoming an independent nation. In that spirit they partially espoused the antiquarian traditions of the Gaelic past which they saw as an epoch of noble warriors if devoid of civilised institutions and used to decorate their form of colonial nationalism (or “patriotism”, as it was then called).

William Molyneux had led the way with *The Case of Ireland Being bound by Acts of Parliament in England Stated* (1698) in which he accused the government of treating Anglo-Irish settlers in Ireland as inferior to English citizens, being taxed at English ports as foreigners rather than not compatriots. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St Patrick’s and author of *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), followed suit with a five-part series of anonymous pamphlets called *The Drapier’s Letters* (1724-25) with which he earned the love of Irishmen of all descriptions and became a notable patriot. It was his boast that every Irishman knew the identity of the author but none betrayed it to the government. (Privately he blamed his English political allies for leaving him to ‘die like a rat’ in Ireland.)

The Protestant Patriot movement reached its zenith in 1782 when the show of military strength made by the Irish Volunteers – a militia purportedly raised to protect Ireland from French invasion but actually designed to extract economic concessions – resulted in Legislative Independence (an early form of Home Rule). For just one-and-a-half decades the Protestant Ascendancy enjoyed virtual sovereignty in Ireland though ultimately beholden to the English Crown which, of course, they unswervingly supported. In the same year, however, they voted to exclude Catholics from the rank of officer in the Volunteers at the Dungannon Convention, thus perpetuating the old division based on colonial land-holding and religious prejudice.

Henceforth the ideal of a non-sectarian nation would passed to the revolutionary party of United Irishmen formed of Presbyterian townsmen and Catholics peasants respectively in North and South. When, in 1798, the United Irishmen broke out into open rebellion, the ferocious suppression of that movement was followed by a vote in the Irish Houses of Lords and Commons – based in Dublin – closing that Parliament down while handing its authority and membership over the the British Parliament in Westminster. The result was the Act of Union which came into force on 1 January 1801. Henceforth Irish Members of Parliament would travel to London.

Although many Irish Protestants from Swift to John Mitchel (1815-75), and later George Russell (1867-1935) ) and W. B. Yeats (1865-1939), supported Irish independence – whether the return of the Irish Parliament to Dublin or the creation of sovereign Irish republic – the line-up pro and contra the Union continued to be broadly ethno-religious on both sides. In theory the Republic projected by mid-ninteeth century Irish Fenians was supposed to be non-sectarian but in practice the ultimate victory of Irish-Ireland (in the famous tag of D. P. Moran) was generally seen as a victory for Catholic Ireland against the Protestant oppressor. (In fact the ‘establishment’ position of the Anglican Church in Ireland was revoked in 1867 – incidentally giving rise to the longest word in the English language: ‘antidisestablishmentarianism’.

Thus, to a large (and not always acknowledged) degree, the creed of Irish Nationalism was as much a matter of religious as ethnic identity for the majority of Irishmen and women. In this sense, the “Troubles” in different generations have more to do with long-standing resistance to the English Refomation than resentment of the Norman Invasion – or even with the Irish Famine, as as often suggested today. Without that difference, Ireland might well be like Wales or Scotland – although today it is uncertain that Scotland will remain part of the British Union.

# Nation, Nationality, and Nationalism

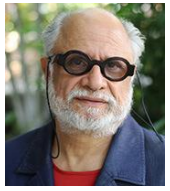
[ Foot-of-page: Homi K. Bhabha and his father Homi J. Bhabha, a Cambridge-educated nuclear physicist and Nobel nominee who was associated with the Indian Congress Party of Gandhi and Nehru. ]

According to Benedict Anderson's formula – already quoted – a *nation* is an 'imagined community' of people who believe they are connected in the way so-named. (He calls it a 'deep horizontal and vertical relation' involving both *territory* and historical *time*.) In the famous sentence of Ernest Renan, the sole thing that holds a nation together is the self-recognition or '*will*' of the people – not some natural or artificial bond created by genetics or state-craft.

Nationhood can be applied to the North American natives (Indians/indigenes) but also to the European colonists (Americans) and even to a combination of both. When the desire for nationhood is a dominant political sentiment, it is identified as *nationalism*. Nationalism seeks *nationality* – that is, the modern form of sovereign-nation status. In so doing, however, it often encounters elements of difference within itself which it must either *accept* and harmonise or *reject* and eliminate. The second course of action leads to civil war and pogroms and is usual associated with ethnic and religious antipathy whether in the form of contesting claims to citizenship or repudiation of the said nationality.

Obviously divided nationhood is a profound political, civic and social problem. One such case is India where the Hindu-Muslim division in the population has provided a basis for both Partition (i.e., the formation of Pakistan in 1949) and also for ethnic hostility in given regions today (notably in the Punjab).

What, if any, is the solution to this problem? Homi Bhabha has given us the idea – derived from Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida – that the **hybridity** of a nation is really the dimension in which it finds itself as the 'ambiguous' entity that it is: *this* and *not this*; *self* and *other*; familiar (*heimlich*) and uncanny (*unheimlich*) – the *many* in the *one*.



Homi K. Bhabha: 'The problem is not simply the "selfhood" of the nation as opposed to the "otherness" of other nations. We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population.' (*The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge 1994, p.98.)

# Thomas Davis and the Rise of Irish Nationalism (1)


Thomas Davis (1814-45)

Thomas Davis, the son of an English naval surgeon stationed in Cork, embraced the romantic nationalism of mainland Europe and launched a popular call for Irish independence under the banner of 'Young Ireland" which he publicised in *The Nation* (1842-97) - the long-lived weekly journal he created. In it, there emerged a vigorous ballad literature which came to dominate Irish memory for many generations. After his early death from scarlatina, his ecumenical outlook was superceded by the revolutionary fervour of the Fenians who became increas-ing exclusive in their Irish-Catholic concept of Irishness.

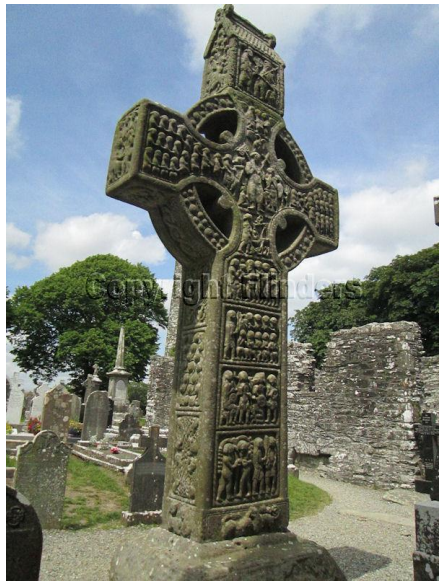
'Nationality of the spirit as well as the letter which would embrace Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter – Milesian and Cromwellian – the Irishman of a hundred generations and the stranger within our gates […] ' (22 July 1842; anticipating publication on 15 Oct. 1842).

Ex-colonial: 'It was not till very lately that the part of the nation which is truly colonial, reflected that though their ancestors had been victorious, they themselves were now included in the general subjection; subduing only to be subdued, and trampled upon by Britain as a servile dependency.

Dear Countrymen!: 'Surely our Protestant brethren cannot shut their eyes to the honour it would confer on them and us if we gave up old brawls and bitterness, and came together in love like Christians, in feeling like countrymen, in policy like men having common interests. Can they - ah! tell us, dear countrymen! – can you harden your hearts at the thought of looking on Irishmen joined in commerce, agriculture, art, justice, government, wealth and glory!' (Quoted in John Neylon Molony, *A Soul Came into Ireland: Thomas Davis 1814-1845 (*Geography Publ. 1995, p.112.)

'The Language of Ireland': 'A people without a language of its own is only half a nation. A nation should guard its language more than its territories - 'tis a surer barrier and more important frontier, than fortress or river. […] To lose your native tongue, and learn that of an alien, it the worst badge of conquest. To have lost entirely the national language is death.' (Arthur Griffith, ed., *Thomas Davis - The Thinker and Teacher*, Dublin 1914, p.55.)

# Thomas Davis and the Rise of Irish Nationalism (2)



An 8th c. Celtic Cross at Monasterboice in Co. Meath. Monastic buildings become icons of patriotism for Irish nationalists in the 19th century

"A Nation Once Again": 'When boyhood's fire was in my blood, / I read of ancient freemen, / For Greece and Rome who bravely stood, / Three Hundred men and Three men. / And then I prayed I yet might see / Our fetters rent in twain, / And Ireland, long a province, be / A Nation once again. // And, from that time, through wildest woe, / That hope has shone, a far light; / Nor could love's brightest summer glow / Outshine that solemn starlight: / It seemed to watch above my head / In forum, field and fane; / Its angel voice sang round my bed, / "A Nation once again." [...] So, as I grew from boy to man, / I bent me to that bidding - / My spirit of each selfish plan / And cruel passion ridding; / For, thus I hoped some day to aid - / Oh! can such hope be vain? / When my dear country shall be made / A Nation once again.'

"My Land": 'She is a rich and rare land, / Oh she's a fresh and fair land; / She is a dear and rare land, / This native land of mine. // No men than hers are braver, / Her women/ s hearts ne'er waver; / I'd freely die to save her, / And think my lot divine. // She's not a dull or cold land, / No, she's a warm and bold land, / Oh, she's a true and old land, / This native land of mine. // Could beauty ever guard her, / And virtue still reward her, / No foe would cross her border - / No friend within it pine. // Oh, she's a fresh and fair land, / Oh, she's a true and rare land; / Yes she's a rare and fair land, / This native land of mine.'

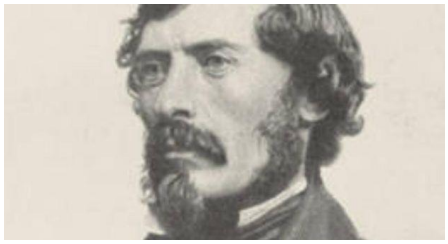
"*Lament for the Death of Owen Roe O'Neill*": '"Did they dare, did they dare, to slay Owen Roe O'Neill?" / "Yes, they slew with poison him, they feared to meet with steel." / May god wither up their hearts! may their blood cease to flow! / May they walk in living death, who poisoned Owen Roe! / … / "We thought you would not die - we were sure you would not go, / And leave us in our utmost need to Cromwell's cruel blow - / Sheep without a shepherd, when the snow shuts out the sky - / *Oh! why did you leave us, Owen? Why did you die?*" [… &c.]' (See parody by James Joyce, infra.)

Thomas Davis's ballads – printed in *The Nation* employed a popular English genre to convey Irish political messages, usually in the form of historical narratives Irish historical content – became the standard mode of patriotic writing much circulated in *The Spirit of the Nation* anthologies from 1842 into the 1890s. The formula was based on reverance for remains of Celtic Christian and Gaelic Ireland, the celebration of (rare) Irish victories in war over the English, and anti-English sentiments in various forms. His own ballads argued for an inclusive Irishness which his successors tended to ignore. The poetic value of the ballads was often quite dubious but their polemic utility was pronounced.

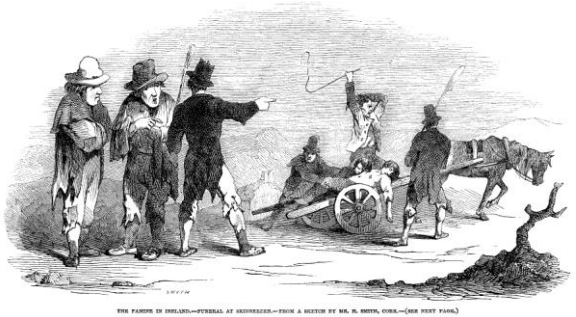
*James Joyce parodied the lament in Finnegans Wake* (1939): '*Shize? I should shee! Macool, Macool, orra whyi deed ye diie? of a trying thirstay mournin? Sobs they sighdid at Fillagain's chrissormiss wake, all the hoolivans* of the nation, prostrated in their consternation and their duodisimally profusive plethora of ululation. (FW, 1.8.)*

**hoolivans* suggests 'hooligans' - a pejorative English name for riotous people (*canalhas*/*vagabondos*) derived from the Irish family name Ó hUllighái [Hooligan] – but it also connotes T. M. Sullivan who wrote "God Save Ireland" in the same patriotic vein.

# John Mitchel (1815-1875)



Mitchel was a survivor of the 1848 Rising who reached New York after a period of deportation in Van Deimen's Land (Tasmania). In America he took the Confederate side in the Civil War and lost two sons in that conflict. His pro-slavery outlook is an embarrassment to modern Irish nationalists. Closely considered, his complaint is not just about the Famine but about the process of modernisation ( or 'amelioration') which has stolen Ireland's 'soul' as well. He was an Ulster Presbyterian by birth.



**The Irish Famine**: 'A calm still horror was over the land [...] An unseen ruin was creeping around you. You saw no war of classes, no open Janissary war of foreigners, no human agency of destruction. You could weep but the rising curse died unspoken within your heart like a profanity. *Human passion there was none but inhuman and unearthly quiet*. Children met you, toiling heavily on stone heaps but their burning eyes were senseless and their faces cramped and weasened like stunted old men. Gangs worked but without a murmur or a whistle or a cough, ghostly, like voiceless shadows to the eye. *Even womanhood had ceased to be womanly*. The birds of the air carolled no more and the crow and the raven dropped dead upon the wing. [...] It seemed as if the anima mundi, *the soul of the land, was faint and dying*, and that the faintness and death had crept into all things of earth and heaven. You stood there too, silenced in the presence of the unseen and terrible.

(*United Irishman*, 1848; W. Dillon, in *Life of John Mitchel*, 2 vols (London 1888), Vol. I, p.211; quoted by Kevin Whelan in 'The Memories of "The Dead"', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 15:1, Johns Hopkins UP 2002, p.67.)

'If one should narrate how the cause of his country was stricken down in open battle, and blasted to pieces with shot and shell, there might be a certain mournful pride in dwelling upon the gallant resistance [...] but to describe how the spirit of a country has been broken and subdued by beggarly famine - how her national aspirations have been not choked in her own blood, nobly shed on the field, but strangled by red tape; - how her life and soul have been ameliorated and civilised out of her; - how she dies of political economy, and was buried under tons of official stationary; - this is the dreary task, which I wish some one else had undertaken.'

(*Last Conquest of Ireland (perhaps),* Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1861, pp.138-39.)

Sketch of Bridget O'Donnell by Sir John Tenniel (*London Ill. News*, 1847). Tenniel is now best known for his illustrations in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865).

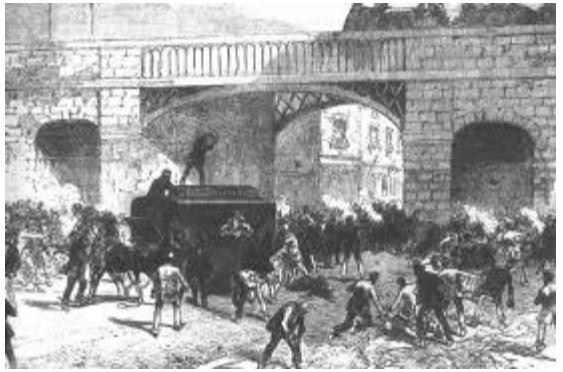
# Famine and Rebellion: 1848 – 1867 – 1916

The Irish Famine of 1845-49 – sometimes extended to the ‘long’ dates of 1845-52 – had a cataclysmic effect on the population (8 million > 4 million) and also on the political discourse of Irish nationalism.

It made manifest the fact that the existing colonial form of land ownership and tenancy, combined with uncaring Westminster Rule, could not hope to find solutions to the real problems of the Irish people – no matter how goodwilled (or otherwise) the British government of the day.

Hence the idea of Repeal of the Union gave way to the aim of National Separatism while the British administration in Ireland increasingly engaged in suppressing rebellion among the so-called ‘peasant’ population and the leadership of Irish-Republican organisations sponsored by the post-Famine Irish in America.

Irish physical-force Republicanism for modern times was thus born.



The Clerkenwell Explosion and the Hyde Road Rescue Bid - 1867


“The Manchester Martyrs” - William Allen, Michael Larkin and Michael O'Brien

At the barricades in 1916.

Execution of Rory O’Connor (Irish Civil War)

*"God save Ireland!" said the heroes;*
*"God save Ireland" said they all.*
*Whether on the scaffold high*
*Or the battlefield we die,*
*Oh, what matter when for Erin dear we fall!*

# Part 2 - Texts and Pretexts …

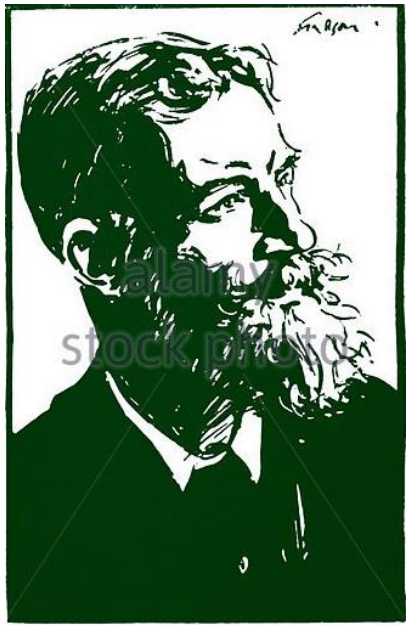
Oscar Wilde

William Butler Yeats

George “Æ”Russell

James Stephens

James Joyce



George Bernard Shaw

John Millington Syne

Lady Augusta Gregory

Sean O’Casey

Nora Barnacle (Joyce)

# The Irish Police and the Revolutionary Movement

In 2020 the last Coalition Government sought to establish an Annual Commemoration for Irish Policemen of all periods in the spirit of the 1998 Belfast Agreement. This would include policemen who had served under British rule since the foundation of the force in 1822 along with the modern Gardaí of the independent state.

In 1920, however, that force had been strengthened with recruits from England (mainly ex-soldiers) expressly intended to combat the IRA campaign against the police in Ireland which took the lives of 400 men in uniform before Indep-endence was declared in 1922. The Black and Tans – as they were called – treated ordinary citizens as enemies, in the usual manner of a colonial police force.

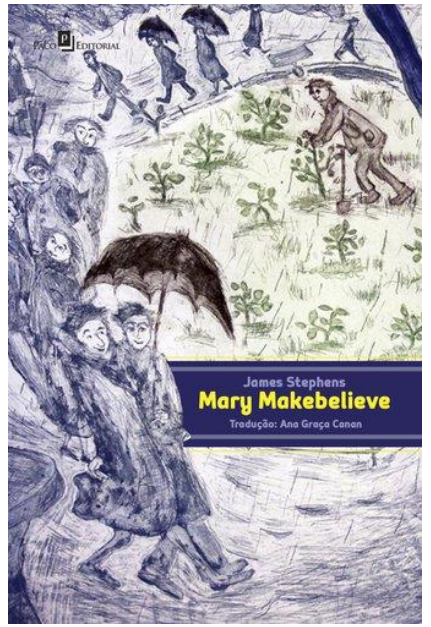
In the 2020 general election the proposed commemoration was counted as one of the chief reasons for the fall of the Coalition when 24% of total votes cast for Sinn Fein shattered the majority of the Coalition and necessitated a coalition between Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, the traditional 'major' parties and Civil War opponents turned middle class (neo-liberal) parties.

James Stephens (1880-1950)

What did the Irish think of the police *before* 1920? Throughout the 19th c. the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) were associated in the countryside with evictions and the prosecution of rebels. In 1913 there had been a Lock-Out Strike in Dublin which the Metropolitan Police (DMP) had baton-charged with lost of several lives. While most Irish citizens probably thought of them as 'the law' most of the time, they also bore the stamp of an armed colonial *gendarmerie*.

In 1910 the novelist James Stephen ventriloquises the feelings of a policeman when a Dublin girl rejects his amorous advances:

'He would gladly have beaten her into submission, for *what right* has a slip of a girl to *withstand* the advances of a man and a policeman? That is a crooked spirit demanding to be *straightened with a truncheon*: but as we cannot decently, or even peaceably, *beat a girl until she is married to us*, he had to relinquish that dear idea. He must be pulled from her eminence and stamped back to her native depths by his own indignant hoofs [...]' (*The Charwoman's Daughter*, 1910, p.176; my italics)




*Mary Makebelieve* [1910] trad. Ana Graça Canan (São Paolo: Paco Editorial 2021)

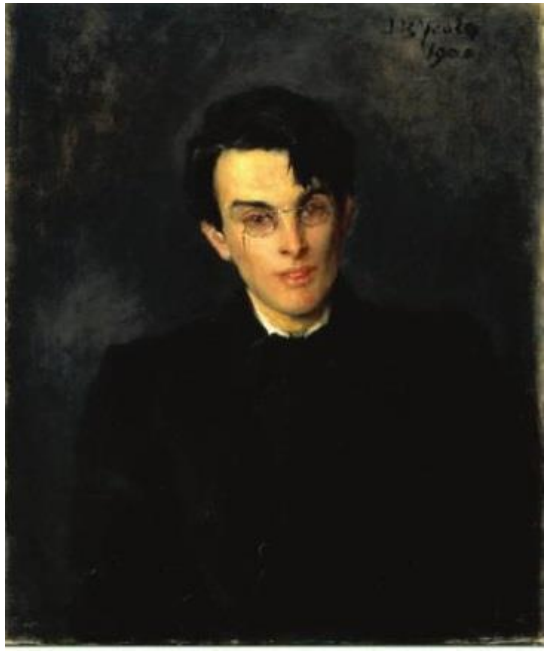
# **Yeats** & Joyce: The Literary Revival

The credit for inaugurating of the Irish Literary Revival goes to William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), an Anglo-Irish poet who returned to Dublin from London in 1892, aged 27, having passed most of his life up to then in his painter-father's Hammersmith household among literary and artistic friends associated with William Morris and the Artisan Movement.

Yeats adopted Irish subject-matter in his first longer poem (*The Wanderings of Oisin,* 1888) for chiefly literary reasons but also because Maud Gonne with whom he had fallen in love was an ardent Irish nationalist. (The daughter of an English Army colonel, she had been stung by the evictions she witnessed in Co. Tipperary.) This enabled him to draw on the scenery of his own childhood during which he had spent many holidays in Sligo town* where his maternal grandfather owned a shipping company.

Yeats placed folklore and mythology reland at the centre of the new movement, combining it with mysticism and a *symboliste* manner of writing. He launched the new style with a collection of prose and poetry called *The Celtic Twilight* (1893), and wrote patriotic plays such as *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902) which became a bye-word among nationalists and inspired their heroic death-wish. After the 1916 Rising, he wrote the triumphant – but deeply ambiguous – poem "Easter 1916" and went on to become an Irish Senator in the new State. He also chaired the Committee which produced the national coinage.

Throughout his life Yeats moved in and out of sympathy with the Republicans. His position as a "creator" of modern Irish nationhood is much contested – one critic equating him with Moses who brought the people to the Promised Land but did not enter. Yeats won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. He died in France in 1939.

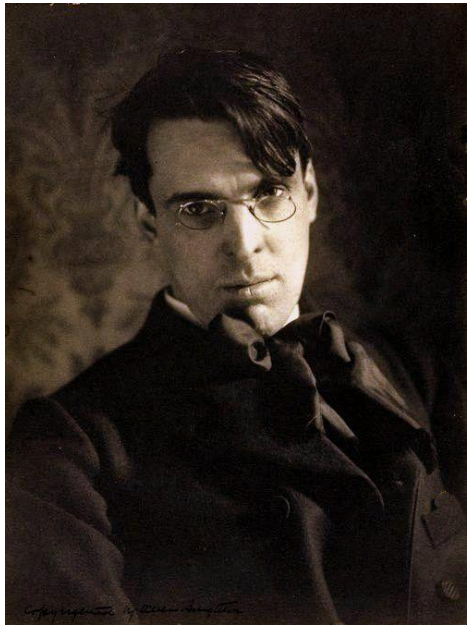


W. B. Yeats (1866-1953)

Maud Gonne (1866-1953)

*Co. Sligo is in the West of Ireland, rich in folkore, and astonishingly scenic.

# The literary beliefs of W. B. Yeats



Yeats in 1903

**The Celts**

'[I]t is only the Celt who cares much for ideas which have no immediate practical bearing. At least Matthew Arnold said so, and I think he is right, for the flood-gates of materialism are only half-open among us as yet here in Ireland; perhaps the new age may close them before the tide is quite upon us.

I will put this differently and say that literature dwindles to a mere chronicle of circumstances, or passionless fantasies, and passionless meditations, unless it is constantly flooded with the passions and beliefs of ancient times [... T]he Celt alone has been for centuries close to the man river of European literature.' ('Nationality and Literature', in *United Ireland*, 27 May, 1893.)

**Folklore**

'Folklore is at once the Bible, the Thirty-Nine Articles, and the Book of Common Prayer, and well-nigh all the great poets have lived by its light. Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare, and even Dante, Goethe, and Keats, were little more than folklorists with musical tongues.' ('Message of the Folklorists', 1893; rep. in Robert Welch, ed., *Writings on Irish Folklore, Legend and Myth*, Penguin 1993, p.17.)

*Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902)

**Irish Literary Revival**

'[O]ur movement is a return to the people [...] if you would ennoble a man of the roads you must write about the man of the roads, or about the people of romance, or about great historical people.' (*Samhain*, 1902; rep. it. *Explorations*, 1962, p.96.

# “Easter 1916” by W. B. Yeats

[...]

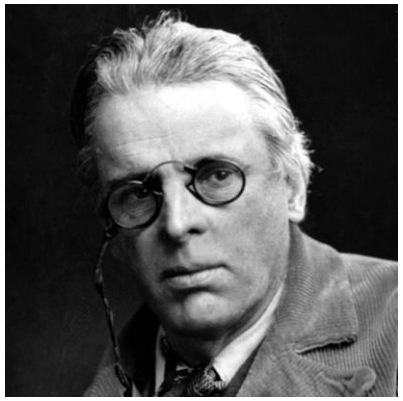
Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
O when may it suffice?
That is Heaven's part, our part
To murmur name upon name,
As a mother names her child
When sleep at last has come
On limbs that had run wild.
What is it but nightfall?
No, no, not night but death;
Was it needless death after all?
For England may keep faith
For all that is done and said.
We know their dream; enough
To know they dreamed and are dead;
And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died?
*I write it out in a verse—*
*MacDonagh and MacBride*
*And Connolly and Pearse*
*Now and in time to be,*
*Wherever green is worn,*
*Are changed, changed utterly:*
*A terrible beauty is born.*

“**No Second Troy**”
Why should I blame her that she filled my days
With misery, or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
Or hurled the little streets upon the great
Had they but courage equal to desire?
What could have made her peaceful with a mind
That nobleness made simple as a fire,
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern?
Why, what could she have done, being what she is?
Was there another Troy for her to burn?

(1910)

“**Meditations in Time of Civil War**”
Some violent bitter man, some powerful man
Called architect and artist in, that they,
Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone
The sweetness that all longed for night and day,
The gentleness none there had ever known;
[...]
What if those things the greatest of mankind
Consider most to magnify, or to bless,
But take our greatness with our bitterness?

—*The Tower* (1922)



*“Daughters of Lir”*
Oisin Kelly (1966)

# Yeats & **Joyce**: The anti-Revival

James Joyce (1882-1941)

James Joyce was a Roman Catholic and the product of an elite education with the Jesuit Order ('extraterritorials') which he had received for free after his father's financial collapse. He was a brilliant, touchy and egoistical young man of extraordinary readership and comprehension who formed a strong bond with modern literature in the French tradition of Flaubert and Maupassant and the Danish example of Henrik Ibsen.

He drank up the Literary Revival but largely rejected its romantic tendency for a stark social realism intended to expose what he called the 'hemiplegia' or 'paralysis' of the Irish spirit. When he met Yeats in 1904 he outrageously told the older writer – whom he very much admired – 'You are too old. I have met you too late to help.' Yet his works are full of homages and sometimes parodies of the great poet and thinker that Yeats was.

Joyce's great novel *Ulysses* (1922) was conceived as 'an epic of two races, Irish and Israelite'. At the same time it was modelled on the sections of Homer's *Odyssey* and its central character, Leopold Bloom – an Irish Jew of Hungarian and Irish extraction – a brilliant intervention in Irish racial discourse on Joyce's part – was created in parallel to Homer's Odysseus/Ulysses, the 'all-capable' hero of the epic. It was thus both an Irish story encompassing a day-in-the-life of Leopold and Stephen Dedalus (Joyce's literary *persona*) as well as a hugely international and, arguably, universal work which took the whole of human culture as its canvas. This was nationalism raised to an international power and, although the Irish cultural class of the day did not accept it as a true representation of their country – or even a decent one – it has come to be considered the primary index of Irish reality in the immediately pre-revolutionary period.

Nora Joyce, dressed as a young Aran Islander in *Riders to the Sea* (1918). Courtesy of Jimmy Joyce

Joyce left Ireland with his unmarried partner Nora Barnacle in 1904. In 1918 he cast her as Pegeen-Mike in Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* – played at the British Embassy in Zürich.

# The ‘other’ revival: James Joyce and *Ulysses* (1922)

In his angry youth, Joyce expressed his opinions about Ireland and Irish nationalism quite vividly in the autobiographical novel *Stephen Hero* (composed 1904-07; publ. 1944) – which, however, he abandoned before re-shaping it as the very different *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). In *Stephen Hero* he castigated Irish people generally and the young men with whom he shared a university classroom in particular:

James Joyce (1882-1941)

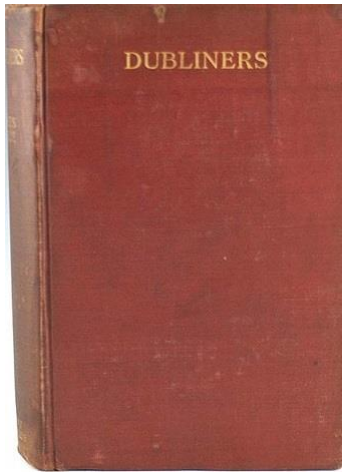
> The faces ... all bore the stamp of Jesuit training. ... They admired Gladstone, physical science and the tragedies of Shakespeare: and they believed in the adjustment of Catholic teaching to everyday needs, in the Church diplomatic. Without displaying an English desire for an aristocracy of substance they held violent measures to be unseemly and in their relations among themselves and towards their superiors they displayed a nervous and (whenever there was a question of authority) a very English liberalism. They respected spiritual and temporal authorities, the spiritual authorities of Catholicism and patriotism, and the temporal authorities of the hierarchy and the government. [...] If the call to a larger and nobler life ever came to them they heard it with secret gladness but always they decided to defer their lives until a favourable moment because they felt unready. [156]

Many of these would later be staunch nationalists. He was particularly harsh on the Catholic Church and all those who followed it:

> The deadly chill of the atmosphere of the college paralysed Stephen’s heart. In a stupor of powerlessness he reviewed the *plague of Catholicism* [...] the vermin begotten in the catacombs issuing forth upon the plains and mountains of Europe. Like the plague of locusts described in *Callista** they seemed to choke the rivers and fill the valleys up. They obscured the sun. Contempt of human nature, weakness, nervous tremblings, fear of day and joy, distrust of man and life, *hemiplegia of the will*, beset the body burdened and disaffected in its members by its *black tyrannous lice*.
>
> Exaltation of the mind before joyful beauty, exultation of the body in free confederate labours, every natural impulse towards health and wisdom and happiness had been corroded by *the pest of these vermin*. [...] He, at least [...] though inheriting a will broken by doubt and a soul the steadfastness of whose hate became as weak as water in siren arms, would live his own life according to what he recognised as *the voice of a new humanity, active, unafraid and unashamed*. (*Stephen Hero* [Cape Edn. 1975] pp.198-99; itals and para. mine.)

**Callista* (1855) - a novel about Christian martyrs by Cardinal J. H. Newman set in the Roman Empire.

# Joyce's 'intention' in *Dubliners* (1914)




Letter to Grant Richards (5 May 1906)

'My intention was to write a chapter in the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis. [...] I have written it for the most part in a style of scrupulous meanness and with the conviction that he is a very bold man who dares to alter in the presentment, still more to deform, whatever he has seen and heard.'

(*Letters of James Joyce*, Vol. 2, 1966, p.134.)

Letter to Grant Richards (23 June 1906)

'[...] I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilisation in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass.'

(*Letters of James Joyce*, Vol. 1, 1966, pp.63-64.)

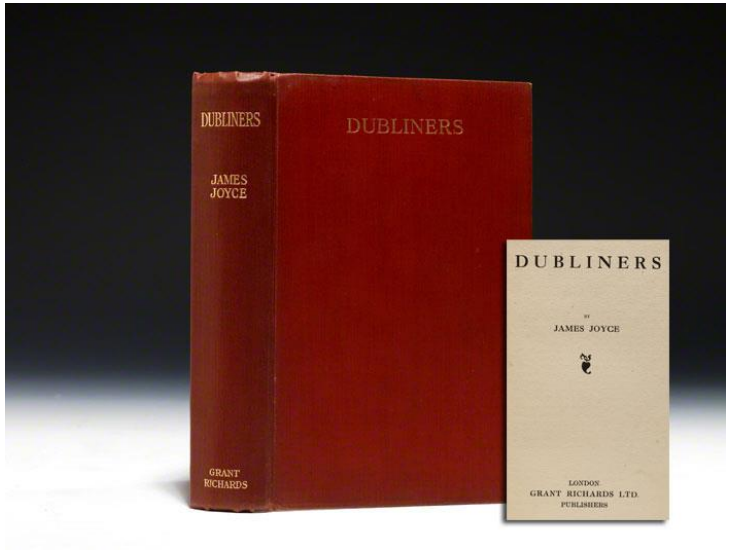
Letter to Stanislaus Joyce (19 July 1905)

'The Dublin papers will object to my stories as to a caricature of Dublin life. Do you think there is any truth in this? At times the spirit directing my pen seems to me so plainly mischievous that I am almost prepared to let the Dublin critics have their way. [… D]o not think I consider contemporary Irish writing anything but ill-written, morally obtuse, formless caricature.'

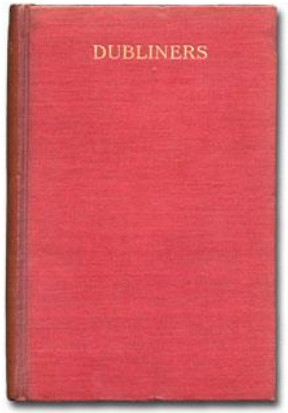
(*Letters of James Joyce*, Vol. II, 1966, p.216.)

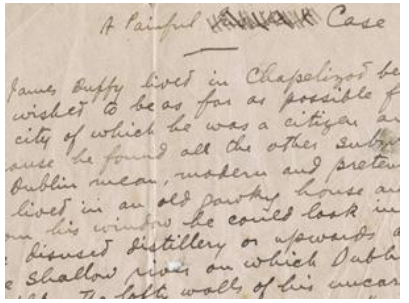
# *Dubliners* (1914)

1. “THE SISTERS”
2. “AN ENCOUNTER”
3. “ARABY”
4. “EVELINE”
5. “AFTER THE RACE”
6. “TWO GALLANTS”
7. “THE BOARDING HOUSE”
8. “A LITTLE CLOUD”
9. “COUNTERPARTS”
10. “CLAY”
11. “A PAINFUL CASE”
12. “IVY DAY IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM”
13. “A MOTHER”
14. “GRACE”
15. “THE DEAD”




Grant Richards - London: 1916



# Irish Nationalism: Reclaiming “The Dead” (1)

15, Usher’s Island

“The Dead” – dir. John Ford (1987)

[...]
Lancers were arranged. Gabriel found himself partnered with Miss Ivors. She was a frank-mannered, talkative young lady, with a freckled face and prominent brown eyes. [...]
—I have a crow to pluck with you.
—With me? said Gabriel.
She nodded her head gravely.
—What is it? asked Gabriel, smiling at her solemn manner. [213]
—Who is G.C.? answered Miss Ivors, turning her eyes upon him.
Gabriel coloured and was about to knit his brows, as if he did not understand, when she said bluntly.
[...]
—Well, I’m ashamed of you, said Miss Ivors frankly. To say you’d write for a paper like that. I didn’t think you were a West Briton.
A look of perplexity appeared on Gabriel’s face. It was true that he wrote a literary column every Wednesday in *The Daily Express*, for which he was paid fifteen shillings. But that did not make him a West Briton surely. [...] Miss Ivors promptly took his hand in a warm grasp and said in a soft friendly tone.
—Of course, I was only joking.

—And why do you go to France and Belgium, said Miss Ivors, instead of visiting your own land.
—Well, said Gabriel, it’s partly to keep in touch with the languages and partly for a change.
—And haven’t you your own language to keep in touch with—Irish? asked Miss Ivors. [215]
—Well, said Gabriel, *if it comes to that, you know, Irish is not my language.*
Their neighbours had turned to listen to the cross-examination. Gabriel glanced right and left nervously and tried to keep his good humour under the ordeal, which was making a blush invade his forehead.
—And haven’t you your own land to visit, continued Miss Ivors, that you know nothing of, your own people, and your own country.
—O, to tell you the truth, retorted Gabriel suddenly, I’m sick of my own country, sick of it.
—Why? asked Miss Ivors. [...] Of course, you’ve no answer.

*Dubliners* [1914] Corr. Edn., ed. Robert Scholes (London: J. Cape 1965), pp.213-16.

# Irish Nationalism: Reclaiming “The Dead” (2)

Recent decades have seen strenuous attempts to reclaim Joyce for Irish nationalism chiefly through the channel of postcolonialism theory which reveals him as a critic of cultural and political imperialism as well as sexism, anti-Semitism and Irish nationalism its ethno-centric mode (of which Miss Ivors appears to be an example).

The key to that attempt is the re-interpretation of “The Dead”, Joyce’s final story in *Dubliners* (1914). Written in 1907, we know him to have undergone a change of mind about his own ‘messianic’ importance as the creator of the conscience of my race’ – the ambition asserted by Stephen Dedalus at the end of *A Portrait* (1916).

In letters written while planning the story he spoke moreover of taking a kinder view of his native city whose ‘ingenuous hospitability’ he had not met elsewhere in Europe. In 1907 he also wrote an article about an Irish-speaker who was hanged by the British after an unfair trial in Galway in his own birth-year of 1882 (“Ireland at the Bar”, in *Piccolo della Sera*, Trieste, Sept. 1907.)

Is “The Dead”, then, an act of repentance in which James Joyce embraces Irish nationhood in its popular form – complete with rural, Catholic Gaelic-speaking cultural norms? The answer depends on how you read the last two paragraphs in the story where Gabriel Conroy seems to approach, or to be approached by, the ghosts of the Irish dead – perhaps even the victims of the Irish Famine.

*Dubliners* [1914] Corr. Edn., ed. Robert Scholes (London: J. Cape 1965), pp.213-16.


Gresham Hotel, Dublin

“The Dead” – dir. John Ford (1987)

She was fast asleep.
[...]
Generous tears filled Gabriel’s eyes. He had never felt like that himself towards any woman, but he knew that such a feeling must be love. The tears gathered more thickly in his eyes and in the partial darkness he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree. Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself, which these dead had one time reared and lived in, was dissolving and dwindling.

[...] The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. [...] snow was general all over Ireland. [...] It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. [...] His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.

# Kevin Whelan, 'The Memories of "The Dead"', in *Yale Journal of Criticism* (2002)


Kevin Whelan

The Memories of "The Dead"

The Celtic Twilight had its origins not in mysticism but in starvation.
—Denis Ireland*

*Introduction*

The Great Irish Famine (1845–52) was the single most important event in Ireland in the modern period. Uniquely, a European country suffered a catastrophe which the continent had not endured for centuries.[1] Over one million people died and two million more emigrated within a decade, sending the country into a spiral of demographic decline which it has only recently arrested. Yet it is a commonplace of Irish cultural history to claim that if one looks for a representation of this terrible and defining event, it is impossible to find one adequate to the scale of the catastrophe.[2] It has also often been observed that the Famine is rarely (and then only obliquely) represented in the Irish Literary Revival at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet, this reading may be superficial, as this essay seeks to demonstrate through a sustained excavation of the historical layers—biographical, literary, historical, geographical, musical—of James Joyce's short story of 1907, "The Dead." One of the chief discoveries of this excavation is the buried history of the Famine embedded at its center. The resonance of "The Dead" and its peculiarly charged language derives from this depth of historical layering, all the more evocative because it is hidden. This story is also set in the period of the Irish Literary Revival, whose origins are conventionally dated to Douglas Hyde's manifesto "On the necessity for de-anglicising the Irish people."[3] "The Dead" may therefore be taken as a work of strategic importance in a consideration of what the Revival was and why modernism was its pre-eminent style.

Indubitably, Ireland remained culturally traumatized in the immediate post-Famine period. It is possible to see the cultural revival as a delayed, second-generation effect, inspired by people born during the Famine. The best known examples would be Michael Davitt (1846–1906), founder of the Land League in 1879, and Michael Cu-

*The Yale Journal of Criticism*, volume 15, number 1 (2002): 59–97
© 2002 by Yale University and The Johns Hopkins University Press

Joyce's work, beneath its calm surface, is pervasively disturbed by the presence of the Famine: the post-Famine condition of Ireland is the unnamed horror at the heart of Joyce's Irish darkness, the conspicuous exclusion that is saturatingly present as a palpable absence deliberately being held at bay, "the terror of soul of a starving Irish village". [*Portrait*, Chap. V; here ftn. to p.67.]*

*Whelan is here quoting Stephen's thoughts in *A Portrait* about the 'peasant' student Davin who shares Miss Ivors outlook. In real lifem Davin (George Clancy) was murdered by the Black & Tans in 1920 – four years after the publication of the book and 16 after the meeting described in it for very different reasons. (Plainly, 'hear of darkness' echoes Joseph Conrad's famous story-title.)

[...]

[I]t may well be that a similar reading strategy could decipher it in other texts of the revival period. Secondly, this essay demonstrates that an account of writing in post-Famine Ireland which neglects the linguistic transition in the period is fatally flawed. The language – Irish – in which the experience of the Famine was actually lived by the bulk of its victims was itself one of its casualties. The trauma was to be increasingly remembered in a different language to the one in which it was experientially endured.

Despite the absolute centrality of this point, it is scarcely glanced at in recent accounts of the cultural history of the Famine. It is this abrupt linguistic transition which differentiates the Irish Famine, its representation and its memory from comparable historical disasters. Palestinians remember the 1948 expulsions from their homeland as *Al-nakbah* (The Disaster) and do so in Arabic, the language in which they lived the experience. European Jews writing about the *Shoah* (Holocaust) have mainly utilised the language that they used at the time of their experience of it.

These are not contexts in which it has been usual to locate Joyce. It is the contention of this essay that we need to pay attention to them. Joyce understood the force of William Faulkner's aphorism: "The past is not dead. It is not even past." (p.87; end.)

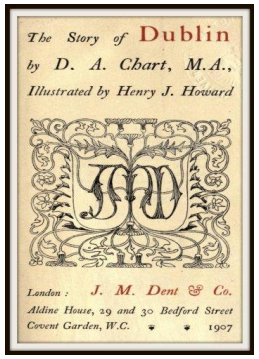
Bibl.: Kevin Whelan, 'The Memories of "The Dead"', in *Yale Journal of Criticism 15: 1* (2002), pp.59-97; available online at http://pciserver.com/Joyce/resources/whelan_memories.pdf. A copy is available in Ricorso under Authors > Joyce > Commentary.

## Kevin Whelan, ‘The Memories of “The Dead”’, in *Yale Journal of Criticism* (2002) – Commentary (1/2)

Nationalism seeks embodiment in texts which ‘narrate the nation’ – tell its story, bear **witness** to its suffering, and point towards the historical recompense *which is the nation itself*. This it often does in the form of literary fiction – especially novels – but also at the level of critical commentary. It is not necessarily the case however that a given story exhibits (or even hides) a degree of national narratology to suit the wishes of the critic.

In this instance the case is made that the **absence** of any reference to the Famine is itself an indication of its essential **presence** – given some musical and topographical features which can only be read as allusions to different chapters of **colonial history**. But Dublin itself *is* a reference to colonial history which its present occupants could be said to be involved in the task of **forgetting** (chiefly by knocking them down). The setting cannot be confused with the ‘argument’ of the story.

Professor Whelan – an expert on the 1798 Rising and the Irish Famine – seeks to establish, quite simply, that the **ghosts** who seem to appear in the dimlight moments of Gabriel’s somnolent last thoughts before sleep are the **victims** of the Irish Famine. How much proof is there for this in the text? Very little. In fact, Joyce’s use of the word *‘famine’* is invariably in reference to the medieval period and not the 19th c. event which obsesses nationalist historians. He was first and foremost a Dubliner, not an Irishman.




In fact, the classic instance in his works – to be met with in *Ulysses* – is about a moment in the 14th century when the starving citizens of Dublin – starving after the Edward the Bruce had destroyed the crops – were relieved to find a school of whales stranded on the beach outside the city, a detail taken from D.A. Chart’s *The Story of Dublin* (1904). Joyce has:

> —A school of turlehide whales stranded in hot noon, spouting, hobbling in the shallows. Then from the starving cagework city a horde of jerkined dwarfs, my people, with flayers’ knives, running, scaling, hacking in green blubbery whalemeat. Famine, plague and slaughters. [*Ulysses*, Bodley Head Edn. 1960, p.56.)

Where Chart has:

> The burghers of Dublin were in sore straits for food, when they were providentially relieved by the stranding of a whole school of whales at the mouth of the Dodder at Ringsend. The chronicler calls the ‘Turlehydes’ [...] The city was rescued for the moment only to find, later on, that the terrible famine had bred the still more terrible pestilence. (*Story of Dublin*, p.33.)

# Kevin Whelan, 'The Memories of "The Dead"' (2002) – Commentary (2/2)

Elsewhere, when Joyce uses the word 'famine', he does so in a context which *does* inculpate the English. Yet, when he cites the word *famine* in his Trieste lecture on Ireland, he speaks of the government *neglect*, not a genocidal campaign such as John Mitchel and others to this day allege against them. There were in fact other historical reasons for the Famine:

> a) Unique dependence on a single tuber crop for subsistence (the potato); b) "rack-rent" landlordism; c) continual subdivision of rural tenancies; d) Catholic clerical insistence on big families and toleration of juvenile marriages; absence of culinary culture using meat and fish; e) very limited dairy culture (no indigenous cheeses); f) extreme western location of worst-effected regions ...

In fact, *all* the features of an under-developed country struggling with economic modernity and likely to produce famine under such circumstances. While in Trieste –in the year of "The Dead" – Joyce touched on the Famine in an invited university lecture:

A) "Ireland: Isle of Saints and Sages" (Trieste 1907): "The English now disparage the Irish because they are Catholic, poor, and ignorant; however, it will not be so easy to justify such disparagement to some people. Ireland is poor because English laws ruined the country's industries, especially the wool industry, because *the neglect of the English government* in the years of the potato famine *allowed* *the best of the population to die from hunger, and because under the present administration, while Ireland is losing its population and crimes are almost non-existent, the judges receive the salary of a king, and governing officials and those in public service receive huge sums for doing little or nothing.

—*The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, ed. Ellmann & Mason (NY: Viking Press 1959, p.197.) [my itals.]

B) Pissed-off Joyce: Once, in an angry letter to his brother Stanislaus, Joyce wrote unkindly that he and his *cattolicissime* sisters had come to Trieste 'in obedience to my summons, from your *ignorant and famine-ridden and treacherous country*.' (12 Jan. 1911, *Letters*, Vol. II, 1966, pp.288-89.) While ignorance and famine-proneness might be alleged by any spiteful Englishman, treachery was a favourite slur on the Irish political character with Joyce and primarily applied by him to the betrayers of Charles Stewart Parnell which was central to the political legacy he receieve from his father – Simon Dedalus in *A Portrait*. He gave it as a reason why no one should involve themselves with an Irish political organisation.

*'the best [.. &c.]': Apparently Joyce absorbed Italian eugenics while in Rome and Trieste – not the ideal postcolonial curriculum.

Famine in Joyce: A word-check (2/2)

**[Quotations extracted from works of James Joyce using Adobe Dreamweaver Search Command with digital copies [22.04.2021 ].**

*Stephen Hero* - 0
*Dubliners* - 0
*A Portrait of the Artist* - 0

***Ulysses***

—[Mr Deasy:] You think me an old fogey and an old tory, his thoughtful voice said. I saw three generations since O'Connell's time. I remember the famine. Do you know that the orange lodges agitated for repeal of the union twenty years before O'Connell did or before the prelates of your communion denounced him as a demagogue? You fenians forget some things. [*Nestor*; U38]

—Then from the starving cagework city a horde of jerkined dwarfs, my people, with flayers' knives, running, scaling, hacking in green blubbery whalemeat. Famine, plague and slaughters. [*Proteus*; U56]

—He drew Shylock out of his own long pocket. The son of a maltjobber and moneylender he was himself a cornjobber and moneylender with ten tods of corn hoarded in the famine riots. [*Scylla & Charybdis*; 262; underlines mine.]

***Finnegans Wake***

—The old hunks on the hill read it to perlection. It made ma make merry and sissy so shy and rubbed some shine off Shem and put some shame into Shaun. Yet Una and Ita spill famine with drought and Agrippa, the propastored, spells tripulations in his threne. [094; my itals.]

—the gleam of the glow of the shine of the sun through the dearth of the dirth on the blush of the brick of the viled ville of Barnehulme has dust turned to brown; these dyed to tartan him, rueroot, dulse, bracken, teasel, fuller's ash, sundew and cress; long gunn but not for cotton; stood his sharp assault of famine but grew girther, girther and girther; he has twenty four or so cousins germinating in the United States of America and a namesake with an initial difference in the once kingdom of Poland; [FW 1.6; my itals.]

—Hungry the Loaved and Hangry the Hathed, here where my tenenure of office and my toils of domestication first began, with weight of woman my skat and skuld but Flukie of the Ravens as my sure piloter, famine with Englisch sweat and oppedemics, the two toothed dragon worms with allsort serpents, has compolitely seceded from this landleague of many nations and open and notorious naughty livers are found not on our rolls. This seat of our city it is of all sides pleasant, comfortable and wholesome. [FW 3.3; my itals.]

—Earwicker, that patternmind, that paradigmatic ear, receptoretentive as his of Dionysius, longsuffer[070]ing although whitening under restraint in the sititout corner of his conservatory, behind faminebuilt walls, his thermos flask and ripidian flabel by his side and a walrus whiskerbristle for a tuskpick, compiled, while he mourned the flight of his wild guineese, [..; 070-71; my itals.]

—scorching my hand and starving my famine to make his private linen public. [FW196 ALP]

—a blackseer, he stroves to regulect all the straggles for wife in the rut of the past through the widnows in effigies keening after the blank sheets in their faminy to the relix of old decency from over draught. (FW340.13-16; underlines mine.)

**Poetry**

*The Right Heart in the Wrong Place*
Of spinach and gammon
Bull's full to the crupper,
White lice and black famine
Are the mayor of Cork's supper.

But the pride of old Ireland
Must be damnably humbled
If a Joyce is found cleaning
The boots of a Rumbold
S.O.S.

No. 30, in *Shorter Writings* [p.126; my underline.]

# Who are *the dead* in “The Dead”?

The narrator makes it clear that the Miss Morkans, who give the Epiphany Night party attended by Gabriel and his wife Gretta, Miss Ivors, and all the other guests, are old and may not survive to give another party. In *Ulysses* we incidentally learn that Julia has died before June 16th, the day when the novel is set. (The Morkans are modelled on Joyce’s maternal aunts, the Miss Flynns, who lived at exactly that address.)

Michael Furey, the young man with tuberculosis who courted Gretta and died shortly after visiting her window in mid-winter (“I think he died for me”) is buried in a Galway graveyard where Joyce and Nora will visit his grave in 1909 – as well as the one in Oughterard where Joyce ‘buried’ him in the story.

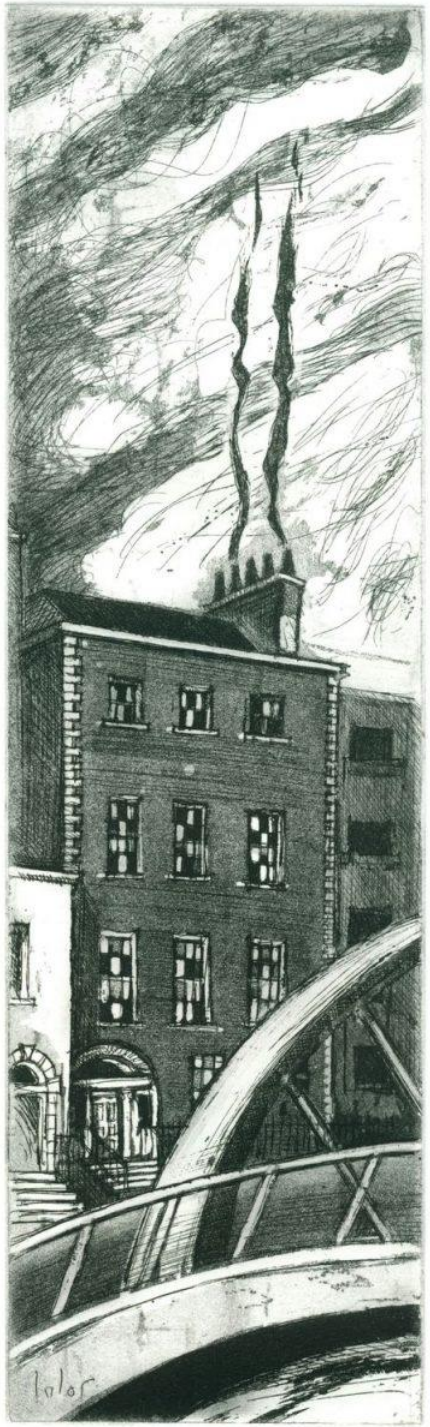
Joyce’s mother Mary-Jane (“May”) Joyce [née Murray] died on 13 August 1903 – causing Joyce to return from Paris in April of that year. In *Ulysses* – where she is called Mrs Mary Dedalus – he moved her funeral to 26 August 1903 presumably within two or three days of her death, which is unmentioned in calendar terms.

In “The Dead”, Helen Conroy, the mother of Gabriel – a character very like Joyce had he stayed in Dublin – has died before the story begins. She is said to have been unmusical (May was very talented) and to dislike Gretta (May Joyce never met Nora Barnacle having died before her son fir encountered her in July 1904.) In fact the name Helen belongs to Joyce’s paternal grandmother (née O’Connell) who disapproved of his father’s marriage. May Joyce nevertheless nursed her in her final illness.

Omitting an reference to May Joyce in a detailed reading of “The Dead” is much odder than failing to discourse on the influence of the famine in the shaping of the story at the level of the political unconscious. In a more obvious view, the dead at those family and non-family members whose relation to Gabriel and Gretta influence their relations with each other and not the victims of British ‘genocide’ or any other colonial atrocity decades and even centuries before.

Considered in that light, “The Dead” performs an act of virtual matricide. Though unmentioned among the shades whom Gabriel senses near, Mary-Jane Murray (later Joyce) is surely among the spirits in the Gothic last scene. This does not preclude the more general idea that we are all mortal and bound to join the human majority sooner or later or that our emotional development, if it is to be complete, must include some conversation with the population of Hades. Or so both Virgil and Dante thought.

“15, Ussher’s Island”
by Brian Lalor



# Joyce and Nationalism: Some Conclusions

It is impossible to ignore the formative effect of late-colonial conditions on Joyce's literary development. In recent decades, moreover, postcolonial criticism has amassed a considerable bibliography on the topic largely arguing that Joyce was engaged on a project of "revenge" against the racist-imperialist epistemology of contemporary Anglophonic culture ..., e.g.,

Vincent J. Cheng, *Joyce, Race, and Empire* (Cambridge UP 1995), xxii, 329pp.
James Fairhall, *James Joyce and the Question of History* (Cambridge UP 1993), xiv, 290pp.
Emer Nolan, *James Joyce and Nationalism* (London & NY: Routledge 1995), 219pp.
Len Platt, *Joyce and the Anglo-Irish: A Study of Joyce and the Literary Revival* (Amsterdam: Rodopi 1998), 249pp.
Andrew Gibson, Joyce's Revenge: History, Politics, and Aesthetics in Ulysses (Oxford: OUP 2002; rep. 2005), 306pp.
Frank Shovlin, *Journey Westward: Joyce, "Dubliners", and the Literary Revival* (Cambridge UP 2012), x, 180pp.
Luke Gibbons, *Joyce's Ghosts: Ireland, Modernism and Memory* (Chicago UP 2015), 288pp.

The addition of Irish nationalism to the anti-imperialist character of his work is less easy to demonstrate, however - especially given the nationalist tendency to produce a mirror-image of imperialist essentialism. The fact that Joyce shared *some* views on Irish history with his compatriots – along with deconstructive strategies unknown to them – did *not* make him a physical-force nationalist nor a supporter of the Irish Free State which, in fact he reviled in both his conversation and his writings ('split little pea'; 'dynamitisation of colleagues and burning of records by blazes'). In 1922 he refused Irish citizenship when offered it by Desmond Fitzgerald, the newly-appointed Irish Foreign Minister, then visiting Paris.

Joyce's literary development was marked by a pattern of ever-widening encyclopedic scope which sets all times and cultures on the same footing as part of a general pattern of alteration and reciprocity answering to a belief in 'coinciding contraries' which he took from Giordano Bruno and the idea of 'Human Ages' which he met with in Giambattista Vico – those Renaissance and Enlightenment philosophers best-suited to his own cosmological outlook. Indeed, he has been chastised for 'indifference' to Irish historical justice by at least one distinguished Irish critic.*

In fact, Joyce's sense of culture – both fragmentary and holistic – can be equated better with post-colonial hybridity in its integrative phase than any form of sectional or national advocacy. (The still-unresolved question of nation and hybridity is a matter for postcolonial critics.) Unlike his brother Stanislaus, who was interned by the Germans in the First World War, Joyce was not particularly adverse to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and actually relished its rich amalgam of cultures without engaging with Italian irredentism – the equivalent of Irish nationalism in the region.

*See Seamus Deane on *Finnegans Wake* (1939): "But, it could be argued, it is a harmony of indifference, one in which everything is a version of something else, where sameness rules over diversity, where contradiction is finally and disquietingly written out." (*Heroic Traditions*, Field Day Pamphls. 1984, p.16.) Notice, by the way, that Joyce has been reading Italian eugenic theory while in Rome and Trieste.

# Finale

Irish society today is facing multiple-crisis around the social policies instituted by the Gaelic-Catholic ethos which was inscribed in the 1937 Constitution, a document that confers a 'special position' on the Church and privileges the family above the individual – and even states that the 'family is the basic social unit' in willful defiance of Modern Sociology. (Art. 44.)

Perhaps the best-known Irish scandal of modern times is the Mother and Child Homes which took in pregnant unmarried mothers at the behest of the triumvir of Family, Church, and State (supposedly their protectors). Some 970 children are believed to have died in those homes, many from avoidable medical conditions including malnutrition and infection caused by poor nappy-hygiene while hundreds of these are known to have been disposed of without funeral rites or death records – they never really existed – in septic tanks designed for the reception of sewage in Tuam. (The position of the bones suggests that they were dropped in or flung in according to convenience.)

Tuam and Bethany Memorials - 2020

The facts speak so plainly for themselves that it is almost unnecessary to quote a searing review of the Irish Government's Final Report written by Clair Wills for the *London Review of Books'* most recent issue:

> 'The *extremely high rates of infant mortality and the practice of discarding the bodies of babies and children in disused septic tanks* are "the most disquieting features" of this history not because they are the most exceptional or the most clear-cut in terms of apportioning blame, which is what the commission suggests. It is because they point to the underlying truth of this history, which is that *the Irish church and state*, with the passive acceptance and sometimes active collusion of Irish families, *was willing to sacrifice its own children – of whatever age – for what it considered to be survival.*' (*LRB*, 220 May 2021 [my italics].)

It could have been a *Dubliners* story. Indeed, had they read "Eveline" "Clay" and "The Two Gallants" in the right spirit it might never have happened.