Thomas F. Halloran

James Joyce
Developing Irish Identity

A Study of the Development of Postcolonial Irish Identity
in the Novels of James Joyce

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Cover illustration: Alisa Blanter

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Acknowledgements

I have heard fellow academics refer to their research projects as "my baby." Indeed, at times this study has demanded the time, effort and patience that a child might demand of its parents. Continuing this analogy, as I have assumed the role of father/mother for this study (now there's a Joycean concept for you), I must first pay my respects, to the man who could only be described as "the Godfather," Dr. Eugene O'Brien. Eugene has done everything that could be asked of a supervisor and a friend. I am truly grateful to Eugene for setting me onto this path of research and learning that I know I am so lucky to have.

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Preface

> We cannot help making the attempt to come to the end of a reading, to reach a stable point where it all makes coherent sense, and we should never stop trying to achieve this moment; but it is an endlessly repeated failure to do so. (Attridge, *Cambridge Companion* 3)

Derek Attridge is writing about the impossibility of providing the definitive interpretation of *Finnegans Wake*, but it could just as easily apply to any project that seeks to summarise or define the Joycean *oeuvre*. The goal of this study is to re-imagine Joyce's work and thus provide a new way of understanding the way that we think about postcolonial criticism and Irish identity.

This thesis finds postcolonial criticism as a theoretical approach capable of offering insightful analysis for the study of Irish identity and a useful new analysis of Joyce. This study makes it apparent that postcolonial theory must recognise Ireland if it is to continue usefully to interpret the literature and cultures of other postcolonial nations.

Through close reading of *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Stephen Hero* and *Ulysses*, Joyce develops an articulation of the problems that colonialism poses to the nation-state without the right to create identity autonomously. This study provides a reading of these texts and develops the postcolonial concepts that arise in Joyce's *oeuvre* years before other postcolonial writers would attempt similar tasks for their nations and cultures. This study will provide the reader with a new perspective on Joyce's international influence through postcolonial literature.

Introduction

Stories of a Developing Identity

> The first Normans landed in Wexford in May 1169. That was the beginning of the political struggle between England and Ireland which was to dominate Irish history until the present day. (Ó hEithir 25)

A strand of modern Irish history mythologises the 800 years prior to Irish independence from the British Empire as a period of struggle and war for autonomy, until finally, sovereignty for the Free State was accomplished in 1922. However, as Declan Kiberd argues, the creation of an independent Ireland caused problems for one of the first decolonising nations. Most importantly for this thesis, these issues involved the necessity of changing national thinking from a war-like mentality of "us" versus "them," to a more open and forward-thinking notion of "us," defined in terms of relation to the outside world. It appears that after such an extended period of Ireland's nationalistic exertions, the general consciousness in Ireland had come to firmly identify with the ideals of the nationalist movement that espoused the self-created construction of a homogenising power, and such a creation would prove difficult to deconstruct.

The nationalist movement was successful because of its ability to unite the different nation-wide political and social agendas and then produce a convergence for the cause of independence. Nationalism had forged a bond throughout Ireland by way of a self-created version of the Irish national history that effectively homogenised its citizens with the intention of creating a unified voice for a societal decolonisation of English imperialism. When the nation was created, the need for this homogenisation was over,

and the deconstruction of such a powerful aspect of national consciousness was necessary if a more pluralist form of national growth were to be encouraged. As difficult as this task might seem, it would be important in terms of altering the national way of thinking. The early Free State governments of Eamon de Valera and Sean Lemass did not re-think the nationalist outlook but attempted to protect national interest and sovereignty by further isolating Ireland. However, banning English products, censoring foreign literature and later censoring any national literature that did not fit the restrictive ideals upon which a new Ireland was to be founded, created a nation that could not cope with change.

Ireland's post-independence founders created a national ideal based on a backwards look at a certain version of Irish history and its people, and found an extension of this created vision of "Irishness" more enticing than the prospects of a present Irish community that was ravaged by war and split by the differences that complicated Irish culture in terms of its core values. These areas included the question of the national language, as well as that of the nation's role in the international community, and specifically with respect to England. A further issue was the extent to which the Catholic Church dictated the morality of governmental policy. There was also the question as to what role the minority could play in the existing restrictive national definition. Rather than answer these difficult questions in the government of the new nation, Ireland stalled the problem by defining the Irish as the inverse of the English. Kiberd explains:

> The newly liberated people would be employing the unmodified devices of the old regime upon themselves. War and civil war appeared to have drained all energy and imagination away: there was precious little left with

> which to reimagine the national condition. (Kiberd, *Inventing* 263)

The above illustrates the need for an independent creation of "Irishness" by the Irish in what came to be their postcolonial situation, rather than making the mistake of simplifying Irish identity in terms of its being defined as non-English.

The Irish Free State and early Republic were founded on the misguided idea of a closed community that had never existed anywhere but in lines of poetry or perhaps worse, of political propaganda.[1] Ireland was never an exclusive nation of one language, one religion, one ethnicity and one culture, but was mythologically imagined to have such a history in a time of precolonial freedom. The combination of attributes including Gaelic ancestry, the Roman Catholic religion, and a rural "west of Ireland" ideology of identity, created confusion and alienation for the vast majority which could not fit into all of these moulds.

Although the early Irish government created a binary anti-English definition for the Irish, Ireland's writers would debate the problem of a successful revolution that lacked a proper ideology to reinforce it. Ironically, those writers who first voiced this need for an ever-changing hybrid definition of Irishness were largely disregarded and condemned as "anti-Irish" by the new state apparatus of the Free State. In order to change the unrealistic self-perception of the nation, writers of the Free State, most significantly James Joyce, re-envisioned the nation in other terms than those sponsored by the dominating powers of imperialism, church and state. Joyce's foresight of the problems of an ongoing Irish

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[1] For this perspective one only needs to consult D. P. Moran, discussed in Willard Potts, *Joyce and the Two Irelands*, or Douglas Hyde's speech "The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland."

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nationalism in the Free State develops throughout the entirety of
his work. From *Dubliners*, where he scrutinises the problems of
the colonial situation, to his conclusive *Finnegans Wake*, where
the author attempts to deconstruct the problems of postcoloniality,
Joyce is ever concerned with the identity issues that arise as a di-
rect result of British and Roman imperialism and its ensuing fol-
lower, Irish nationalism.

Before dealing directly with Joyce's constructions and decon-
structions of imperialism, it is necessary to answer questions
about the very nature of the postcolonial approach to literature in
the first place. First of, what is postcolonialism/postcolonial litera-
ture and theory? In Dane Kennedy's words, postcolonial studies
have

> [r]aised provocative, often fundamental, questions about
> the epistemological structures of power between metro-
> politan and colonial societies, about the construction of
> group identities in the context of state formation, even
> about the nature and uses of historical evidence itself.
>
> (356)

This study takes postcolonialism on for the benefits described
above. Furthermore, Ireland has proved particularly controversial
because of its existence in both "first-world" and "third world"
canons.[2] Therefore, it seems increasingly necessary that Joyce,
who stands in the crossroads of seemingly all theories, categorisa-
tions, groupings, listings and canons, should be studied from an

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[2] Graham and Maley note that Ireland, "so susceptible to binaries, undoes the
double bind of West and rest"(Graham and Maley 151). They continue that
Ireland should remind postcolonial studies that the binary of "West" and
"rest" must be regarded carefully, as Ireland exists in both spaces.

angle that seeks to investigate these boundaries and liminal spaces. Taking a cue from Colin Graham and Willy Maley's editing of the *Irish Studies Review* issue on postcolonial theory, this study's objectives are quite similar with an interest in raising the following issues:

> the 'uniqueness' of Irish postcolonialism; the 'binary' as a dominant mode of thinking in Irish contexts, the possible differences in an Irish setting, between 'literary' or 'cultural' models of postcolonial criticism, and the various ways in which themes of postcolonial – ambivalence, authenticity, diaspora, difference, hybridity, migrancy, mimicry, nativism, signifying and subalternity – can work to counteract the exclusive and negative aspects of identity politics. (149)

Of course the major difference is that this project looks exclusively at how some of these concepts of postcolonial theory apply to Joyce's body of work and only touches on the implications for Irish Studies and postcolonial literature.

This relatively new method of literary theory has gained wide acceptance for the literature of the decolonised nations of Africa and the sub-continent of India, the Caribbean and to a lesser extent South America. However, the few examples of European postcolonials, namely Ireland, Greece, Catalonia and the Basque Country are rarely, if ever included in studies of postcolonialism. Trouble arises for the postcolonial categorisation of the newly independent Irish nation, mainly because Ireland has been internationally perceived as having so many similarities to its former coloniser, England. Because of the colour of the Irish people's skin, the dominance of the English language and movement between the countries, not to mention their close proximity and be-

cause the Irish participated in the imperial endeavour, Ireland has often been linked with the coloniser, more often than regarded as a colony itself.

Recent scholarship in Irish studies has made important strides to help give recognition to Ireland's role as an early model in the discourses of decolonisation and postcolonialism. In these studies, the problems of classifying the Irish experience as postcolonial also arise, but because of the unique aspects of the situation and circumstances, and most importantly the contribution on the part of Irish literature, this study argues for the vital need to incorporate the Irish and most specifically Joyce into the field of postcolonial literature.

The first section of this study traces the major issues that arise in the acceptance and importance of Irish postcoloniality. Because the Irish role in postcolonialism is that of pioneer and outsider in comparison with the former faraway colonies, Ireland does not fit with more recognisable decolonised nations and attention is also given to the problems with Irish postcoloniality and postcolonial theory that have become complicated because of this unique situation. This first chapter seeks to provide an explanation of postcolonial studies as related to Ireland, to examine the benefits and difficulties, but ultimately the necessity of this synergy.

The next aspect of the study moves from an expressly theoretical angle to a combination of theory and close reading in a study of Joyce's unique reaction to colonialism. While this thesis may add to the increasingly developing area of "Joyce studies" overall, a gap remains in Joyce studies in terms of postcolonialism, in that recent scholarship has yet to include the modern identity questions of contemporary Ireland in relation to Joyce's *oeuvre*. In *Joyce, Race and Empire*, Vincent J. Cheng has noticed that until recently Joyce has not been regarded as anything but a writer concerned

with style above all, as well as being deemed to be devoid of a political message. Expanding on this aspect of Joyce studies, this thesis will be joining Joyce's critical ideas about British colonialism with those of the mainstream contemporary postcolonial criticism. To do this, the second chapter examines *Dubliners*, reading the collection as presenting a nation lost in inarticulate fantasy or conversely the mimicry of materialism which frames the problems of a colonised nation afraid to create itself independently. The third chapter studies the articulation of the desire to control one's own identity as expressed by Stephen Dedalus in *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and *Stephen Hero*. The final chapter provides a study of *Ulysses* that highlights the colonial trappings of Irish identity and the possibility of freedom that exists and is eventually articulated and realised by Leopold Bloom.

This study finds Joyce to have taken an extraordinarily progressive stance on decolonisation, by comprehending the need for nationalism and yet also acknowledging the necessity for the deconstruction of this vehicle for independence. Joyce's innovations in style have a postcolonial aim as well, more complicated than just a post-modern writing technique, namely the deconstruction of the English language, and the promotion of the hybrid language that develops in *Ulysses* and especially in *Finnegans Wake*, which is a template for the former colonies to use English and the novel tradition in an independent way.

Moving beyond Joyce's deconstruction of the English language and tradition, the question for contemporary Irish studies becomes: "What is Irishness?" Joyce's deconstruction of the traditions leads to benefits for society in terms of hybridity, fluidity, and openness. But what consequences have these changes had for modern Irish identity? What makes up the national definition after postcolonialism is a question just beginning to be asked let alone

answered and it is fitting that one of the first countries to decolonise would be among the first to find itself at a crossroads of identity in its evolution. This book seeks to encourage the study of Ireland for the scholar interested in postcolonialism and world literature.