Introduction

Post-war criticism constructed Joyce as the voice of common-sense humanity. When it came to politics generally, and nationalism in particular, Joyce was presented as holding the liberal centre. Youthful, and distinctly theoretical, flirtations with socialism and even anarchism put Joyce broadly on the correct side. This tradition acknowledged that Joyce’s great vocation was art and argued that art was, by and large, indifferent to politics. The issue of nationalism, however, produced an exception to this elevation of art and artists. Even artists were required to take position on the ideology which, apparently, had split the world. Joyce, almost alone amongst the major modernists, was untainted by any associations with the extreme right. He has been presented as a liberal humanitarian, unequivocal in his stand against anti-Semitism and against what has been perceived as the violent and bloody bigotry of Irish nationalism. Revivalism has played a part, albeit a small one, in this tradition of Joyce studies. The perceived indifference to both language and literary revivals apparently marks the distance between Joyce and Irish nationalism, although, in fact, nationalism and revivalism are not necessarily the same thing. This distance is often taken as evidence of an enmity between provincial and metropolitan, primitive and modern, and Ireland and Europe. Influential American and English critical traditions, often supported by naïve historical readings, have formulated, then, this liberal humanist Joyce who turns his back on nativist Ireland and the excesses of Irish nationalism to embrace and reproduce the relativity, innovation and multiplicity of modern European culture. The significance of Joyce’s fictions as canonical modern texts has thus been shifted from the Irish cultural domain. This is one reason why the fact of Joyce’s resistance to revivalism has been little more than a long-standing footnote to critical work on Joyce. In this classic tradition of Joyce studies, Joyce’s interaction with such movements as the Gaelic League and the Irish Literary Revival has been approached largely as a ‘content’ issue — of local, contextual significance certainly, but not at all critical to what is really important
about *Ulysses*, and that is its ‘modernity’, or its ‘textuality’.¹

One of the central arguments of this study is that Joyce’s response to revivalism, far from being marginal, is actually fundamental to the quality of *Ulysses*, to the kind of text that *Ulysses* is. Indeed, this is the first and foremost challenge of *Joyce and the Anglo-Irish*. It explores a context which has received little serious attention from Joyceans, yet which has an essential impact on *Ulysses*. Joyce’s response to the movement that claimed to represent the national consciousness is engineered with extraordinary vigour and persistence here. *Ulysses* is not merely fortuitously different to revivalism. It is, at almost every point, in precise and explicit antithesis. Against the Literary Revival’s celebration of an aristocratic culture of heroism is Joyce’s celebration of the culture of Dublin’s streets, his mock-heroic; against the neo-Platonic aesthetic of Yeats and Russell, Joyce’s concoction of Aristotle and Aquinas; against their mysticism, his realism; against the Revival’s vegetarianism, his own Leopold Bloom who eats ‘with relish the inner organs of beast and fowls’ (4.1-2); against its evocations of a timeless idyllic rurality are Joyce’s

¹ There is an interesting example of exactly this kind of content/form division in a very early account of Irish revivalism, Ernest Boyd’s *Irish Literary Renaissance*, revised edn (London: Grant Richards, 1922). Boyd suggests that ‘no Irish writer is more Irish than Joyce; none shows more unmistakably the imprint of his race and traditions’ (405). By ‘race and traditions’, Boyd has Catholicism in mind. In Joyce’s work he sees ‘such an analysis of repressed and stunted instincts as only an Irishman could have made to explain the curious conditions of Irish puritanism’.

In his representation of the Literary Revival, Boyd wants to insist on a syncretic concept of nationality, but it is quite apparent that the Anglo-Irish heroes of his analysis, O’Grady, Yeats, Russell and Synge, for example, are ‘Irish’ primarily by virtue of their ennoblement of the Irish character, whereas Joyce is ‘Irish’ because he has been oppressed by the priests. Boyd makes great claims for Joyce as a national writer. The problem is that Joyce represents the ‘wrong’ Ireland, one in which ‘the glamour of love is absent’; where there exists ‘a crude horror and fascination of the body as seen by the great Catholic heretics’ (410); which focuses on ‘all that is mean and furtive in Dublin society’ (408).

The further problem in Boyd’s attempt to claim Joyce for Ireland is that Boyd can find few Irish precursors for Joyce — only one, in fact: George Moore. But the European influences on Joyce range from Rabelais to Zola and include Flaubert, Jules Romain and the German expressionists, Walter Hasenclauer and George Kaiser. It is in an attempt to sort out this problem that Boyd makes the claim, repeated by so many later Joyceans, that the ‘technical’ qualities of *Ulysses* are ‘European’, but the ‘matter’, is, in Boyd’s coy term, ‘local’ (411).
exc ssively time-specific urban fictions. The reverse side to Joyce’s classi al detachment is the impatient temper of romanticism which he ascribed to the Revival. While the Revival often stressed the unconscious, ‘spiritual’ element in art-manufacture, Joyce’s fictions contain the most intricate designs and patterns (he saw a parallel in this respect between *Ulysses* and the complex decorative art of *The Book of Kells*, an art ‘at which the ancient Irish excelled’ — *CW*, 161). A central argument here is that this antithesis is not, as was previously thought, the accidental product of aesthetic difference, but is rather a designed assault on the foundations of revivalism.

The main purpose of this introduction is to establish some bearings on why *Ulysses* engages revivalism in this way. In order to do so it is necessary to describe some of the central characteristics both of revivalism generally and the Irish Literary Revival in particular. It is not the intention here to give a potted history of revivalism in Irish culture, but rather to outline some of the key features of revivalism, as it is constructed in this study. Firstly, however, my usage of the words ‘revivalism’ and ‘Revival’ requires a brief explanation. The capitalised word ‘Revival’ will always refer to one particular movement, the Literary Revival, in this study. The reason for this privileging will become clear in due course. The term ‘revivalism’ (and ‘revivalist’), taking a lower case initial letter, is used here to define a process of identifying with a historical and, usually, ‘native’ culture. ‘Revivalism’, then, refers not to a particular group or movement, but to a cultural practice. This practice will be characterized and theorized in what follows, but the essential point is that revivalism invariably involves the attempt to transform a pre-modern, often archaic, tradition into something living.

Revivalism is invariably nationalistic and is by no means exclusive to Ireland. On the contrary, it is difficult to think of a modern society which is not, almost continuously, defining itself in terms of a revived, and largely imaginary, past. Nor did Irish revivalism suddenly emerge in the late nineteenth century to produce the organizations of Joyce’s immediate cultural environment, like the Gaelic League (concerned with the language revival), or the Gaelic Athletic Association (concerned with sports revival), or the Literary Revival (concerned with a literature revival, in English). The construction of contemporary analogues with the

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2 In latter life, Joyce claimed that *The Book of Kells* was ‘the most purely Irish thing we have, and some of the big initial letters which swing right across a page have the essential quality of *Ulysses*’ (*JJ*, 545).
'Gael', 'Celt', 'Milesian', or 'Firbolg' has been a characteristic of Irish cultural history over a very long period of time. Indeed this paralleling or corresponding is arguably the process of Irish cultural history. The process of revivalism has been and continues to be a central strategy of Irish culture, deployed by Seamus Heaney and Brian Friel in the 1970s and 1980s, as it was by W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge at the turn of the nineteenth century, and by Samuel Ferguson in the earlier nineteenth century. The longevity of revivalism is one reason why it has been a mistake for historians and Joyce critics to dismiss the enthusiasms of late nineteenth-century revivalists too readily. It is easy enough to laugh at, for example, Douglas Hyde's de-Anglicizing rhetoric. The crusading fervour of his attacks on barrel-organs and the wearing of 'English second-hand trousers' does indeed look odd and cranky in the modern period. But the process of revivalism has been cumulative. Revivalism, in the broad sense, has been at the heart of the serious business of 'inventing Ireland', at least since the eighteenth century. There have been times in this long history when it has moved from the oddball cultural margins to take the centre stage. Indeed at some historical moments, revivalism has been crucial to the political agenda. That is to say, in the right context, it is possible for something which once appeared perhaps as juvenile faddism to become transformed into a compelling ideology of the moment. This happened in Ireland in the 1920s and 30s:

The Irish nation is the Gaelic nation; its language and literature is the Gaelic language; its history is the history of the Gael. All other elements have no place in Irish national life, literature and tradition, save as far as they are assimilated into the very substance of Gaelic speech, life and thought. The Irish nation is not a racial synthesis at all; synthesis is not a vital process, and only what is vital is admissible in analogies bearing on the nature of the living Irish nation, speech literature and tradition. We are not a national conglomerate, nor a national patchwork specimen; the poetry or life of what Aodh de Blacam calls Belfast can only be Irish by being assimilated into Gaelic literature.\(^4\)


Introduction

Professor Timothy Corcoran, the author of the above, was an important figure in the formulation and articulation of education policy in the early Irish Free State. Here, in a classic exposition of revivalism, he places the revived Gael, the awakened Finn, at the very centre of his vision of the Irish nation. The vision, of course, was not his alone. Corcoran’s essentialism is extremist, but it represents something fundamental to De Valera’s new republic. Precisely to what extent the new state converged with cultural nationalism may be debatable, but it is certain that the Republic’s promotion of, ‘self-sacrifice, religious idealism, purity, respect for women and fear of external evils’, to say nothing of its educational policies, owed something substantial to revivalism. This, then, is revivalism at its most influential, confidently defining Irish culture, the Irish nation and Irish identity from a position of authority. The point is important, because it enables us to focus on a revivalism significant enough to be of major concern to the foremost novelist of the modern period.

Corcoran’s statement is illustrative in further ways. Revivalism is by definition retrospective and it has usually produced a conservative nationalism. This may seem a wild generalization given the diversity in revivalist movements. In the heyday of modern revivalism, broadly the period between Parnell’s fall and 1914, there were many revivalist organizations responding in very different ways to the dominant issues of Anglicization and modernization. There were notorious ambivalences in both Catholic and Protestant relationships to the ‘new nationalism’. But whether the articulation was from Yeats or Moran, Gaelicism focused strong conservative perspectives in this period. Revivalist movements were by definition anti-modern. They were often puritanical, invariably anti-socialist and sometimes anti-trade union. Many were assimilated by the Catholic Church through its promotion of the Gaelic language and more guarded acceptance of Moran’s extremely influential version of the Irish-Ireland movement. Certainly Corcoran’s conservatism is apparent in his deep antagonism towards what he terms ‘assimilation’, but there is nothing particularly idiosyncratic about this in revivalist terms. The

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demonization of socialism which was characteristic of a revivalist rhetoric crossing a range of organizations, makes the point emphatically:

For the past twenty years the Gael has been crying ... for help to beat back the Anglicization he saw dragging its slimy length along — the immoral literature, the smutty postcards, the lewd plays and the suggestive songs were bad, yet they were merely puffs from the foul breath of a paganised society. The full sewerage from the *cloaca maxima* of Anglicization is now discharged upon us. The black devil of Socialism, hoof and horns, is amongst us.  

By the 1920s the besieged Catholic/Gael was a dominant cultural identification, cementing a conservative alliance of the state, the nation and the Church.

Revivalism was also conservative in its eighteenth-century origins, but in a very different sense. Early revivalism was closer to High Toryism and established a set of identifications quite at odds to those of De Valera’s Gaeltacht. Revivalism in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries emerged from a Protestant intelligentsia, and from Protestant institutions. These self-appointed guardians of the national culture were not attempting to construct a Catholic Ireland. On the contrary, they were attempting to preserve an Ascendancy Ireland, where traditional, feudal relations could be preserved from the onslaught of an alien modernity. This was the Protestant tradition of revivalism that was developed by Petrie, O’Curry, O’Donovan and, more radically, Samuel Ferguson and Standish O’Grady. It found its greatest champion in Yeats and his Literary Revival, and it was the literary culture which, until Joyce’s intervention, held the most serious claim to be articulating not just the voice of Ireland but its very consciousness.

Revivalism was crucially a Protestant Anglo-Irish culture and one of the central arguments of *Joyce and the Anglo-Irish* is that it was understood as such by Joyce. Of course, Joyce was very much aware that his Catholic contemporaries were turning to Gaelicism in the League and the G.A.A., and a host of other revivalist organizations. He despised them for it, partly because he saw them as blindly following strategies which had been evolved by the old Ascendancy. Joyce takes some vicious swipes at the young ‘Irishers’ in the pre-*Ulysses* fictions, but, in the epic later work, his bigger target is the Literary Revival. The frontal assault, as

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we shall see, is not against the imitators, but the progenitors and their descendants, the writers and intellectuals of a traditionally hegemonic class. It was through the agency of the late revivalists, Yeats, Synge, Lady Gregory and so on, that Anglo-Ireland continued to stake its monopolizing claim on Irish culture, to define the national culture, as it had done since the seventeenth century. In this sense the Literary Revival was not a new departure but the continuance of an old establishment. The argument here is that it becomes the dominant conservative culture against which Joyce redefines Ireland and Irishness.

This identification of revivalism as a conservative ideology suggests that Joyce’s engagement is politically motivated. The idea that Joyce’s response to revivalism is consistent with, or at least reinforced by, a radical politics will be developed in this study. But this does not mean that the identification of a coherent Joycean politics is centrally on the agenda here or even generally possible. The Joycean text is related to revivalism, but not through deployment of an alternative discourse which is demonstrably ‘socialist’ or ‘anarchist’. On the contrary, the Joyce text, for all its resistance to revivalism, is substantially within revivalist traditions. It imports revivalist discourses and, I will argue, is centralized in the post-colonial cultural issues which dominated revivalist Ireland. These issues had important political implications and articulations of cultural nationalism did, of course, consolidate around political positions and take political forms. But, despite the syncretic claims of Yeats’s ‘Unity of Culture’, there is no doubt that revivalist formulations were characterized much more substantially by the complex mix of class and ethnic identities which were embedded in a heterogeneous colonial culture than by neat political positions and affiliations. In a flashpoint of revivalism, such as the Playboy riots, (which Joyce, incidentally, was so angry at missing), it is perceived racial and class identities which are most obviously engaged, not political theories. Particularly in these post-Parnell years, defining the

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7 Joyce’s political interests, particularly in socialism and anarchism have been well researched, most notably in Dominic Manganiello, Joyce’s Politics (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), and some Joyceans, like Colin McCabe in The Revolution of the Word (London: Macmillan, 1978), have postulated a political metonymy operating in Joyce’s texts. But a Joycean politics has never been convincingly articulated.

8 ‘I feel like a man in a house who hears a row in the street and voices shouting he knows but can’t get out to hear what the hell is going on’ (Letters II, 212).
national culture was the burning issue for the Dublin intelligentsia. All interactions with cultural nationalism implied historicizations and historicization inevitably exposed social and cultural allegiances. Thus in the one extended account of Irish cultural history that Joyce produced, the Triestine lectures (1907), Joyce’s claim that he writes as an ‘unprejudiced observer’ (CW, 163) is everywhere compromised by such controversial and problematic statements as ‘Ancient Ireland is dead just as ancient Egypt is dead’ (CW, 173); by the characterization of Gaelic as being a ‘harsh and guttural tongue’ (CW, 156); by the caricature of a Gaelic League, whose members ‘write to each other in Irish, and often the poor postman, unable to read the address, must turn to his superior to untie the knot’ (CW, 151) and so on.

The suggestion here is that Joyce’s encounter with revivalism engages something deeper, more visceral, than political persuasion. Such an argument implies a modernity of Ulysses which is centred in Irish post-colonial contexts, because so much of the innovation of Ulysses will be presented here as responding to Anglicized traditions of Irish culture. In this broad sense, the current study joins ranks with recent scholarship that takes its bearings from the crucial importance of the colonial landscape in and for Joyce. At the same time there is an important distinction to be drawn between this study and a new Joyce incarnation that seems to be emerging. This new incarnation might be thought of as more the product of Irish scholars, which may be one reason for its historical sophistication. It has it origins, perhaps, in the admirable work of Seamus Deane, is evident everywhere in Emer Nolan’s book, Joyce and Nationalism (1995) and, to some extent, operates in Declan Kiberd’s Inventing Ireland (1995). The trouble with it is that it reconstitutes Joyce as a member of a ‘family’ of nationalisms which can indifferently include Yeats, Hyde and others in a broad cultural community. This Joyce incarnation erases or transcends the powerful contradictions and conflicts internal to his culture. That an Irish critic like Kiberd should wish to sustain such a view is understandable enough. But the view itself is problematic — above all in that it loses sight of the dynamic of Joyce’s class consciousness and its central importance in his work. It is here, in insisting on the vital

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9 These lectures do discuss such matters as Irish politics, the role of the modern Catholic Church and so on, but Joyce makes clear his intention to deliver a history of Irish culture. This is apparent in his periodisation of this history into ‘two large parts’ and ‘five sub-divisions’. He intended to cover the whole of this ground during the course of the three lectures that were planned. See CW, 176.
significance of the class question along with the colonial question, on their *inseparability*, that the historicizing approach to Joyce taken in this study parts company with that of the most interesting contemporary Irish Joyceans. The fundamental point of this study is that the antithesis between *Ulysses* and the culture of revivalism is formulated out of conflicting class and cultural identities.

One final introductory point. Historical materials have been used throughout this study. The materials have been used to contextualize the fiction, but I would stress that they have not been used to substantiate the 'truth' or otherwise of Joyce's interpretation of Irish history. I would argue that Joyce's version of things has validity by comparison to the wild historical fabrications promulgated by the Literary Revival, but this does not mean, of course, that Joyce's writing is objective history-making. It is mediated fiction and engages in its own distortions. To take a small, but illustrative example, I doubt that John Eglinton was really the idiot that Joyce depicted in *Ulysses* 9. Eglinton's own disputes with Yeats reveal a sharp mind, and it may be the case that Joyce owed a debt to Eglinton that he was not prepared to acknowledge. As early as 1899, Eglinton was arguing that a national literature based on old myths would fail because it would be out of touch with real life and 'modern sympathies'. He had strong doubts about an art which served the nation: 'in all ages', he wrote, 'poets and thinkers have owed far less to their countries than their countries have owed to them'.

He wrote of mechanical and scientific culture and its relation to art in terms that Joyce might well have approved of:

The kinematograph, the bicycle, electric tramcars, labour-saving contrivances etc., are not susceptible to poetic treatment, but are in fact themselves the poetry, not without a certain suggestiveness of a scientific age, with which the poetry of Greek and Hebrew tradition vainly endeavours to vie. It is no wonder that an age which produced this concrete type of poetry should be content with an attitude of simple politeness towards those dreamers who talk with their heads in a cloud of vision.

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11 J. Eglinton, 'National Drama and Contemporary Life', in Eglinton et al., *Literary Ideals*, 42.
The fact that Joyce should have turned this sophisticated writer, with whom he actually shared territory, into the fool of the National Library, to say nothing of the insults heaped on AE, damned for his ‘vegetable verse’ and ‘vegetable philosophy’ (Letters II, 28), and the liberties taken with just about every artistic precept deployed by Yeats, indicates that Joyce had a very considerable investment in historical reconstruction, a motivation that was powerful, committed, even raw. The final product, in Ulysses, may be deeply controlled, but something of the original rawness is certainly apparent in Joyce’s blatantly self-dramatizing farewell to the ‘mumming company’ which included Russell (‘he who once when snug abed/Saw Jesus Christ without his head’); Eglinton, who was apparently both puritanical and aristocratic (he, ‘who will his hat unfix/Neither to malt or crucifix/But show to all that poor-dressed be/ His high Castilian courtesy’), and above all Yeats. Yeats, the architect of late nineteenth-century revivalism, was at the very centre of this ‘motley crew’, these dreamers of ‘dreamy dreams’, men of ‘timid arses’ who the young author of ‘The Holy Office’ intended to ‘spurn for evermore’. The venom expressed in this invective, which has Yeats appealing ‘his giddy dames’ frivolities/While they console him when he whinges/With gold-embroidered Celtic fringes’ (CW, 149-52), is surely suggestive of some deep class animosities. That the animosities cut both ways is apparent in some revivalist responses to Joyce and the publication of his book. George Moore found Ulysses ‘boring’, ‘dirty’ and derivative and identified its author as ‘a nobody from the Dublin docks: no family, no breeding’. J. P. Mahaffy described Joyce as ‘a living argument in favour of my contention that it was a mistake to establish a separate university for the aborigines of this island — for the corner boys who spit in the Liffey’. Once we accept that Joyce’s engagement with history involves conviction and that there are social and cultural issues centrally at stake in his work, then a general distinction has to be drawn: a distinction between Joyce the so-called theorist of the meaning of history, who has featured so

12 See also Letters II, 211 where Yeats is tellingly described as a ‘tiresome idiot’ who is ‘quite out of touch with Irish people’.


14 From Gerald Griffin, The Wild Geese: Pen Portraits of Famous Irish Exiles (1938), quoted in JJ, 58.
largely in recent, post-structuralist accounts, and Joyce the combatant who is engaged in a furious war over cultural politics. This distinction will be developed throughout what follows, but I would just emphasize, here, that Joyce’s engagement with Anglo-Ireland, which he essentially constructs as an engagement with cultural colonialism, is not, in my account, the pure, intellectual, theoretical affair that many recent writers on Joyce and history have suggested.¹⁴ *Ulysses* is not a retreat into mythic historiography or philosophical relativism, or into a sealed world of endless verbal significance, but rather a vital and wildly comic production which is fundamentally engaged with the cultural conditions of its own making. It is John Eglinton who, again showing considerable insight, was perhaps first to place this engagement in the context of revivalism. He described *Ulysses* as a ‘violent interruption of what is known as the Irish literary renaissance’, and was certain about the social dimension embedded in this interaction, which is presumably why he read *Ulysses* as an expression of ‘Celtic revenge’.¹⁵

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¹⁴ See, for instance, James Fairhall, *James Joyce and the Question of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 38. In his opening chapter, Fairhall uses different accounts of the Phoenix Park murders and Joyce’s own reconstruction of them in ‘Eumaeus’, to argue that, for Joyce, all history is subjective and therefore unknowable. He quotes Deane’s view, which was also McCabe’s, of Joyce working to ‘find new relationships between author and audience through language, so that language (and author) could escape from history … and yet at the same time be rooted in history.’ See Seamus Deane, ‘Joyce and Nationalism’, in *James Joyce: New Perspectives*, ed. Colin McCabe (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), 137.