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READING IRELAND

THE LITTLE MAGAZINE



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Every quarter, Reading Ireland will publish an E-Journal, Reading Ireland: The Little Magazine, which will be available to subscribers for an annual fee of \$40. The magazine will be published on March 15, June 15, September 15, and December 15. The aim of this publication is to provide in-depth analysis of Irish literature, past and present, through a series of essays and articles written by myself and other Irish and American writers and academics, along with opening a window onto the best of contemporary Irish poetry, prose and drama. To honor the tradition of Irish Literary Magazines, each issue will also focus on a specific “Little Magazine” from the first half of the twentieth-century.

Volume 1, issue 1 will appear on March 15 2015, and will be made available at no cost so that you as the reader can decide if this is a publication you would like to receive on a quarterly basis. Simply contact us by e-mail at leavya@cox.net and let us know where to e-mail you your copy.

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Introduction



Welcome to the first issue of *Reading Ireland: The Little Magazine*, an E-Journal dedicated to promoting Irish literature and contemporary Irish writing. Each issue of our magazine will feature engaging and informative in-depth essays, along with articles and book reviews written by myself and other writers and academics. Our aim is to cover a broad spectrum of literary talent, from playwrights to poets, novelists to non-fiction writers. What we offer is a simultaneous focus on past masters of Irish literature and on the very best of established and emerging literary talent. To honor the tradition of Irish literary magazines, each issue will also feature a column on a *Little Magazine* published in Ireland during the first half of the twentieth-century.

In this inaugural issue, the spirit of James Joyce informs much of the contents. We open with an essay on the first text which declared Joyce's genius, his short story collection *Dubliners*, which celebrated its centenary in June 2014. A century after their initial publication, Joyce's stories continue to fascinate both readers and writers with their powerful artistic expression of what his fictional alter-ego Stephen Dedalus called "the drab dullness of Dublin." As this essay discusses, writers and scholars are still engaged in lively and innovative conversations with Joyce and his chapter on the moral history of his native city. Following this consideration of *Dubliners* is an essay by Irish poet and historian, Michael Farry, on the 1911-1912 correspondence between two Irish men, James Marren and Thomas O' Grady, and an Irish-American man, Joseph McGarrity (1874-1940). Drawing on source material from the National library of Ireland and the Joseph McGarrity online collection at Villanova University, Dr. Farry provides a fascinating factual context to some of the issues debated by the protagonists in Joyce's self-declared favorite *Dubliners* story, "Ivy Day in the Committee Room."

The spotlight of this little magazine then shifts to the work of the novelist Jennifer Johnston, one of the foremost Irish writers of her generation. The author of eighteen novels, Ms. Johnston has won many awards for her work, beginning with The Evening Standard Best First Novel Award for *The Captain and the Kings* (1972). She was shortlisted for the Booker Prize with her fourth novel, *Shadows on our Skin* (1977), and her fifth novel, *This Old Jest* (1979), won the Whitebread Award for Fiction. In 2014 she was a nominee for the inaugural Laureate for Irish Fiction. Johnston's tightly controlled novels deal primarily with women struggling towards individual identity across boundaries imposed by nationality, class, sex and religion. Critical attention is long overdue for her distinctive oeuvre, and my hope is that this appraisal will stimulate renewed interest and discussion from both readers and scholars. In addition to the essay I am delighted to include a recent interview with Ms. Johnston.

This issue also includes two book reviews that demonstrate how long Joyce's shadow is, and how important he continues to be for Irish writers. The first review discusses Thomas Kinsella's most recent poetry collection *Late Poems* (2013). The social realism and iconoclasm of Joyce's early urban work has always been important to Kinsella, but in this new collection many of the hallmarks of Kinsella's work, his obsession with honesty, his interest in the real world, and the heroic stance of the artist, come together to clearly reveal his Joycean sensibility.

Until recently, there was only ever one Nora in Ireland – Nora Barnacle, Joyce's lifelong partner and Muse. With the publication of Colm Tóibín's new novel, *Nora Webster*, another Nora will now capture our literary imagination. Like Joyce, Tóibín revels in the particularity of everyday life, and in the character of Nora, he gives us a powerful portrait of the slow personal reawakening of a middle aged woman coming to terms with her husband's death in small town Ireland.

For our focus on Little Magazines we shine the spotlight on *The Klaxton*, a single issue publication that appeared in the winter of 1923/1924. Edited by Lawrence K. Emery, the pseudonym of A. J. Leventhal, *The Klaxton* was Ireland's first (and perhaps last), fiercely modernist magazine. Tom Clyde explains that the prime motivation for Leventhal to produce the magazine was "the refusal of the *Dublin Magazine*, under pressure from their printers, to print his long review of *Ulysses*." It is fitting therefore, that we end this issue of *Reading Ireland: The Little Magazine*, by drawing attention to another literary magazine that was created in large part to celebrate the writing of James Joyce.

James Joyce's *Dubliners*: Still Engaging Readers and Writers 100 Years After Publication

By Adrienne Leavy

James Joyce was born in Dublin on February 2, 1882, into a family that after enjoying a brief period of prosperity and financial security, collapsed into poverty due to his father's alcoholism. As the oldest of ten surviving children, Joyce was the one who benefited from his family's short-lived wealth. At the age of six, he was sent to a private Jesuit boarding school, though after three years his family was unable to afford the fees, and he had to return home to attend the local Christian Brothers School, until he obtained a scholarship to Belvedere College, another Jesuit school. This change in academic institutions was accompanied by a corresponding change in the family's living arrangements, which saw the Joyces move many times, always at a step down on the social and economic ladder of Dublin society. In 1902, following his graduation from University College Dublin, Joyce went to Paris to devote himself to writing full time; however, due to the fatal illness of his mother, he returned to Ireland in 1903. During this time he met a young Galway woman named Nora Barnacle, who was to remain his lifelong partner and eventual wife. Disillusioned with what he felt was the intellectual and political paralysis of Dublin, Joyce persuaded Nora to leave Ireland with him and aside from a brief visit to Dublin in 1912, he remained in self-imposed exile from his country for the remainder of his life. Joyce's repudiation of Catholic Ireland and his countering declaration of artistic independence are integral features of his writing. Nevertheless, he was formed by the religion he was brought up in, and by the Ireland he repudiated, and all of his prose work is set in Dublin, its capital city. 4

Joyce's first book, *Chamber Music*, was a book of poetry that was published in London in 1907. This was followed by his first book of fiction, the short story collection, *Dubliners*, in 1914. In 1916 he published his first novel, the coming of age story, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which centered on Joyce's fictional alter-ego, Stephen Dedalus. In 1920, Joyce and Nora moved to Paris, and two years later, in 1922, he published *Ulysses*, the novel that brought him international fame and cemented his growing literary reputation. *Ulysses* tells the story of a modern Odysseus, the everyman Leopold Bloom, who wanders the streets of Dublin for one day, June 16, 1904, before returning home to his unfaithful wife Molly Bloom, in the company of his young friend, Stephen Dedalus. Odysseus's epic struggles are transformed into the small trials of an average day, as seen from many different points of view and different narrative styles. *Ulysses* is critically regarded as one of the greatest novels ever written and it is one of the most important literary works of the twentieth century. It is also considered a masterpiece of modernist writing, which celebrated the disruption of the conventions governing both form and content in writing. In his final book, the radical and experimental *Finnegans Wake*, published in 1939, Joyce continued his efforts to re-write the genre of the novel and to encourage readers to read and think differently about what prose fiction could accomplish. After the outbreak of World War II, the Joyces moved back to Zurich and the author died there on January 3 1941.

Although now recognized as a milestone in short prose fiction, and the gold standard against which all short story writers measure their work, the initial reception to *Dubliners* was lukewarm at best, and it sold poorly. Moreover, Joyce had to fight a lengthy battle to get his stories published in the first place. In the middle of 1904, the Dublin literary lion George Russell, to whom Joyce had shown his poems some years earlier, invited the twenty two year old writer to contribute a story to *The Irish Homestead*, a weekly publication sponsored by the Irish Agricultural Organization, where Russell served as an editorial advisor. Could he write, Russell asked, “something simple, rural, and lively,” which readers would not be shocked by? Clearly, the answer was no, as the stories contained in *Dubliners* are anything but simple, and they unfold in an urban setting with hardly any discernible action. Furthermore, Joyce’s stories deviated from the usual fare a reader would find in the pages of *The Irish Homestead*, as several involve unconventional depictions of religious figures and frank acknowledgment of sexual relationships.

Nevertheless, in response to Russell’s request, the improvised author wrote the short story that opens *Dubliners*, “The Sisters,” which the magazine published in 1904. Over the next three years, he wrote another fourteen stories to create a collection he called *Dubliners*, and it took a further seven years before he found a publisher willing to take on a book which depicted sexual situations, used swear words, named real Dublin establishments, and treated the then King of England, Edward vii, disrespectfully. In 1906, his publisher Grant Richards, who was having second thoughts about publishing the work, received a series of letters from Joyce, defending his text from charges of indecency and rejecting all of Richard’s suggestions for changes. In Joyce’s opinion, these stories represented nothing less than a chapter on the moral history of Ireland, and as he termed it, “the first step towards the spiritual liberation of my country.” “It is not my fault,” Joyce writes in a subsequent letter to his beleaguered publisher,

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“That the odor of ashpits and old weeds and offal hangs round my stories. I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilization in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass.”

Joyce was determined that the mirror which he held up to his native city was going to reflect a reality that no-one had depicted before. His ambition was to present an accurate reflection of life in Dublin as it appeared to him – to tell the truth as he saw it, and in so doing, make a stand against the tide of sentimental Irish nationalism which he viewed as narrow and naïve. Although Joyce was frustrated by the city’s insularity, he also felt it was important to write about it. In an early letter to his brother Stanislaus, Joyce wrote:

“When you remember that Dublin has been a capital city for thousands of years, that it is the “second” city of the British Empire, that it is nearly three times as big as Venice, it seems strange that no artist has given it to the world.”

Dubliners is now absorbed into our literary landscape, but in the early part of the twentieth century it was the sort of book that hadn’t been seen before, certainly not from an Irish writer, and much of it shocked the conventional literary world. Another reason that the initial reception to these stories was so muted is that *Dubliners* represented a striking rejection of the dominant literary mode popular in Ireland at the turn of the century. At the time, the

Irish Literary Revival, sphere headed by the poet W.B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory, along with the playwright John Millington Synge, was in full swing and gaining in popularity. The literature of the Revival tended to harken back to ancient Irish folklore and the glorious Irish mythic past, privileging tale of heroism over the stark reality of contemporary Dublin life.

By the time *Dubliners* was published in 1914, Joyce had been living out of Ireland, primarily in Trieste, for about ten years, and he was attracting attention as a novelist due to the fact that his second major work, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, was appearing in serialized form in the Little Magazine, *The Egoist*. *Portrait* further overshadowed Joyce's collection of short stories because, as Terence Brown points out in his introduction to the newly published centenary edition of *Dubliners*, "the longer fictional form enjoyed greater critical esteem than the short story....so it was not readily recognized that *Dubliners* constituted a milestone in the history of short prose fiction, and that it was a remarkable and precocious achievement in its own right."

To fully appreciate what Joyce set out to do with *Dubliners* it is helpful to have some knowledge of the political and cultural history of Ireland in the period which the stories are set. Dublin had been the administrative centre of British rule in Ireland since 1800, when the Act of Union was passed. As a result of this legislation, parliamentary representation for Ireland was consolidated in Westminster, but Dublin Castle remained the seat of government for Ireland.

In *Dubliners* Joyce concentrates his attention on a fairly narrow strand of Dublin society: the predominantly Catholic lower middle-class, petit bourgeois world of shopkeepers and tradesmen, functionaries of one sort or another – clerks, bank tellers, salesmen and maids, whose prospects were limited for a variety of reasons. The population of Dublin in the first decade of the twentieth century was about 83% Catholic while the rest was Protestant. As Professor Brown points out, "That Protestant minority included the ruling elite whose loyalty to the union between Ireland and Great Britain was unquestioned and certainly understandable, since the union protected their own position in a strikingly inequitable social order." This Protestant minority controlled entry into the major professions of law and medicine, and they were equally powerful in the business and banking world. Thus, upward social mobility for the Catholic lower classes was virtually impossible, as the ruling elite reserved for poorer Protestants many of the better paying jobs in all of the government branches and other walks of life. Although Joyce's stories deal with issues of identity, they are equally involved with issues of Irish politics, and what it felt like for these characters to be a part of Ireland as a nation with a particular history and a particular place within the British Empire.

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Not all Irish men and women were content to acquiesce in the provincial lethargy and colonial subjugation which Joyce so intensely documents in *Dubliners*. Various movements, in particular the Gaelic League founded by Douglas Hyde and Yeats's Literary Revival, nurtured a desire for national independence. Yet for Joyce, the ideology of the Revival with its romantic vision of the past risked turning into nothing more than a sentimental affectation of the emerging Catholic middle class, who continued to live passively under colonial

rule. And while Joyce wanted to see Ireland achieve independence, he was also skeptical of a nationalist movement that was so closely aligned with the alternative dominant power that existed in Ireland at that time - the Catholic Church.

When one first encounters *Dubliners*, a common reaction among some readers is that compared to Joyce's later fictional masterpieces, it seems at first glance to be insubstantial. One of the greatest challenges it poses for the reader lies not in any complexity of language or obscurity of allusions, like the later works, but rather, in the apparent sparseness of each of the little narratives. Hardly anything of any great significance seems to happen, and when it does, its role in the story is not that of the conventional climax or resolution at the end of a tale. However, *Dubliners* is a deceptively simple work, and the more one revisits these stories, the more one appreciates the thematic, structural and stylistic cohesiveness of the collection. The notion of an "epiphany" is one of the primary aesthetic building blocks in these stories, yet in many cases, the Joycean epiphany does not so much confirm a truth as disrupt what the character has grown comfortable accepting as true.

Understood in its broadest sense, the theme of *Dubliners* is an ambitious one, nothing less than the moral and political paralysis, as Joyce saw it, of Dublin at the end of the nineteenth century, and by extension, the deadening effect on any population of a hypocritical religious institution aided and abetted by a self-serving impotent political clan. Joyce is famously on record as saying: "My intention was to write a chapter on the moral history of my country and I choose Dublin for the scene because the city seemed to me to be the centre of paralysis." The malaise that Joyce identified was exacerbated by Ireland's subservient status as a colony of Britain, without its own government, and ambivalent about its own native culture and traditions. These larger themes are suggested at, and reflected in the minutest nuances of the lives and feelings of the characters in *Dubliners*. 7

The structural integrity of the collection is another distinctive feature. Like all of Joyce's subsequent work, these stories seem to have a built in principle of openness to further investigation, further interpretation, and further enjoyment. As Colum McCann points out in his forward to the centennial edition, "The collection is methodical, even mathematical in its construction," and indeed, the skillful organization of these stories is deliberately symmetrical. The first three stories centre on childhood, that is to say, the centre of consciousness in each story is that of a child. The subsequent four stories are of adolescence, which for Joyce's purposes extended well into an individual's early 30s, then four more deal with maturity, while the final three concern public life. However, the later addition of the most well known of these stories, "The Dead," disturbed both the careful equilibrium and the pervasive pessimism of the collection.

Various tensions surface in *Dubliners* – the relationship between desire and the external circumstances that shape it, the divisive aspects of Irish politics in a colonial society, and the pressures to conform imposed by family and religious obligations. Several critics, including Gary Leonard, point out that Joyce's greatest accomplishment is that he "develops a style that puts all these various factors into play virtually at the same time." In other words, when characters appear paralyzed by indecision, or overwhelmed with unwelcome insight, or even resolutely oblivious to the significance of various events in their lives, we as readers can see these moments as a complex convergence of all the issues at play in the stories.

Joyce himself described his style in *Dubliners* as one of “scrupulous meanness.” In one sense he was referring to his economical writing style, which rejected any superfluous or ornate language, in favor of a style that was one of unprecedented documentary realism. However, the “scrupulous meanness” that Joyce talked about can also be read as referring to the meanness of all the small scale Dublin lives of the characters. Yet Joyce softened his attitude towards Dublin and its inhabitants prior to publication, for in 1907, he added a new concluding story, “The Dead,” which provided a quite different conclusion to the collection. This more empathetic view of Ireland was signaled in 1906, when in a letter to his brother, Joyce confessed: “Sometimes thinking of Ireland it seems to me that I have been unnecessarily harsh. ...I have not been just to its beauty.” Placed at the end of the fourteen bleak tales that precede it, “The Dead” altered the balance and the meaning of Joyce’s collection, as it acknowledged for the first time what he described as Dublin’s “ingenious insularity and hospitality.”

A close reading of several stories illustrates how skillfully Joyce juxtaposes the disparate observations, thoughts and desires of his characters, and how each story communicates to the reader what the characters cannot see or refuse to acknowledge.

“Araby”

A young boy goes to a Bazaar to buy a present for the older sister of one of his friends, whom he has developed an obsessive crush on. In the conclusion of “Araby” the boy, on the simplest of levels, realizes as the Bazaar is closing that he doesn’t have enough money to buy a present for Mangan’s sister. As Leonard points out, what makes the ending a literary and stylistic masterstroke “is Joyce’s careful preparation for this moment, so that the reader can tease out for himself or herself the convergence of the political, the personal, the familial, the textual, and the religious.” In the case of the political, the shop girl in the bazaar is English, implying that the goods themselves are another way for England to profit from the chronically dissatisfied citizens of colonial Ireland. In terms of the personal, the boy realizes upon seeing the shop girl flirt with two admirers that he has never engaged in similar conduct with the object of his affection, and that he has fantasized a relationship with a girl, who in fact, thinks nothing about him at all. In terms of the textual, while the boy may not be aware of the extent to which he has patterned his journey from his uncle’s home to the Bazaar on the search for the Holy Grail, the reader is invited to see the parallels, and to note that the boy’s savage disillusionment is the result of his fairy tale script unexpectedly crashing into the very reality it was meant to dissolve. He is no Sir Lancelot, nor was he ever destined to become such a hero. So here, the Joycean epiphany does not so much confirm a truth as disrupt what one has grown comfortable as accepting as true.

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“Eveline”

In “Eveline” a young woman has consented to an elopement to far off Buenos Aires in order to escape a violent alcoholic father who beats her and treats her as his servant after her mother dies. At the last minute she loses her nerve and changes her mind, refusing to get on the boat with her boyfriend, Frank. The story ends with an image of Eveline’s white face, “passive, like a helpless animal,” staring at Frank with eyes that “gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition.” Thus ends this sad little tale. But the narrative behind “Eveline” is far more complex and ambiguous than my brief synopsis suggests. What Joyce is doing in this story is writing within the formula of the anti-emigration story and using it to show that

people stay in Dublin not because they discover the wisdom of doing so, or because they realize that they live in a pure and nurturing homeland, but rather, they stay put because they are paralyzed and trapped. “Eveline, in the end, cannot leave Ireland – so far so good – that is after all the endpoint of all the anti-emigration stories. But what we as readers are left with is the nagging question, to what sort of life is Eveline returning to once Frank sails away on the ship? For in Joyce’s story, home is not where you escape to, but rather where you need to escape from. A different interpretation can also be put forward, as the critic Hugh Kenner demonstrated in his reading when he suggested that Frank actually wanted to turn Eveline into a prostitute. Such a reading prompts a contrary conclusion to the one I offer above, as it assumes that emigration poses a far greater threat to Eveline than remaining in Dublin. Like many other stories in *Dubliners*, Joyce leaves it up to the reader to decide.

“Two Gallants”

Widely regarded as the nastiness of Joyce’s stories, Joyce held this story in particular esteem. He told his publisher, Grant Richards that “Two Gallants” was so important to *Dubliners* that he would sooner sacrifice five other stories than allow his masterpiece to be amputated. He also said that “Two Gallants,” along with “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” was the story that pleased him most. In this story, two depraved companions, Corley and Lenehan, strike a shady deal: Corley the gigolo wins a bet with Lenehan the leech by cheating a hardworking “slavey” out of a substantial sum of money. Or at least, this is what we suspect, because the narrator makes it impossible for the reader to ascertain the facts for certain. The “code of honour” which the ironically named “two gallants” live by is a code that prides itself on circumventing legitimate circuits of exchange. Corley is emotionless, as is the narrator of the story. Corley believes in nothing but money and machismo. Lenehan’s emotional repertoire consists of minor outbursts of self-pity. The slavey functions as the object of exchange for the two gallants; however, the girl and the two gallants are all trapped in the circuit of exchange that they are trying to manipulate. As with the other stories in *Dubliners*, the exploited exploit each other in a world reduced to debt and doubt. 9

With regard to the character of the slavey – her “knowing leer” makes it impossible to see her as an innocent. We never learn the meaning of the leer, and it is from this vacuum that every inference unravels, leaving all the questions of the story lying open. Furthermore, the leer makes it impossible to sentimentalize the slavey as a victim. The leer implies that she is up to something – did she fob Corley off with a shiny substitute for a gold coin? We never know. Furthermore, we never gleam exactly what the characters are trying to get out of each other, and the gold coin raises more questions than it answers:

How did she get the gold coin? Why is Lenehan so obsessed with Corley’s transaction with the slavey? Does Corley owe Lenehan money? Does Corley really exhort this money from the slavey or does he pull it out of his own pocket to hoodwink Lenehan? Does Corley con the girl into paying him for sex, or is she “on the game” with Corley as her pimp? (Remember Corley’s former squeeze had resorted to prostitution). Whether she stole the money from her employer or earned it on the game, she is defenseless against Corley, who is likely to report her for either infraction of the law, and in fact, it is possible that Corley is blackmailing her about her activities on the street. Does the gold coin therefore represent the price of sex or

the price of silence? At the end of the story, we never see the gold coin change hands, nor do we ascertain what exactly it is paying for, because the exposure of the coin in Corley's hand reveals nothing of its origin or its significance.

“The Boarding House”

In this story, the hapless Bob Doran lives in a boarding house run by Mrs. Mooney, a manipulative woman who corners Doran into making a proposal of marriage to her daughter Polly, after tacitly encouraging a romance between the two under her roof. It is Mrs. Mooney's pretence of adhering to ideals of sexual purity (which were for Joyce false ideals), while at the same time cynically maneuvering Polly and Doran into sexual compromise in order to trap him, which most bitterly indicts her. Mrs. Mooney pretends to be an ideal of feminine purity in order to secure an economic advantage for her daughter, and of course for herself as a widow trying to eke out a living running a low rent boarding house. Joyce is not just damning Mrs. Mooney, but rather the culture that produces such unrealistic expectations as that of pure men and pure women, which often results in forced marriages. Moreover, Joyce's story recognizes the reality of life for women who operate from a disadvantaged social position, and who exist in a world where men seem to have all the power. Such women need to possess what one critic terms “a deft sense of social dynamics,” and Joyce does not shy away from exposing the compromises that such women make; however, neither does he romanticize their plight.

“A Little Cloud”

Like the narrator in “Araby,” the central character in this story uses almost constant fantasy to insulate himself from the life he is living. Little Chandler imagines himself becoming a famous poet, and he spends much of his time writing favorable reviews of his work in his head, despite never having written a single poem. By shoring up his fragile self-esteem in this manner, Little Chandler leaves himself chronically exposed to abrupt disillusionment, which is what happens when he agrees to meet an old acquaintance, Gallagher, recently returned from London where he has become a “success.” After an evening drinking with Gallagher, Little Chandler returns home and finds that he hates his wife, his house, his marriage and even his little son, for robbing him of his chance to be an acknowledged poet. But the story critiques more than just the self-delusional would be poet. Little Chandler's vague poetic aspirations organize themselves around the idea of becoming a poet of the Celtic Twilight. This encapsulates Joyce's view of the Literary Revival as a movement that, with the exception of talents such as Yeats and Synge, often lacked real intellectual content, and instead manufactured clichéd versions of Irishness for condescending English audiences.

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“Ivy Day in the Committee Room”

If Joyce's experimentation with the formal properties of the short story forces us to suspend conventional expectations of linearity and closure, then this next story, the complicated “Ivy Day,” compounds such challenges because the story seems wholly dependent on convoluted historical and political facts. The ghostly presence of Charles Stuart Parnell, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster, haunts this snapshot of the changing political landscape of early twentieth century Ireland. After Parnell was cited in a divorce case his party abandoned him and the national movement split into two factions, thereby weakening their ability to negotiate for home rule. Parnell died prematurely on October 6 in 1891, and Ivy Day honors his memory. In the story, various men who are involved in a local election

come and go in the committee room, gossiping about various political figures. The story is merciless in its representation of the venality of several characters, political hacks, whose loyalties are purchased with a few bottles of stout. Through their seemingly innocuous conversations Joyce exposes the conflicting political aims of the period as Irish nationalists are torn between cooperation with Britain and the quest for independence.

“The Dead”

Many commentators, including the poet Paul Muldoon read this story as a critique of late nineteenth century Irish cultural nationalism, and indeed, it was written at a time when Irish literature was being asked to define itself in the context of politics. “The Dead” brings the question of history inside the terms of its personal narrative. Yet it is also a multilayered love story, and a ghost story. “The Dead” begins at the start of a private party in the Dublin house of Kate and Julia Morkan, sometime in early January 1904, most probably on January 6, which is the twelfth night of Christmas and the Feast of the Epiphany. Among the guests are the main characters of the story, Gabriel Conroy and his wife Gretta, who have travelled in on this snowy night from the Dublin suburb of Monkstown and who plan to stay overnight in the city after the party at the Gresham Hotel on O’Connell Street.

Ultimately though, the story is constructed around a character that is not present - Gretta’s deceased sweetheart, Michael Furey. Gretta is reminded of him when someone sings an old Irish ballad, “The Lass of Aughurm” at the party, and later that evening, when they are back in their hotel room, she reveals to Gabriel how the young man died of love for her. This revelation violently disturbs Gabriel’s sense of his own importance, and he realizes that for his wife, this dead boy from her youthful past, is in many ways more real to her than Gabriel. Some of the most beautiful sentences that Joyce ever wrote are contained in this story, including the following lines taken from the famous closing scene of “The Dead,” where Gabriel is lying awake in bed, watching his wife sleep and reflecting on her confession:

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“Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, further westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. 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.”

There have been two recent exciting literary experiments concerning *Dubliners*. The first item is an exciting project called *Digital Dubliners: A Multimedia Edition*, which is the result of a two year endeavor by undergraduate students at Boston College under the direction of Professor Joe Nugent that was completed in time for the 100 year anniversary. This multimedia version of *Dubliners* is available for free through Apple. Open iBooks on your iPad, Apple laptop or Apple desktop and you will find, along with the stories, some 300 odd images, 700 or so annotations, two dozen videos, critical essays and hyperlinks, along with interactive maps sourced from the newspapers of the time period, and sound, film and photographic archives. An interview with noted Joycean scholar, Professor Joseph Valente, provides a wonderful introduction for readers new to Joyce. <http://www.DigitalDubliners.com/>

The other major development in contemporary responses to *Dubliners* takes a more conventional literary form, but is just as innovative. To mark the 100 year anniversary a new Irish publisher, Tramp Press, launched *Dubliners 100*, a collection of fifteen short stories by a range of well established and promising new Irish writers. This project represents an exciting dialogue between Joyce and his Irish literary successors, who were challenged with the task of reimagining and rewriting the fifteen original stories. The writers involved in the project include such well established writers as Patrick McCabe (author of *The Butcher Boy and Breakfast on Pluto*), along with John Boyle, author of several bestselling novels, including *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, and *A History of Loneliness*, and Eimear McBride, whose debut novel, *A girl is a Half-formed Thing*, won the 2013 Goldsmiths Prize and the Bailey's Women's fiction Prize for 2014.

Not only are these new stories a timely and creative contribution to our understanding of *Dubliners*, but they also provide an exciting snapshot of contemporary Irish writing and contemporary Dublin life in 2014. The collapse of the Celtic Tiger is never far from the pages of these stories, and many of the characters are as trapped by their own delusions and paralysis as Joyce's originals. Commissioning editor Thomas Morris explains in his introduction that when he sent out the call for submissions he had no idea what to expect, and that the response he received far surpassed his expectations: Morris writes, "Each author has given us two things: one a purely new and superb story – of now and speaking to now – and the other a wonderful nuanced commentary on the original work by Joyce.

A striking feature throughout the new collection is the re-gendering of characters and the transposition of sexual roles. This plays out in interesting ways. For example, in John Boyle's "Araby," a young boy is stranded in Ireland with his unwelcoming aunt and uncle, because his parents had to flee to Canada due to his father's role in the recent banking crisis. He develops a homoerotic crush on a handsome rugby player, which frightens him, because he hardly understands it. Dismissed by the rugby player as a mere child after a match he was invited to attend, the boy wanders miserably through an unfamiliar part of the city, and the story concludes with a chilling forecast of his future after this heartbreak: "That part of me that would be driven by desire and loneliness had awoken and was planning cruelties and anguish that I could not yet imagine."

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Donal Ryan's "Eveline," is narrated by a boy Eveline, who was named by his mother after the British novelist Evelyn Waugh. Here, the title character falls in love with an asylum seeker and makes a promise to her that he will save her from deportation. Realizing he could not possibly keep this promise, and trapped by his guilty feelings for abandoning his senile widowed mother, he then abandons the girl in a remote cottage in the west of Ireland and drives back to Dublin, to his unhappy fate. In "The Boarding House," Oona Frawley centres her tale on a feckless husband who is addicted to internet pornography – the sort of man readers could imagine Bob Doran from the original story, turning into.

The shady Ignatius Gallagher form "A Little Cloud" has been transposed to New York, where he is celebrated as "an Irish writer of import, perception and wit." The writer John Kelly makes clear what Joyce subtly hints at, that Gallagher is a fraud, whose boasts of a raucous life in America are that of a manipulative ex-pat, trying to cash in on being, as he tells Chandler "an Irish writer in New York." Even though Chandler realizes "that Gallagher was

only patronizing him with all his bonhomie, just as he was patronizing Ireland by coming back in the first place,” he returns to his home deeply dissatisfied, unable to communicate with his drunken teenage daughter or a wife who despises him.

Emer McBride’s “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” is one of the two best examples in the book of Joycean prose (the other being Sam Coll’s version of “Grace”). This particular story is a fascinating example of how this new version might have sounded had Joyce himself written it. As one reviewer notes, McBride “perfectly captures the male bravado of smoke filled rooms, manically fueled by delusion and drink.” In a nice touch, the presiding spirit of Joyce’s story, the noble Parnell, is counterpointed by the venal figure of the recent Irish Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern.”

In a bold move, Peter Murphy’s rendering of “The Dead” makes no attempt whatsoever to mimic the beloved original. In the words of one reviewer, this new story “is set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, and avoids any reference to Joyce until the end, when a tribe of “junk monkeys and grog- zombies” unearth a battered copy of “The Dead” and recite it around a camp fire. Murphy brilliantly summarizes the original story in three paragraphs, and we learn that “most among them jackdaw folk agreed the writer of the book had caught the ache of it just right.” The lone dissenter is Crazy Mary (with a subtle nod to Yeats’s Crazy Jane poems), who launches into a feminist reading of the story, arguing that “the fella in the book was an awful class of gom, cuckolded by a corpse,” Crazy Mary has no pity for Gabriel Conroy and his pain when he discovers his wife Gretta’s love for the long deceased Michael Furey. As Crazy Mary see it, “if you scratch the skin of any sentimentalist you’ll find a chauvinist, cos it’s the icon of a woman they’re mooning over, not the real thing.

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I have only drawn attention to some of the stories that match the original ones; however, all of these new stories are worth reading, both individually, and in concert with the corresponding Joyce story. This book is not yet available in the United States, but can be purchased directly from the publisher Tramp Press at www.tramppress.ie

It is now recognized that what appear at first glance to be simple stories can be read again and again, with increasing enjoyment as the tensions and ironies become more evident and the tiniest elements take on more and more meaning. Without indulging in moralizing or grandstanding, Joyce scrutinizes Dublin’s religious, political, and cultural life. Critics now appreciate the multi-faceted quality of *Dubliners* - in these fifteen stories, religion offers consolation only to the self-seeking, sex is disfigured and traded, political life is trivialized as self-serving and venal. Youthful dreams are exposed as empty, and fantasies are shown to be necessary self deceptions.

While still only in his early twenties, Joyce took the landscape of his childhood, the backstreets of “dear dirty Dublin,” (as he called it), and transformed it into something universal. The unprecedented explicitness with which Joyce introduced the mundane details of ordinary life into the realm of art and aesthetic expression opened up rich new territory for writers, painters and filmmakers in the first half of the twentieth century. As Seamus Deane points

out, Joyce “is one of the few authors who legitimize the modern world.” The stories continue to resonate with Irish readers and with readers who have no particular interest in the social and political history of Ireland, precisely because they trace the urges and disappointments, the deceptions and self-delusions, of characters not too different from us or our friends.

Colum McCann nicely captures the continuing allure of Joyce’s first fictional work when he writes: “The stories in *Dubliners*, with their sudden endings, their lack of dramatic resolution, their frequent repetitions, call on us, as readers, to constantly evaluate our own everyday lives. What this affirms is not the “meanness” of what we encounter, but rather the meaningfulness.” Taken in their entirety, these stories compel attention by virtue of the power of their unique vision of the world, and of the universal truths of human experience. They also give us a vision of life in the colonial capital city of Dublin, which serves as a kind of metaphor for the spiritual condition of the Irish nation as a whole at the beginning of the twentieth century. In conclusion, *Dubliners* should not be looked at as simply the beginning of a promising career; it remains a great work in its own right and is justly celebrated as an important contribution to the modernist movement.

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Web Links

Digital Dubliners: A Multimedia Edition is a free Apple iBook download for iPad, Apple laptop and Apple desktop.
<http://www.DigitalDubliners.com/>

Sincere but Mistaken Men

McGarrity Letters 1911-1912

By Michael Farry

Sunday, 30 July 1911, was a glorious day, much appreciated by those attending the various Garland Sunday outings in County Sligo including the annual pilgrimage to the holy well, Tubbernault, beside Sligo town. Among those who attended were two south Sligo friends, employees at Achonry Co-operative Creamery, who stopped on the way to take photographs at the Teeling monument outside Collooney. This monument to the 1798 Irish and French insurgents who defeated an English force nearby had been erected as a result of the centenary celebrations of 1898.



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While the men were taking photographs a motor stopped. The occupants, an Irish American couple touring the country, engaged the men in conversation which, in view of the venue, naturally turned to politics and nationalism. The Americans and Irish discovered that their attitudes to current political developments coincided and they exchanged names and addresses. Later, when the Americans returned home, the men engaged in a short correspondence.

The Sligo men were 24 year old James Marren of Carrownedan, Mullinabreena and 18 year old Thomas O'Grady, Doomore, Cloonacool. Both were farmers' sons. O'Grady was assistant manager at Achonry creamery and Marren was also employed there. The Irish Americans were Joseph McGarrity (1874-1940) and his wife Kathryn. Joseph was born in Carrickmore, County Tyrone, emigrated to the USA in 1892 and settled in Philadelphia. The couple had

married in Philadelphia in June 1911 and their Irish visit was part of an extended European honeymoon. Joseph was a successful businessman and a leading member of Clan na Gael, the Irish republican organization whose objective it was to assist the Irish Republican Brotherhood to achieve an independent Ireland.

O'Grady took a photograph for Mrs McGarrity, presumably of the couple at the monument, and they parted, the men attended the pattern at Tubbernault and the McGarritys continued their Irish tour, sending a postcard to O'Grady from Belfast.

In the McGarrity Papers in the National Library, Dublin, there are five letters to McGarrity, three from Marren and two from O'Grady, and a draft of a reply from McGarrity to O'Grady. The letters were written during the period December 1911 to May 1912 and we have no way of knowing if the correspondence continued after that time. McGarrity wrote at least three letters to one or other of the two men and also sent some copies of the weekly newspaper, *Gaelic American*, 'A journal devoted to the cause of Irish independence, Irish literature, and the interests of the Irish race.' McGarrity supported this newspaper which was run by the Irish American Fenian, John Devoy.



The surviving correspondence though short, is interesting in that it shows that in spite of the impression given in local nationalist newspapers such as the *Sligo Champion* and the *Sligo Nationalist*, there was some dissatisfaction with the activities, aims and achievements of the Irish Parliamentary Party under its leader John Redmond. On the surface County Sligo was thoroughly loyal to the party with a well-organized, active, county-wide network of parish-based branches of the United Irish League. These operated as constituency branches of the party and their monthly meetings passed regular resolutions of support for Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party.

Neither Marren nor O'Grady supported Redmond or the Irish Parliamentary Party. Both were steeped in the tradition of revolutionary nationalism and their heroes were generally physical force men, Wolfe Tone, Michael Dwyer and Robert Emmet. They contrasted the idealism and selflessness of these with the Irish Parliamentary Party politicians of the day. Their ultimate aim was the complete independence of Ireland. Their reading matter included John Mitchel's *Jail Journal* and *History of Ireland*, and the poems and stories of William Rooney. Marren told McGarrity that he had just read George Bermingham's *Northern Iron*, published in 1907, an historical novel about the United Irishmen's uprising in 1798 in which the protagonist is the son of a Presbyterian clergyman. They read radical newspapers, *Irish Freedom* and *Sinn Féin*. The former was published monthly by the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Dublin from 1910 until it was suppressed in 1914. It was controlled by Tom Clarke and Seán McDiarmada, later signatories of the 1916 Proclamation, and was edited by Bulmer Hobson. *Sinn Féin*, a weekly, was edited by Arthur Griffith, published between 1906 and 1914.

Marren told McGarrity that on holidays in mid-May 1912 he visited places of separatist nationalist interest including Limerick and its famous Treaty Stone 'that silent witness of British perfidy'. He also visited the memorial to the Fenian, Peter O'Neill Crowley, in Killooney Wood, between Mitchelstown and Kildorrery, County Cork. O'Neill Crowley had been killed during the Fenian rising of 1867.

O'Grady praised Marren calling him 'a staunch patriot and as sound an Irishman as ever trod this glorious sod' and noted that Marren had been engaged in promoting the purchase of Irish-made goods, in teaching Irish in the area and in distributing radical newspapers such as *Irish Freedom*.

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The correspondence coincided with the final stages of drafting and the publication of the 1912 Home Rule Bill. Redmond's alliance with the Liberals had resulted in the 1911 Parliament Act which removed the House of Lords' right to veto bills passed in the Commons and meant that the upper house could not block a home rule bill. The Home Rule Bill was being drafted during 1911 and while the *Sligo Champion* was certain that it would be a good bill, it showed little interest in the details of its provisions. Both Sligo MPs, Thomas Scanlan for North Sligo and John O'Dowd for South Sligo, rallied constituents for what Scanlan called 'the last battle for Home Rule'.

O'Dowd told a South Sligo United Irish League executive meeting in Ballymote in December 1911: 'We are in sight of the promised land and now stand on the threshold of freedom . . . which will enable each and everyone of us to live in a free and happy Ireland, governed by Ireland's own laws and representatives subject only to an Irish executive'. He also paid tribute to the importance of Irish America to the Irish Parliamentary Party and its constitutional fight for independence: 'If it were not for Ireland's standing army represented by the millions of her exiled children scattered all over the globe the Irish Party could never have brought you so far on the road to freedom'.

When the third Home Rule Bill was eventually introduced in April 1912 the *Sligo Champion* welcomed it as: 'far and away the best Home Rule measure that Ireland has ever had a chance of obtaining' and the Irish Parliamentary Party and local MPs supported it unreservedly.

PENNSYLVANIA AIR BAD FOR "PLAYBOY."

"Irish" Players Arrested in Philadelphia And Protest Against Presentation Of Synge's Objectionable Play Is So Strong In Pittsburgh That College Club Is Forced To Present Others Instead—Players And Objectors Discharged In Philadelphia—McGarrity To Carry Case To Superior Court—Decent Attitude Assumed By Pittsburgh Papers Which Recognize Reasonableness Of Objections.

PHILADELPHIA, Jan. 24.—Yesterday afternoon Judge Carr, in the Court of Quarter Sessions, without handing down any opinion in the matter, discharged the "Irish" Players, whose pres- ing Rev. P. J. McGarrity and Rev. James Higgins. The testimony of each and every witness was that beyond question the play was highly immoral, indecent and sacrilegious.

In his letter to Marren McGarrity was scathing about the bill calling it a 'pig in a poke'. Referred to Redmond's statement 'that it will make the Irish loyal and the Empire secure' he said, 'I would rather see Ireland sink in the sea than to see here loyal to England'. Marren agreed: 'It is not even Home Rule in its ordinary restricted sense, and certainly it is nothing in the nature of a national settlement . . . Why Ireland should give up her high and holy ideas to willingly become a province of any Empire but above all of Britain's pirate empire seems too unintelligible'.

This correspondence also coincided with McGarrity's campaign against the Abbey Players performances of *The Playboy of the Western World* in Philadelphia. The January 1907 performances of Synge's play at the Abbey Theatre had been disrupted by some nationalists who denounced the play as a libel upon Irish peasant men and, worse still, upon Irish peasant girlhood. When in 1911 the Abbey Players embarked on an American tour, with *The Playboy* among the repertoire, many Irish-American groups expressed alarm regarding the potentially harmful effects of *The Playboy* on the image of the Irish in America. Performances in Boston, Chicago and New York went ahead without serious incident. However in Philadelphia in January 1912 McGarrity was the prime mover in repeated audience disturbances and he was instrumental in having the actors brought to court to answer charges of engaging in a public performance that was 'lascivious, obscene, indecent sacrilegious or immoral.' The case was dismissed.

McGarrity mentioned the incidents in his letters to the Sligo pair and coverage of the disturbances appeared in the Gaelic American newspaper which he sent them. The story was also covered in Irish national newspapers and in *Irish Freedom*. Both Sligo correspondents praised McGarrity for his actions in 'teaching Yeats a lesson', O'Grady adding that he felt 'ashamed that we ever feathered (fathered?) such a vandalized ruffian in Sligo'.

Marren and O'Grady were strong supporters of the Irish language. O'Grady told McGarrity that 'Mr Marren has also made a great headway in this district in Irish teaching'. The 1911 Census Marren family return was completed in Irish though the father signed it in English. All the family were returned as being able to speak Irish. The handwriting suggests that it

was James who filled the form in Irish. Their 1901 form had been completed in English. Marren opened each of his three letters with "A Chara Dhilis" and signed his name in Irish to the first two but signed James Marren to the third. The file contains the envelope addressed by Marren to McGarrity in December 1911 on which he wrote McGarrity's name in Irish, (Seosamh Mac Oireachtaigh, Uasal), and beneath in English.

McGarrity encouraged the pair to continue their work in spreading the separatist doctrine. 'You young men of Ireland have the keeping of the national spirit in your hands. On you and you alone depends Ireland's future'. He advised them to write to Patrick McCartan, Carrickmore, Tyrone, an Irish republican who emigrated to the USA as a young man and became a member of Clan na Gael in Philadelphia. He returned to Ireland in 1905 and continued working closely with the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

The ideas espoused by Marren, O'Grady and McGarrity were not popular in 1911/12 when the vast majority of Irish people supported the Irish Parliamentary Party and expected that



party to achieve Home Rule which would give a limited form of self determination. The attitudes and ideals they shared seemed out of date relics of the previous century. But the irony is that within seven years these very attitudes appeared to sweep the country with the rise of Sinn Féin.

By the time of its victory in the 1918 election the network of United Irish League branches in County Sligo had been replaced by a similar number of Sinn Féin clubs which operated in much the same way. Marren was indeed correct when he told McGarrity that 'an exceptional opportunity will come for those who are in earnest in preaching Irish Independence' but even he couldn't foresee the succession of events which would ensure that opportunity.

While it appears that neither Marren nor O'Grady were members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood or Sinn Féin at the time of this correspondence both seem to have become active soon afterwards when Alec McCabe organized both organizations in the area. McCabe was born in 1886 in Keash, south Sligo, where his mother was a primary teacher. He also became a teacher and was appointed principal of Drumnagranchy National School, Keash in 1910. According to Tom O'Grady's witness statement to the Military Bureau, Marren became Irish Republican Brotherhood centre for Mullinabreena and he himself became centre for Cloonacool. Both were involved in the rapid growth of Sinn Féin in 1917. Marren, with Owen Tansey of Gurteen, became joint secretary of the Sinn Féin South Sligo constituency organization which was formed in April 1917. In early 1918 Tom O'Grady wrote to Sinn Féin headquarters as assistant secretary of this body.

Marren, Alec McCabe, Pádhraic Ó Domhnalláin and Owen Tansey went forward for nomination as Sinn Féin candidate for South Sligo constituency for the 1918 election. Tansy and Marren withdrew before the convention and McCabe was selected. McCabe had an easy victory in the election over the sitting MP, O'Dowd.

Marren and O'Dowd appear not to have taken prominent parts in the IRA campaign during the war of independence. In Tom O'Grady's witness statement he said that from 1918 on 'younger men ... took over from the men responsible for the early organization of Republican activities' in his and surrounding areas. He would have been only twenty five in 1918. Both however are listed on parish IRA company volunteer rolls for 1921, O'Grady for Cloonacool and Marren for Collooney.

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At the end of December 1920 Marren was arrested by Crown forces in Collooney and was interned in Ballykinlar Camp, County Down. He was manager of the Collooney Co-Operative Creamery and of the creamery's main supporters, Charles O'Hara, used his influence to try to have Marren released, saying he 'practically runs the business and the district will suffer much naturally if he has to be interned'. As far as he knew, he said, Marren did not belong to 'the extreme party'. O'Hara was told by Dublin Castle that if Marren applied for parole his case would be looked into with a view to allowing him back to his employment. When Marren refused to submit his case for investigation O'Hara complained, 'I went to a good deal of trouble on your behalf'.

Joseph McGarrity continued his support for armed separatism until his death in 1940 and was involved with plans for the Easter Rising, support for Sinn Féin and the IRA during the war of independence, the anti-Treaty IRA in the civil war, and post civil war Sinn Féin and IRA activities.

Extracts from the Correspondence

16 December 1911: James Marren to McGarrity.

During the coming years we require plain speaking on National questions and no man should be allowed to promise for this nation loyalty to the British Empire in return for an Act-of-Parliament-created legislature. Irishmen can never be loyal to the pirate Empire or any other Empire, and remain true Irishmen.

22 January 1912: James Marren to McGarrity

The work of the immediate present is to keep alive, and spread the doctrine of true Nationality. During recent years but scant attention was paid to those who upheld the flag of Irish Independence, the people looked on them as sincere but mistaken men - they in fact considered that it was the wrong time to raise such an issue, or at least to push it to the front.

A change in Irish conditions must however come during the present year, hence the need now for propaganda work. In the ordinary course of events the recent reaction would be likely to be followed by a period of activity, and considering the circumstances it is safe I think to say that an exceptional opportunity will come for those who are in earnest in preaching Irish Independence.

When it comes we must be prepared but the best thing we can do at present is to endeavour to get a wider circulation for papers such as "Irish Freedom" and "Sinn Féin" also to recommend such books as Mitchel's "Jail Journal" Rooney's works and others of a similar kind, and as "Irish Freedom" puts it this month to turn ourselves into National firebrands this together with learning and speaking the Irish language and supporting Irish Industries is to my mind the work of the hour.

The Irish Language should not be left out of any programme we lay out for ourselves, for on no other foundation can an Irish nation be builded. I have secured eight subscribers here for "Irish Freedom" and hope during the summer to get more.
1912: 26 February. Thomas O'Grady to McGarrity

After reading your patriotic letter many times in succession, I found a fresh zeal of Nationality creep around me as indeed it was one of the most interesting letters I have ever

read, therefore; I owe you a great deal for all the information I have received. Your very nice remarks with regards to the outlook of political affairs in Ireland has my confirmation, as every word bears testimony to what I can see and read of every day in the political atmosphere.

I cannot tell you presently what kind of measure it will be and I am of the opinion that 25% of our M.P.'s are equally as ignorant. The majority of the Irish people are anticipating great benefits by it, and as regards this point I cannot tell. Some people are predicting it will be only a subordinate Parliament thereby meaning that every bill to be passed in this so called Parliament will have to go before the English Parliament, and if this is so, every bill that will be passed for the good of Ireland will receive its mutilation as sure as the Treaty of Limerick was violated on the banks of the Shannon. In my opinion at the present time this is the Parliament "that will have the green flag flying over it" as many times stated by our Irishmen on U.I.L. and A.O.H. platforms.

17 April 1912: McGarrity to Marren. Draft.

The Home Rule Bill is I fear a "Pig in a Poke" and Mr Redmond's statement that it will make the Irish loyal and the Empire secure is if told as a truth by the man is nothing less than treason to Ireland. I say from my heart if Home Rule makes Ireland loyal may it never pass. I would rather see Ireland sink in the sea than to see here loyal to England.
...

But bill or no Bill you young men of Ireland have the keeping of the national spirit in your hands. On you and you alone depends Ireland's future.

27 May 1912: James Marren to McGarrity

I also saw by the Irish and American papers that you were looking after the 'Playboy of the Western World'. The staging of such plays in America or other countries should be resented. Filthy plays in any case should not be allowed, but when these plays are staged in foreign countries and when they are taken as typical of Irish life they are especially hurtful to our feelings. Irish America in this case did its part.

Since I wrote you last the long promised Home Rule Bill has been introduced. It is not even Home Rule in its ordinary restricted sense, and certainly it is nothing in the nature of a national settlement. To offer the assistance of the Irish

people in building up the British Empire in return for this miserable Bill is to offer what no man or no party has the right to offer. Why Ireland should give up her high and holy ideas to willingly become a province of any Empire but above all of Britain's pirate empire seems too unintelligible.

If the bill were offered to Parnell (sic) in his day he would probably have accepted it for what it was and make use of it to get more, in fact make it a stepping stone to Irish Independence. Parnell's word that "no man can set bounds to the march of a nation" are conveniently forgotten by the men who claim to be his successors. The chief is in his grave and British Liberalism plays hide-and-go-seek with Ireland at Westminster. This to some extent is what might have been expected once Ireland began to bargain with England by sending members to her parliament thereby acknowledging English supremacy she was bound to whittle down her national demands. With a strong man at the helm possibly the party would not have fallen so low, with its present leaders and advisors it has cut itself away from the movements of the past. But Redmond or no other man can sell to Britain the rising manhood of Ireland and the generations yet unborn. They will owe allegiance to Ireland and to Ireland alone.

I am writing to Dr McCartan and hope to be able to do something more to increase the circulation of "Irish Freedom".

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Photographs

1. Joseph McGarrity driving his father John. Taken in Ireland. Date unknown.
(Joseph McGarrity Collection. Digital Library@Villanova University. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License)
2. A postcard included by Thomas O'Grady in his letter to McGarrity, 14 January 1912. It shows the Teeling Monument and the Catholic Cathedral in Sligo. (National Library of Ireland)
3. The headline from *The Gaelic American*, 27 January 1912, regarding the protests in Philadelphia against the Playboy. (National Library of Ireland)
4. A cartoon published in *The Gaelic American* newspaper, 2 December 1911, making fun of Yeats and the Abbey Players, "protectors" of the Playboy in the USA. (National Library of Ireland)

Two Poems by Michael Farry

A Blackfriary Burial

Infants take much longer, their bones fragile,
faint, more difficult to dig. I spent two
days with make-up brush and trowel, while

my workmate recorded progress, drew
each bone of the emerging skeleton.
When I had finished, every scrap on view,

I joined the other diggers, who one by one
had left their cuts to stand above it, stare
in admiration or remembrance. Some

judged age, agreed on two. I didn't care
by then, worn out, spent that restless night
brushing soil from friendly skulls, staring

at their smiles. Next morning, back at the site
I analysed my finds tray, shocked to count
so many shroud pins, tarnished and slight,

ten from my burial. We searched and found
the books suggested that the norm was four
and our past experience on this ground

confirmed that. It was worrying. Although
I had been methodical, I may have missed
an infant, failed to notice the ghostly

trace of decay. But it was time to lift,
bag bones for later lab work. On my knees
that evening, packing the final flimsy

pieces in their labelled bags, I realized
the care desolate parents took to wrap
their transient gift, how well they sealed

its shroud with abundant pins, to equip
the body for its long and silent wait
until we reverently raised it up.

The Western Wall

In the upper layers they found a supermarket trolley
and a scrap of vinyl record, its label torn, familiar –
mid-sixties I thought. We stood, a team of heretics,

agnostics, archaeologists, in what we believed
was the nave, eager to unpick building rubble,
uncover the western wall of the friary church.

Our earlier scrapings had revealed the bell tower,
chancel, altar base and lady chapel, so on our knees
we dreamed of significant finds, window glass,

painted plaster, carved Purbeck marble pieces
from a doorway, the foundations of a solid wall.
But as the hours passed and we found only stones

in sterile clay we lost hope. That evening standing
in our cutting, disappointed at our lack of finds,
we wondered if we were beyond the western end,

the church smaller than we thought. Either that
or all the stones had been robbed for reuse in local
building projects, the void filled with tons of rubble.

I remembered then, sixty-six, *Sounds of Silence*.

These poems are part of a series written as a result of my
interest in the Blackfriary Community Archaeology Project
in the town of Trim, Co. Meath, Ireland which runs the
annual Irish Archaeology Field School. This project is
bringing to light the remains of a 13th century Dominican
Friary and the friars and townspeople who lived, worked and
were buried here. Each year students from all over the world
attend the field school and receive comprehensive archaeo-
logical training.

A Blackfriary Burial was awarded first prize in the 2014
Dromineer, Co. Tipperary Poetry Competition.

Link: <http://iafs.ie/>

Michael Farry



Bio

Michael Farry, a native of County Sligo, Ireland, is a retired primary teacher. He is a founder member of Boyne Writers Group, Trim, and edited the group's magazine, *Boyne Berries*, from 2007 to 2014. He has also been a member of the LitLab initiative of Meath and Cavan Arts Offices since its inception in 2007.

His chapbook *The Hawk's Rock – A Poetry Sequence* was published as part of a collaboration with Sligo artist Conor Gallagher in September 2010.

His poetry has been widely published including in the following magazines: *Cyphers*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, *The SHOP*, *Crannog*, *Revival*, *Prole* (UK) and *Regime* (Australia). A series of his poems was included in the anthology *Imagination & Place – Cartography* (Lawrence, Kansas.)

In 2009 he was awarded third prize in the Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Competition and was shortlisted for the Bridport Poetry Competition (UK).

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In 2010 he was selected as one of the eight *Poetry Ireland Introductions* poets and read at the Irish Writers Centre.

His first poetry collection, *Asking for Directions*, was published by Doghouse Books, Tralee, in 2012.

He won the Síarscéal Poetry Competition (Roscommon) and the Fermoy Poetry Competition in 2013. He won the Dromineer Poetry Competition in 2014 with the poem *Blackfriary Burial*.

He is also a historian and Four Courts Press, Dublin, published his book *Sligo, The Irish Revolution 1912-1923* in 2012.

History

Michael Farry (1947-) is a native of County Sligo and worked as a primary teacher in county Meath. He is now retired. He researched the history of his native parish and published *Killoran and Coolaney – A Local History* in 1985. This book is out of print but a pdf is available on www.michaelfarry.com.

He interviewed some survivors of the Irish war of independence and civil war while researching his local history and went on to study that period in Sligo. He published *A Chronicle of Conflict: Sligo 1914-1921* in 1992. This is also out of print but a pdf is also available on www.michaelfarry.com.

He then studied the civil war in County Sligo in detail and completed a doctoral thesis on the subject in Trinity College, Dublin in 1999. This was published by UCD Press, Dublin, in 2000 as *The Aftermath of Revolution - Sligo 1921-23*.

His book, *Sligo 1912-1923 The Irish Revolution*, was published by Four Courts Press, Dublin in 2012. This was the first volume in the publishers' series, *The Irish Revolution 1912-23* (Mary Ann Lyons & Daithí Ó Corráin, series editors) which explores the experience of the Irish Revolution, addressing key developments and issues. The approach is both thematic and chronological, and the series aims to provide concise, accessible, scholarly studies of the Irish Revolution at county level.

He regularly gives presentations on aspects of Sligo history during the 1912 – 1923 period and has contributed articles to local Sligo history journals. He is at present researching the poetry published in Sligo local newspapers during that period.

Jennifer Johnston's Ireland

By Adrienne Leavy

Widely regarded as one of Ireland's foremost contemporary novelists, Jennifer Johnston occupies a curious place in Irish literature. Although her talent is widely recognized, and she has won many awards, her works have so far rarely appeared in critical studies of contemporary Irish literature. Born in Dublin in 1930 to the playwright Denis Johnston and the actor and producer Shelah Richards, Johnston was educated at Trinity College Dublin, and lived for many years in Derry before returning to Dublin, where she now lives. Her first novel was published in 1972 when she was forty two, and since then she has published seventeen novels with another one scheduled for publication later this year. Her awards include The Evening Standard Best First Novel Award for *The Captain and the Kings* (1972), *The Whitebread Prize for The Old Jest* (1979), and her fourth novel *Shadows on our Skin* (1977), was shortlisted for the Booker prize. In 2012 she was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Irish Book Awards and she was one of the writers nominated in 2014 for the position of first Irish Laureate for Fiction.

For the many fans of her work, Johnston's skillfully constructed novels, with their elegant economic realism and tight story lines, constitute a distinctive and sophisticated voice in Irish literature. Writing about the impact that Johnston's debut novel *The Captain and the Kings*, had on him, Dermot Bolger recently described how he loved the book for "its sparse intensity and intimacy and how the simplicity of the writing belied the complexity of her characters." The qualities that were evident to Bolger in Johnston's first novel have manifested themselves to equal effect in each of her subsequent novels. Broadly speaking, Johnston's work deals with family sins and human frailty within the context of the turbulent history of twentieth-century Ireland. The scope of her novels includes examinations of gender, class, religion and politics. Her stories involve characters on both ends of the aging spectrum, from youth and adolescence to old age and inevitable decline. They are Protestant and Catholic, male and female, urban and rural. As one critic has noted, her novels "record with great care the ways in which individuals recoil from, or attempt to meet, the political, economic and cultural exigencies that impinge so crucially, and so damagingly, on their lives."

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One of the narratives of Irish history that Johnston frequently draws upon is the literature of the Irish "Big House." Fictional representations of the social and cultural organization of the Anglo-Irish or Protestant Ascendancy class dates back to Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*, which was published in 1800, with perhaps the most well known exponent of the genre being Elizabeth Bowen. Contemporary novelists such as William Trevor and John Banville have also used the motif of the Big House in their work; however, Johnston's imaginative incorporation of this theme is far more extensive. Her Big House novels highlight the destructive effects of the religious, economic and class divisions on those who inhabit and also those who surround the Big House. In these stories, her characters appear to be prisoners of both personal and political history, trapped by family expectations and pre-ordained societal

expectations. Often, these novels revolve around a female character struggling to establish a voice in post independent Ireland, with an elderly patriarch in the background, irreparably damaged by the events of war.

Irish independence dovetailed with the collapse of the social organization of Anglo-Irish life, and by 1922 the events of the previous decade had rendered the Ascendancy class “nervously defeatist and impotent.” Terence Brown sums up the new political reality thus: “The establishment of the Irish Free State found Protestant Ireland in the twenty-six counties ideologically, politically, and emotionally unprepared for the uncharted waters of the new separatist seas, where they comprised what was seen by many of their nationalist fellow citizens as an ethnic minority.”

Two novels, in particular, *The Old Jest* (1979) and *Fool's Sanctuary* (1987), exemplify Johnston's treatment of wartime Ireland and its aftermath. Set in 1920, *The Old Jest*, centres on Nancy Gulliver, a young Protestant girl who unwittingly becomes ensnared in the conflict between nationalists and the English army during the Anglo-Irish war. Nancy longs to grow up, and her sheltered life is dramatically shattered when she befriends a mysterious stranger hiding in a deserted beach house near her grandfather's home. The man is Major Barry, an IRA commander on the run, and Nancy's innocent attempt to escape her insular world results in tragedy when she agrees to convey a message from Barry to one of his contacts in Dublin. As a result of his instructions, twelve soldiers are shot in Dublin. In one of his few lucid moments, Nancy's ailing grandfather, who spends his days mourning the death of his son on the battlefield of Ypres during world War One, tells the authorities that he had seen his granddaughter talking with the fugitive. The novel closes with Nancy witnessing the execution of Barry when he is discovered on the beach, and it is unclear to what extent if any this experience will galvanize her into political action.

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Fool's Sanctuary, which is also set during the War of Independence, is narrated in the form of a flashback by Miranda, a young Protestant woman who lives on a large estate with her parents. Her father Termon realizes how unjust his position of privilege is and tries to compensate by devoting his life to preserving and improving the land for ultimate redistribution to the new Irish nation. Both he and Miranda are sympathetic to the republican cause, but they are not in favor of violence. As a young woman from the Ascendancy class, Miranda feels excluded from the political events taking place around her: “I felt briefly at one time a longing to fight for freedom, but I merely cried for freedom; an inadequate contribution to the struggles of a nation.” Miranda is in love with Cathal, a Catholic tenant whom her father is subsidizing through college. Tragedy ensues when Miranda's brother, Andrew and his fellow British army officer Harry, return to Ireland and to the estate for a visit. Cathal, a republican sympathizer, is also a childhood friend of Andrew's, so when the local IRA men plan to kill the two British soldiers, Cathal comes to warn them and is himself killed for being an informer. This eruption of violence, which robbed Miranda of her chance for love, stunts her development and she remains alone on the estate for the rest of her life, trapped in a hyphenated identity, belonging to neither side of the class or political divide. In her essay “Jennifer Johnston's Irish troubles,” Christine St. Peter's reading of this novel underscores the impossibility of resolving the ideological contradictions and class barriers which the doomed lovers face: “Cathal is obliterated by an act of noble self-sacrifice that perpetuates

class privilege, and by a narrative necessity that demands punishment for two violent acts: belonging to the republican cause during the civil war and daring to love a woman from the landed class.”

The theme of problematic and dangerous interactions between the Anglo-Irish and the native Irish is also evident in Johnston’s early work. In *The Gates* (1973), Minnie McMahon, a young woman on the verge of womanhood, returns to Ireland to the care of her elderly uncle, “The Major,” after completing her education in England. Free from the domineering clutches of her English aunt who has ambitions to make a socially acceptable marriage for her, Minnie develops an attraction for Kevin, the son of one of the tenants on her uncle’s estate. Between them, they hatch a plan to steal and sell the ornate gates that adorn the entry way to the estate. Minnie’s intention is to invest the money in the estate’s farming potential, whereas Kevin seeks only to escape from the grinding poverty of his family. The gates symbolize this Ascendency family’s slide into genteel poverty, as they are the only remaining item of value on the estate. The position of the Anglo-Irish in the new Independent Ireland is deftly conveyed with poetic symbolism: “Just off the road leading to the Major’s house, the Protestant church crouched like a little old lady, embarrassed at being found some place she had no right to be, behind a row of yew trees. The other end of the village, on a slight eminence, a semi-cathedral, topped by an orange gold cross, preened itself triumphantly.” When the young couple succeeds in their plan and Kevin drives away to deliver the gates to their potential buyer, the reader guesses before Minnie does that only heartache and betrayal will be her recompense.

In one of her early stories, *How Many Miles to Babylon* (1974), Johnston moves the setting of the novel from the initial background of a rural estate, to the battlefields of Flanders during World War One. The possibility of communication across class or religious divisions is usually explored in Johnston’s novels through two lonely individuals, and in this instance the protagonists are both male. Alexander Moore, the only child of parents in a loveless marriage, grows up lonely and friendless on his family’s estate in County Wicklow. When he befriends Jerry Crowe, a stable hand who works on the estate, his mother forbids all interaction with Jerry because he is socially inferior. When Jerry enlists in the British Army because his family needs the money, Alec impulsively enlists too. Alec’s action is prompted by his mother’s revelation that his father is someone other than her husband. In the trenches the two friends are separated again by class and now also by rank. They are commanded by Major Glendinning, a ruthless officer who shares Alec’s mother’s belief in the class system. When Jerry is tried and convicted as a deserter after leaving his unit to search for his father, Glendinning orders Alec to command the firing squad. In an act of mercy, Alec privately kills his friend and he in turn is arrested and condemned to die.

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The flare up of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland in the 1960s, which continued for several decades, prompted a number of interventions by a diverse range of writers, artists and intellectuals from both sides of the border. Johnston turned her attention to contemporary Northern Ireland, specifically the violence in Derry in the early 1970s and the machinations of the IRA in the early 1980s, with two novels, *Shadows on our Skin* (1977), which was shortlisted for the Booker prize, and *The Railway Station Man* (1984).

In *Shadows on our Skin*, Johnston explores the relationship between a young working class Catholic boy in Derry, Joe Logan, and Kathleen Doherty, the teacher who befriends him. Joe lives with his beleaguered mother and an ailing embittered father who is living in the past with a heroic fantasy he has constructed to maintain his self-esteem. Mrs. Logan, who has been hardened by poverty and a loveless marriage, is fiercely protective of Joe, and tries to shield him from the conflict that destroyed her husband and threatens to engulf her older son Brendan. Her character is in many ways reminiscent of the inner city mother figure featured in Paula Meehan's poem, *The Pattern*, who also sublimates her frustrated energies into constant cleaning and scrubbing. When Brendan returns from England he encroaches on his younger brother's relationship with Kathleen, and eventually confides in Joe that he dreams of a future life with her. In a jealous rage Joe tells Brendan something about Kathleen that only he knows: she is dating a British soldier. Unbeknownst to Joe, Brendan is involved with the IRA and having confided in Kathleen, he panics when he finds out about her boyfriend and disappears. Joe's revelation results in a devastating punishment for Kathleen, similar to that described by Seamus Heaney in his poem "Punishment."

The Railway Station Man begins in Derry with the news that Helen Cuffe's husband has been accidentally killed by a terrorist when visiting a pupil whose father was in the RUC. Helen leaves Derry for the quiet coastal village of Knappogue, in Donegal, a move calculated to insulate her from the violence she suffered in Derry. Helen retreats from the world through her painting, and avoids all efforts by her son to jolt her into political awareness. In this isolated area she meets an Englishman, Roger Hawthorne, who is devoting himself to reconstructing a disused railway station. Roger, who was pressurized into fighting in World War Two by his imperialist family, is both physically and psychologically damaged as a result. A tentative friendship grows into a more serious bond, and for a brief moment it appears that these two characters will be able to find peace and exorcise their ghosts. Like the character of Mrs. Logan in *Shadows on our Skin*, Helen wishes to avoid any interaction with the politics of Northern Ireland, but when her son and lover are accidentally killed in an IRA explosion, she is forced to confront the political realities of the world around her.

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Writing about *Shadows on our Skin* and *The Railway Station Man*, Neil Corcoran points out Johnston insists on drawing attention to "the complications and confusions of motivation, desire, and involvement which should corrupt any stereotyped conception of 'terrorism'." In Corcoran's view, "these novels draw their strength from Johnston's long engagement with transgression, *rapprochement*, and catastrophe in Irish history."

Politics and personal life also intersect in a more modern context in *The Invisible Worm* (1991). In this novel, which is another story about arrested female development, Johnston explores the intersection of various conflicting ideologies: Catholicism, nationalism, Protestantism and unionism. Like the character of Miranda in *Fool's Sanctuary*, the female protagonist of this novel lives in a fog of reminiscence because of a past trauma. Laura Quinlan has become emotionally crippled by her father's sexual abuse. Johnston places Laura's rape within a specific political context as her father is a former IRA man turned Senator, and Ireland is presented as run by men like him. As Heather Ingman points out, "Laura comes to symbolize all the abused children, battered women, and incest survivors whose stories bear

witness to the underside of Irish nationalism, stories that men like her father wish to suppress because they do not fit into the image of a glorious new nation.” And in fact, Quinlan warns her not to tell anyone about the rape, stating: “we have to keep our suffering to ourselves.”

A recurrent preoccupation for Johnston is the subject of aging. For the many elderly characters that populate her novels old age is not a dignified state; they have trouble, moving sitting, sleeping, eating, and remembering to stay focused on the present instead of the past. The limitations of old age are elaborated on in typical Johnston style, with great economy of language and a refusal to either sentimentalize or patronize. An example of what it’s like to live in an aging body appears in *Two Moons* (1998). This story, which involves three generations of women, two of whom live together, continues Johnston’s interest in female relationships in multi-generational Protestant families. Mimi, the elderly grandmother is typical of Johnston’s heroines in that she is quirky, outspoken, fragile and brave. She lives with her daughter Grace, a stage actress, who is preparing for an upcoming role in *Hamlet*. Mimi spends her days drinking too much and communicating with an angel she names Bonifaccio, whom only she can see. This fairy-tale conceit does not detract from the rich portrait Johnston draws of an aging character confronting the pain of her past and the inevitability of her future demise.

Recent work deals with families struggling with secrets in contemporary Ireland. *In Grace and Truth* (2005), Johnston writes about incest, a subject rarely broached in Irish literature. Her skill as a master storyteller prevents the drama that unfolds from descending into lurid sensationalism. One of Johnston’s strengths as a novelist is that she always makes her characters matter, no matter how reprehensible their behaviour, and the subtle cameo portraits one finds in this novel are drawn with great skill and control. Her characters are psychologically convincing, even when engaged in self-deception. The uneasy accommodation that Protestant families have had to make in Catholic Ireland is subtly conveyed in *Shadow Story* (2012), in which the typically benign grandfather of the central character Polly, rails against the possibility of his son marrying a Catholic woman. What concerns the old man is the thought that future generations of his family would be brought up Catholic because of the Vatican’s *Ne Temere* decree, which demanded that children of mixed marriages be raised in “the one true faith.” In his mind, the minority thus becomes further marginalized through forced indoctrination into the Catholic Church. Although set during World War Two, the impact of the *Ne Temere* decree was felt for many generations in Ireland, and remained a source of resentment for the Protestant community.

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Johnston is a chronicler of Irish families, and her imaginative preoccupation with family dynamics and relationships has resulted in a body of work that ranges across a century of Irish history. Individual life is often emblematic of national struggles, ranging from the Irish volunteers who fought alongside the British in the battlefields of World War One, to the recent “Troubles” in Northern Ireland. Very often in her work the past reshapes the present, and family secrets are shown to be just as damaging as a corrosive political legacy. Johnston’s fiction reminds us of the indeterminacy of the past, and the dangers of idealizing any one version of Ireland’s recent history, or our own family history.

Questions for Jennifer Johnston



Alan Betson/The Irish Times

Growing up as a Protestant in Ireland in the 1930s and the 1940s, you were part of the generation that was caught between DeValera's New Catholic Ireland and the old Anglo-Irish culture of Georgian houses and country homes. Many of your novels revolve around individuals who find themselves adrift in a changing society. My question is, were you aware of the disintegration of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy class when you were growing up?

J.J. All of Europe was changing after the war. Everyone was ploughing through confusion. I left Ireland in 1951. It was rigid and harsh in many ways, but in other ways it was wonderful. I didn't come back here to live until 1974 when it was very different. On my return I found a country that was becoming open and inquisitive and imaginative.

How much, if any, of your early life and background is used as raw material or inspiration for your novels?

J. J. I have used places and houses and small snapshots from people's lives. I don't seem to be able to write a book without having the sea in it. Remarks that people made to me down the years pop into my mind just at the right moment. Those sorts of things. They do not seem important when you are writing, but all these small truths are the bedrock of what you write.

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It is common knowledge that your first published novel, *The Captain and the Kings*, which was actually the second novel you wrote, was published when you were aged 42. Were you writing novels for many years before this breakthrough, or was writing something you came to in later adulthood?

J. J. I used to write quite a lot when I was a child, between the ages of 8-17, but I stopped writing when I went to Trinity College as I couldn't see the point of filling up more of the world's bookshelves.

As a follow up from the question above, what was the impetus for you to start writing?

J. J. I was married and had four children and needed something else in my life so I started to write. I thought this was a better alternative to getting a job and working for someone else as I have always hated being pushed around. So that was how it started. *The Captain and the Kings* won a prize so there was no reason to stop. And there were a lot of novels queuing up in my head wanting to get out, so out they came! I didn't ask anyone's advice; I just got on with it and wrote during the quiet hours when the kids were at school.

Your father, Denis Johnston, was a successful playwright and war correspondent. Did any of his plays, in particular, *The Old Lady Says 'No'*, an expressionist attack on the condition of the Irish Free State and romantic republicanism, or *The Moon in the Yellow River*, a comedy of ideas which challenges the moral and political bases of the newly formed Irish Free State, influence your work?

J.J. I admired my father's plays greatly, but had no desire to follow his path. I had my own things to say, which were not remotely the same as his. He wrote so well, and I never felt that I could match that.

Your mother, Shelah Richards, was an actor with the Abbey Theatre, and subsequently a producer in the theatre and with RTE. Growing up, did you ever harbor any ambitions to follow in her footsteps as an actor?

J. J. I loved the theatre greatly and would have like to be an actor, but luckily I didn't, as I think I am a better writer than I would have been an actor. She did not encourage me in any way, nor did my father. He wrote me a letter once in which he told me of his disappointment that I wanted "merely to be an actress"! That sort of put my mind off the stage. I do think that actors have a better time than writers; however, I think I made the right decision.

To what extent if any was the character of Pamela, a successful theatrical actress in *Truth or Fiction*, based on your mother?

J. J. No extent at all.

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Both your parents passed away after you had achieved early recognition and praise as a novelist. If I am not mistaken, your father passed away in 1984, the same year that seventh novel, *The Railway Station Man* was published, and your mother passed away the following year. How did they react to your success as a novelist and did they like your work?

J. J. I don't really know whether they liked my work or not. My mother was sarcastic about it from time to time, and my father was silent, so I had to guess!

You have cited the importance of John McGahern to your work. Could you elaborate on how he influenced your writing?

J. J. I don't think he was an influence on my work. He was a writer I enormously admired and a man I also admired. He wrote so well about Ireland. I would love to have been able to put words on the page as he did, to have his understanding and his capacity for making the reader understand what he is saying.

Have you had any mentors in your life?

J.J. Not really. There are many writers whose work I like very much, but that's not the same thing. I just ploughed my own furrow – it was all I could do.

And in juxtaposition to the above question, what is the worst piece of writing advice you ever received?

J. J. I rarely asked for advice. I was too frightened of making more of a muddle if I got involved with the way other people set about their work. It's all so personal.

I notice the presence of ghosts in many of your novels, for example in *The Captains and the Kings*, *This is Not a Novel*, and *The Christmas Tree*. Is this a conscious decision on your part, or does the story just demand that a character is not just haunted by their past, but is also in active communication with it?

J. J. Ghosts have different meanings for different people. We all have ghosts of one sort or another. Sometimes they liven up the book you are writing. Some people hate them and tell me so. I laugh!

The male characters in your novels tend to inhabit an ordered, hierarchical world, and militarism or the duty to fight for one's country, is often linked with a definition of masculinity. Conversely, many of your female characters exist on the margins of society, and are portrayed as powerless, with some of them resigned to opting out of society. Was there a point in your career when you felt that both genders were trapped into conforming to pre-ordained societal expectations and social constructs?

J. J. You have to fight to get out of that trap. More and more you see young people giving up all thought of fighting – taking the easy way out. That bores me. I like fighters.

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Often, the turbulent family dynamics at play in your novels serve as a metaphor for the myriad social problems facing Ireland in the past and in the present. Is that always your intention?

J. J. Not really. I don't write in metaphors. I prefer watching and reporting about the turbulence of people. The Irish people – that includes me – must face their social problems. They must be honest about their past, and honest in their present, and also as they face the future. It is our family turbulence that intrigues me most.

In your thirteenth book, *This is Not a Novel*, the main character's great-grandmother spends her time setting the poetry of Francis Ledwidge to music, and you quote directly from his poetry. Ledwidge was an Irish poet who enlisted in the British Army when the First World War broke out, and he was killed in Flanders on July 31, 1917. Was it your intention that the echoes of the Great War would reverberate in the novel through Ledwidge's poetry, or were there other considerations for including his work in this story?

J. J. Ledwidge listened to and agreed with John Redmond (who supported the British war effort), as did many others. He wasn't actually killed in action; I believe he was repairing a road when an explosion occurred. Echoes of World War One reverberate through all our lives – even those who prefer not to remember it. Things are saner now and the war dead are being acknowledged and spoken about. We no longer feel embarrassed by their having lived and died as they did. We are beginning to understand what IRISH means. It takes a long time.

Do you ever look at your early work and think about it? If so, what is your assessment of your first few novels?

J. J. I don't really, except when I have to. *How Many Miles to Babylon* crops up quite a lot. It's not a bad book, and school children also seem to like it.

There are many writers who experience more of a sense of freedom about their writing in their later years than in the early stages of their careers. Would the same be applicable to you?

J. J. Not really. Each book produces its own problems. Always there comes the old cry "write more," or "try harder." I am back at school again and no-one listens when I tell them that I find no point in PADDING! When the word from my head comes to write the end, I write The End.

Would you say that your writing or your writing process has changed since you first started out?

J. J. It has improved, but so has the inside of my mind. Maybe sometimes my books become a bit more complicated – but that is for each reader to decide.

Anne Enright was recently appointed the first Laureate for Irish Fiction, a position which you and several of your contemporaries, including Edna O' Brien and William Trevor were also nominated for. The position sounds quite demanding in terms of the expectations attached to the position. What advice, if any, would you give Anne Enright?

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J. J. Do what you think is the right thing to do. Don't be pushed around. Keep time to write. You are after all a writer, and that is what is most important.

Are there any contemporary novelists whose work you admire?

J. J. Yes. I presume you mean Irish writers. Colm McCann, Donal Ryan, Claire Keegan, John McKenna, Roddy Doyle, Julia O' Faoláin, Dermot Healey (who died, alas, very recently), Hugo Hamilton, Joseph O' Connor and Deirdre Madden.

What project are you working on now?

J. J. I have a book being published at the moment; *Naming the Stars*. I don't know when it will be out, but it should be soon. It is very short, and the publisher complained, but it is coming out and I feel okay about it. There is some good writing in it. I am currently writing a book concerning certain domestic upheavals in my life, but it is coming along very slowly.

February 2015.

Book Review

Late Poems by Thomas Kinsella. Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd., 2013

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Reviewed by Adrienne Leavy

CARCANET

THOMAS KINSELLA *Late Poems*



Now in his mid 80s, Thomas Kinsella is regarded as the elder statesman of Irish poetry, and with this latest volume he consolidates his position as one of the most talented poetic voices writing today. Widely acknowledged as one of Ireland's most important contemporary poets and Gaelic translators, the Dublin born Kinsella began his career in the mid 1950s, with the publication of his first collection, *Poems*. Since then he has continued to produce an innovative and challenging body of work characterized by a symbiotic relationship between his autobiographical experiences and their aesthetic rendering. Notwithstanding the critical and commercial success that his lyric poetry enjoyed, Kinsella abandoned traditional poetic forms and strict meter early in his career, turning instead to free verse and the Anglo-American modernism of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. This change in style, first exemplified in *Nightwalker and Other Poems* (1968), and *Notes from the Land of the Dead* (1972), has resulted in a remarkable poetry of personal interrogation that is simultaneously traditional in theme and formally experimental. The importance of James Joyce to Kinsella's poetics has always been evident, and with this latest collection, Joycean modernism continues to inform the poet's search for meaning in the modern world. 37

Late Poems gathers together the five most recent pamphlets issued by Kinsella's own Peppercanister Press: *Marginal Economy* (2006), *Man of War* (2007), *Belief and Unbelief* (2007), *Fat Master* (2011), and *Love Joy Peace* (2011). Collectively, these compact volumes reflect Kinsella's continued effort to craft a positive aesthetic response to the waste and bitterness that he considers an inevitable facet of life. They also reveal a poet at the top of his form, interrogating not only his own life, but also his relationship to the moral and political world that revolves around him. The search for meaning and order will always be provisional, but as these poems show, there is a level of peace to be found in "an imagination arguing with itself / until the ache is eased."

In addition to the minimalist style and sparse diction that has characterized much of Kinsella's mature work, a hallmark of the poet's aesthetic is a refusal to honor the poetic conventions of resolution and closure. Kinsella deliberately and creatively repeats and echoes himself, finding new aesthetic meanings in experiences and poems from decades earlier, and *Marginal Economy*, the first sequence in this collection, continues this practice. A prologue is addressed to unidentified "Nightwomen," whom the poet described to this reviewer as akin to "a trio of witches in the dark of the mind." This poem, which also conjures up allusions to the archetypal Jungian figures who dominated much of the poet's mid-career work, and the Muse figure who is the subject of the final two sequences in this collection, establishes the mood of inquiry and self-reflection evident throughout *Late Poems*: "Nightwomen, / picking the works of my days apart, / will you find what you need / in the waste still to come?" The opening poem, "First Night," chronicles the young Kinsella's move into his flat in Baggot Street in Dublin, the setting for many of the poems about the poet's wife Eleanor, and also the well known "Baggot Street Deserta." The funeral of a close friend from Kinsella's civil service days is remembered in the provocatively titled "The Affair," where an old adversary of the poet's is among the mourners.

In his influential study *The Dual Tradition* (1995), Kinsella examined the uneasy meeting of two traditions, Gaelic and English, which every Irish poet encounters due to the loss of the Irish language through colonization. Kinsella has a deeply self-conscious sense of isolation from the Gaelic tradition, and he writes with an awareness that he is writing, like all other modern Irish writers, within a "gapped, discontinuous, polyglot tradition." This linguistic separation provides an undercurrent in "Wedding Service." Here, a Catholic wedding in the Protestant chapel at Trinity College is described with detached detail, creating the impression that the Kinsella's are outsiders, and that the poet in particular stands as an observer on the cusp of two religious traditions. Yet the tension underlying the religious and political differences alluded to are undercut in the poem by the emphasis on love, and the fact that the parties are witnessing a marriage ceremony. As in much of Kinsella's earlier work, the bitterness of life is redeemed to a certain extent by the transformative power of love.

Personal reminiscence gives way to a more generalized meditation on the effect of change on civilizations, in "Marcus

Aurelius," the key poem in *Marginal Economy*. Kinsella portrays Aurelius as a gifted but flawed ruler in the wrong job, a man more inclined to philosophy than warfare, but also a man unconcerned with the persecution of "the early Christians". The Emperor is "in a false position" at a precarious time in history when "over-confidence and ignorance" are everywhere. Yet Aurelius is not immune from participating in the brutality that surrounds him, as his wife's passion for a gladiator results in the gladiator's death and Aurelius ordering that his wife be bathed in the dead man's blood. Read in the context of the contemporary political climate, another time of "over-confidence and ignorance" where similar threats to civilization abound, the poem is a chilling reminder that history continually repeats itself. In keeping with Kinsella's practice of revisiting previous work, several other poems in this volume recall the Jungian influenced poetry from Kinsella's middle period.

Like Joyce, Kinsella's poetry shows how art can be created out of the corruption and disappointments of modern life. Kinsella's reputation as a poet of genuine moral seriousness is evident in *Man of War*, the next sequence in *Late Poems*. According to Kinsella, the impetus for these poems was an attempt to provide a poetic response to a request made to the poet that he sign a petition for the abolition of war. The complex relationship between good and evil is examined in a series of poems that consider mankind's propensity for violence, which he describes at one point with typical understatement (and Joycean irony), as the "occasional destruction of others, face to face, of the same kind." However, the poems also include sections of brutal description when the circumstances require it, which are reminiscent of the language and tone of *A Technical Supplement* (1976), a series of twenty-four poems in which Kinsella interrogates the ideas that informed the Age of Enlightenment. In "A Proposal," the third poem in *Man of War*, the poet proposes various alternatives to "the waste of lives," however; Kinsella recognizes that these alternatives would only limit man's brutality by curtailing the carnage, because warfare is part of the human condition. The poet reminds the reader of this fact at the onset of the sequence in "Argument": "A brutal basis in the human species, / native to man as beast, we must accept; / indifferent cruelty – a lack of pity -/ in dealing with the lesser forms of life." The self-serving ideology of war, with its false claims of moral authority, is made apparent through selective references and allusions to literary and historical texts that describe conflicts ranging from the

Trojan War to the Crusades. The tone throughout is one of grim irony and controlled anger against physical and spiritual violence, reminiscent of Kinsella's earlier work in "Old Harry," from *Downstream* (1962) and *Butcher's Dozen* (1972). Ultimately, Kinsella's horror of war is based not just on the human suffering it causes, but on the recognition that this capacity for destruction undermines man's achievements and rationality. Ultimately, this sequence should not be read as an act of moral judgment on the existence of war, but rather it should be understood as the poet's attempt to understand and explain the ever present aspect of violence in the human condition.

Despite Kinsella's longstanding skepticism of organized religion, he has always been interested in the relation between skepticism and faith, and the tension between these two belief systems informs the poems in *Belief and Unbelief*, the third sequence in this volume. Themes of loneliness and sickness, along with the random fragility of life, dominate the opening poems, but as in much of his work, Kinsella finds solace in the redeeming power of love. "Legendary figures, in Old Age," celebrates the sexual nature of man, and suggests that human love is more real than abstract concepts of divinity and redemption. "Prayer 1" and "Prayer 2," along with "Addendum," suggest that the relationship between skepticism and faith is one of mutual interaction rather than one of contradiction. This sequence reinforces the impression in "Rhetoric of Natural Beauty," the last poem from *Marginal Economy*, where a disappearing sunset momentarily stills the speaker's doubts: "In the face of God's creation / our last doubts fall silent, / fulfilled in acceptance, / reflect, and disappear."

Fat Master and *Love Joy Peace* find the elderly poet still striving to craft a creative response to issues of suffering, erosion and mortality. The "Fat Master" of the title poem is J.S. Bach, who is envisioned as seated at his organ in a great church with his audience, present and future, who are listening to the master play a major toccata and fugue. These meditations coalesce around the figure of the Muse (the poet's "old opposite"), who is represented as both a metaphor for the creative process and as the artist's ideal audience, "the one only adequate Other." In both sequences, Kinsella continues to explore his role as an artist, arguing that the possibility of fashioning some form of aesthetic order from the chaos and disappointments of life is a worthy endeavor. Interestingly, Kinsella deliberately destabilizes the poetic

convention of the Muse, when the figure is imagined as a snake-like apparition and ultimately a disembodied voice who symbolizes the poet's alter-ego. Regardless of what form the Muse takes, the difficulties and challenges inherent in the creative response are symbolized by this figure, which is frequently depicted as an unwelcome trespasser on the poet's consciousness, yet one whom he is continually in dialogue with. These poems reveal the Muse to be an essential aesthetic partner who has provided a necessary and enabling foil to the poet over a lifetime of writing. As he writes in "Into Thy Hands," Kinsella's life-long search for aesthetic meaning is ultimately "All offered to an intimate, / wayward in acceptance, / self-chosen and unknown."

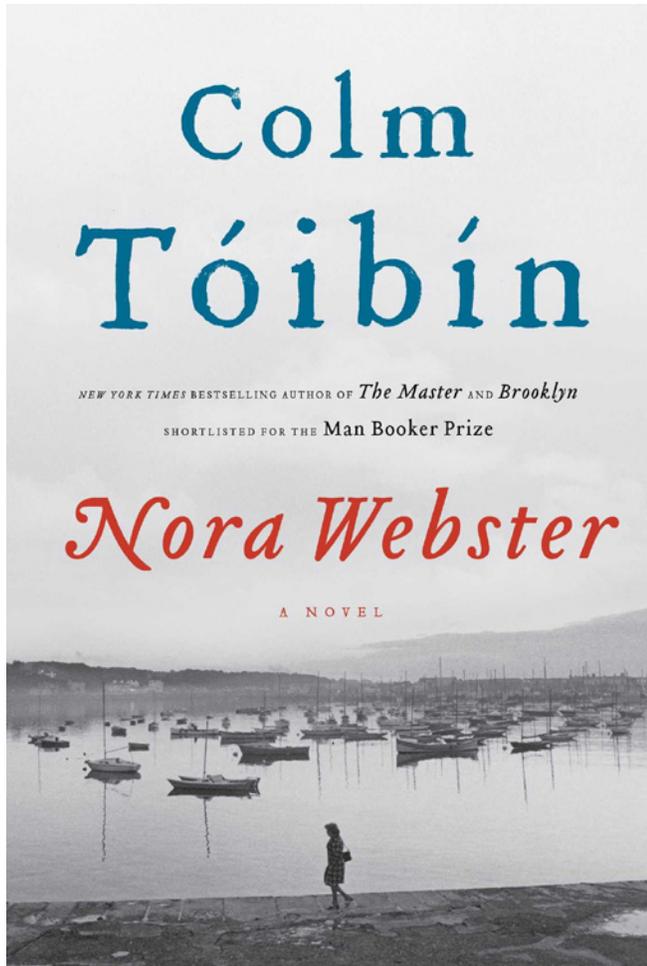
This latest collection reminds us of the singular talent of one of Ireland's most distinguished poet, who continues to fearlessly explore the predicament of the individual in the modern world. Like Joyce, Kinsella's artistic vision is characterized by a profound humanity and a deeply rooted commitment to the aesthetic quest for meaning and self-knowledge. The poems in *Late Poems* confront the ordeals of life and show us the varied and contradictory responses of the human heart to these ordeals: wonder and longing, brutality and compassion, joy and grief. Despite the long overdue critical attention that Kinsella's work is now beginning to receive, Kinsella still remains an oddly marginalized figure; Irish critics and poets respect his work, yet somehow his work has failed to attract the global audience it deserves. With this new collection, readers have an opportunity to immerse themselves in the work of this extraordinary Irish poet, which one hopes will prompt further reading of Kinsella's extensive canon.

Book Review

Nora Webster by Colm Tóibín. Scribner; First Edition edition 2014

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Reviewed by Adrienne Leavy



In his masterful new novel, *Nora Webster*, Colm Tóibín paints a vivid portrait of a middle aged widow, Nora Webster, who is struggling to cope with the premature death of her husband, Maurice Webster, “the love of her life,” and a popular schoolteacher in the small Irish town of Enniscorthy. In addition to being a love story and a study of Nora’s grief over the loss of Maurice, the novel also chronicles small town life and the routine difficulties faced by a single mother, who strives to maintain a sense of normalcy within the chaos of bereavement. At times Nora seems both remote and detached from her four children, and from the reader’s perspective, she is often clueless as to their needs and ambitions if they do not fall within the scope of her own agenda. Nevertheless, she worries about them constantly, particularly about her eldest son Donal, who developed a stutter when his father became ill. To his credit, Tóibín resists the urge to judge her, nor does he encourage his readers to do so. In the character of Nora, Tóibín has created a fascinating and multi-layered heroine, who, if she is not especially likable at times, is nevertheless undeniably real. Like James Joyce, Tóibín is a writer who reveals in the particularity of everyday life, and his pared down narrative strategy is reminiscent of the style that Joyce employed in *Dubliners*. Through a myriad of small seemingly inconsequential details, we learn that Nora is a strong, intelligent woman, frustrated by the petty small-town rivalries and gossip that imprison both her and her neighbors, and emotionally guarded as a result.

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But this story extends beyond Nora’s environment, which Tóibín regards as a microcosm for the political and cultural life of Ireland in the late 1960s. While the focus of the narrative is always on Nora and her struggle to redefine her life in the absence of Maurice, outside forces hover on the periphery. The brewing troubles in Northern Ireland, which in the novel focus on the Bloody Sunday protest march, are watched on TV by everyone in the town, with no-one quite sure how to react. Also commented on by the townspeople is the rise of the young Charlie Haughey in the political party

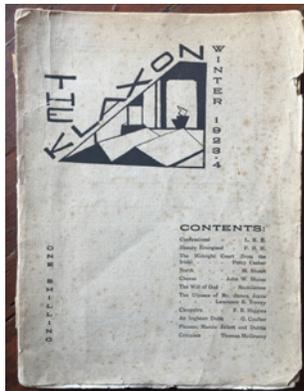
Fianna Fáil, along with the scandal caused by his arrest for gun-running. Nora likes Haughey because as Minister for Finance he regularly increased the Widow's pension, and with this minor observation, Tóibín subtly explains part of Haughey's grassroots appeal.

Nora's personal reawakening begins when she returns to work at Gibneys, the local flour mill where she had worked before her marriage to Maurice. Gradually she gains confidence and is able to confront a bullying co-worker, and also the authoritarian priest who runs the school her sons attend. As the novel progresses we learn that the key to Nora's acceptance of Maurice's death is through her exposure to music. Gradually, she allows herself to develop a friendship with another woman who shares her interest in singing, and she attends musical evenings organized by the local music appreciation society. She uncharacteristically indulges herself through the purchase of a new gramophone, which leads to frequent trips to Dublin to purchase classical music records. All of these activities lead her away from painful memories of her life with Maurice: "It was not merely that Maurice had no ear for music, and that music was something they had never shared. It was the intensity of her time here; she was alone with herself in a place where he would never have followed her, even in death." However, Tóibín refuses to allow Nora the easy consolation of an entirely new life through music, which makes the transformative effect on her personality more realistic. Her music teacher bluntly informs her that she will never be a star: "You've left it too late," the teacher says of her singing voice, on first hearing it. "We can all have plenty of lives, but there are limits."

In his *Irish Times* review Roy Foster assessed Tóibín's latest novel thus: "In delineating a fully realized interior life patterned against a confining local society, this latest novel is his most Flaubertian work yet." This comparison to the great French novelist Gustave Flaubert, the leading exponent of literary realism in his country's literature, is apt. With great economy of style and syntax Tóibín effortlessly weaves Nora's past and present together to show the history of her relationships with her late husband and her immediate family. In the process, the author gives us a remarkable and moving portrait of a woman trying to do the best she can within the confines of her environment and her personality.

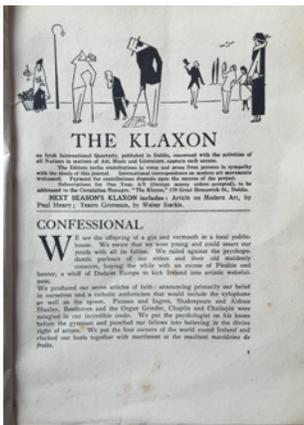
Reading Ireland focus on Little Magazines

The Klaxton: Winter 1923-24



In his survey of Irish Literary Magazines Tom Clyde aptly describes *The Klaxton* as “Stylish, provocative, promising, but evidently too strong for its contemporaries.” With its confrontational and polemical style, *The Klaxton* could be regarded as an Irish version of the British avant garde journal *Blast* (1914-15). Published in the winter of 1923-1924, by Abraham Jacob Leventhal, *The Klaxton* is perhaps the most aesthetically radical of the Irish “Little Magazines.” Unlike previous publications such as *The Irish Review* or *Samhain*, this magazine looked to European modernism for artistic inspiration. Describing itself as an “Irish International Quarterly,” the publication opened with a clearly enunciated international cultural manifesto, asserting boldly that it was “concerned with the activities of all Nations in matters of Art, Music and Literature.” Leventhal, (who in later life was a friend and secretary to Samuel Beckett), sets the tone for what Tim Armstrong describes as the “aggressive modernism of the doomed journal” – “We railed against the psychopedantic parlours of our elders and their old maidenly consorts, hoping the while with an excess of Picabia and banter, a whiff of Dadaist Europe to kick Ireland into artistic wakefulness.” The poet R.F. Higgins took up the cry for an intellectually liberal climate in the newly established Irish Free State by proclaiming in his editorial: “Therefore, in flinging the restraints of modern systems to the winds, we assert for oneself the necessity of personal freedom and individual expression.”

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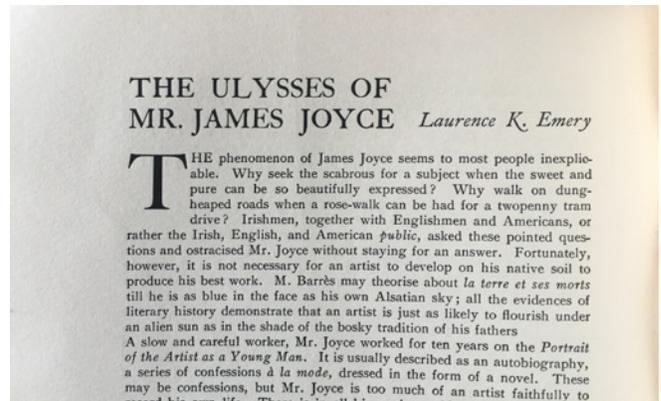
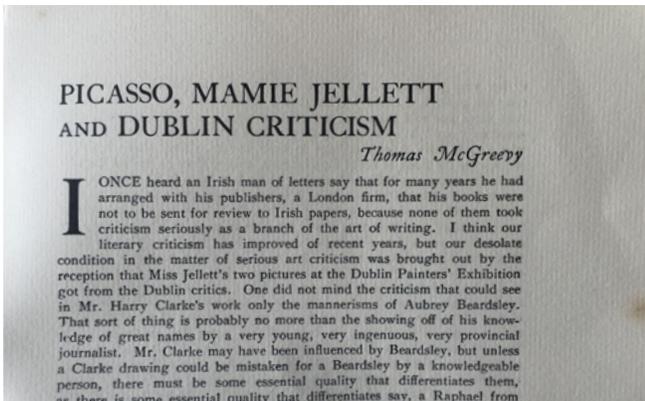


Frank Shovlin argues that “Joyce is the presiding, if absent, eminence behind this journal,” and indeed the initial impetus for the magazine was the refusal by the printer of another literary magazine, the *Dublin Magazine*, to print Leventhal’s essay, “The *Ulysses* of Mr. James Joyce.” Refusing to bow to censorship, Leventhal founded *The Klaxton*, and published his review in the first issue under the pseudonym Laurence Emery. Joyce’s novel had been serialized in parts in the American journal *The Little Review*, from March 1918 to December 1920, and then published in its entirety by Silvia Beach in Paris in 1922. Although *Ulysses* was not officially imported into Ireland for fear of a ban on the basis of obscenity, the audience for Leventhal’s essay were probably familiar with the contents of Joyce’s controversial novel. This piece in *The Klaxton* was the first critical assessment of *Ulysses* that was published in Ireland, and while its measured tone may seem inoffensive to modern readers, as Shovlin notes, “for Ireland in 1923 it was strong stuff.” Leventhal begins by addressing the fact that the events of the novel take place over the course of one day, and notes that “there is such a world of learning, scientific, metaphysic, aesthetic, of life real and imagined, of force comic and tragic, to make the day longer than any conceived on this planet.” While acknowledging that “the relationship of Joyce to modernism is a vast subject” which he can only touch on, Leventhal proceeds to compare *Ulysses* with the work of the Dadaists because of Joyce’s “inventions of onomatopoeic words and the mixing of science with literature,” and he also finds parallels between Joyce and Picasso. A good portion of his review concentrates on the lengthy, surrealist “Circe” chapter. Leventhal concludes with the observation that “In truth, there is no real parallel to Mr. Joyce in literature.”



Nine pages of the magazine are devoted to part one of Percy Ussher's English translation of "The Midnight Court" (*Cúirt An Mbéan Oíche*), a lengthy Gaelic poem composed by the County Clare poet, Brian Merriman in 1780. Merriman's poem, which takes the form of a debate on the question of marriage and matchmaking practices in the eighteenth century, is a bawdy celebration of female sexuality, with a decisive anti-male judgment delivered by a female judge at the conclusion of the poem. The inclusion of this translation was likely intended to provoke the conservative sensibilities of the Irish public rather than as any kind of tacit approval of the agenda of the Literary Revival and its privileging of Gaelic mythology and folklore.

The influence of European modernism is evident on the cover page, with a design reminiscent of the clean geometrical lines advocated by the Romanian sculptor Brancusi. Further emphasis on the visual arts is evident from a black and white photograph of a "Negro sculpture in wood" on the opening page. Just as Leventhal was compelled to defend the artistic merits of Joyce's *Ulysses*, Thomas MacGreevy, the poet and future director of the



National Gallery of Ireland, felt compelled to defend the experimental work of Dublin artist Mamie Jellett. Along with fellow artist Evie Hone, Jellett was the first Irish artist to exhibit abstract paintings in Ireland. Two of her paintings were displayed at the Dublin Painter's autumn exhibition in 1923, and were received with great antagonism by the press and the public. As Sean Kennedy points out in his study *Irish Art and Modernism*, "only Thomas MacGreevy admired these paintings, recognizing their exhibition to be a major event." In an impassioned essay that concludes this issue of *The Klaxton* MacGreevy savagely attacked the quality of art criticism in Ireland and offered a program for Irish modernism that was to be free of English influence and also "unencumbered by the agenda of the state," "bourgeois morality" or "the necessity to embody a symbolic reality."

The Klaxton's effort to change the cultural and aesthetic environment of the newly created Irish Free State could not overcome the climate of cultural retrenchment and political conservatism that soon manifested itself in post-independent Ireland. As Clyde points out, "*The Klaxton* was swimming against the stream in the Ireland of its day, and not just the forces of church and state, but also the new literary establishment." After publishing this one issue, the magazine closed.

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