Catching the Conscience of a Race: Joyce and Celticism

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James Joyce opens his essay "Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages" thus: "Nations have their ego, just like individuals. The case of a people who like to attribute to themselves qualities and glories foreign to other people has not been entirely unknown in history, from the time of our ancestors, who called themselves Aryans and nobles, or that of the Greeks, who called all those who lived outside the sacrosanct land of Hellas barbarians" (CW 154). Even as early as 1907, when this essay was written, Joyce was aware that nations participate in the activities of the ego/self, and in the consequent dynamics of self and other in which the self attributes to itself qualities "foreign to other people," who are thus labeled "barbarians." At the national and ethnic levels, these are discursive processes that participate in the dynamics of "othering" that create and consolidate an imagined national "character," a sovereign Self—most usually by defining "others" in terms of clearly defined essences and comfortable, essentialized stereotypes (of "barbarians"). For example, in 1836 Benjamin Disraeli railed about the Irish, who, he claimed, "hate our free and fertile isle. They hate our order, our civilization, our enterprising industry, our sustained courage, our decorous liberty, our pure religion. This wild, reckless, indolent, uncertain, and superstitious race have no sympathy with the English character" (Curtis, Anglo-Saxons 51). Disraeli's description is classic in what it reveals, which is that "they" are everything that "we" are not (or at least prefer to think that we are not): subservient, disorderly, uncivilized, unenterprising, cowardly,

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indecorous, and so on. In fact, then, as Joyce's comments on the national "ego" also suggest, the nature of what one formulates as "other" and "barbarian" tells us much more about the self than about the other.

In particular the "Irishman"—an expression that Conor Cruise O'Brien has referred to as the "pejorative singular"—was endowed by Anglo-Saxonists with those traits most feared or despised in respectable English society. This process, of course, was basically similar to the way the English formed their images of Africans and Orientals, too, based on their particular needs at the time, in a universalized essentialism of the other as primitive, barbaric, and uncivilized/uncivilizable. During the nineteenth century the Irish were repeatedly (including through scientific arguments) "racialized" by the English as "White Negroes" or savage Orientals, and functioned as belonging to a primitive race much more closely related to African Hottentots and Bushmen, or to native Maoris or savage Chinese. Eventually, in the latter half of the century, the Irish were relegated to a subhuman status, to anthropoid apes.

In "Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages" Joyce expresses his awareness of such stereotyping mechanisms, in which "the English now disparage the Irish because they are Catholic, poor, and ignorant," whereas in fact "Ireland is poor because English laws ruined the country's industries"; and in which Ireland has been made into "the everlasting caricature of the serious world" (CW 167, 168). But, as Joyce goes on to point out about such English stereotypes, "That the Irish are really the unbalanced, helpless idiots about whom we read in the lead articles of the Standard and the Morning Post is denied by the names of the three greatest translators in English literature—FitzGerald, translator of the Rubaiyat of the Persian poet Omar Khayyam, Burton, translator of the Arabian masterpieces, and Cary, the classic translator of the Divine Comedy" (CW 171; significantly, Joyce's examples were able to prove themselves by going outside the English/Irish cultural borders into broader, international cultural perspectives, through acts of cultural "translation").

Such derogatory images of "other" cultures conjoin in what Edward Said calls an "essentialist universalism" in which the Other is constructed to seem unchanging, unalterable, and universal along essentialized stereotypes, which serve to consolidate a comfortable us/them binarity and distinction that operates along lines similar to Freud's concept of projection—a projection that, as Curtis notes, is a "refracted image" that "worked to enhance the self-esteem of the beholder at the expense of those being stereotyped" (Apes 14), much like Virginia Woolf's depiction in A Room of One's Own of the female as a mirror that allows the male to see himself as twice his actual size.

In such essentializing of a universal primitivism, these racial stereotypes create comfortably, securely, clearly defined boundaries between the self and the other, within the dynamics of what Derrida has taught us to recognize as Western logocentrism—a clearly demarcated us/them binarity and difference that functions to reify the dominant Western culture's sense of itself as civilized and
rational by contrast while repressing or occluding the knowledge that the qualities of primitive otherness are already contained (but repressed) within the self. In this way, Anglo-Saxonists could proclaim, as did Joseph Chamberlain in 1895, in all good conscience (or at least in all good “conscious”), that “the British race is the greatest governing race the world has ever seen” (Banton 76).

During the nineteenth century the popular English conception of the Irish as a backward, primitive, “native” Celtic race attained the broad cultural force behind it consistent with the Gramscian notion of “hegemony” or the Foucauldian notion of “discourse” and discursive formations, along the lines of Said’s concept of Orientalism, in which “such [Orientalist] texts can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe” (Said 94). Consequently, by the 1860s the popular image of the Irishman in both popular cartoons and in written discourse was an anthropoid ape. L. P. Curtis’s Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature convincingly documents how Victorian cartoons and illustrations transformed “peasant Paddy into an ape-man or simianized Caliban. . . . by the 1860s and 1870s, when for various reasons it became necessary for a number of Victorians to assign Irishmen to a place closer to the apes than the angels” (2). The English, of course, reserved the designation of angels for themselves, frequently punning on angels, Angles, and Anglo-Saxons. The timing of this culturally created image (of Irish apes) was not accidental, for it was when the Irish turned to political activism and agitation in their demands for Home Rule that Punch and other English periodicals began to “picture the Irish political outrage-mongering peasant as a cross between a garrotter and a gorilla” (Curtis, Apes 31). Bolstered by such scientific, anthropological reasoning as Robert Knox’s pseudo-scientific Celtophobic racism, John Beddoe’s “index of nigrescence,” which purported to show that Celts were Africanoid in physical characteristics, and Daniel Mackintosh’s data claiming that the heads of Irish people were characterized by absent chins, receding foreheads, large mouths, thick lips, melanous and prognathous features, and so on, it was perhaps inevitable that Anglo-Saxonist racism would turn the “white Negro” into a simian Celt.

While there were many equations made between the Irish and apes in both literature and nonfictive writing, the most prevalent manifestations of the equation of the Irish Celt with an ape appeared in the popular cartoons of the day, in English periodicals such as Punch and Judy, in which any character with a prognathous jaw and simian features was readily recognized as representing an Irishman, without any need for further identification. Joyce reveals his pained awareness of such derogatory stereotyping in Stephen Hero, when Madden (Davin in Portrait) speaks of those “old stale libels—the drunken Irishman, the baboon-faced Irishman that we see in Punch” (SH 64). To illustrate Madden’s point, I have included a small but striking selection of such cartoons here (selected from Curtis’s Apes and Angels pp. 41, 42, 43, 59, 60, 66, and 63, respectively). They depict Anarchy as an Irish agitator with repellent features
evoking simianness (figs. 1 and 2); an “Irish Frankenstein” described by *Punch* as a bestial “*Caliban* in revolt” (fig. 3); St. Patrick’s Day as a stereotyped “shindy” or “donnybrook” involving Irish-Americans in the form of gorillas bashing each others’ heads (fig. 4); a cartoon in *Harper’s Weekly* balancing (as equal in weight) black slaves in the South with simian Irish-Americans (fig. 5); a degenerate “Simian Irish Celt” doing a jig while John Bull and Uncle Sam look on disapprovingly (fig. 6). The last example (fig. 7) is perhaps the most strik-
Figure 2. Anarchy: detail from “Two Forces.” The close-up underscores how Paddy, as the stereotyped Irishman, has been fully simianized as a repellent Irish agitator with apelike nose, lips, jaws, and teeth. (Punch, 29 October 1881.)

ing: Paddy and Bridget, as the essentialized Irish pair, are portrayed as living in their native habitat, a shanty; the rather Wakean title of “The King of A-Shantee” connects the Irish Celt with the African Ashanti, and Paddy’s clearly apelike features imply that he may be the “missing link” in the evolution between the lower species of apes and Africans.

This, then, was part of the context and discourse of race at the end of the nineteenth century: a discourse racialized along a binary axis that posited the English “race” as one pole (the positive) and the Irish as the other (the negative).
Figure 3. "The Irish Frankenstein." Tenniel's stereotype of the Irish assassin appeared in Punch just two weeks after the Phoenix Park murders, in which two English emissaries were assassinated in Phoenix Park. The prognathous jaw and simian nose of this monster/assassin—shown carrying pistol and a bloodied dagger, standing over its maker, a respectable and law-abiding English gentleman—were features that the English considered distinctly Irish. Punch described this Frankenstein as a Celtic Caliban: "Hideous, blood-stained, bestial, ruthless in its rage, implacable in its revengefulness, cynical in its contemptuous challenge of my authority, it seemed another and a fouler Caliban in revolt, and successful revolt, against the framer and fosterer of its maleficent existence." (Punch, 20 May 1882, pp. 234–35.)
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Figure 4. “The Day We Celebrate: St. Patrick's Day, 1867.” St. Patrick's Day is depicted by Thomas Nast in Harper's Weekly as a stereotyped "shindy" or "donnybrook" involving Irish-Americans in the form of gorillas beating up policemen and law-abiding citizens. (Harper's Weekly, 6 April 1867.)

in which “Irish” was defined as everything not desirably “English.” Thus, the conception of an essentialized and racialized Irishness depended, for its very definition and formulation, on the English ideal of Englishness, a national ego-ideal (assuming that “Nations have their ego, just like individuals”).

Joyce was certainly very aware of and very sensitive to such stereotyping and essentializing. Having denied (in his 1907 essay) “that the Irish are really the unbalanced, helpless idiots about whom we read in the lead articles of the Standard and the Morning Post,” Joyce goes on to argue that these stereotypes have their origin in the oppressive conditions of an Irish environment long suffering under the cruel Penal Laws (which forbade Irish Catholics to vote, become government employees, practice a trade or profession, sit in parliament, own land, keep a horse, and so on) imposed until recently by England (see CW 168–71); but, as he further comments about the constructed stereotypes, “this pejorative conception of Ireland is given the lie by the fact that when the Irishman is found outside of Ireland in another environment, he very often becomes a respected man. The economic and intellectual conditions that prevail in his own country do not permit the development of individuality” (CW 171).

That same year (1907) Joyce wrote an essay for Il Piccolo della Sera in Trieste titled “Ireland at the Bar,” in which he narrated a very suggestive story (which I quote at length):
Figure 5. "The Ignorant Vote: Honors are Easy" (black slaves and white apes). Nast’s cartoon in Harper’s Weekly suggests that emancipated Southern slaves were equivalent in weight to the brutish Irish-American voters in the North. The Northern voter is characterized by simian features and the identifying clay pipe and hat of the stereotypical Irishman. (Harper’s Weekly, 9 December 1876.)

Several years ago a sensational trial was held in Ireland. In a lonely place in a western province, called Maamtrasna, a murder was committed. Four or five townsmen, all belonging to the ancient tribe of the Joyces, were arrested. The oldest of them, the seventy year old Myles Joyce, was the prime suspect. Public opinion at the time thought him innocent and today considers him a martyr. Neither the old man nor the others accused knew English. The court had to resort to the services of an interpreter. The questioning, conducted through the interpreter, was at times comic and at times tragic. On one side was the excessively ceremonious interpreter, on the other the patriarch of a miserable
Figure 6. "An Irish Jig." James A. Wales's cartoon in Puck of "An Irish Jig" shows both John Bull and Uncle Sam unable to tame the wildness of the Irish ape, fattened on English and American food supplies (and also on "drugs") and sporting distinctly apelike features (as well as the stereotypic Celtic clay pipe and hat). (Puck, 3 November 1880, p. 150.)
tribe unused to civilized customs, who seemed stupefied by all the judicial ceremony. The magistrate said:

"Ask the accused if he saw the lady that night." The question was referred to him in Irish, and the old man broke out into an involved explanation, gesticulating, appealing to the others accused and to heaven. Then he quieted down, worn out by his effort, and the interpreter turned to the magistrate and said:
“He says no, ‘your worship.’”

“Ask him if he was in that neighbourhood at that hour.” The old man again began to talk, to protest, to shout, almost beside himself with the anguish of being unable to understand or to make himself understood, weeping in anger and terror. And the interpreter, again, dryly:

“He says no, ‘your worship.’”

When the questioning was over, the guilt of the poor old man was declared proved, and he was remanded to a superior court which condemned him to the noose. On the day the sentence was executed, the square in front of the prison was jammed full of kneeling people shouting prayers in Irish for the repose of Myles Joyce’s soul. The story was told that the executioner, unable to make the victim understand him, kicked at the miserable man’s head in anger to shove it into the noose. (CW 197–98)

In December of 1882 an old man named Myles Joyce had indeed been hanged, along with two other men, in County Galway for murder; he “was generally considered to be an innocent victim of public indignation” (Mason and Ellmann in CW 197). Joyce’s narrative emphasizes the fact that, as a Gaelic-speaking Irish Celt, Myles Joyce was allowed no voice of his own in an English-speaking forum. The story serves as an allegory of the Irish “race” under English domination. As Gayatri Spivak has asked, can the subaltern speak? Or must we conclude, along with Karl Marx, that “they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented”? If so, that representation is often, as in this story, distorted and peremptory, resulting in public execution or personal immolation. As Spivak has argued about the subaltern woman under imperialism, she is allowed no subject position from which to speak: “There is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak” (Young 163); thus everyone else speaks for her but herself. And if the racialized and colonized Irish subalterns “must be represented,” how can they be represented? How can a young Joyce represent them, and thus create/represent the uncreated/unrepresented conscience of his race? Should he speak as an Irishman, or must he use the language and cultural systems of the oppressors? (As Stephen Dedalus thinks about the English dean of studies in Portrait: “How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master, on his lips and on mine! . . . His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech” [P68 189] ) To speak as an “Irishman” means that, like Myles Joyce, one will not be heard: surely it did not escape Joyce’s linguistic sensitivity that the de-speeched subaltern here has the same name as himself and is of “the ancient tribe of the Joyces.”

Joyce’s own comment after telling this story is revealing precisely along these lines:

The figure of this dumbfounded old man, a remnant of a civilization not ours, deaf and dumb before his judge, is a symbol of the Irish nation at the bar of public opinion. Like him, she is unable to appeal to the modern conscience
of England and other countries. The English journalists act as interpreters be­
tween Ireland and the English electorate. . . . Skimming over the dispatches
from London (which . . . have something of the laconic quality of the inter­
preter mentioned above), the public conceives of the Irish as highwaymen
with distorted faces, roaming the night with the object of taking the hide of
every Unionist. (CW 198)

Joyce is aware that being-spoken-for ("interpreted" and represented) results in
the essentialized negative stereotypes of the race ("the Irish as highwaymen
with distorted faces, roaming the night"). Unable to speak, Ireland is "unable
to appeal to the modern conscience of England and other countries." Along
with Joyce, Ireland herself was acutely aware of the trap involved in this pat­
tern of being "represented" and essentialized, as illustrated in a telling Irish
political cartoon ("Par" in fig. 8), in which an English journalist sent to Ire­
land to "furnish truthful sketches of Irish character" encounters a handsome
and respectable looking Irish gentleman and draws/re represents him instead
as a frighteningly bestial and vampiric gorilla (Curtis, Apes 71). As Joyce has
Madden point out in Stephen Hero, the Irish Celt is labeled/libeled as "the ba­
boon-faced Irishman that we see in Punch" (SH 64). How can one break this
pattern and represent oneself and one's own "race" and conscience?

For this binary pattern is a trap that essentializes and limits representation
to precisely its own terms, terms one must play by if one accepts the binary op­
positions. In other words, if you try to prove that you aren't what "they" say
you are, you are judging/arguing by the same rules/categories "they" are, and so
you end up reifying/maintaining those categories in place as functional reali­
ties. For example, if you try to prove that you are more angel than ape, that
you aren't a Hottentot or Maori, then you are only reinforcing and reinscrib­
ing the terms of a hierarchy that places angels (and Anglos) at the top and
"Negroes" and Orientals near the bottom. A textbook example of the dangers
of such totalizing binaries is the case of Benjamin Disraeli, who, as an English
Jew trying to exculpate Jews from English and European anti-Semitism, proved
more English than the English and more racist than the Anglo-Saxonist.
John Tenniel's cartoon (fig. 9) in Punch of Disraeli masquerading as an angel
brilliantly underscores the racial supremacist's motivating fear and anxiety of
being seen or represented as an ape instead (Curtis, Apes 106). Consequently,
Disraeli's attitudes toward "other" races were, in spite of his own marginal­
ized/othered status, essentialist and prejudicial, resulting in his opinion that
the Irish are a "wild, reckless, indolent, uncertain, and superstitious race" who
"hate our order, our civilization, our enterprising industry, our sustained cour­
age, our decorous liberty, our pure religion" (Curtis, Anglo-Saxons 51; one won­
ders which "pure religion" Disraeli meant).

Is it possible to break this pattern, to step outside its functions? Joyce, as
his essays exemplify, "tells his compatriots that they must cease to be provin-
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Figure 8. "Setting Down in Malice." The cartoonist of *Pat* suggests the typical and distorted representation of Irish features and character by the English press. In his representation an English reporter, "Chalks" (no. 1), portrays a handsome and respectable Irishman (no. 2) as a bestial and vampiric gorilla instead (no. 3). (*Pat*, n.s. 1, no. 2, 22 January 1881.)
Figure 9. “Dressing for an Oxford Bal Masqué.” In Tenniel’s cartoon Disraeli’s masquerade as an Oxonian angel underscores the central fear by racial supremacists of being thought of as apes rather than angels. (Punch, 10 December 1864.)

Joyce’s logic might be seen as a choice not to play by the same terms as the binary system that would function him as a primitive and racialized Celtic other, but to “play along” with such terms and racial comparisons—by re-

ch and folklorist and mere Irish” (Mason and Ellmann in CW 8); he rejected the limitations of a narrow and provincial nationalism in order to speak to a wider, international (and not purely “English”) forum, advocating internationalism over provincialism, advising the Irish to look toward Europe and the international community as its “bar of public opinion,” rather than trying to define itself within English constructions of empire, race, and nationhood.4
functioning them and activating them in an enabling (rather than disabling) fashion. As Michael Banton has noted about attitudes toward racial difference and sameness, "Ideas about race have mostly been used to exclude people from privilege while ideas about shared ethnicity have been used to create bonds of belonging together" (126). In *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce repeatedly rejects and reverses all these racialized, derogatory analogies (of the Irish as racial others) by using them in a positive, vital, and enabling manner, by turning them into bonds of shared ethnicity, analogizing and equating the Irish with other races and colonized peoples by suggesting a solidarity of the marginalized and othered.\(^5\)

If the Irish were depicted as other races, Joyce shows that being like (or just being) other races is a positive thing. As early as 1907 he was arguing that the Celtic race in Ireland has Oriental roots: "This language [Gaelic] is oriental in origin, and has been identified by many philologists with the ancient language of the Phoenicians," a racialized analogy clearly meant to be positive rather than pejorative, since the Phoenicians were (he tells us) "an adventurous people, who had a monopoly of the sea" and were "the originators of trade and navigation, according to historians"; Joyce goes on to argue that this ancient people's Druidic religion and civilization were also transplanted to Ireland (CW 156). Later Joyce points out that Irish civilization is "almost as old as the Chinese," dating back "to a time when England was an uncivilized country" (173).

The Orientalist comparison had already provided the Irish with the enabling analogy of themselves as Israelites (led by Parnell as another Moses) searching for freedom from a tyrannical Egyptian empire, an analogy Joyce would play with in the "Aeolus" episode of *Ulysses* and which he first evoked in his 1912 essay "The Shade of Parnell," who "like another Moses, led a turbulent and unstable people from the house of shame to the verge of the Promised Land" (CW 225). None of these equations/analogies between the Irish and other "races" has derogatory implications for the peoples being compared; rather, they argue that the Irish share in and participate in the strengths and glories of these other civilizations. Joyce is able to employ the racialized analogies positively, even if only by suggesting a solidarity of the marginalized, as when he warns that the English, "if they are wise... will hesitate to alienate the sympathy of the Irish for constitutional agitation; especially now that India and Egypt are in an uproar and the overseas colonies are asking for an imperial federation" (CW 194).

By the time Joyce came to write *Ulysses* he would equate the Irish with the Greeks as well as with the Phoenicians and the Jews, citing Victor Bérard's arguments about Homer in *Les Phéniciens et l'Odyssée*; as Richard Ellmann has pointed out, "Joyce could [thus] claim Bérard's authority for that climactic encounter in *Ulysses* when 'jewgreek meets greekjew'. . . . In other words, the whole Middle East played its part" (27). Which is to say that the very conception of *Ulysses* is based on an implied equation of Otherness with the Self,
of Oriental/Jew with West/Greek, denying the comfort and clarity of binary distinctions based on an essentialized (and fetishized) notion of inherent difference.

Conversely, to base a nationalist response upon the terms of these essentializing binary distinctions is to play by the same rules of that binarity and thus to take on the same hierarchical assumptions. Thus, as Luke Gibbons argues, “many of the conceptions requisitioned by nationalist propagandists in defence of Irish culture are, in fact, an extension of colonialism, rather than a repudiation of it. The racial concept of an Irish national character is a case in point” (104). By positing a countering notion of Irish racial/national character to combat the English stereotype, Irish nationalists were themselves performing an act of static stereotyping; “the ‘Celt,’ and by implication the Celtic revival, owed as much to the benevolent colonialism of Matthew Arnold as it did to the inner recesses of hidden Ireland” (Gibbons 104).6

Such binary logic is predicated on an Us/Them distinction that argues for racial purity and superiority, Us always being valued above Them. Buying into those terms means simply reversing the terms, and claiming that “no, it’s we who are better than you” in an act of reverse racism. Irish Nationalism and the Celtic Revival, or Celticism, were in large measure just this sort of response; thus, for example, Arthur Griffith could (much like Disraeli), while arguing for Irish autonomy and freedom, be so otherwise bigoted as to approve of black slavery (see Gibbons 104).

Celticism or Irish Nationalism tried to do for the “Irish race” what Anglo-Saxonist racism had done for the “English race,” by exalting the Self’s own proclaimed racial and cultural superiority in comparison to all other races/cultures. Thus, Irish scholars involved in the Celtic Revival during the latter decades of the nineteenth century argued that they were “the direct descendants of a pure and holy race, composed of Firbolgs, Tuatha de Dananns, and Milesians, whose ancient institutions, veneration for learning, and religious zeal made Saxon culture . . . look nothing less than Barbarian”; as Curtis concludes, “ethnocentric Irish men and women sought to combat heavy doses of Anglo-Saxonist venom with a Celticism serum of their own making” (Anglo-Saxons 15), seeking to provoke patriotic fervor by being “racy of the soil.” Ernest Renan’s (whom Stephen cites three times in Stephen Hero) lyrical and ecstatic views of the Celtic race in his La poésie des Races Celtiques, which argued that the Celts were unmatched in the world in both their purity of blood and their strength of character, were sounded by the Gaelic League and the Irish Literary Revival; similarly Irish apologists like Charles Gavan Duffy had already proclaimed that “the history of Ireland abounded in noble lessons, and had the unity and purpose of an epic poem” (see Lloyd 68). The collusion and mirrored quality of such ethnocentrisms is suggested by the fact that the same logic and the same stereotypes were invoked by both sides: Matthew Arnold’s analyses of the distinctive character of the Irish genius (such as that
“he is truly sentimental”) were in fact largely derived from Renan, which also explains why the Arnoldian image should have so appealed to the Irish Literary Revival. The ease with which Irish apologists could accept “the Arnoldian stereotype as benign—in fact, as not a stereotype at all—explains how it could be taken to heart by Irish revivalists,” as Gibbons suggests (104).

In fact, the very notion that there was still a pure and distinct Celtic race living in Ireland was an essentialist construction that, ironically enough, was equally acceptable (in fact essential) to both the Irish Nationalist and to the Anglo-Saxon imperialist, for both depended (emotionally and psychologically) on the notion of themselves as a race pure and distinct from others. Thus, the Celticist response was a mirror image of Anglo-Saxonist racism, resulting in the ancestor worship and racial mythology espoused by the Gaelic League, the Gaelic Athletic Association, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and so on.

In 1892 Douglas Hyde delivered in Dublin his powerful and influential lecture “The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland,” which advocated that the noble Celtic race should divest itself of the despicable culture of the “bloody brutal Sassenachs” and return to Irish cultural purity by studying Gaelic, “our once great national tongue” (Hyde 160). This nationalist nostalgia for origins argues for the same kind of cultural purity and superiority that the Anglo-Saxonist supremacists had long advocated for the English “race.” In spite of all the bloody invasions, settlements, and migrations in Irish history—Celts, Romans, Danes, Normans, Saxons, and so on—the Irish were somehow still held up as being pure of blood. Arguments were even made by Celticist enthusiasts that America had been discovered in A.D. 545 by Saint Brendan, or that Shakespeare had been a Celt (suggestions Joyce roundly mocks and parodies in the “Cyclops” episode of Ulysses).

Such Celtic ethnocentrism was most fervently espoused by the Fenians (whose very name reflects a commitment to Celtic mythology and militarism), espousing an ancient mythology that seemed to justify war, bloodshed, and heroic death, adding the likes of Shane O’Neill, Wolfe Tone, and Robert Emmet to the mythological pantheon of Cuchulain and Finn MacCool. Joyce, who found Emmet’s uprising and the Young Ireland movement to risk foolish and pointless spilling of blood (CW 189), would have none of this Celtic ethnocentrism, blood cult, and originary nostalgia, and refused to be involved in the Revival and in the public activities of Irish Nationalism. His parody of Fenian Celticism in the “Cyclops” chapter of Ulysses skewers such blindly racist logic as that espoused by the “Citizen,” in real life Michael Cusack, treasurer of the Gaelic Union (see Fig. 10). For the pacifist, exiled, and multilingual Joyce, the “spiritual liberation” of Ireland and the creation of the “conscience of my race” involved getting out of the binary structure and into an internationalist, multilingual, and multicultural perspective.

What Joyce grew increasingly to understand is that, whereas racism and ethnocentrism depend on static essences and absolute difference, peoples and
Figure 10. "The Gaelic Union." Pamphlet put out by the Gaelic Union "to encourage the study of our Native Language," an activity it refers to (citing Schlegel) as "a sacred trust." Michael Cusack is listed as Treasurer. (My thanks to Theresa O'Connor for providing a copy of this pamphlet.)

populations contain multiplicitous and heterogeneous characteristics of both individual and cultural difference that cannot be so conveniently (and logocentrically) named and essentialized. In such binary operations both self and other get conveniently and comfortably demarcated (and bordered by an essentialist Pale), and the consequent totalizing (and Manichean) mechanics of absolute differences "left no loophole for the Irish to share much in common with their English rulers" (Curtis, *Anglo-Saxons* 53), allowing neither for shared traits nor for heterogeneity within each individual group characterized.

The result is a form of reverse ethnocentrism in which the racialized and colonized subaltern group (Ireland) searches for its own native origins and cultural superiority in order to proclaim a racial purity with which to match and mirror the claims of its imperial oppressor. In *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, Robert Young points out that "those who evoke the 'nativist' position through a nostalgia for a lost or repressed culture idealize the
possibility of that lost origin being recoverable in all its former plenitude without allowing for the fact that the figure of the lost origin, the 'other' that the colonizer has repressed, has itself been constructed in terms of the colonizer's own self-image" (168). As Spivak and Homi Bhabha have argued, and as the Celticist case illustrates, such a "nativist" position merely mirrors the hierarchical fantasies of the colonizer's culture, now projected onto the fantasized originary culture of the other, and that all such arguments, from either side, employ the terms and logic constructed by the dominant, colonizing culture. Or, as Frantz Fanon writes: "Western bourgeois racial . . . ideology . . . manages to appear logical in its own eyes by inviting the sub-men to become human, and to take as their prototype Western humanity as incarnated in the Western bourgeoisie" (163).

One of the colonizer's rules/terms by which both sides of such a binary dialectic play is a "purer than thou" racial claim, arguing the purity and essence of one's own racial group. But arguments for either an Anglo-Saxon or a Celtic racial essence/purity are but wishful thinking, since they suppress the specific heterogeneities, differences, and slippages within each individual notion. As early as 1895 William D. Babington and George Sigerson had both tried to refute the notion that either the English or the Irish were separate races, noting that the concept of "the English race" itself willfully ignored the fluid mixture of races in Britain over many centuries, that "the Irish race" was the composite result of waves of invasions and strife over many centuries, that there were thus no such things as inherently Celtic (or English) virtues or vices, and that the specific differences between cultures resulted from social and environmental influences (see Curtis, Anglo-Saxons 104 and Gibbons 105).

Instead of a pure lineage of cultural inheritance, composite cultures might more fruitfully be theorized not on a notion of difference based on rigid binarisms but on a heterogeneity resulting from porous borders and live spheres of influence and interaction. After all, the very activities and characteristics that the self would expel and represent as primitive and other in fact shape the self's own culture and constitution. What gets occluded is not only the actual heterogeneous specificities of different cultures but also the presence of the other within the self, the willingness to acknowledge that not only does the other-within shape the self, but that in very real ways it is the self. What is denied is an awareness of the fluid and reciprocal nature of influence and cultural formation, in which the self both acts and is acted on. As James Clifford puts it in his essay "Traveling Cultures," "what's elided is the wider global world of intercultural import-export in which" the encounter with the other "is always already enmeshed" (100). The physical as well as figural topos of a conquered culture (as also of the conqueror's culture) is already what Mary Pratt calls a "contact zone," composed of porous or fluid "borders" that blur and deny any clear markers of absolute difference (in this sense, Gloria Anzaldua's figuration of "borderlands" functions similarly).
Finally, this was a reality Joyce was well aware of in his choice to reject the Celticism of Irish Nationalism, founded as it was on this binary trap. His argument that the Irish should look beyond their narrow provincialism and their affairs with England and develop a more international consciousness was an attempt to break out of such constricting dynamics and terms, in which an Irish essence could be defined only on the conqueror's terms (such as those posited by Arnold) and in reaction/response to English claims. For Joyce rejected wholesale the Celticism argument for racial purity and national characteristics, which he found to be as specious as the English stereotyping of the Irish character as the "baboon-faced figures" (SH 64) and "the unbalanced helpless idiots we read about" (CW 171) in the English papers and magazines. Like Babington and Sigerson, we find him (in "Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages") reminding us that "the Celtic race" was "compounded of the old Celtic stock and the Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon and Norman races . . . with the various elements mingling and renewing the ancient body." The Irish, Joyce argues, are in fact a very mixed race—"Do we not see that in Ireland the Danes, the Firlbolgs, the Milesians from Spain, the Norman invaders, and the Anglo-Saxon settlers have united to form a new entity?" (CW 166)—including many Irish patriots such as Parnell "in whose veins there was not even a drop of Celtic blood" (CW 161–62; the then mayor of Dublin, Mr. Nannetti, he informed his Triestine audience, was Italian). Joyce's representation of the Irish "race," cogently articulated in a significant passage, is very much a vision of a complex mix of racial and cultural strains operating within a fluid "contact zone":

Our civilization is a vast fabric, in which the most diverse elements are mingled, in which nordic aggressiveness and Roman law, the new bourgeois conventions and the remnant of a Syriac religion [Christianity] are reconciled. In such a fabric, it is useless to look for a thread that may have remained pure and virgin without having undergone the influence of a neighbouring thread. What race, or what language . . . can boast of being pure today? And no race has less right to utter such a boast than the race now living in Ireland. (CW 165–66)

In rejecting the argument that the "race now living in Ireland" has somehow remained "pure and virgin," Joyce is rejecting the ideological foundation behind the Citizen's, the Gaelic League's, and the Literary Revival's motivations. In arguing that in Irish civilization "the most diverse elements are mingled," Joyce is acknowledging the hybridity and collaboration of discursive influences and cultural formations. His subsequent fictional works become increasingly informed by his sensitivity toward the nature of the hybridity, ambivalences, and interpenetrations involved in hegemonic and discursive formations. This was, of course, the understanding of discourses that Foucault advanced in *The Order of Things* when he suggested that the histories of the same (self) and the other were inextricably implicated and interpenetrated: "the history of the order imposed on things would be the history
of the Same—of that which, for a given culture, is both dispersed and related" (xxiv); as Shem/Mercius would say to Shaun/Justius in Finnegans Wake, "the days of your youth are evermixed mimine" (FW 194.4). Joyce would go on, especially in Ulysses and Finnegans Wake, increasingly self-consciously to blur the racialized demarcations of difference between a dark other and an imperial self. For Joyce was consciously rejecting the rigid simplicity of the mirrored racial arguments and characters posited by both Anglo-Saxonism and Celticism, as he attempted more fruitfully to engage in the "spiritual liberation of my country" and to "create the uncreated conscience of my race" by representing Ireland in "my nicely polished looking-glass" instead, a representation not mirrored in the haze of a Celtic twilight but, in Seamus Deane's phrase, as a "mirror held up to Culture" (41).

NOTES

1. Cited in Curtis, Anglo-Saxons and Celts, p. 22. Curtis adds: "So persistent has been this theme of English cultural and racial superiority over the Irish that one begins to suspect the existence among those who tried to subdue and rule the Irish of a deep-seated need to justify their confiscatory and homicidal habits in that country" (18).

2. Joyce himself has been, in our own century, a recipient/victim of this racialized discourse of Irishness, for—as Gibbons points out—it was the Unionist provost of Trinity College, J. P. Mahaffy, who asserted that "James Joyce is a living argument in favour of my contention that it was a mistake to establish a separate university for the aborigines of this island—for the corner boys who spit in the Liffey" (113).

3. "The stereotype of the primitive, melancholic, and prognathous Irish Celt was documented by anthropologists and ethnologists who constructed impressive typologies of the physiognomies of the British and Irish peoples" (Curtis, Apes 94).

4. Joyce's portrayal of Davin, Stephen's young Nationalist friend in Portrait, whom Stephen mocks as a "rude Firbolg Mind" with a "delight in rude bodily skill—for Davin had sat at the feet of Michael Cusack, the Gael" (P68 180), is of a character trapped precisely inside the binary logic and limits of Celticism. Stephen describes Davin as "the young peasant worship[p]ing] the sorrowful legend of Ireland. . . . His nurse had taught him Irish and shaped his rude imagination by the broken lights of Irish myth . . . [with] the attitude of a dullwitted loyal serf"; as a result, "whatsoever of thought or of feeling came to him from England or by way of English culture his mind stood armed against in obedience to a password: and of the world that lay beyond England he knew only the foreign legion of France in which he spoke of serving" (P68 181). In effect, such a closed system is trapped within the oscillation of an English/Irish dialectic, in which everything is still finally defined around Englishness.

5. This was also the basic logic and strategy behind a recent popular film, The Commitments. In this engaging Alan Parker movie, a young man named Jimmy Rabbitte organizes a rock-and-roll band in Dublin that he trains to perform black "soul music." When one of the skeptical band members asks, "D'ya think maybe we're a little white for that kind of thing?" Jimmy points out, "You don't get it, lads. The Irish are the
blacks of Europe. And Dubliners are the blacks of Ireland." The poor Dublin young­sters in the band then take on as their motto "I'm black and I'm proud." At another point, standing in a welfare queue and finding another band member also on the dole, Jimmy notes, "We're a Third World country, what can you do?" Finally, in a resonant comment that speaks to the racialized discourse of the Irish as apes, Jimmy describes his band thus: "We're the guerillas of soul. That's guerilla with a 'u', not an 'o'".

6. Gibbons goes on to suggest that "the racial mode is, moreover, the version of Irish nationalism which has passed into general academic circulation in recent years through the 'revisionist' writings of Conor Cruise O'Brien and F. S. L. Lyons (among others)—largely, one suspects, because it redefines even resistance within the colonial frame and thus neutralizes the very idea of anti-colonial discourse" (104).

7. Theresa O'Connor's essay "Demythologizing Nationalism: Joyce's Dialogized Grail Myth" (in Cheng and Martin, 100-21) demonstrates how Joyce subverts such a Celtic mythological discourse of war and blood by replacing it with a mythos of life, birth, and renewal.

8. Pratt defines "contact zone" in this way: "I use this term to refer to the social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34).

WORKS CITED


