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The Deflation of the Medieval in Joyce's *Ulysses*

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For James Joyce, Irish nationalism, with its appeal to patriotic emotionality and promotion of interest in the archaic and medieval Irish past, was suspect.[1] His wariness toward institutionalized political movements is best illustrated in the figure of The Citizen in the Polyphemus section of *Ulysses*. Important strands in the nationalist movement were a reverence for the Irish language (although few patriots bothered to learn it) and for the great body of Irish myth and medieval legendary history. The Irish past, medieval and otherwise, was mediated by the marginalized speakers of Irish in the west of the island and by a body of nineteenth-century scholars, many of them Swiss, German, French, English, or English-speaking Irish Protestants. It found expression in the works of Lady Gregory and Yeats—the Celtic Twilight phenomenon—and Synge, O'Casey, and Stephens. Both the scholars and the enthusiasts promoted a view of the Irish past that has since been qualified as "nativist": an identification of early medieval Irish culture and story-telling as

1. There is a substantial scholarly literature on James Joyce and Irish nationalism. Some significant titles, all but one from the last two decades, are appended to this note. Since only the author's treatment of the Irish Middle Ages is under consideration here, the format and focus of the paper remain largely those as presented at the 27th International Conference on Medievalism, "Medievalism(s) and Diversity," Kent State University at Stark, October 18-20, 2012. For a wider consideration, see, inter alia, Christy L. Burns, Gestural Politics: Stereotype and Parody in Joyce (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000); Brian G. Caraher, "Irish and European Politics: Nationalism, Socialism, Empire," in James Joyce in Context, ed; John McCourt (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 285-98; Wayne K. Chapman, "Joyce and Yeats: Easter 1916 and the Great War," New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua: A Quarterly Record of Irish Studies 10 (2006): 137-51; Seokmoo Choi, "'Imagined Communities': Discourses on the Formation of the Irish Nation and Nation-State in Joyce's Writings," Journal of English Language and Literature/*Yŏngŏ Yŏngmunhak* 48 (2002): 559-83; Seamus Deane, "Joyce and Nationalism," in James Joyce: New Perspectives, ed; Colin MacCabe (Brighton, England, and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 168-183, and "Joyce the Irishman," in James Joyce, ed; Derek Attridge (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 28-48; Heyward Ehrlich, "Inventing Patrimony: Joyce, Mangan, and the Self-Inventing Self," in Joyce through the Ages: A Nonlinear View, ed; Michael Patrick Gillespie (Gainesville, FL; University Press of Florida, 1999), 133-47; Marjorie Howes, "Colonialism, and Nationalism," in James Joyce, ed. Derek Attridge (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 254-71; Michael Patrick Lapointe, "Irish Nationalism's Sacrificial Homosociality in *Ulysses*," Joyce Studies Annual (2008): 172-202; Toby H. Loeffler, "'Erin go bragh': 'Banal Nationalism' and the Joycean Performance of Irish Nationhood," Journal of Narrative Theory 39 (2009): 29-56; Donald E. Morse, "'I"m Irish! I Was Born Here!' The Conflict between Nationalism and Internationalism in James Joyce's 'Ulysses'," in Nationalism vs; Internationalism: (Inter)National Dimensions of Literatures in English, ed; Wolfgang and Ken L. Goodwin (Tübingen, Germany: Stauffenburg; 1996), 177-84; Andras Ungar, Joyce's *Ulysses* as National Epic: Epic Mimesis and the Political History of the Nation State (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002).

unique in Europe, deriving in unbroken, unadulterated fashion from a lost pagan Celtic world, unaffected by Roman civilization (since the Romans never conquered Ireland) and only lightly colored by a Christian wash after the missionary efforts of St. Patrick. Today the fact that this vernacular precocity was wholly dependent on literacy in Latin has led to a revision of medieval Irish culture, as evidenced in Kim McCone's title, Pagan Past and Christian Present in Irish Literature.[2]

Although James Joyce followed the publication of translations of Irish mythological and epic tales as these appeared in serial form in such publications as The United Irishman, and had a better knowledge of the Irish language than he let on and would allow Stephen Daedalus in The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, his aversion to the excesses of nationalist fervor found expression in his ambivalent treatment of medieval themes and motifs in *Ulysses*. In this essay four such instances are reviewed, first as they appear in sections 1 and 9 of the novel, the opening scene in the Martello tower and the conversation in the reading room of the National Library, then as characters are recalled in transmogrified form in the phantasmagorical scenes in Bella Cohen's brothel in Nighttown, in section 15, identified as Circe. Intertwined motifs are Ireland and England—and even India!--, sibling rivalry, candidacy for the Irish kingship, even slicing bread and spreading butter, and, of course, nationalism.

The novel begins with Buck Mulligan having a morning shave on the upper platform of a Martello tower, an obsolete coastal defensive structure. Mulligan mocks all things native and Irish. For him, the sea—Thalatta ! thalatta ! he cries--is the great mother. Stephen Daedalus is preoccupied with his mother's death, his own refusal to pray for her soul, and Mulligan's later coarse reference to the death, which Stephen overhears. Joyce has the words "new paganism – omphalos" cross Stephen's mind, omphalos being the very word used by modern scholars to describe the sites of sacred trees and standing stones (of which the Martello tower is a homologue), whose erect linearity joins the cosmic elements of sky, earth, and under-earth, and facilitates human interaction with cosmic forces, brought into play on earth through human practice in the spheres of truth and justice. For the early Irish, the land, not the sea, was the Great Mother. Mulligan calls Stephen "Aengus of the birds", an allusion to a tale of love and longing but also to Oengus as the son of Lug, the great artificer god, thus tying Greek Daedalus and his son to Ireland and Stephen.

In this context of morning grumbling over the visit of the English Celtophile Haines, stray references to early and medieval Ireland, and Mulligan hewing a loaf of bread for breakfast an old woman brings the tower-dwellers their fresh morning milk. As the representative of the land, the old woman is what is now called a "sovereignty figure." She symbolizes Celtic Ireland fallen from its greatness and now under the heel of a foreign ruler. She recalls the medieval poem known as The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare, who has lost her former glory because of the lack of a just ruler over the land she incarnates.[3] Stephen, who is often likened to a king-candidate, muses at the

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2. Kim McCone, Pagan Past and Christian Present in Irish Literature (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990).
3. See Donncha Ó hAodha, "The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare," in Sages, Saints and Storyterllers: Celtic Studies

sight of the milk lady:

> He watched her pour into the measure and thence into the jug rich white milk, not hers. Old shrunken paps. She poured again a measureful and a tilly. Old and secret she had entered from a morning world, maybe a messenger. She praised the goodness of the milk, pouring it out. Crouching by a patient cow at daybreak in the lush field, a witch on her toadstool, her wrinkled fingers quick at the squirting dugs. They lowed about her whom they knew, dewsilky cattle. Silk of the kine and poor old woman, names given her in old times. A wandering crone, lowly form of an immortal serving her conqueror and her gay betrayer, their common cuckquean, a messenger from the secret morning. To serve or to upbraid, whether he could not tell: but scorned to beg her favour.[4]

These impressions overlie Stephen's memories of his mother's death bed, his view of his place in Ireland, and questions of what should be the matter of Irish art, which he calls the cracked lookingglass of a servant. But the old woman as sovereignty figure has lost her Irish along with her freedom, and cannot respond to Haines's questions in that language, taking it for French and then wondering whether he might not be from the west. The nationalist movement took the same interest in sovereignty figures but would never have made one the object of gentle fun. Mulligan and Stephen do not have quite enough loose change to pay the milk bill. The old woman replies, "Time enough, sir ... time enough." The milk lady does not sound a rallying call for a national renascence and a popular engagement in the native past and possible future remains deferred.

In early Ireland ith agus mlicht "grain and dairy products"—bread and butter, we might say—was a frequent legal tag for food in general. While Joyce is unlikely to have encountered the phrase or its English rendering in the Ancient Laws of Ireland that began to appear in 1865, the notion is pervasive in Irish letters and has a significant presence in Ulysses. The milk woman is recalled when Haines and Mulligan visit a tea-room. Haines had been asking Stephen about religious belief and recalls a passage from his scholarly reading:

> —Eternal punishment, Haines said, nodding curtly. I see. I tackled him [Stephen] this morning on belief. There was something on his mind, I saw. It's rather interesting because professor Pokorny of Vienna makes an interesting point out of that.
>
> Buck Mulligan's watchful eyes saw the waitress come. He helped her to unload her

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in Honour of Professor James Carney, ed. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, and Kim McCone (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989), 308-31.

4. All references, which will henceforth be given parenthetically, are to James Joyce, Ulysses, ed. Hans Walter Gabler et al. (London: Penguin, 1986). This quotation is taken from 1.397-407.

> tray.
> —He can find no trace of hell in ancient Irish myth, Haines said, amid the cheerful cups. The moral idea seems lacking, the sense of destiny, of retribution. Rather strange he should have just that fixed idea. Does he write anything for your movement?
> He sank two lumps of sugar deftly longwise through the whipped cream. Buck Mulligan slit a steaming scone in two and plastered butter over its smoking pith. He bit off a soft piece hungrily. (10.1076-88)

Haines is a bit loose with his personal pronouns, "he" referring first to the scholar of Old Irish, Julius Pókorny, and then ("does he write ...") to Stephen.[5] From this may be retained for later recall and consideration the image of the smoking scone and butter (ith agus mlicht)—and the idea of Viennese doctors.

The section of *Ulysses* identified as Scylla and Charybdis takes place in the reading room of the National Library in Dublin. Along with English letters, topics of the conservation are the Irish literary movement, fed by myth, medieval legendary history, and life on the land. This section has the greatest number of historical characters in the entire book but, self-positioned on an English/Irish axis, they are compromised or otherwise ambiguous as concerns what might be called "nationality." T. W. Lyster, the director of the library, is a Quaker in Catholic Dublin; John Eglinton is the English nom de plume of W. K. McGee, from an Ulster Scots family; George William Russell published under the initials A.E (or Æ). Another conversationalist is Richard Irvine Best, a recently appointed assistant librarian, also to become a distinguished editor and bibliographer of medieval Irish literature.

The view of Best is determined by Joyce's initial characterization: "Mr Best entered, tall, young, mild, light. He bore in his hand with grace a notebook, new, large, clean, bright" (9.74-5) . In the ensuing conversation, Best never quite loses the impression of eager schoolboy who never has his facts quite right. He informs the group that Haines had gone to buy Douglas Hyde's translation of *Lovesongs of Connacht*. Best had also shown him "Jubainville's book". Some years earlier, Best had been in Paris, where he met and befriended John Millington Synge. Synge, in turn, had recommended the lectures at the Collège de France of Henry d'Arbois de Jubainville, who in 1884 had published *Le cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique*. Best was enthused and later returned home to Ireland to begin his lifelong study of Old and Middle Irish. Best was surely a Protestant, raised in the north, although little is known of his childhood, so that his infatuation with medieval Irish is at some odds with his cultural origins. He translated his mentor's book as The Irish Mythological Cycle and Celtic Mythology and this had been published in the year immediately prior to the scene in the reading room. The translation, to which Best added

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5. For a fuller discussion, see William Sayers, "'Professor Pokorny of Vienna' (U, "Wandering Rocks" 10.1043-99)," *Hypermedia Joyce Studies* 10 (2009), http://hjs.ff.cuni.cz.

additional notes of his own, had also been serialized in The United Irishman. At the time of Ulysses Best is then a professional medievalist in the making.[6]

Shakespeare is one of the chief topics of speculation in the reading room. Yet Best contributes little to the discussion of "Who is King Hamlet?" Rather, his allusions lead away from the topic, as when he glosses the issue of the separation of work and life, more exactly, Shakespeare's life and his King Lear. Best cites a line from Russell's play Deirdre, which had been performed two years previously, "Flow over them with your waves and with your waters, Mananaan, Mananaan mac Lir ..." (9.190-1). Best has correctly identified the remote antecedents of the Lear story in Celtic mythology. Manannán mac Lir is the Irish god of the sea. The reference here is to the ceaseless waves that promote oblivion, the oblivion that the conscience-stricken Stephen Daedalus seeks but cannot achieve. This, too, is the topic of Best's next interjection: "--But Ann Hathaway? Mr Best's quiet voice said forgetfully. "Yes, we seem to be forgetting her as Shakespeare himself forgot her." Readers cannot escape the impression that the handsome, boyish Best, whatever his knowledge of medieval Ireland, is being cast as an intellectual lightweight.

While the subject of male homosexuality is not breached in the mention of the dark lady of Shakespeare's sonnets, Lyster, who seems to have had a bit of a prurient nose for scandal, remarks, "I own that if the poet must be rejected such a rejection would seem more in harmony with--what shall I say?--our notions of what ought not to have been." The conversation then turns to further questions of identity, now sexual: Hamlet played by an actress, Hamlet a woman. Best, now opines:

> --The most brilliant of all is that story of Wilde's, Mr Best said, lifting his brilliant notebook. That Portrait of Mr W. H. where he proves that the sonnets were written by a Willie Hughes, a man of all hues. ... It's the very essence of Wilde, don't you know. The light touch. (9.522-30)

Again Joyce makes Best faintly ridiculous by describing him with words from his own remarks, as if it were Best himself who were guilty of the redundancy, and by getting the reference to Wilde slightly but revealingly wrong (Wilde suggested the poems were written for not by W. H.). It is now that Joyce is at his most explicit with reference to Best: "His [Best's] glance touched their faces lightly as he smiled, a blonde ephebe. Tame essence of Wilde."

Associations of Shakespeare and Dublin continue and Mulligan, typically, raises the matter of "the charge of pederasty brought against the bard." "All we can say is that life ran very high in those days," to which Best makes one of his most revealing responses: "The sense of beauty leads us astray, said beautifulinsadness Best to ugling Eglinton." Eglinton replies that "The doctor can tell us

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6. Fuller discussion of Best and his background in Sayers, "Best the Mythographer, Dinneen the Lexicographer: Muted Nationalism in Scylla and Charybdis (Ulysses)," Papers on Joyce [Spain] 12 (2006): 7-24.

what those words mean" and here we should understand Freud, the other Viennese doctor. Later, "Gentle Will is being roughly handled, gentle Mr Best said gently."

Then Stephen launches his theory of the rivalry among the Shakespeare brothers, William, Gilbert, Edmund, Richard. It is at this point that Best makes his fullest contribution to the conversation:

> --That's very interesting because that brother motive, don't you know, we also find in the Old Irish myths. Just what you say. The three brothers Shakespeare. In Grimm too, don"t you know, the fairytales. The third brother that always marries the sleeping beauty and wins the best prize. Best of Best brothers. Good, better, best. (9.956-59)

Best's allusion is to the myth of the brothers Éber and Éremon and to the Milesian invasion as told in The Book of Conquests, an account of which is given in Best's translation of Arbois de Jubainville, Joyce's likely source.

The account of the Milesian invasion is accompanied by a discussion of the legendary poet Amairgen, the equivalent of the Welsh Taliesin. On setting foot on Ireland, Amairgen equates himself with all forms of life there and, knowing it all, thus masters all. "I am the wind which blows over the sea; I am the wave of the Ocean; I am the murmur of the billows; ... I am a vulture upon the rock; I am a tear of the sun," etc.[7] Stephen's shapeshifting musings in the library are consonant ("the fire upon the altar"; "I am other I now"; "as we, or mother Dana, weave and unweave our bodies"; 'seabedabbled, fallen, weltering") and may owe something to Joyce's recollection of these pages. Not only did the Milesian lookout fall from the masthead into the sea (cf. the martello tower), one of the leaders also drowned at sea—"seabedabbled" indeed. Dana or Danu was the name of one of the early Irish sovereignty figures and also the name of the literary magazine published by Eglinton, in which Joyce's early work appeared.

Stephen is quite familiar with legendary Ireland. His evocation of the aging Ann Hathaway "now her leaves falling, all, bare" and "gap-toothed Kathleen, her four beautiful green fields" (the four provinces of Ireland) is consistent with the imagery in the earlier mentioned Lament of the Old Woman of Beare, with its explicit equation of the crone's hair and the stubble of wheat fields. The motif of the sovereignty of Ireland as a woman of varying fortunes is persistent in Irish letters.[8]

There are numerous other brief allusions to matters medieval in this section as Stephen's thoughts leapfrog among associations. Tir na n-og, the land of youth (more correctly Tír na n-Óg) appears as a tag. The mention of Patrick and Oisin references The Colloquy of the Ancient (Acallam

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7. Lebor Gabála Érenn, ed. R. A. S. Macalister (London: Irish Texts Society, 1938-56).

8. The presence of sovereignty figures in Joyce was first recognized by Maria Tymoczko, "Sovereignty Structures in 'Ulysses'," James Joyce Quarterly 25 (1988): 445-64. See, too, her "'The Broken Lights of Irish Myth': Joyce's Knowledge of Early Irish Literature," James Joyce Quarterly 29 (1992): 763-74.

na Senórach) and the corpus of Fenian tales there. "I met a fool i"the forest" could well be a recall of the tale of Mad Suibhne, a reflex of the Celtic wild-man-of-the-woods story. The pun on Fred Ryan and the two pieces of silver he lent Stephen, fraidrine, refers to the metallurgical term in Old Irish findruine, now judged a tin and copper alloy and often translated as "white metal" or "white silver." Stephen's rant about the "incests and bestialities" of the world is strikingly consistent with the apocalyptic vision of the battle goddess, the Morrigan, at the end of The Second Battle of Mag Tuired.

In his mention of the "brother motive ... in the old Irish myths," Best may also have a second tale of fraternal conflict in mind, this drawn from legendary history, not myth. It concerns the future king Níall of the Nine Hostages and his half-brothers.[9] In the second of two trials to determine their suitability for the kingship, they are sent out hunting with new weapons. They meet a hag at a well. Once revealed to Níall after the kiss she demands, she is, in fact, sovereignty personified. She promises nearly undisputed single rule to him and his descendants. This is the "loathly lady" motif later met in Gower, Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Tale, and the fifteenth century The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell.

Best's comment on fraternal enmity is his last substantive contribution to the conversation and is soon followed by Lyster being called away to attend to the needs of Father Dinneen (see below). Irish myth continues to resonate, as when Stephen muses, "Why is the underplot of King Lear in which Edmund figures lifted out of Sydney's Arcadia and spatchcocked on to a Celtic legend older than history?" As Mulligan and Stephen leave the library, Stephen seems to hesitate and turn back, apparently seeing two of the conversationalists, Eglinton and Best, a last time. "The dour recluse still there (he has his cake) and the douce youngling, minion of pleasure, Phedo's toyable fair hair." With this and other suggestions of an erotic tension between Eglinton and the assistant librarian, this is the last view of Richard Irvine Best, or last true view. The portrait of Best in *Ulysses* is comic, a bit malicious, and daring in its reference to the sexual orientation of a living figure but Best's recorded remarks about his treatment in *Ulysses* are tolerant. His contemporaries remember him as the registrar for a song festival in which Joyce participated and as a meticulous editor of early Irish, but not much interested in the literary qualities of a work. In *Ulysses*, mockery of Best serves to invalidate the subject of his life's work, medieval literature, and thereby those who would wed it to Irish nationalism.

The presence of Patrick S. Dinneen in the novel is substantially less than that of Richard Irvine Best and, indeed, he never truly appears on stage, only summons Lyster from the wings. Trained for the priesthood, Dinneen early became interested in the work of the Gaelic League and began his long career as lexicographer, author, and editor of writing, initially poetry, in Irish. Thus, Dinneen, unlike Best, had solid academic training when he began his work on the Irish language. He has been characterized as "gifted, industrious, a formidable controversialist, given to punning

9. Whitley Stokes, "The Death of Crimthann, and the Adventures of Eochaid," Revue Celtique 24 (1903): 172-207.

and earthy humour, cranky as well"—a pity he didn't enter the reading room![10] But no, the librarian is called out to satisfy his needs. What might these have been in June of 1904?

Three years earlier, and only one year after leaving the Jesuits, Dinneen had assumed the editorship of a dictionary project under the aegis of the fledgling Irish Texts Society, which had been founded in 1898. It would be fanciful to imagine that what Father Dinneen wanted of Lyster in June of 1904 had any practical bearing on the dictionary, which must already have been typeset and at least partially proofed by that date, but from the perspective of Joyce and *Ulysses* we can entertain the conceit that what Dinneen wanted was "More words!" Dinneen's lexicographical work was based on a continuously expanding collection of "slips." In this he followed the contextualizing practice of the New English Dictionary under the editorship of James Murray. Dinneen and his assistants had working space in the National Library "where tables were spread for the growing mass of slips which accumulated as the work progressed" (MacLochlainn, 69). We might imagine these as the same kinds of slips that Lyster carried in *Ulysses*, that Mulligan scribbled on, and that Stephen planned to stock up on his way out (9.1058). The slips, real and imagined, offer a nice counterpart to Best's (and Joyce's) notebook(s). The revised edition of Dinneen's dictionary appeared in 1927 and has been continuously kept in print since then. Thus his work in the library could well have had a place on Joyce's mental map of Dublin. How well might Joyce have known the dictionary? The incidence of modern Irish in *Ulysses* is quite limited and, like that of medieval motifs, its treatment is almost uniformly dismissive via parody, the association with characters with negative attributes, including emotionally heightened nationalistic aspirations. Yet, as Brendan Ó Hehir has shown for the Wake and other works, Joyce's knowledge of Irish (unlike Stephen's) was quite extensive and the result of formal instruction, even if not fully deployed until the Wake was well along.[11] An abridged version of Dinneen's dictionary of 1927 was among the books left in Joyce's Paris apartment (Ó Hehir, viii). Only a few tags of Irish inform Scylla and Charybdis but, unlike the medieval matter, the lexicographer and his work are not mocked, only marginalized, left in the wings of the reading room.

We know that informal conversations were a regular feature of the reading room at the National Library in Dublin. Thus, however careful its organization by Joyce, the depicted scene would not have been unusual and it is only Stephen's verbal gymnastics and oft-derailed inner train of thought, the world seen through the prism of a hangover and remorse, that make it distinctive and rewarding. The reading room of the library, with its chiaroscuro effects, is the ideal place to discuss, meanderingly, literary identities, Shakespeare and Hamlet, but also to deploy and promote the conflicted, ambiguous, unresolved identities of the conversationalists themselves, with their ambivalent attitude toward the native Irish past, contemporary Irish letters, and the national future.

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10. Alf MacLochlainn, "Father Dinneen and his Dictionary," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 91 (Spring 2002): 68-77, at 68.

11. Brendan Ó Hehir, *A Gaelic Lexicon for Finnegans Wake, and Glossary for Joyce's Other Works* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

Reinventing himself through language, Best turns from his northern Protestant background to embrace Old Ireland. Dinneen judges that the language of that same Old Ireland (and his boyhood past) is best saved in a bilingual dictionary.

Much of the foregoing interpretation of Richard Best is confirmed by the later grotesque appearance of Lyster, Eglinton, and Best in Nighttown, the hallucinatory alternative universe of the now drunken Stephen in Dublin's red-light district, where he will also meet Leopold Bloom. But, first, a brief recall of the milk lady in the opening "stage directions" of Circe: "A crone standing by with a smokey oillamp rams her last bottle in the maw of his sack" (15.29-31), the sack of a rag and bone man. The supply of milk has dried up. A bit later we see Lyster, in historical Quaker garb, again falsely discreet; Eglinton, wearing a yellow kimono (like Mulligan's buttery dressing gown), is a plain man in search of the truth; and Best, tricked out in hairdresser's gear and his hair in "curlpapers," states that he has been beautifying Eglinton: "A thing of beauty, don't you know, Yeats says, or I mean, Keats says" (15.2244-60). By calling into question Best's sexual orientation and making him a lightweight conversationalist, Joyce deflates his scholarly status as editor and bibliographer of early Irish literature, and in so doing diminishes the stature of the Irish Middle Ages and its honored place in emergent Irish nationalism.

On the heels of the appearance of Best and colleagues, this apparition appears in the sitting room at Bella Cohen's and recalls the earlier discussion of Russell's play Deirdre:

> In the cone of the search light behind the coalscuttle, ollave, holyeyed, the bearded figure of Mananaun MacLir broods, chin on knees. He rises slowly. A cold seawind blows from his druid mouth. About his head writhe eels and elvers. He is encrusted with weeds and shells. His right hand holds a bicycle pump. His left hand grasps a huge crayfish by its two talons. (15.2261-6).

In this hieratic picture, the bicycle pump represents pneumatics. Combining Greek pneuma "breath, spirit, soul" and the crustacean, the value of the icon is "sprit of the sea," but comically realized (cf. Stephen's musing and Ameirgin). But, comparable to the milk lady who has no Irish, when the Irish god of the sea speaks, it is a gibberish of Sanskrit, with calls to Shakti and Shiva. With a reference to Hindu ritual and, for readers, a recall of the scenes in the Martello tower and tea-room, he intones with a voice of waves, "I am the light of the homestead! I am the dreamery creamery butter." The reference here is to clarified butter (ghee) often burned at small domestic altars in India (cf. Stephen "the fire upon the altar"). Joyce appears to get the Irish god of the sea all wrong yet was well aware of then current scholarly speculation on the similar archaism of early Irish and Indian tradition. Even Mulligan can speculate about the Upanishads and it could well be that it is he who is masquerading as Mannanán. Medievalism in Joyce is in the mode of parody, aimed at those who would colonize the past in order to further present political ambitions. But

parody offers no replacement for its victims. Nor does Joyce seek such a replacement in the riches of medieval myth and literature, which is only cited for its comic potential.

As noted, the milk lady as sovereignty figure is recalled in Circe as the crone with her empty bottle in the opening scene in Nighttown. Earlier in the novel she had appeared at the tower as Mulligan was slicing bread with a huge knife and plastering it with butter (practicing for his later scone, perhaps). Now we see the sovereignty figure down on her luck and in her dark guise as goddess of death. The details of the toadstool and silky kine, along with Hamlet, are recalled from Stephen's earlier musings:

> Old Gummy Granny in sugarloaf hat appears seated on a toadstool, the deathflower of the potato blight on her breast.)
> STEPHEN: Aha! I know you, gammer! Hamlet, revenge! The old sow that eats her farrow!
> OLD GUMMY GRANNY: (Rocking to and fro) Ireland's sweetheart, the king of Spain's daughter, alanna. Strangers in my house, bad manners to them! (She keens with banshee woe) Ochone! Ochone! Silk of the kine! (She wails) You met with poor old Ireland and how does she stand? (15.4578-89).

Later, in the course of Stephen's altercation with the British privates visiting the brothel:

> OLD GUMMY GRANNY: (Thrusts a dagger towards Stephen's hand) Remove him, acushla. At 8.35 a.m. you will be in heaven and Ireland will be free. (She prays) O good God, take him! (15.4736-9).

Only Bloom prevents this reckless act for Ireland's liberation, which would also have aped Mulligan's mock lunge with slices of morning bread impaled on his knife (I.363-4). The brothel, as a place out of time where all classes meet, recalls the hostels of early Irish literature, as in The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel, ostensibly places where a king could be received on his circuit but in literature always the site of contention and usually a royal death.[12] Here, the medieval hostel is grotesquely subverted, made the site of the hallucinatory realization of deep-seated anxieties, all more personal than national.

Just like the unresolved reading room questions of the identity of the author of Shakespeare's dramas and the sex of his actors, of sexual orientation and public sexual identity, the tensions between modern and medieval are to be seen as another metaphor for participation in and/or attitudes toward Irish nationalism. No one in Scylla and Charybdis rises above personal concerns to articulate a stance on the future of the nation. Collectively, the library

12. John V. Kelleher first suggested that Joyce was familiar with the epic tale Togail Bruidne Da Derga; "Irish History and Mythology in James Joyce's 'The Dead'," Review of Politics 27 (1965): 414-33.

conversationalists reflect Joyce's own ambivalence toward national aspirations and their underpinning in the early Irish past. Joyce offers no analysis and no critique of either nationalism or the nature and chief themes of the precocious literary achievement of the early Irish Middle Ages. Instead, in comic portraits of their exponents and enthusiasts, Joyce parodies his medieval motifs, deflates their seriousness, but stops short of denigration or dismissiveness. The procedure is irreverence leading to irrelevance, marginalization. Yet at the same time the author is at pains to establish multiple correspondences—both playful and significant--between motifs and scenes, even drawing in Indian parallels. Still, while India has a historical depth comparable to Ireland's as concerns language, myth, law, and legendary history, its mention in Ulysses, in the context of debating English or Irish language and literature, Irish freedom or British rule, the medieval past or mutable future, inserts the incongruous element that is the operative mechanism of a joke or pun, destabilizing the dialectic and the debate by throwing in a whacky third quantity. As with other comic touches, the reader is precluded from taking either early Ireland or the modern nation-to-be seriously. The end result is a disconnection between medievalism and nationalism.

Compared to the reading room with bright Mr. Best, Circe has a darker, more threatening coloration, and, from June 16, 1904, projects the violence to come in the Easter Uprising of 1916 and in the War of Independence three years later, at the very time when portions of Ulysses were first appearing in The Little Review.

In conclusion, for Joyce the universalist, nationalism is just inflated, emotionalized provincialism. Joyce anticipates the revisionist Irish history of the present in his ambivalence toward the medieval past and the uses to which it was being put by Irish nationalism. His resolution of, if not solution to, this ambivalence toward the Irish legendary and medieval is life in exile in the French and Swiss present, far from the four green fields.