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# Joyce's Dubliners (1914) and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916): A Postcolonial Analysis

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**Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916): A Postcolonial Analysis****Samir Ferhi**English Department  
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Tizi Ouzou, Algeria**Abstract**

This research paper explores James Joyce's imagined attitudes towards the building up of an Irish cultural identity and a new Irish nation in selected short stories from *Dubliners* (1914) and his autobiography *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Taking our bearing from Postcolonial theory proposed by Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968), we argue that Joyce opposes the nationalism of the literary, political, cultural, religious, and linguistic discourses advocated either by the Irish Revivalist authors such as William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory, Edward Martyn, John Millington Synge and others, or the Gaelic League's aspirations to de-anglicise the Irish minds at the turn of the nineteenth century Dublin. Indeed, we demonstrate that according to Joyce the cultural and political nationalism vindicated by the Revivalists was old-fashioned and needed to be adapted to modern concerns. We also showed that he considers the Leaguers as 'Gaelo-centric' because of their linguistic confinement. This is why he promotes the use of an English language which is more adequate with opening Ireland for the rest of the world. What comes of this study is that Joyce plays the role of an awakener of his fellow Irish men and women and avoids falling in the traps of what Fanon (1968) calls the "pitfalls of national consciousness".

**Key Words:** Discourse, identity, Irish revivalism, native intellectual- subjectivity

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## Introduction

“If we wanted to trace in the works of native writers the different phases which characterize this evolution we would find spread out before us a panorama on three levels” (Fanon, 1968, p. 179). Such is the claim made by Fanon (1968), the universally recognized founder of the postcolonial theory, in his categorization of “African Culture” chapter of his *Wretched of the Earth* (1968). For Fanon (1968) the (ex)colonized writers pass through a first phase called the assimilation, stylistically imitative phase of literature to a second phase, the hallmark of which is a return to the remembered popular sources packaged in a “borrowed aestheticism” before finally reaching in the third phase what is qualified as the fighting phase of literature. In this third phase Fanon (1968) tells us, the “Native after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people will on the contrary shake the people. Instead of according the people’s lethargy an honored place in his esteem, he turns into an awakener of the people, hence comes the fighting literature” (pp, 222-23). It is with this critical paradigm in mind that we undertake the reading of James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). To our best knowledge, little attention to date has been accorded to Joyce as a postcolonial writer of fighting literature and an awakener of his people. In the discussion below, we look at Joyce through the Algerian-Martiniquean eyes of Fanon to see how this Irish author puts his finger on the sole points of the Irish culture as defined by the Revivalist Movement. We are particularly interested in what Fanon (1968) calls the pitfalls of national consciousness, religious fundamentalism, and authoritarian patriarchy.

Following what has been said above, the present research explores then the unexamined and unexplored late Victorian and Edwardian attitudes of subjectivity in Ireland through the analysis of James Joyce’s *Dubliners* with a particular emphasis on the final short story “The Dead” and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. One of its key arguments is that Joyce himself, like many of his characters are under the constraints and ideological confinements of Irish nationalism, politics, religiosity, as well as linguistic and gender conditions. In other words, Joyce’s collection of short stories and his novel are not concerned solely with the routine of everyday life at the turn of the century Dublin, but with the exploration of the discursive cultural conditions and ideological forces at shaping the Irish modern subjectivity.

## Discussion

Montrose (1986) has suggested that the subjective self is “created within history, culture, politics, institutions, class and gender conditions” (pp. 16-17). This means that language is influenced by the shifting tides of cultural and discursive patterns or models. Since the self is constructed through language; so we can say that subjective identity absorbs influence and exists in a continual process of constant change and instability. This idea parallels what many historians and literary critics said about the complex relationships between colonial Ireland and Britain. The highly ambivalent status of many Irish writers and intellectuals like Joyce “anticipate the postcolonial writer precisely to the extent that they themselves, *as subjects*, have been colonized by hegemonic discourses to which they offer forms of resistance” (McGee, 1992, p. 139).

Joyce sees that the changing currents of language and culture have had a deep impact on the forging of an Irish subjective identity. This is made clear in Joyce’s (1907) famous essay

*Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages*, where he argues that the Irish civilization as well as national identity are “convenient fictions” based on the immutabilities of race and language and of “blood and human world” (p. 166). The latter show us clearly the instability of Irish identity and allude to the metaphorical relationship that exists between culture and identity (Schwarze, 2002). However, throughout his various works, Joyce plays variation on the multifaceted and discursive narratives of Irish Victorian and Edwardian culture embodied in strikingly different rhetorical patterns of national, political, religious and gender conditions, ultimately the author constructs characters whose identities shaped by the force of the rhetoric exerted on them.

It has to be noted that Joyce, like many of his Irish fellow intellectuals, grew up in late Victorian Dublin, a city marked not only by social wretchedness, the dramatic rise of Irish Catholic fundamentalism and British rule, but also by the rising currents of nationalitarianism, spiritualism, and women's right organizations. Besides, his early letters and essays written during his brief and short stay in France from 1902 to 1903 as medical student shows his keen anxiety of the oppressive, paralysing and assimilating forces of the Irish culture and history. Throughout the letters addressed to his brother and his wife, Joyce repeatedly and constantly stresses the fact that colonial politics, religiosity and gender strictures are the dominant forces of his time, acknowledging the difficulties and sometimes the impossibility of living or existing outside their influences and agendas. In 1904, for example, (Joyce (1957) sent a letter to his wife Nora Barnacle explaining to her that he is “fighting a battle with every religious or social force in Ireland” (p. 52), and that he is very conscious about the component of these forces. Joyce (1996) claims: “my mind rejects the whole present social order and Christianity-home, the recognized virtues, classes of life, and religious doctrine [...] I cannot enter the social order except as a vagabond” (p. 48).

Furthermore, during his life Joyce saw Ireland's national politics as being a threat to his own nation-state. In addition to his evident rejection of the British imperial system, Joyce totally refused to support the nationalist, cultural and political ideologies and the Revivalist organizations such as The Irish Abbey Theatre led by such figures as William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory and others, or the Gaelic League led by Douglass Hyde and Arthur Griffith. He rejected the homogeneity these movement fostered, and criticized the discourse of Irishness they propagated, not because Joyce opposed an ultimate separation from Britain, but rather because he believed that this discourse of national, literary and cultural Irishness is another way of “self-betrayal of Ireland (Joyce, 19 38)”. In this respect, Kibred (1995) suggested that Joyce's position vis-à-vis these cultural movements is that he situates himself both with, and against the cultural Revivalist. In other terms, like them Joyce opposed colonial occupation, but unlike them he also “proceeds to indict the native culture” (p. 363). Postcolonial critics such as Fanon (1968) in *The Wretched of the Earth* and Said (1994) in *Culture and Imperialism* have shown that these kinds of movements and revivals can replicate the oppressive power as they pursue the goals of cultural and racial homogenization. In this context, Fanon (1968) contends that:

The native intellectual throws himself in frenzied fashion in the frantic acquisition of the culture of the occupying power and takes every opportunity of unfavorably criticizing his own national culture, or else take refuge in setting out and substantiating the claims of that

culture in a way that is passionate but rapidly becomes unproductive occupying power and takes every opportunity of unfavorably criticizing his own national culture, or else take refuge in setting out and substantiating the claims of that culture in a way that is passionate but rapidly becomes unproductive. (p.154)

To say it more explicitly, Joyce was in fact very critical of the autochthonous, monolithic, mysticism of the revivalist authors who all sought to create an Irish identity and art from Irish popular imagination, heroic culture, and peasant past history for the sake of reassessing, reaffirming and restoring pre-colonial Celtic heritage. Joyce (1996) rather welcomed and favoured modernity for the sake of creating an imagined Irish nation:

Not this at all. I desire to press in my arms the loveliness which has not yet come into the world, the past is consumed in the present, and the present is living only because it brings forth the future (p. 273).

Whilst Joyce earliest fiction, the *Dubliners* seeks to represent a relentlessly paralysed society, his autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* attempts to find the means by which to free both the artist and modern consciousness from all ideological strictures in all its form, national, political, religious or gender. Thus, like Stephen Dedalus and the rest of Joyce's characters in *Dubliners*, Joyce (1996) himself was a product of the late Victorian and Edwardian Ireland, of "this country and this life" (p. 20), his writings describe both the complexities of modernist thought and the conditioning of fin de siècle subjective identity in Ireland.

In *Dubliners*, for instance, Joyce does not provide us with a clear-cut vision of the confining ideologies of his era, but he gives us instead a portrait of a city whose individuals' minds are shaped by a complex set of discourses. These characters remain unaware of the enclosing or surrounding paralysed thoughts and at the end not even epiphanies ensure their liberation or freedom. For instance, the narrator of the first short story *The Sisters* in *Dubliners* never discovers and knows what has "gone wrong" (Joyce, 1996, p. 2) with his friend's relation, the priest Old Father Flynn, a representative of the Irish Catholic church, nor does he understand why he feels liberated and his mind is soothed "free from his death" at the end of the story. The small Eveline, in *Eveline* is unable to go beyond the socially endorsed norms of her own family, mother and by extension her country, and follow her beloved Frank to Buenos Aires, although an opportunity is given to her. On this part, the narrator of *Araby* never realizes, despite his final illumination, how his image of Mangan's sister is shaped by the culture's vision of the ideal woman he loved. Mrs Kearney, the heroine of *The Mother* never fully understands the patriarchal nature of colonial politics and the nationalist power that she tries to challenge (Schwarze, 2002). Moreover, Joyce's distance and apathy with Irish Revivalism is revealed clearly in the character of James Duffy in *A Painful Case*, whose subjective identity and consciousness turns to alienate him from the social and cultural world in which he lives. We learn from the story that James Duffy "began to doubt the reality of what *memory* told him" (Joyce, 1996, p. 117). This character goes in line with Fanon's native intellectual who in the second phase returns to the popular memory and sources, before reaching the third phase of doubting and fighting against his own memory.

In *The Dead*, the last short story of the *Dubliners* is made to be Joyce's culminating critique of Revivalism. In the story, the characters Gabriel, his wife Gretta Conroy and Miss Ivors all held contradictory attitudes towards the Irish race and the Irish Language. In this regard, Michael Levenson (1996) asserts that the story makes "two strains of political discourse [...] the national autonomy movement of Sinn Fein, and the Irish languages campaign" (p. 145). As it is shown in the story, Gabriel Conroy's ambivalent or uncertain linguistic and cultural belongings are made clear when Miss Ivors accused him of being a "west Briton", because of his literary reviews in *The Daily Express* every Wednesday:

It was true that he wrote a literary column every Wednesday in *The Daily Express*, for which he was paid fifteen shillings, but that did not make him a West Briton surely. The books he received for review were almost more welcome than the paltry cheque. He loved to feel the covers and turn over the pages of newly printed books [...] he wanted to say that literature was above politics. (Joyce, 1996, p. 188)

The above quotation reveals Gabriel's detachment from the Revivalists and Gaelic Ireland which Miss Ivors idealises. Gabriel's account of his strenuous motivations for writings, therefore, becomes the typical example of the "native intellectual" engaged in "the frantic acquisition of the culture of the occupying power" who "takes every opportunity of unfavourably criticizing his own culture". (Fanon, 1968, p. 237).

It is also important to say that *The Dead* has been generally considered to be Joyce's immune *résistance* against the arcane, romantic and primitive views of the Irish revivalist. First by Gabriel Conroy's wife, Gretta with her confession about a love of a peasant dead country boy, named Michael Furry. It can be also considered as a contrast between two Irelands; (rural misrepresented western Ireland symbolized by the Conroy's family who all belong to the petit bourgeoisie of the urban city, and a mystified, idealized eastern Ireland presented by the dead country boy who sacrificed himself for Gretta Conroy. This contrast between the two Irelands can be seen as a parody and an ironic comment on Yeats (1902) propagandist play *Cathleen Ni Haulihan*. Thus, we may say that Joyce sustained the idea that the individual identity of the *Dubliners* had been subsumed by the discursive patterns of religion and Irish nationalism, whose moral and cultural influences were very considerable. The *Dubliners* were denied any opportunity to make choices in their lives.

We contend also that Joyce's moral history presented in the collection addresses the apathy Irish citizens express about their colonial and religious conditions. This accounts for the organization of *Dubliners* into four parts - childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life - retracing the development of the Irish identity since all characters to borrow Fanon's worlds try first to assimilate, then borrow and finally, confront, resist and fight these different ideologies and by extension finding possibilities for escape or change. These examples remind us of Joyce's (1907) public lecture of 1907 when he said that "the economic and public conditions that prevail in (Ireland) do not permit the development of individuality" (p. 171). However, in a series of

famous correspondence with his publisher Richard Grant in 1906, Joyce claimed that the *Dubliners* intends to represent Ireland's paralysis and to counter this ideological confinement and Irish dogmas by providing the Irish people with "one good look in [his] nicely polished looking glass" (Joyce, 1966, p. 64). He had seen in such portrait the possibility of self-recognition of his Irish readers as "the first step towards the spiritual liberation of [his] country" (Joyce, 1957, p. 63).

progressively makes his characters aware of their confinements by the prevalent discursive conditions. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus, the novel's protagonist is described at the very beginning as being fully plunged and controlled by the discourse of the prevalent politics, language, and religion. Stephen is seen as being contained within the cultural discursive narrative and by extension of the predominant Irish ideologies of home, church and country. From his first awakening and conscious moment in the bedtime of his father's tale at the beginning of the novel, the young Stephen did not entirely free himself from the power of political and religious dogma. Furthermore, Stephens pledges only to "try to fly by those nets" of "nationality, [and] religion" (Joyce, 1996, p: 19), but his close friend Cranly reminds him and notes the different obstacles of achieving such an artistic freedom because Stephen's mind has been indoctrinated with the very ideologies he disavows. Not withstand his attempt at freedom, he remain caught in the nets of ideology.

Joyce's cleavage with the nativist attitudes of the Gaelic League and their aspiration of de-anglicising the Irish people is shown in the employment of the English language in the novel. When Stephen is confronted to the this issue, we learn that Dedalus feels uneasy with the use both of his Irish mother tongue, and the British one, because both languages do not seem to be adequate for his artistic needs and aspirations. He tells Davin the following: "my ancestors threw off their language and took another. They allowed a handful of foreigners to subject them. Do you fancy I am going to pay in my own life and person debts they made? What for?" (Joyce, 1916, p. 204). However, Stephen Dedalus has also misgivings about the British, notwithstanding his mastery of that language of education. When he meets with the Dean, an English convert to Catholicism at the university, Stephen explains that:

The language with which we are speaking is his before its mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master, on his lips and mine! I cannot speak or write these words, without unrest of spirit. His language so familiar and so foreign will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language. (Joyce, 1996, p, 190)

Stephen's experience of language and the oppressive culture that sublimates his own identity, leads to his growing awareness of the meaning and function of language. In fact, Dedalus' ambivalent attitude towards the issue of language reminds us of Fanon's (1968) native intellectual caught between "two worlds", the "national" and the assimilated, but not in the way the men of the same nation are. (p. 139). For Stephen/Joyce, the aim is not to clean the Irish language from the influence of Englishness and the traps of the English colonizer, but to use this language at hand (the English) as a tool to fight and perform his resistance against the oppressors.

Moreover, throughout the novel, Stephen Dedalus experiences the “hollowsounding voices” (Joyce, 1996, p. 145) of Irish nationalism, catholic fundamentalism, and even masculinism that echo constantly throughout his consciousness mind. In this regard, Schwarze (2002) states that Dedalus considers the Irish cultural history “as a convergence of multiple discourses (p. 18)” which urged him to be a “gentleman” and a “good catholic above all things”, “strong, and manly and healthy” and “true to his country” (Joyce, 1966, p. 83). It has to be observed that, Stephen Dedalus is happy only when he finds himself removed from these discursive voices, far from the “nightmares of history” when he is “beyond their call, alone” (Joyce, 1916, p. 84). In the same manner as Fanon, Joyce's Dedalus becomes the awakener of his fellow Irish men and women. Dedalus contends at the end of the novel:

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use –silence, exile and cunning. (Joyce, 1996, p, 281)

Joyce believes that it is only the literature of combat that can enable the rise of the very conscious of the nation. A committed artist tries to fight and combat the predominant ideologies in order to achieve his intellectual and colonial independence.

Joyce's presentation of the subjective identity as a mere social and historical construction rather than as a personal or epitome essence is in line with Jameson's (1981) statement that “human consciousness is not timeless and everywhere essentially the same, but rather situation-specific and historically produced” (p. 152). Thus, Joyce not only exposes the social and historical forces at work on shaping identity, but he also interrogates whether modern Irish subjectivity and consciousness can resist the ideological forces of the culture and history that produced them (Schwarze, 2002).

### **Conclusion**

It follows that, though Joyce spent a long time in Paris, Trieste, Rome, and Zürich, with only occasional and brief visits to Ireland, his native country remained basic to all his writings. His willed exile can be accounted for the quest of an Irish identity that departs from the paralysis and stasis of stay-at-home authors. It is in exile that the writer remained faithful to the artistic mission because exile provided Joyce with to move away from “the centralizing authorities toward the margins, where (he) sees the things that are usually lost on minds that have never traveled beyond the convention of the comfortable” (Said, 1993, p. 124). His absence did not mean to diminish his wry affection for his *Dubliners*, nor disqualify him from his nation-love. As Deane (1960) puts it “Joyce became the professional exile from a home he never, imaginatively speaking, left” (p. 56). In the last analysis, we can say that Joyce's works, mainly *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* seek to liberate the Irish modern consciousness from the authoritarian strictures of nationalism, religion, gender and even morality, by a strong commitment to what Fanon (1968) calls the literature of combat. Unlike assimilationists and a return -to- the source authors, Joyce

the author of combat literature puts his finger on the sole points of his fellow nationals, the better to awaken them to the reality and complexities of modern life.

As a parting work, we would say that Joyce, like Fanon plays the role of an awakener for his fellow Irish men and women. He does this by avoiding what Fanon (1968) calls the pitfalls of nationalism, religion, masculinism, and the culture of the blaming of colonialism.

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