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For Declan Kiberd, 'the emergent literatures of modernity' are 'formed around a single question: how to express life which has never yet found expression in written literature?' How have Irish writers explored the relationships between modernity, colonialism, and national identity?

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Like one of the ubiquitous Celtic knots that have come to be a symbol of Ireland, the different strands of modernity, colonialism, and Irish national identity are hard to pull apart. They are interlinked, and it is part of the complex challenge for Irish writers, therefore, to disentangle the strands of these three cultural and sociological concepts and to explore the relationship between them. So Seamus Deane explores the connection between the three concepts when he claims that 'to be colonial is to be modern. It is possible to be modern without being colonial; but not to be colonial without being modern'.[1] This essay will investigate how James Joyce and W.B Yeats use their writing to unravel the issues that Deane discusses here, and how that links into their concept of an Irish nationality identity.

James Joyce and W.B. Yeats are two writers who interrogate the links between modernity, colonialism and national identity. Their work spans the late nineteenth and mid twentieth centuries and it is interesting to consider how each of these writers reacted to European Modernism. I will explore how Joyce styled himself as, above all, a Modernist and how he tried to distance himself from his Irish nationality. In contrast, Yeats saw himself as a national poet for Ireland and actively constructed this image of the national poet as something 'reborn [...] intended, complete'.[2] Furthermore, while Yeats focused his early writing on a Romantic and idealised pastoral view of Ireland, Joyce distanced himself from the rural and aligned his writing to the urban and technological advances that characterised the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite their differences, each of their texts demonstrates a preoccupation with Irish national identity and modernity, whether in the form of Modernism or not, and this essay will further explore this preoccupation and how it is evident in Joyce's short story 'Araby' and one of Yeats' late poems 'The Statues'.

Modernity is characterised by a sense of forward impetus; an all-consuming whirlwind of capitalist expansion, industrial progress and secularization. Joyce's short stories are a desolate picture of how Ireland could not compete with other nations in the drive to modernity – being, as it was a recipient of British modernity rather than an instigator of its own.[3] It was stunted by the colonial powers and was struggling to move forward on a path to its own modernity, and Joyce's style in Dubliners reflects this. The naturalist style illustrates the bleak nature of the city; the opening of 'Araby' is characterised by imagery of blindness, suffocation and futility.

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[1] Seamus Deane, 'Dead ends: Joyce's finest moments', eds. Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes, *Semicolonial Joyce*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.27.
[2] W. B. Yeats, 'A General Introduction for my Work', in *Selected Criticism and Prose*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares, (London: Pan, 1980), p.255.
[3] Joe Clery, 'Introduction: Ireland and Modernity' in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture* eds. Joe Clery and Claire Connolly, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.5.

> The former tenant of our house, a priest, had died in the back drawing-room. Air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms, and the waste room behind the kitchen was littered with old useless papers.[4]

This naturalist style that presents descriptions without figurative language or symbolism is perfect for describing the city and its inhabitants, because it does not distract from the grime and desolation of the scene. In a description of the area where the boy lives it says 'we ran the gantlet of the rough tribes from the cottages, to the back doors of the dark dripping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits, to the dark odorous stables'. (p.28) The cumulative effect of the darkness and the unpleasant odours that pervade all of Joyce's short stories are an illustration of Dublin as a city trapped in its colonial present, and the naturalist style perfectly encapsulates the deprivation and filth of the modern city. However, there are moments in each story when we catch glimpses of Joyce's modernist style that emphasise the fleeting transcendental moments that occur. During these small epiphanies, Joyce departs from the sparse naturalist style and his prose becomes more stylistically complex. For example, when the boy realises the futility of his quest in 'Araby', Joyce uses alliteration and rhyme to focus attention onto the boy's moment of insight. The sound [-all] is repeated in the penultimate paragraph in the words 'stall', 'fall', 'call', and, in altered form, 'gallery'. (p.33) When read aloud, this repeated sound slows down the pace and gives the passage a chant-like quality, which links into the boy's repeated phrase '0 love! 0 love' that he chants earlier in the story. (p.29) In addition, the alliteration of 'd' and 'ang' in the final sentence – 'Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger' (p.33) – means that the moment is condensed with phonetic patterns, and this heightens the boy's moment of insight. Therefore Joyce uses naturalism to convey the depressing setting of modern Dublin, but he also employs highly-charged prose to highlight the moments of epiphany. It is important, though, that even these moments of epiphany do not provide consolation, but rather emphasise the bleak nature of the city trapped in poverty and destitution.

Joyce thematically represents Dublin's colonial condition in the repeated idea that the characters are figuratively paralysed in their desires and aspirations. David Lloyd suggests that this paralysis is brought about when a colonized people are forced to accept enslavement to the colonial rule or to assimilate themselves into the colonial culture.[5] The people of Dublin are stuck in a cultural no-man's-land, where the violence of colonialism has denied them access to their own course of modernity but they are unable, or unwilling, to blindly follow the British colonizers' path, clashing as it does with their cultural and national history. In other words, they are paralysed – stuck in their mundane everyday tasks with little hope of escape. This is evident in 'Araby' when the boy's obsession with Mangan's sister and the bazaar mean that he cannot concentrate on anything;

> I answered few questions in class. I watched my master's face pass from amiability to sternness [...] I could not call my wandering thoughts together. I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life which, now that it stood between me and my desire, seemed to me like child's play, ugly monotonous child's play. (p.30)

The 'ugly monotony' of the boy's life is reflective of all colonial Dublin, and the effect of each sentence beginning with the first person pronoun is to produce a frustratingly

[4] James Joyce, *Dubliners*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973), p.27. All further references to this edition will be given as page numbers in the text.
[5] David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity*, (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2008), p.28-9.

monotonous experience for the reader as well. The boy is trapped in the house and prevented from going to the bazaar by his uncle's absence, and every sound becomes magnified for him as a mockery of his situation: 'At nine o'clock I heard my uncle's latchkey in the halldoor. I heard him talking to himself and heard the hallstand rocking when it had received the weight of his overcoat. I could interpret these signs.' (p. 31) The boy is hyper-sensitised to his personal plight, and the ticking clock and the gossip of the tea-table infuriate him as they act as a reminder of his inability to leave the house. This is not just a story about the thwarted dream of a young boy but when reading it alongside all the other short stories in *Dubliners*, we can see that Joyce is using a 'universalizing impulse'[6] whereby each thwarted desire, each failed task, and each example of paralysis are representative of the stupor and stagnation of the nation as a whole.

David Lloyd argues that in an attempt to escape from the colonial course of temporality that colonizers have ordained for Ireland, nationalists look to create symbols of tradition that are part of the 'original and occluded' life of the Irish people. He suggests that 'tradition becomes, in this refined form, the means by which the nation accedes to modernity.'[7] However Joyce, whose political ideologies are notoriously ambivalent, provides no such hope in *Dubliners* that tradition will yield a path to modernity. Indeed, in 'Araby' Joyce uses symbols of the past, such as images of Catholicism, but then refutes them by use of narrative form to leave an overwhelming feeling of desolation and darkness. One of the symbols of tradition that Joyce creates and then refutes is seen in the allusions that Mangan's sister embodies. Joyce's description of her is both an allusion to the Virgin Mary – the boy idolises her and says that 'her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood' (p.28), and he repeats it involuntarily 'in strange prayers and praises which [he] did not understand' (p.29) – but also to the mythical female figure of Ireland, as represented by the old woman Cathleen nì Houlihan. Both these female figures encourage a sense of affinity with Ireland's pre-colonial past. The religious symbolism is made explicit in a reference to the Eucharist when the boy actualizes his adoration as a 'chalice'. (p.29) He takes hope and comfort from his worship of Mangan's sister, and at this point in the story Joyce could be suggesting that a similar comfort can be found in religion for the Irish people. On a stylistic level, Joyce develops this metaphor by using imagery of light. The passages in which the boy sees her are moments of light in a story characterised by blindness and darkness: 'If she remained, we left our shadow and walked up to Mangan's steps resignedly. She was waiting for us, her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door.' (p.28) And later when he talks to her, he is mesmerised by the light from the lamp opposite our door [that] caught the white curve of her neck [and] lit up her hair.' (p.29). A female figure who mesmerises young men is also reminiscent of Yeats' character of Cathleen nì Houlihan in the play of the same name. Joyce offers these two spiritual and secular images from Irish cultural history as possible ways of creating a new path into modernity.

However, despite the comfort and quasi-spiritual ecstasy that the boy derives from the girl's image, ultimately his belief in her is proved to be a futile fantasy. The gradual darkening of the last scene in the bazaar shows the desolation of the boy's quest. As he enters the bazaar 'the greater part of the hall was in darkness' and he 'recognize[s] a silence like that which pervades a church after a service'. (p.32) Gone is the light and comfort, and instead he is humbled by the English stall-holders and is struck by a sense of pointlessness. 'I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out. The upper part of the hall was now completely dark.'(p.33) At the story's close, the boy is left in darkness without the hope that the girl's image had given him. In this way, Joyce demonstrates that it is vain to hark

[6] Deane, p.35.
[7] David Lloyd, 'Counterparts: Dubliners, masculinity and temperance nationalism', eds. Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes, *Semicolonial Joyce*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.31.

back to symbolism of the pre-modern past. It can only ever offer an empty promise.

It is interesting that while Joyce saw modernity as something to be aspired to, but at the same time something that colonial Ireland had not yet attained, Yeats described the modern condition as that which was wrong with Ireland. Furthermore, while Joyce believed that ancient Ireland was dead,[8] Yeats purposefully tried to recreate a sense of the ancient Gaelic heritage in opposition to the modernity that surrounded him. Invoking the past is as much a symptom of modernity as it is a method of fighting against it, and it is this that undermines Yeats' attempt to struggle against modernity. In an exploration of the interdependent relationship between tradition and modernity, T.5 Eliot writes that '[the] historical sense...is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.'[9]

Yeats' poetry exemplifies this claim because although it refers to the pre-modern past, it does so as a reaction against the modern. For example, his poem 'The Statues' considers the history of western art and the tradition that it has passed down to the people of modern Ireland and simultaneously eulogizes Irish nationhood. He refers to the tradition of Greek sculpture and extols it as one of the greatest forms of art that both uses Pythagorean theories, but also surpasses them.[10] He describes how Greek sculpture was the perfect balance of 'passion' and 'character' (1.6) arising from Pythagoras' numbers; and it is for this reason that critics have termed Yeats' description the 'subjective' tradition of western classical art, in opposition to the 'Asiatic vague immensities' (1.12) which have been termed the 'objective' tradition.[11] In the poem it seems that Yeats is trying to fight the 'filthy modern tide' (1.28) by aligning his people with the Greek classical heritage. Cuchulain's statue in the fourth stanza represents modern Ireland's struggle during the 1916 rebellion, but it also provides a direct link with the past. Yeats places the Irish artistic tradition within this framework to invoke a sense of national identity for the Irish people. On a simple level, the poem is about a link with the past which reinforces a sense of the present.

Despite his dislike of the onset of modernity and his construction as a national poet of the ancient Gaelic people, Yeats' late poetry, such as 'The Statues', can be described as 'modern' because it shares formal similarities with the modernist style. The poem reads like one of the modernist masterpieces such as 'The Wasteland' with its ambiguous references to other art forms and its multiple layers of meaning whose difficulty is exacerbated by the tightly formed lines. It is evident that there is a conflict between the form and the content of 'The Statues'. Yeats laments the onset of modernity that has 'wrecked' the 'ancient sect' of the Irish people. However, the form which he chooses is undeniably modernist, thereby showing that Yeats' desire to retreat to the pre-modern past is unfounded and impossible. He is writing in a world that has left behind those remnants of the ancient past and they cannot be recreated again. The violence of the clause, 'But thrown upon this filthy modern tide' (1.29), shows that Ireland is the victim of colonial aggression that had 'catapulted Ireland into modernity.'[12] Similarly, three verbs of the stanza are passive – 'born', 'thrown' and 'wrecked' (11.28 - 30) – and they demonstrate that Ireland is a victim of the ceaseless barrage that modernity and colonialism have inflicted upon it. This angry bitterness develops throughout the stanza and comes to a climax with the spondaic 'formless spawning fury'

[8] James Joyce, 'Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages', in *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing* ed. Kevin Barry, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.125.
[9] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* ed. Frank Kermode, (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p.38.
[10] W. B. Yeats, 'The Statues' in *Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, (London: Macmillan, 1955), p.375. All further references to this edition will be given as line numbers in the text.
[11] F. A. C. Wilson, 'The Statues' in *Yeats; Last Poems, A Casebook Series* ed. Jon Stallworthy, (London: Macmillan, 1968), p.168.
[12] Cleary, p.11.

(1.29) that Yeats uses to define modernity. The modernist style, with its compacted meaning and complicated references, lends itself to this anger but Yeats' formal choices seem to undermine his argument against modernity.

I find 'The Statues' an extremely frustrating text to grapple with, as I feel as though Yeats is being purposefully complicated. I wonder whether the poem would yield a more satisfying reading experience were he to sacrifice some of his strange metaphors and tortured syntax – 'Empty eyeballs knew/ that knowledge increases unreality, that/ Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show'(II.20 - 22) – and try to capture some of the bitter tone of the last stanza where the poem really speaks its message. When I read his poetry, I always have a sense of the poet himself, reading over my shoulder and nodding smugly at what he has written. He constructs himself as a poet for Ireland: 'We Irish, born into that ancient sect' and he views himself as being a suitable mouthpiece for Irish national history and also for the anger of the masses. Yeats said '[the poet] is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete'.[13] Perhaps Yeats should forego his obsession with everything being 'intended' and instead working with the raw materials. Just as Ireland has difficulty in constructing a 'complete' image for itself, out of the ashes of colonialism, Yeats himself should concentrate on aesthetic and political worth as a journey, rather than as an already achieved goal.

James Joyce and W.B. Yeats both explore the interwoven relationship between modernity, colonialism and Irish national identity in their writing. In *Dubliners* Joyce uses a naturalist style to portray the destitution of post-colonial Dublin and the paralysis of its inhabitants. Joyce's use of symbolism in the short stories was interrogated using Lloyd's argument that tradition is a way that a nation accedes to modernity, but the former's stylistic rejection of the symbolism of the past and the eventual feeling of bleakness at the end of 'Araby' demonstrates that Joyce aligns himself and his writing with the forward motion of modernity. While Yeats constructs his image as an Irish national poet and one of the 'ancient sect', his references to tradition are actually an invocation of the modernity against which he is fighting. 'The Statues' represents the conflict in Yeats' work between the ancient and the modern as shown in the manner in which the poem's modernist form undermines its author's anger at modernity. In conclusion, colonialism and modernity in Ireland are entwined both historically, because the former in effect produced the latter, and in the effect that they have had culturally upon Ireland. Both writers are aware of this interlinked relationship and discuss it using a metaphor of thread. Joyce writes 'our civilization is an immense woven fabric [...] in such a fabric, it is pointless searching for a thread that has remained pure'[14] and similarly Yeats claims 'each age unwinds the thread another age has wound [...]all things dying each other's life, living each other's death.'[15] Both of these statements describe how, like the Celtic knot with its interlinked parts, traditional forms are unwound by colonialism and modernity and rewoven to create a new strand of Irish nationhood.

[13] Yeats, 'General Introduction', p.255.
[14] Joyce, 'Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages', p.118.
[15] A. N. Jeffares, *A New Commentary on the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.414.

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