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The Phenomenon of the Irish Literary Revival and how it was shaped by History

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction

The relationship between history and literature is interdependent: history shapes the stories we tell while stories help us remember history. The lines between influencer and influenced were blurred during the Irish Literary Revival. Beginning in the late 1880s and ending around 1915, this period saw a significant increase in literary output and renewed use of Gaelic motifs. The authors of this time, among the most renowned in Irish history, were exceptionally politically active, contributing to the nationalist movement which ultimately led to the Irish Free State in 1922.

The objective of my thesis was to identify common themes in the literature of the period and trace them back to the historical catalysts of the Revival. I focussed on two writers: W.B. Yeats (1865 – 1939), a leading member of the initial wave of revivalists, and James Joyce (1882 – 1941), who wrote his early works towards the tail end of the movement. As well as a general overview of Irish history, I needed to understand the backgrounds of both writers before I could analyse what they had written. For Joyce, I read excerpts from his biography as well as some of his letters, which provided invaluable context for his motives and thought processes. To understand Yeats's work, I researched his political activity, as I felt his proximity to nationalistic movements would influence his writing the most.

Once I properly understood where each author was coming from, I began examining their works. I selected three of Yeats's poems, first published in 1893 as part of the collection *The Rose*, namely *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, *To the Rose upon the Rood of Time*, and *To Ireland in the Coming Times*. These were written at the beginning of Yeats's career, coinciding with the beginning of the Revival. In contrast, his later writings were more heavily influenced by subsequent events in Irish history, making them less relevant to my research. To support my analysis, I included the folk tale *Happy and Unhappy Theologians* from Yeats's collection *Celtic Twilight*, arguably the piece of literature that influenced other revivalists the most to the point it can be used as a synonym for the Revival. For similar reasons, I chose Joyce's collection of short stories, *Dubliners*, written in 1904, early in his career. I chose a story from each of the four sections that the book is split into (see p. 12), namely *The Sisters*, *Eveline*, *Two Gallants*, and *A Little Cloud*.

I have split my work into four main parts: first, I begin with a general overview on the history of Ireland, going into more detail for the years directly preceding the Revival. Then, I dedicate

a chapter to each of my authors in which I analyse their respective literature. My concluding chapter then compares the two writers and connects the common themes with historical events. My Yeats and Joyce chapters mirror this structure, as in each I begin by introducing their backgrounds, including the styles in which they wrote, before analysing the primary literature and conclusively summarising each chapter.

2. History of Ireland

2.1 Historical Overview until 1848

Early Irish history can be divided into sections based on the different cultures that came to interact with the island, beginning with the Celts as the first significant group. Based on their oral history and archaeological evidence, the Celts are likely to have arrived in Ireland from the Iberian Peninsula around 300 BC (*Maurer, 2022, p. 18*). Authority in familial structures was not decided based on primogeniture but 1instead deferred to the person most capable of defending their land and territory. As such, Celtic culture was centred on physical strength, and female warriors were not unheard of (*Maurer, 2022, p. 23*). Another vital part of medieval Irish culture was the oral tradition. Bards were a prestigious class of their own, keeping old legends alive as they sang of great battles in the royal courts (*Maurer, 2022, p. 24*).

The arrival of Christian missionaries from Britain marks the next stage in Irish history. The first and most influential mission to evangelise Ireland was carried out in 432 AD by St. Patrick, also known as the Apostle of Ireland (*Maurer, 2022, p. 26*). In polytheistic Gaelic society, the Christian God was integrated as yet another deity, with Jesus Christ's resurrection being revered as an act of strength. (*Maurer, 2022, pp. 28-29*). Thus, the evangelisation of old Ireland was a mostly peaceful process, as evidenced by the lack of martyrs from this period. Monasteries were established across the island and it is in these institutions that many of the Irish legends we still know today were recorded in written form for the first time.

The next defining group were the Vikings, first arriving in 795 AD. Initially, their presence was marked by violent raids and a lack of permanent settlements. The Vikings later founded multiple cities along the east coast, including Dublin in 841 AD. As time went on, these settlements were entirely absorbed into Gaelic society as the two cultures traded and intermarried (*Maurer, 2022, pp. 32-33*).

The fourth immigration to Ireland is perhaps more accurately described as an invasion, namely that of the Anglo-Normans. Beginning with an Irish king seeking help from Anglo-Norman barons in his struggle to keep his crown, the first invasion took place in 1169 (*Maurer, 2022, p. 36*). Over the next 500 years, the influence of England over Ireland waxed and waned. Though Ireland was a lordship of England, meaning it was subject to the English Crown, most Irish people still deferred to Gaelic laws and customs (*Maurer, 2022, p. 44*). The Anglo-Norman ruling class freely intermarried with the Irish, becoming Anglo-Irish: no longer solely English, nor yet fully Irish (*Maurer, 2022, p. 48*).

The relatively perfunctory status of Ireland under the English Crown changed with the Tudor conquest. As part of the installation of the Anglican Church, Henry VIII set out to reform Catholic Ireland as well, igniting centuries of confessional conflict (*Maurer, 2022, p. 72*). The subsequent 'Flight of the Earls' in 1607 saw the last of the Gaelic aristocracy flee the country. While this may have been an attempt to rally an army in continental Europe and regain rule of Ireland, they more likely exiled themselves due to resignation their exclusion from Irish politics (*Maurer, 2022, p. 96*).

Over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, the institutionalised repression enacted by the Penal Laws led to Catholics being forcibly relocated, having their land taken from them, and generally being treated as lower-class by the English Crown and the ruling Protestants (*Maurer, 2022, pp. 101, 140*).

In 1798, the French Revolution had left its mark on Europe and spurred the Irish to revolt in the same year. The revolution was brutally crushed and lead to the 1801 Act of Union which abolished the Irish Parliament and fully integrated it into Westminster Parliament (*Maurer, 2022, pp. 179-186*). The 19th century can be split into distinct periods before and after the catastrophic famine. Lasting from 1845 to 1848, it cast such a dark shadow over the country that fundamental issues, previously dismissed, became glaringly obvious. The historic export of wheat and other produce to England had raised prices to an extent that the Irish lower classes were entirely dependent on potatoes for their nutrition. When exports continued despite a fungal plague which devastated potato crops all over the country, the impoverished were effectively doomed to starvation. (*Maurer, 2022, pp. 219-224*).

2.2 The Home Rule Movement and Irish Identity

The decades ensuing the famine saw three key developments: unrest regarding the treatment of farmers by agrarian landowners, the emergence of nationalist sentiment, and renewed interest in Gaelic culture. The land question calmed somewhat in 1870 with the first wave of land reforms and was resolved by 1903, when new laws allowed tenants to buy their own land and live off of it.

The years following 1870 were further marked by the Home Rule movement, a nationalist cause that sought to attain Irish sovereignty. Home Rule was closely connected to the land question, most obviously in the tactics of Charles Stewart Parnell, an Anglo-Irish member of parliament and leader of the *Irish National Land League.* He seized the opportunity to introduce his nationalist ideas into parliament by tackling the Land Reform issue, placating the angry farmers to appeal to the government in Westminster whilst also supporting their issues and securing political voting power (*Maurer, 2022, p. 239*).

The third issue that emerged in the second half of 19th century Ireland was the resurgence of cultural awareness. Gaelic culture had been gradually declining since the late Middle Ages, as English rule introduced a number of suppressive policies with varying success. In the 17th century aggressive reformative efforts oppressed Catholics and by proxy Gaelic culture, resulting in widespread anglicisation by the 18th century. Compulsory schooling accelerated the transition to English. By the mid-19th century, Irish was a language of the past, with parents forbidding their children from speaking it. Faultless English became a matter of survival, as those who emigrated to escape the famine lost any reason to speak Irish, while those who stayed were forced to adapt if they wanted a place in society (*Maurer, 2022, pp. 247-248*).

After Irish tradition had faded into obscurity, an interest in the historic culture was awakened in the 19th century, inspired by similar movements in other parts of Europe (M*aurer, 2022, p. 248*). Headed by Anglo-Irish antiquarians, the wave of research into the Celtic history of Ireland was driven by historic and romantic ideals of the pre-Christian era, the golden age of Gaelic life. Despite hailing from England, the English-speaking Anglo-Irish sparked the idea of a cultural identity that reached back to before the Anglo-Norman invasion. The politicisation of this concept was inevitable, for the recognition of an Irish identity wholly independent of England lent itself to the idea of a sovereign nation-state (*Maurer, 2022, p. 249*). These socio-political ideas led to the formation of the *Gaelic League* in 1893, which, despite being a society

for academics and scholars, quickly ignited the political movement that drove Irish independence (*Maurer, 2022, p. 250*). Home Rule was thus intrinsically connected to this cultural reawakening, as the rediscovery of an Irish identity immensely informed the desire to be a free, autonomous state.

3. William Butler Yeats

3.1 Political Activity

William Butler Yeats's love for Ireland not only influenced all of his writing, but also his politics, manifesting as intense patriotism and nationalism. Yeats became involved with republicanism in the 1890s, contributing to the Gaelic League and the National Literary Society as well as co-founding the Irish Literary Theatre (*Lotha et. al., 2024, unpaginated*). He was a firm believer that literature informed nationality, which in turn influenced and inspired writers (*Regan, 2006, p.88*). It is these outspoken opinions that lend confidence in interpreting Yeats's earlier writings as nationalist or at least pertaining to the nation. Arguably, Yeats's conscious goal was to reshape Irish nationalism and move it away from an exclusionary basis which exploited confessional differences (*Mulcahey, 2000, p.20*). Instead, Yeats hoped to awaken an appreciation for an Irish identity more concerned by what it included. His use of legendary myths and wistful images of Irish landscapes lent his prose a distinctly Irish note while still writing in English. This style would go on to be a cornerstone of his work and influence the rest of the Irish Literary Revival.

3.2 Romanticism

Yeats considered himself one of the last romanticists. Though his style later shifted towards modernism, his writing during the Irish Literary Revival was distinctly romantic in nature (*Regan, 2006, p. 87*). Yeats's romanticism is intrinsically attached to his nationalism, with nostalgia and more druidic, nature-oriented themes fitting very well into both. *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, most likely written in 1888, is exemplary of this romantic vein. Nostalgia and yearning emanate from this poem, illustrating Yeats's desire to leave the grey pavements of London and go to the mystical, pastoral island of Innisfree (*Yeats, 2024, p. 34*). Here Yeats makes a

distinction between the rural and the urban, as well as between England and Ireland. He frequently moved between the islands. Moving to England at a young age, he then completed most of his education in Ireland before returning to London in 1887 at the age of 22 (*Yeats, 2024, Introduction p. 9*). Perhaps it was his homesickness that made Yeats so romantic. As he reminisced about the island in the middle of Lough Gill in his home County of Sligo, he was inspired to recreate images of the countryside he could not see. Mystical elements emerge, such as the 'purple glow' of the namesake heather of Innisfree, this name meaning 'island of heather' in Irish. Yeats's longing for home was so strong that he could hear the lapping of the Irish lake 'in the deep heart's core', a phrase redolent of romantic ideals of yearning and wanderlust. The intersection of romanticism and nationalism emerges where wistful depictions of rolling hills become proud, patriotic praise of the Irish landscape.

In a second poem, *To the Rose upon the Rood of Time*, another motif linking romanticism and nationalism becomes quite prominent: medievalism. With references to Cuchulain, the legendary hero of Ireland, as well as archaic grammatical structures such as 'thine' and 'chaunt', Yeats intentionally evokes the feeling of medieval literature. Medievalism is quite a common theme amongst romantic movements within European literature (*Davis, 1974, p. 34*), but in Ireland it gains a more nationalist aspect (*Maurer, 2022, p. 249)*. The pre-Christian era of Ireland is often lauded by revivalists as being the golden age of Irish history, as it was then when Gaelic culture existed free from outside influences (*Maurer, 2022, p. 11*). Yeats's rallying cry for Ireland to join together based shared history and culture is made literal. The rose is a mythological symbol used heavily by Irish poets to refer to Éire, the goddess after whom Ireland is named (*Yeats, 1903, p. 811*). Yeats calls to the Irish people to gather around him as he tells of Cuchulain and druids. His specific wording of 'sing the ancient ways' (*Yeats, 2024, p. 29)* references Irish oral tradition, wherein Irish legends and epics were memorised and sung by bards before the advent of a widespread writing system (*Maurer, 2022, p. 24*). The penultimate line of the poem echoes this idea, with Yeats mentioning Ireland by its Irish name, Éire, and once more calling upon the old ways. He begs the Irish people to look back and remember what once bound them together, to forget the petty conflict of the 'poor foolish things that live a day', which could refer to the rift between Catholics and Protestants that dominated nationalist discourse. Instead, they should recognise the 'Eternal beauty wandering on her way', which could refer to Éire, as the Irish ideal slowly coming to be.

3.3 National Pride

When regarding Yeats and his work, it is important to remember his Anglo-Irish identity. Born to a protestant family and spending many years abroad, Yeats's connection with Ireland was an active, continuous effort. As opposed to other emigrants such as, for example, George Bernard Shaw (*MacDonagh, 1963, p. 16*), under no circumstances would Yeats let himself be viewed as an English writer. His writing, just as he himself, should be seen as Irish in every way (*Lucy, 1977, 6*).

In some of Yeats's earliest work we can see his fascination with folklore. In his 1893 collection *Celtic Twilight*, Yeats sought to use folk myths and legends to forge a national ideal. In fact, this piece was so crucial to the movement that 'Celtic Twilight' acts as a synonym for the Irish Literary Revival (*Russel, 2014, p. 7*). In it, Yeats compiles tales inspired by his travels in his home County Sligo with his father (*O'Medley, 2009, p. 17*). The book contains all manner of writing, from short tales to longer stories as well as snippets of poems authored by Yeats himself or recounted from his conversations with locals. The image of Ireland created in this volume is mostly divorced from religion, characteristic of Yeats's ideal. Aside from his heritage, Yeats chose Ireland as his literary muse for calculated reasons. As a man convinced that spirituality was necessary for the continuation of society, Yeats hoped to spark a spiritual revolution in the world using literature he found in Ireland (*Lenoski, 1979, p. 44*). Yeats placed Ireland above other European nations because he believed it to be the least Christianised. He asserted that his people were still fully in tune with their Celtic roots, implying an instinctive appreciation for the poetic surpassing that of the English (*O'Medley, 2009, p. 19*). However, he severely underestimated the depth to which religion and sectarianism had become part of the Irish way of life (*Lenoski, 1979, p. 30*). Yeats was perhaps blinded by his national pride, but this view of Ireland is also symptomatic of his protestant upbringing. The peasantry that was closest to Gaelic culture was also part of the Catholic demographic of Ireland. The two were now inextricably linked – any attempts to antedate Christianity to achieve a sense of 'purer' Irish culture were met with resistance. The fact that religion still features in *Celtic Twilight*, a collection intended to circumvent the sectarian divide, makes this even clearer. In one of the tales, *Happy and Unhappy Theologians*, the man telling the story to the narrator is of the belief that the faery are devils. With the line "Yet he was so scornful of unchristian things for all their dancing and singing that he thinks that 'You have only bid them to be gone and they will go'" (*Yeats, 2008, p. 50*), Yeats derides the man's Christianity, almost treating it as an irrelevant aspect of the story. Meanwhile, he places unquestioned faith in the existence of the faery. The man's belief

that a command is enough to be rid of the faery, is implied to be false as well, showing that he does not understand them properly.

Another poem, *To Ireland in the Coming Times*, betrays a quiet anxiety, namely that of someone who does not feel fully accepted as part of a movement. In it, Yeats continuously refers to specific groups he almost demands to be seen as a part of. Firstly, as a 'True brother of a company / That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong' (*Yeats, 2024, p. 50*), which can be read as Yeats placing himself in the role of a medieval bard. He then adds: 'Nor may I less be counted one, with Davis, Mangan, Ferguson', a group of contemporary poets (*Regan, 2006, p. 95*), firmly stating that Yeats cannot be omitted from such literary discussions. The final four lines 'I cast my heart into my rhymes / That you, in the dim coming times / May know how my heart went with them / After the red-rose-bordered hem' act as Yeats almost begging the reader to accept him as one of Ireland's poets. Yeats commits himself fully to following the 'red-rose-bordered hem', an image which strongly hints to a female mythical figure, most likely Éire herself (see p. 7). Ireland here is something to be chased after, an image which ironically mirrors Yeats's anxieties: he was chasing Irishness as a member of the Anglo-Irish upper class attempting to define an Ireland that was not Catholic and would not intrinsically exclude him. The final stanza of this poem has an almost apocalyptic ring to it, referring to 'dim coming times', but asks again of the reader that Yeats be remembered for his commitment to the country.

Yeats's national pride was complex; it was not a blind, passionate patriotism, as it had clearly defined motives: Yeats was proud of the present Ireland, but he was totally convinced by the Ireland he hoped would arise. What links both the poem and the tale from *Celtic Twilight* is the intentional shift away from Catholicism. We can see this in the line 'Of her, whose history began / Before God made the angelic clan' where Yeats explicitly places Christianity as a later mutation of Ireland, in much the same way as he dismisses the reinterpretation of pagan figures, the faery people, as satanic. Whether his treatment of Catholicism was intentional so as to sway his readers away from such a divided image of Ireland or caused by his genuine ignorance of the grip that it had on the Irish is unclear. What is clear is that Yeats's national pride, no matter how skewed or misguided, was the spark from which many of his early poems emerged. Yeats believed that showing his glowing depiction of Ireland to its people could help forge a nation. Over time, however, his ideal diverged ever more from the social stagnation that plagued Ireland. Soon, a more critical literary figure would come to prominence.

4. James Joyce

4.1 Paradoxical Exile

James Joyce once stated in an interview: 'You are an Irishman and you must write in your own tradition. Borrowed styles are no good. You must write what is in your blood and not what is in your brain' (*Ellmann, 1982, p. 505*). For someone who left Dublin at 22 years old and never moved back, Joyce was very passionate about his hometown and in fact his home country as a whole. The question therefore arises, if Ireland shaped his very nature in such a way that he was incapable of writing of anything else, why did he leave?

Joyce's first foray abroad was his move to Paris in 1902, having decided that medical school in Dublin did not suit him. The most obvious place to move would be London, a road taken by many other Irishmen. Wanting further separation from familiar things, he instead chose to study in Paris (*Ellmann, 1982*). At this time, he was likely driven by a desire to partake in culture and society rather than an active distaste towards home. Dublin, despite its long history as the "'second' city of the British Empire" (*Joyce, 1966, p. 109*), it had none of the cultural prestige of a great European capital. He returned to Dublin in 1903, withdrawing from his studies in France upon hearing of the rapidly declining health of his mother (*Ellmann, 1982, p. 128*). The second and final time Joyce left Dublin was in October of 1904. He reached a tipping point after a bewildering incident while living with Oliver St. John Gogarty and Dermot Chenevix Trench. After nearly being shot due to Trench's night terrors and the ensuing panicked fusillade, he immediately left the residence and was overcome by the desire to flee the country again. This was further fuelled by the fact that Nora Barnacle, the woman with whom he would spend the rest of his life, was looked down upon by his family due to her lower social standing. Joyce was arguably paranoid, believing he was 'working against the grain' in Ireland and that living elsewhere would be less irritating (*Ellmann, 1982, p. 175*). He left Dublin for Pola, a town in what is now Croatia, then spent the rest of his life moving around Europe with sporadic visits to Dublin.

Despite dramatizing his move away from Dublin as a banishment (*Ellmann, 1982, p. 237*), Joyce was never forced to leave Ireland, nor was his return barred, meaning his status as an 'exile' was a personal choice. However, living in Dublin would have made it impossible to publish his work due to extremely strict obscenity laws in both England and Ireland (*Hutchinson, 2014, unpaginated*). Therefore, while he had legitimate reasons to leave Ireland,

most of his vituperation towards his home was exaggerated, as he was aware that his perceived ostracism was fuel for his prose (*Ellmann, 1982, p. 109*). In the previously mentioned interview (see p. 10), Joyce states: 'For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin [sic] I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal' (*Ellmann, 1982, p. 505*). This justification seems like relatively neutral writing advice, but considering Joyce's complex relationship to Ireland, it seems more likely that he was unwilling to remove himself from Ireland in any way but physical.

4.2 Realism

The collection of fifteen short stories *Dubliners* is written in the style of realism. This is distinguished from earlier literary genres by the focus on unembellished, middle-class life. Realism took shape in late 19th century France in response to the rise of the Bourgeois and slowly spread through Europe (*Habib, 2013, unpaginated*). Joyce's realism is in stark contrast to the romanticism of his contemporaries. While W.B. Yeats served a romantic, historical ideal of Ireland (see p. 8), Joyce's *Dubliners* was a brutally honest, critical representation of Dublin and, by extension, Ireland. He puts it best himself, claiming to present a 'chapter of the moral history' of Ireland which holds up a mirror to its people (*Joyce, 1966, p. 134*). There is an absence of clearly defined beginning, middle and end, with most of the stories beginning *in medias res*, expounding sparingly if at all throughout the story. The overall lack of common storytelling structures displays the mundanity of the urban Dubliner: these are no great Celtic heroes, but ordinary people going about their lives in a country ravaged by poverty and clashing political ideals. The introspective critique of Ireland that lies at the core of *Dubliners*, more obviously pronounced in some stories than others, is thus most suitably conveyed through realism. This raw and unfiltered depiction of human nature was, at the time, incredibly controversial, and publishers refused to print it for close to ten years after the completion of the first manuscript. This was due to the 'indecency' in the material, with publication only taking place in 1914 after a saga of rejections and printing mishaps (*Hutchinson, 2014, unpaginated*).

4.3 National Critique

Spiritual paralysis is an overarching theme shared between the various stories. Each character is trapped in indecision, caught in a conflict with their environments. The paralysis is split into four aspects, each corresponding to a life stage: childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life (*Joyce, 1966, p. 134*).

The stories are specifically arranged in this order, with the focal characters aging up through these separate stages and facing unique paralyses. The most obvious allusion to this keystone theme is in the very first story, *The Sisters.*

The story begins with the young boy who narrates being told that his friend, the priest James Flynn, has died. While not necessarily the immediate cause of his death, the priest appears to have lost his mind after accidentally smashing a chalice. Even though it was empty and not of great value, the event caused him great distress and made him recluse.

Our young narrator grapples with this news, feeling shocked but not particularly mournful. That night, he is haunted by visions of the 'paralytic'; the priest appears to him as a grey, murmuring face attempting to confess something unspecified. The boy then refers to the priest as a simoniac (*Joyce, 1992, p. 14*), someone guilty of simony, the sin of exchanging indulgences for money. While this is not explored any beyond this brief mention, it contextualises much of the story: one of the priest's sisters describes an instance where Flynn was found sitting in his chapel in the dead of night, softly laughing to himself in his confession booth (*Joyce, 1992, p. 20*).

This disturbing image succinctly captures the priest's contradiction: sinner and holy man, confessor and penitent. The story does not offer a simple answer as to what exactly killed Father Flynn. The stagnant, haunting atmosphere provides the thesis of *Dubliners*: paralysis. Here this state of immobility is viewed through the eyes of a child, the first of the four stages, not fully comprehending the depth of the condition but reviling it all the same, referring to paralysis as something sinful and maleficent (*Joyce, 1992, p. 11*). The priest is trapped between two states: a pious man and an unfulfilled simoniac wishing for absolution.

The state of Ireland is reflected in this duality; a burgeoning nation full of bright new ideas and cultural reawakening yet remaining unchanged, paralysed in visionary stasis at the time that *Dubliners* was written. The lofty prospects of the Home Rule movement had stagnated, with Ireland no closer to freedom from English rule than before. In much the same way a priest is

driven insane by the hypocrisy of being a sinning holy man, Joyce's Ireland is trapped in the rift between romantic ideals of self-realisation and the political reality at the time. While being desperate for freedom, the Irish people continued to suffer the indignities of foreign sovereignty. Joyce's stance on this suffering was not particularly sympathetic, in fact, he deemed it to be self-imposed. He condenses the simultaneous rejection of England and continuing dependency on the Crown into the stasis that plagues the characters in *Dubliners*. It is a sickness born of a half-hearted struggle for liberty and the frustration of indecision. *The Sisters* opens the book with the main concept of paralysis and sets the sombre tone as well as the thematic keystone of the stories to come.

In the story *Eveline,* the eponymous young woman has met a sailor, Frank, with whom she plans to escape Dublin for Buenos Aires. The main bulk of the story is Eveline pondering this massive change that she is about to embark on. She does not reflect on much with joy since the death of her brother and mother, but in light of her leaving for something wholly new and unknown, her old life does not seem entirely unappealing. She appears caught in this idea of the past, spending what is to be her last evening in her old life sitting by her window and ruminating, aware that her time in Ireland is coming to an end. Her biggest confliction lies in her relationship with her father. While she can remember times when he was kinder, he is the reason she must flee Ireland. His threats of violence and refusal to allow her to marry Frank prevent her from leading a happy life at home. However, her desire to escape conflicts with an equally strong attachment to her responsibilities and the promises she made to her mother on her deathbed. Although she loved her dearly, Eveline is terrified of ending up like her mother, who led a pitiful life full of 'commonplace sacrifices' (*Joyce, 1992, p. 48*) and died unhappy. The narrative then shifts to the morning of the journey. As Eveline waits to board the boat to Argentina, she is anxious and detached. The permanence of her decision takes hold. She becomes paralysed by fear and anxiety, gripping onto the railing, reduced to a panicked, passive state as her lover is swept onto the ship by the crowd and she is left in Dublin.

In contrast to *The Sisters*, the paralysis at the core of this story is experienced by the protagonist, not externally viewed. We get a much greater insight into the mindset of the main character as it shifts from childhood to adolescence. Eveline's paralysis is a product of her inability to make a selfish decision due to her upbringing. She promised her mother to take care of her family. Though one of her brothers had since passed and the other moved out, she is now entrusted with the care of two children, a responsibility which is mentioned in one sentence and not

expanded upon. On top of this, she is forced to give up her wages for the household every Saturday while her father keeps his money, as he believes she would squander them otherwise. All the responsibilities of a mother have been thrust upon her at the young age of 19. Though she finds a way out – a young, handsome sailor willing to take her with him to the other end of the world – she cannot bring herself to take it. Eveline ends up choosing the relative predictability and familiarity of a life that will make her miserable over taking a risk that would allow her to start anew.

In a way, Eveline's attempt to emancipate herself, starting afresh as a wife in a foreign country can be interpreted as an allegory for Ireland's desire to reinvent itself independently of British dominion. While she is miserable in the life she is forced to lead under the harsh scrutiny of her father, it is comfortably familiar. Trapped between these two equally powerful desires, Eveline is rooted in place, unable to decide until the moment passes and she is stuck where she was before. In much the same way, the Home Rule movement had petered out. In an effort to clearly define an independent Ireland, Catholicism was seen as fundamental to Irishness. This meant protestants in the north preferred to remain part of protestant England, stymying island-wide autonomy (*Maurer, 2022, p. 258*). Eveline's dilemma could be symbolic for the whole of Ireland, both unable to break free from the grasp of the oppressor who offers them stability.

Taking a step further from Eveline's adolescence into the third life stage mentioned in Joyce's letter (*Joyce, 1966, p. 134*), *Two Gallants* follows the men Corley and Lenehan for a day, as they meet, separate and wander about somewhat aimlessly. The two speak of their strategy around women, which involves leeching off of them for monetary gain by pretending to be temporarily unemployed, as opposed to spending on dates in a gentlemanly manner. The two split up, with Corley meeting a woman and Lenehan continuing to wander, reminiscing on his lethargic, unstable life of 'pulling the devil by the tail' as Joyce puts it. However, he shuts down these self-critical ideas by reaffirming that all he needs is to find a 'good simple girl with a little of the ready' (*Joyce, 1992, p. 71*).

When he meets again with Corley, he appears with a shining gold coin, having successfully swindled the woman, and the two men grin like schoolboys.

Corley and Lenehan's social stagnation ties back to his critique of Ireland. These men have found a perfect parasitic niche to inhabit. Since as it has served them well enough, they cannot break free from it, despite their apparent desire. Roaming the streets, they come across a busking harpist, whose instrument is described as 'weary alike of the eyes of strangers and of her

master's hands' (*Joyce, 1992, p. 68*). The imagery in this scene is some of the clearest in the collection, with the harp being an obvious heraldic and mythological symbol of Ireland. The harp has long stood for Irish pride and values (*Snook, 2021, unpaginated*), and her (the harp's) weariness at being exposed is an allusion to the defilement of this medieval courtly ideal. While the harp stands as a literary device to expose the failings of the two gallants, I believe it also serves a more satirical purpose. As pre-Christian emblems of Celtic culture, harps were featured heavily in the Irish Revival as a symbol of Irish nationalism and used in the imagery of the Home Rule movement and many other nationalist groups (*Snook, 2021, unpaginated*). By placing the harp in this distinctly unromantic setting, Joyce trivialises the idealism of these nationalist movements, bringing the shining paragon of Irish identity in contact with the reality of contemporary Ireland. He directly chastises the over-idealisation of Ireland with this symbol often used to mythologise the country, revoking the out-of-touch romanticism, while also condemning the stagnation and placidity of the Irish people. It is the very vulgarity that Joyce seeks to criticise in this short story that made it so controversial, being one of the reasons why the book took so long to publish. However, Joyce states that it is one of the most important stories in the book, going so far as to say that its removal would be disastrous and that he would rather omit five others than lose *Two Gallants* (*Joyce, 1957, p. 61*). I believe his stance on this book was so intransigent due to its portrayal of the moral decay within Ireland at the time, so succinctly and effectively told through the lecherous men at its centre.

A Little Cloud illustrates the final aspects of paralysis, maturity and public life, following a man named Little Chandler and his meeting with a childhood friend, Ignatius Gallaher, an accomplished writer in London. Chandler's imminent meeting has awakened an immense distaste for Dublin within him, viewing himself as above the dull, inelegant city by nature of his interest in poetry and desire to become a published writer himself. He feels trapped in Dublin, convinced his talent is squandered by a city and country that does not know to appreciate his ability. London seems, to him, a paradise in which his poetry would flourish.

Chandler and Gallaher's conversation in the pub is full of constant condescension, passive-aggression and thinly veiled insults. Gallaher mocks Chandler's lack of experience and safe life by monologuing on his travels in Europe and demeaning married life by calling it stale (*Joyce, 1992, p.* 98). Chandler's relatively positive image of his friend quickly sours as he drinks and smokes to keep up with him and disprove Gallaher's image of his abstinence. Chandler makes jabs at Gallaher, who rebuffs these, and the two part ways less than amicably.

Having drunk and smoked more than usual, Chandler returns home, forgetting the sugar which his wife then has to buy herself, leaving him to take care of their son. He takes a dislike to everything around him, finding faults in the photograph of his wife, the furniture she had filled the house with, and everything else in sight. He attempts to read a book of Byron's poems which lies before him, but his child begins to cry, shaking him out of his poetic mood. Unable to comfort him properly, Chandler screams for the crying to stop, upon which his wife bursts into the room and takes her son from him. As she calms the baby, Chandler begins to cry remorseful, frustrated tears.

Chandler feels that Gallaher's very visit to Dublin is not only condescending to him, but in fact patronising to the entire country (*Joyce, 1992, p. 97*). He is trapped between taking pride in his Irish heritage while simultaneously disregarding modern, urban Ireland. This chasm between ideology and reality permeates the entire story: the rift between the dream of publishing poetry in London and the reality of a life as a clerk, his graceful Celtic verse that he cannot write before escaping his own repressive Irishness.

Joyce makes many references to England, with Gallaher acting as an ambassador for the English in this story. Chandler's need to compare himself to Gallaher symbolises the habit of many Irish writers to define themselves in relation to England. Given that it is written in the language of the occupier, all Irish literature written in English is by its very nature a hybrid. This caused uncertainty within many Irish authors as to the legitimacy of their writing as Irish at all (*Kiberd, 1995, p. 115*). Gallaher is placed in a similar role as many Irish authors who went into self-imposed exile. Even though it is not stated why, Gallaher clearly felt the need to leave Ireland to follow his dreams. Similarly, Chandler seems incapable of reconciling his poetic goals with his city of origin, as if the two could not coexist.

With Little Chandler, Joyce creates an image of the Irish man which serves his critique of Irish society, as Chandler fails to provide for his family. At first, he fails in the masculine role of the provider as he forgets to buy sugar on the way home. Later, he fails in his role as a father, being unable to console his own child. His wife is forced to make up for these shortcomings, having to buy groceries for herself as well as caring for their son.

One of the conspicuous choices that Joyce makes is the specific poem he chooses for Chandler to read at the end. Joyce could have chosen any English poet, but he picks a poem by Lord Byron, one of the most famous romantic poets in English literature (*Marchand, 1911, Introduction p. V*). Leveraging his Celtic identity when he felt it appealed to English critics, Joyce

mocks revivalism as nothing more than a passing fad as opposed to the great destiny of the Irish nation (*Platt, 1998, p. 18*). Chandler's self-romanticisation and the drama he spins around his own lack of success is intensely satirical, intended to be mocking rather than empathetic.

Joyce's Ireland is a country plagued by an immobilising paralysis, with Dublin City as the centre of the affliction. The people of the city are bipolar, trapped between different states that render them incapable of forward motion and stagnating in their own indecision. As a work intended to be a looking glass held up to the Irish nation (*Joyce, 1957, p. 64*), Joyce used *Dubliners* to criticise many disparate aspects of Irish culture at the time. Additionally, the collection offers a less intentional insight into Irish society at the time. Joyce heavily criticised the gulf between ideology and action which rendered Ireland's inhabitants hemipelagic.

Cultural decay is perhaps most clearly visible in the characters of *Two Gallants*, two men who, to all intents and purposes, prostitute themselves to get by. Lenehan personifies paralysis by the cyclical nature of his story, walking around the city and getting nothing done. Joyce was convinced Ireland was sick, and part of this sickness was the moral decay that he noticed within Dublin. His Dublin is corrupted, dirty, stinking of offal and ashtrays, and Joyce is very intent on this image shining through in *Dubliners* (*Joyce, 1957, p. 63*). The gallants represent the depth of the depravity that the Irish have sunk to, with Joyce imbuing into them his own fears of what would have become of him had he stayed in Ireland (*Walzl, 1965, p. 74*).

Further active critiques can be found in *A Little Cloud*, where he shows little sympathy for the main character, who struggles to address his own desires for freedom. The whole narrative punishes Little Chandler's meek, self-sabotaging nature and immediately silences him as his frustrated outburst is cut down instantaneously. Chandler, like all of Dublin, remains trapped by his inability to reach for what he wants.

Another element of commentary that shines through that might be more unconscious is Joyce's depiction of men in these stories. In one of the few stories without a male protagonist this negative image becomes most clear, as we see an image of the Irish man from an outsider's perspective in *Eveline*. The provider role is shifted from her father, the man of the house, to Eveline, a barely adult girl forced to give up her savings. Joyce creates a very negative image of the Irish man who does not fulfil traditionally masculine roles, instead parasitising the people around him and squandering his time and money in pubs. We see this in *A Little Cloud* as well, as Little Chandler also fails to provide for his family. The point can be made that Chandler does not fulfil these roles due to being drunk, a critique of pub culture in Ireland, places where

men would spend hours drinking away their sorrows. The men of Dublin failing to provide and exploiting the people, especially women, around them could well be a symptom of the decay of Irish society that Joyce found so repulsive. His depiction of men as members of a decaying society is mostly negative.

Joyce's looking glass is therefore brutally blunt, leaving very little to the imagination as he criticises the state of Ireland as he had left it. Ireland through Joyce's eyes has none of the romantic air of Yeats's work, as he believed that Ireland had completely stagnated (*Joyce, 1957, p. 55*). He hoped that *Dubliners* would lead Ireland out of its torpor, that without it, Ireland's future would remain just as bleak as the Dublin of the present. Despite this drastic tonal difference between the two authors, their works still share significant commonalities.

5. Common Themes

5.1 Image of Ireland

While Yeats and Joyce viewed the same country in very different ways, both depict their home country through a personal lens. Yeats's works was romantic and poetic, focussing on the rural and pushing the modern and the urban to the side. Meanwhile, Joyce's stance is the opposite: *Dubliners* takes place solely in the gritty, dirty present, devoid of references to medieval Ireland. Both authors clearly had a vision of their home that they wanted to display to the world, a desire heavily informed by the social and political environment of the time.

With nationalistic movements emerging in Ireland around the end of the 19th century, it became necessary to define Ireland by what it was and was not, which led Yeats, a proud nationalist, to develop his own conception of the country. With painterly descriptions of the glorious landscape, Yeats describes a mystical nation whose heart beats to the rhythm of Éire's harp. His vision, however, dismisses Christianity in favour of pre-Christian pagan deities. This served his own interests as a Protestant Anglo-Irishman eager to downplay denominational divides in majority Catholic country.

Joyce, on the other hand, was more outward-looking. Always aware of his non-Irish audience, he aimed to distil Dublin in a way that he could 'give it to the world' (*Joyce, 1966, p. 111*). This said, the main moral themes of this work were certainly aimed at his countrymen. Having watched the Home Rule movement come and go by the time he wrote *Dubliners*, Joyce had become frustrated with Ireland. He did not write of the great flame of Celtic resurgence because all he saw were the dying embers of a movement that had, as of his time, failed to fulfil its promise. He pictured Ireland as a country and a people that had become frozen, trapped between different desires and believed that something had to be done to shake his country out of this inanition. Both of these authors very intentionally forged these images. It is precisely due to this intentionality that they must be analysed more diligently. With such intense convictions, one must be aware of their biases, so as to accurately understand the past from which they were writing.

5.2 Ireland in Actuality

While literature can be an excellent depiction of the past, it must also be scrutinized more thoroughly as a historical source, especially with authors harbouring such propagandist intent. Yeats's image of Ireland as a unified, brave, Celtic nation is beautiful and compelling but does not ring true for the majority of Ireland or even his own situation. Despite his insistence in *Celtic Twilight* that he maintains an immense respect for the peasantry of Ireland, it is clear that there was a great divide between him and his muse. Alongside his veiled disdain for Catholic beliefs (see p. 9), he could not speak Irish. Thus, it was quite hypocritical to redefine Ireland on the backs of people with whom he did not even share a language. In his poems, Yeats consistently refers to mythological characters such as Cuchulainn and Éire. However, his personal research for *Celtic Twilight* yielded naught but small-scale stories of supernatural encounters and simpler beliefs. This is because longer myths were still being told in Irish, meaning Yeats could not access them (*Sundmark, 2006, p. 101*). Nonetheless, Yeats's efforts are not to be dismissed entirely, as his commitment to this ideal was well-intentioned. When looking at Yeats, it is important to remember that his early poetry, while strongly informed by the zeitgeist at the time, portrayed a unified Ireland that did not exist.

Joyce's Ireland was similarly skewed – where Yeats idealised, Joyce overly criticized. The very nature of Joyce's self-imposed exile is, to an extent, proof of this: Joyce was aware that his actual ostracism was not enough to justify his distaste for Ireland. So, he banished himself, actively maintaining his quarrel with the country (see p. 10). Hardly a single character in *Dubliners* is content, and those that are, are mocked for their placidity and simple-mindedness. Even so, Joyce clearly took pride in being Irish, specifically a Dubliner, later in life (*Ellmann, 1982, 505*). After a lifetime of living abroad, Joyce eventually admitted that his Irishness was integral to his art. His nationalism begot the cosmopolitan spirit that allowed him to see the universal in the particular (*Ellmann, 1982, 505*). The intense viewpoints of both Yeats and Joyce, while quite opposed to each other, led the two to the same pitfalls: their depictions of Ireland are not accurate. Within these inaccuracies, the lessons the authors sought to teach their countrymen can be found.

5.3 Guiding the Irish

Both authors displayed a strong focus on the future but took completely different approaches. Yeats looked to the past for guidance, whereas Joyce advocated a new beginning. Quite dismissive of revivalist antiquarianism, Joyce staunchly asserted that ancient Ireland was dead and nothing good would come of hindsight (*Platt, 1998, Introduction p. xix*). Meanwhile, in both *To Ireland in the Coming Times* and *To the Rose upon the Rood of Time*, Yeats encourages the Irish people not to forget the myths of the past, but also not to forget him and other poets of his time. He depicts the future as dim (see p. 9), which can be interpreted differently. On the one hand, it could be inevitable, with Yeats trying to pre-emptively help the Irish through the coming struggle for Home Rule, or he could have written it as a warning, that Ireland heed his word lest it succumb to this sombre vision of tomorrow.

Joyce, again, stands in direct opposition to this: his guidance is anything but gentle, immediately shoving Ireland's, especially Dublin's, shortcomings into the faces of his readers. His looking glass (see p. 17) is there to brutally beat sense into Ireland, to shock it out of its paralytic trance. To conclude, Yeats's positive images encourage his countrymen to engage with their ancient cultural heritage, while Joyce tells of exactly what not to do. Though they used different means, both authors felt indebted to their country, duty-bound to use their literature for the betterment of Ireland.

6. Closing Words

6.1 Conclusion

When I began researching my thesis, I set out to answer two questions: why the Irish Literary Revival happened and what motifs in the literature hinted at this root cause. This required three sources of information: the historical context and two distinct literary sources to cross-reference common topics. Each of these had to be understood on their own before they could be combined for a final response to these questions.

The Irish Literary Revival did not have a singular, easily defined catalyst. Towards the end of the 19th century, Ireland was a bubbling pot of interconnected movements. Renewed interest in Celtic culture sparked both the Revival and Home Rule movements. As nationalism gained traction, it in turn became a topic in the literature of the time. What I had not expected was the extent to which the Irish Literary Revival inspired the Home Rule movement. It reinforced a national legend based on which Home Rule advocates pushed for the Irish Free State.

Commonalities between Yeats and Joyce, while not immediately obvious, were abundant. Their opinions on Ireland were almost diametrically opposed. Yet still, both were mesmerised by their home country with neither writing of much else. Yeats was infatuated with the rich history of his country. Joyce, disgusted with the state of Irish society, felt he had to deliver a rude awakening. Joyce's work may seem anti-nationalist, but at their core, the two authors, as Irishmen, only sought to lead their home into a better future.

During my research, I noticed that, while many of Yeats's works are examined in comparison with the context of the time and his own nationalism, Joyce analyses are usually quite isolated from historical discussion. While Joyce's work is not nearly as patriotic as Yeats's, it is my belief that in viewing his works without contextualising the history in which he lived, one omits key themes. *Dubliners* especially, is entirely dependent on the historical background for the moral lesson within it to make sense.

6.2 Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Olivia Batchelor, for keeping me on the right track when I was writing in circles. I thank my brother, who was my tireless support. I would also like to thank Regina, my mother, and Neil for their careful proofreading of my work. Finally,

I would like to thank my father for inspiring me to look to Ireland as a research topic and for helping translate the title of my thesis for my title page.

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7.3 Appendix

W.B. Yeats:

Poems:

The Lake Isle of Innisfree (p. 34)

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,

And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;

Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,

And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day

I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;

While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,

I hear it in the deep heart's core.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,

Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;

There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,

And evening full of the linnet's wings.

To the Rose upon the Rood of Time (p. 29):

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!
Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways:
Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide;
The Druid, grey, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed,
Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold;
And thine own sadness, whereof stars, grown old
In dancing silver-sandalled on the sea,
Sing in their high and lonely melody.
Come near, that no more blinded by man's fate,
I find under the boughs of love and hate,
In all poor foolish things that live a day,
Eternal beauty wandering on her way.

Come near, come near, come near—Ah, leave me still
A little space for the rose-breath to fill!
Lest I no more hear common things that crave;
The weak worm hiding down in its small cave,
The field-mouse running by me in the grass,
And heavy mortal hopes that toil and pass;
But seek alone to hear the strange things said
By God to the bright hearts of those long dead,

And learn to chaunt a tongue men do not know.

Come near; I would, before my time to go,

Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways:

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days.

To Ireland in the Coming Times (p.50):

Know, that I would accounted be

True brother of a company

That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong,

Ballad and story, rann and song;

Nor be I any less of them,

Because the red-rose-bordered hem

Of her, whose history began

Before God made the angelic clan,

Trails all about the written page.

When Time began to rant and rage

The measure of her flying feet

Made Ireland's heart begin to beat;

And Time bade all his candles flare

To light a measure here and there;

And may the thoughts of Ireland brood

Upon a measured quietude.

Nor may I less be counted one

With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,

Because, to him who ponders well,

My rhymes more than their rhyming tell

Of things discovered in the deep,

Where only body's laid asleep.

For the elemental creatures go

About my table to and fro,

That hurry from unmeasured mind

To rant and rage in flood and wind;

Yet he who treads in measured ways

May surely barter gaze for gaze.

Man ever journeys on with them

After the red-rose-bordered hem.

Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon,

A Druid land, a Druid tune!

While still I may, I write for you

The love I lived, the dream I knew.

From our birthday, until we die,

Is but the winking of an eye;

And we, our singing and our love,

What measurer Time has lit above,

And all benighted things that go

About my table to and fro,

Are passing on to where may be,

In truth's consuming ecstasy,

No place for love and dream at all;

For God goes by with white footfall.

I cast my heart into my rhymes,

That you, in the dim coming times,

May know how my heart went with them

After the red-rose-bordered hem.

Celtic Twilight:

Happy and Unhappy Theologians:

I

A Mayo woman once said to me, ‘I knew a servant-girl who hung herself for the love of God. She was lonely for the priest and her society,[1] and hung herself to the banisters with a scarf. She was no sooner dead than she became white as a lily, and if it had been murder or suicide she would have become black as black. They gave her a Christian burial, and the priest said she was no sooner dead than she was with the Lord. So nothing matters that you do for the love of God.’ I do not wonder at the pleasure she has in telling this story, for she herself loves all holy things with an ardour that brings them quickly to her lips. She told me once that she never hears anything described in a sermon that she does not afterwards see with her eyes. She has described to me the gates of Purgatory as the showed themselves to her eyes, but I remember nothing of the description except that she could not see the souls in trouble but only the gates. Her mind continually dwells on what is pleasant and beautiful. One day she asked me what month and what flower were the most beautiful. When I answered that I did not know, she said, ‘The month of May, because of the Virgin, and the lily of the valley, because it never sinned, but came pure out of the rocks,’ and then she asked, ‘What is the cause of the three cold months of winter?’ I did not know even that, and so she said, ‘The sin of man and the vengeance of

God.' Christ Himself was not only blessed, but perfect in all manly proportions in her eyes, so much do beauty and holiness go together in her thoughts. He alone of all men was exactly six feet high, all others are a little more or a little less.

Her thoughts and her sights of the people of Faery are pleasant and beautiful too, and I have never heard her call them the Fallen Angels. They are people like ourselves, only better-looking, and many and many a time she has gone to the window to watch them drive their wagons through the sky, wagon behind wagon in long line, or to the door to hear them singing and dancing in the forth. They sing, chiefly, it seems, a song called 'The Distant Waterfall', and though they once knocked her down she never thinks badly of them. She saw them most easily when she was in service in King's Country, and one morning a little while ago she said to me, 'Last night I was waiting up for the master and it was a quarter-past eleven. I heard a bang right down on the table. "King's Country all over," says I, and I laughed till I was near dead. It was a warning I was staying too long.

They wanted the place to themselves.' I told her once of somebody who saw a faery and fainted, and she said, 'It could not have been a faery, but some bad thing, nobody could faint at a faery. It was a demon. I was not afraid when they near me put me, and the bed under me, out through the roof. I wasn't afraid either when you were at some work and I heard a thing coming flop-flop up the stairs like an eel, and squealing. It went to all the doors. It could not get in where I was. I would have sent it through the universe like a flash of fire. There was a man in my place, a tearing fellow, and he put one of them down. He went out to meet it on the road, but he must have been told the words. But the faeries are the best neighbors. If you do good to them they will do good to you, but they don't like you to be on their path.' Another time she said to me, 'They are always good to the poor.'

1 II

There is, however, a man in a Galway village who can see nothing but wickedness. Some think him very holy, and others think him a little crazed, but some of his talk reminds one of those old Irish visions of the Three Worlds, which are supposed to have given Dante the plan of the *Divine Comedy*. But I could not imagine this man seeing Paradise. He is especially angry with the people of Faery, and describes the faun-like feet that are so common among them, who are indeed children of Pan, to prove them children of Satan. He will not grant that 'they carry away women, though there are many that say so,' but he is certain that they are 'as thick as the sands of the sea about us, and they tempt poor mortals.'

He says, ‘There is a priest I know of was looking along the ground like as if he was hunting for something, and a voice said to him, “If you want to see them you’ll see enough of them,” and his eyes were opened and he saw the ground thick with them. Singing they do be sometimes, and dancing, but all the time they have cloven feet.’ Yet he was so scornful of unchristian beings for all their dancing and singing that he thinks that ‘you have only to big them begone and they will go. It was one night,’ he says, ‘after walking back from Kinvara and down by the wood beyond I felt one coming beside me, and I could feel the horse he was riding on and the way he lifted his legs, but they do not make a sound like the hoofs of a horse. So I stopped and turned around and said, very loud, “Be off!” and he went and never troubled me after. And I knew a man who was dying, and one came on his bed, and he cried out to it, “Get out of that, you unnatural animal!” and it left him. Fallen angels they are, and after the fall of God said, “Let there be Hell,” and there it was in a moment.’ An old woman who was sitting by the fire joined in as he said this with ‘God save us, it’s a pity He said the word, and there might have been no Hell the day,’ but the seer did not notice her words. He went on, ‘And then he asked the Devil what would he take for the souls of all the people. And the Devil said nothing would satisfy him but the blood of a virgin’s son, so he got that and then the gates of Hell were opened.’ He understood the story, it seems, as if it were some riddling old folk-tale.

‘I have seen Hell myself. I had a sight of it one time in a vision. It had a very high wall around it, all of metal, and an archway, and a straight walk into it, just like what ’ud be leading into a gentleman’s orchard, but the edges were not trimmed with box, but with red-hot metal. And inside the wall there were cross-walks, and I’m not sure that there was to the right, but to the left there were five great furnaces, and they full of souls kept there with great chains. So I turned short and went away, and in turning I looked again at the wall, and I could see no end to it.

‘And another time I saw Purgatory. It seemed to be in a level place, and no walls around it, but it all one bright blaze, and the souls standing in it. And they suffer near as much as in Hell, only there are no devils with them there, and they have the hope of Heaven.

‘And I heard a call to me from there, “Help me to come out ’o this!” And when I looked it was a man I used to know in the Army, an Irishman, and from this county, and I believe him to be a descendant of King O’Connor of Athenry.

‘So I stretched out my hand first, but then I called out, “I’d be burned in the flames before I could get within three yards of you.” So then he said, “Well, help me with your prayers,” and so I do.

‘And Father Connellan says the same thing, to help the dead with your prayers, and he’s a very clever man to make a sermon, and has a great deal of cures made with the Holy Water he brought back from Lourdes.

List of images:

Title Image:

Joyce (right): https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/james-joyce-reading-his-work-1924-1929/

Yeats (left): https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/92/William_Butler_Yeats_by_Elliott_%26_Fry.jpg

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Ring of Kerry by Sharkshock

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