

James Joyce, *Ulysses*, and the Politics of Early Twentieth-Century Ireland**Remarks by Ronan Gargan, Ambassador of Ireland to Hungary**

*HJEAS***Introduction of Ambassador Gargan by the Chief Editor**

The thematic diversity and wealth of our fall issue is further enhanced with the opportunity that we present Irish Ambassador to Hungary Ronan Gargan's lecture on James Joyce given at the University of Debrecen in 2022 on the occasion of the university's celebration of the 100th anniversary of the publication of *Ulysses*. *HJEAS* is delighted to be able to share the lecture, which will hold special interest not only for Joyceans but also for anyone curious about the role of an Irish ambassador in the twenty-first century. Ambassador Gargan typifies the Irish diplomatic corps in the experience of many of us in that he has a deep commitment to sharing and spreading Irish culture including Irish literature as seen in this highly informative lecture on Joyce in the context of early twentieth-century Ireland.

Ambassador Gargan rightly describes Joyce as "one of Ireland's most accomplished and best loved writers," which while true in the twenty-first century, was not always so. Joyce's early reception in the post-Civil War Free State of Ireland was anything but cordial. *Ulysses* alarmed those in power both in government and in the Church and both excoriated the book repeatedly, but as the shopkeeper said to the foreign visitor about Joyce's novel: "Do you know that Ireland is the only country that never banned *Ulysses*?" "No," said the surprised tourist, "I didn't." "And do you know why we never banned it?" followed up the shopkeeper, "why? because we never read it!" It took *Ulysses*' growing global audience, especially in America to awaken both the sleeping giant of Irish criticism that now dominates the academic study of *Ulysses* and the tourist-hungry Irish travel and hospitality industries that today relentlessly exploit Joyce and his works. As Ambassador Gargan emphasizes, however, Joyce today has found the readers he sought in his fellow countrymen and women as well as in the world-wide audience for his literature that in so many ways remade the short story, novel, and fantastic fiction in English.

Donald E Morse, Chief Editor

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Ronan Gargan, Ambassador of Ireland to Hungary

I am delighted to be back at the University of Debrecen to present a celebration of James Joyce, one of Ireland's most accomplished and best loved writers whose impact has been global.

There is no question that James Joyce and his seminal work, *Ulysses* (1922), has had a major and lasting impact on the world, not just in literary terms but also in terms of the important messages that the novel contains. Just as Joyce was writing in a time of war and turbulence in Europe over one hundred years ago, we have the outbreak of war once again on the continent of Europe. President Putin's war of aggression and the turbulence it has caused has reminded us of the basic values and principles every free country holds dear. Many of these values are espoused by James Joyce in *Ulysses*, which some see as an Irish book but is in fact a European book and a book that is as relevant today as it was when published one hundred years ago. In writing the book, Joyce was very much influenced by what was going on around him, when both Ireland and the rest of Europe were experiencing turbulent times. Therefore, today, I thought I would talk about James Joyce, *Ulysses*, and the politics of early twentieth-century Ireland, a highly contested and turbulent time in the history of Ireland.

Turn-of-the-century Ireland became James Joyce's lifelong preoccupation in that he set three major works, *Dubliners* (1914), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), and *Ulysses* during that time. He left Ireland for Trieste in 1904 and made only a handful of return visits during the remaining thirty-seven years of his life. His decision to focus such attention on early twentieth-century Ireland suggests that he acquired a fascination with the country he left, a fascination that never left him.

"Ivy Day in the Committee Room" was Joyce's favorite story from *Dubliners*. Why was that? In my view, part of the reason was his intense interest in the political career of Charles Stewart Parnell and its protracted aftermath, which I will return to later. It would be a mistake to see Joyce as an artist airily remote from political concerns. Although Stephen Dedalus, armed with an acute sense of intellectual superiority, is based on Joyce's youthful self, the mature Joyce was not like that. In fact, he took an intense, gritty interest in the life of the country of his birth and upbringing.

While living in Trieste, he wrote a series of articles in a local newspaper which showed him to have a comprehensive knowledge of Irish affairs from a

broadly nationalistic point of view. If I had to position Joyce on the Irish political spectrum, I would put him somewhere between the Parnellite tradition and Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin, which was founded in 1905. Griffith does not appear in *Ulysses*, but he is name-checked there quite a few times. For the sake of clarity, it is important to know that Griffith's Sinn Féin had little in common with the party that was transformed into a national movement in the wake of the Easter Rising of 1916. In fact Griffith took political inspiration from Hungary. His book, *The Resurrection of Hungary*, argued that the dual monarchy system between Austria and Hungary, could be a model for achieving Ireland's autonomy from Britain.

Joyce's understanding of the public life of Ireland comes out in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room." That knowledge probably came through his father, John Stanislaus Joyce, who was a fervent supporter of Parnell. Known as "the Chief" and as Ireland's "uncrowned King," Parnell was a political colossus. In a piece published in Trieste, Joyce, writing about Parnell, referred to the "extraordinary personality of a leader who, with no forensic gift or original political talent, forced the greatest English politician (Gladstone) to follow his orders." He added that "the influence that Parnell exercised over the Irish people defies the critic's analysis." It is hard to disagree with Joyce's assessment. Parnell attained an unrivalled political ascendancy during the 1880s as leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, which represented Irish interests at the Westminster parliament. Parnell's Party sought a form of self-government for Ireland known as Home Rule. In 1886, Parnell persuaded Prime Minister W.E. Gladstone, with whom he had forged a political alliance, to support Home Rule. Gladstone's Home Rule Bill split his Liberal Party and then came to grief in the House of Lords. Joyce took a cynical view of Gladstone and had an astute appraisal of Parnell. In Joyce's estimation, "Gladstonian liberalism was an inconstant algebraic symbol whose coefficient was the political pressure of the moment and whose exponent was political advantage."

Joyce's take on Parnell recognized his capacity to unify different strands of Irish life. As he put it: "Parnell, convinced that such a liberalism would only yield to force, united every element of national life behind him, and set out on a march along the borders of insurrection." There is an echo of this analysis in 'Ivy Day' with its reference to "hillsiders and fenians." In Henchy's dismissive view, "half of them are in the pay of the Castle." One "certain little nobleman with a cock-eye" is targeted as someone "that'd sell his country for fourpence and thank the Almighty Christ he had a country to sell." The Fenian tradition had its day in 1916, two years after the belated publication of *Dubliners* in which "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" was included.

Parnell's career came to a dramatic end when he was named in a divorce suit involving a nationalist MP, Captain O'Shea, and his wife, Katherine, with whom Parnell had conducted a clandestine affair. Parnell lost the support of a majority of his fellow Irish Party MPs who split into Parnellite and anti-Parnellite factions. That bitter divide within nationalist Ireland continued until 1900 when the Irish Party was re-united under the leadership of John Redmond.

Although Parnell died when Joyce was just nine years old, his name and legacy reverberates through his work—the Christmas dinner scene in *A Portrait of an Artist As a Young Man*, the multiple references to Parnell in *Ulysses*, and in “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” in *Dubliners*. In this story, we encounter three strands of Irish political life: canvassers for the nationalist party candidate, “Tricky Dicky” Tierney, a publican standing for the Irish Parliamentary Party; Colgan, a working man, who may be based on 1916 leader James Connolly and whose case is argued by Joe Hynes; and the unionist tradition represented by Crofton, who, not having a candidate from his own party, is supporting Tierney so as to help defeat the more radical option, Colgan. Joyce gives us an insight into the decay of the recently-united Irish Party. Its candidate's canvassers have no great enthusiasm for Tierney. Their main concern is that they be paid for their efforts on his behalf: “I wish he'd turn up with the spondulics” and “how does he expect us to work for him if he won't stump up?” The highlight of the canvassers' day comes with a delivery of some bottles of stout courtesy of their candidate. The Party's Committee Room on Wicklow Street is depicted as a miserable place, cold and “denuded,” with bare walls.

Joe Hynes, a character who will appear again in *Ulysses*, where he plays a significant role in my favorite chapter, the “Cyclops” episode, speaks with greater passion about the socialist candidate, Colgan, “a good honest bricklayer” and “a plain, honest man with no hunker-sliding” someone “who is not going to drag the honour of Dublin in the mud to please a German monarch.” This brings out varying attitudes towards the British monarchy, and in particular whether the impending visit of King Edward VII ought to elicit an Address of Welcome from Dublin Corporation. That was a controversial issue also during Queen Victoria's visit to Ireland in 1900 when the Corporation, which had a nationalist majority, voted thirty to twenty-two in favor of delivering an Address to the visiting monarch. Here, responding to Mr. Lyons (who may be “bantam” Lyons who appears several times in *Ulysses*), Henchy takes a benign view of the King, describing him as “an ordinary knockabout like you and me. He's fond of his glass of grog and he's a bit of a rake perhaps.”

In *Ulysses*, the drinkers in Barney Kiernan's pub indulge in a more trenchant critique of King Edward: "There's a bloody sight more pox than pax about that boyo." Here, Hynes comments that if Parnell was alive "we'd have no talk of an address of welcome." This brings the memory of Parnell into focus and the story concludes with an emotional rendition by Hynes of a poem he wrote on the Death of Parnell:

He is dead. Our Uncrowned King is dead.
O, Erin, mourn with grief and woe
For he lies dead whom the fell gang
Of modern hypocrites laid low.

The day that brings us Freedom's reign.
And on that day may Erin well
Pledge in the cup she lifts to Joy
One grief – the memory of Parnell.

Everyone in the committee room can rally around the memory of Parnell who had been dead eleven years in 1902 when "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" is set. Even the unionist, Crofton, respects Parnell because he was a gentleman. Henchy sums up Parnell's achievement more punchily: "He was the only man that could keep that bag of cats in order."

But what was Joyce's relationship with Ireland? As a writer, he had little time for the Yeats-inspired Irish literary revival that informed the rise of nationalism in Ireland and which provided the artistic commentary to the turbulent time that was early twentieth-century Ireland. Joyce saw the work of Irish literary revival as backward looking and insular. As he wrote in *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*: "Michael Robartes (a reference to W.B. Yeats) remembers forgotten beauty, and, when his arms wrap her round, he presses in his arms the loveliness which has long faded from the world. Not this. Not at all. I desire to press in my arms the loveliness which has not yet come into the world."

Yet despite Joyce's determination to break away from Ireland, his greatest work is firmly rooted in the country of his birth. Indeed, *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*, and *Ulysses* are all set in Ireland in the years immediately prior to Joyce's departure. It seems as if Joyce, despite the thirty-seven years he spent outside of Ireland, accumulated the inspiration for his great work during the twenty-two years he spent growing up in Dublin, and especially in the four years prior to his departure.

The finest writing in *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* comes as Joyce prepares to leave Ireland. In the novel's final chapter, Joyce debates those issues of nationality, language, and religion that defined early twentieth-century Ireland. Joyce saw these elements of Irish life as "nets" designed to trap him, but he was determined not to allow himself to be trapped. As he put it: "When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets." The novel's resounding final passage includes much powerful writing: "O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race."

Writing about his attitude to Ireland, Joyce explained that: "My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis." His writings, however, offer a portrait of Ireland as it prepared for the great changes that took place between 1916 and 1922 and of the political tensions that swirled around early twentieth-century Dublin. *Ulysses in particular* contains a compelling portrait of early twentieth-century Ireland. Especially in the Cyclops episode, the political life of early twentieth-century Ireland comes alive through a series of vivid exchanges between the characters in Barney Kiernan's pub in the aptly named, Little Britain Street where Joyce pits Bloom, his cosmopolitan outsider, with his Hungarian-Jewish background, against the pub's other customers with their more conventional nationalist attitudes. Joyce has some fun at the expense of Arthur Griffith, claiming that Bloom had given Griffith the idea of Ireland aspiring to emulate Hungary by acquiring effective independence as part of a dual monarchy—a reference to Griffith's Book: *The Resurrection of Hungary*.

Early twentieth-century Dublin became such a productive source for Joyce's work in part because it was a society in transition. The "nets" of language, nationality, and religion, which Joyce left Ireland in order to escape, also made the Dublin of his youth a source of fascination for him. Great writing rarely emerges from settled, satisfied societies. Discontentment provides far more fertile ground for creative impulses. By the time Joyce published *Ulysses* in 1922 the land he left behind had been "changed utterly" as Yeats famously put it. The "centre of paralysis" Joyce had fled in 1904, went on to conduct a revolution that shook an Empire and led eventually to the Ireland's independence.

James Joyce was not always popular in his homeland and had an ambivalent relationship with the Ireland of his time. Unlike Yeats, who

wanted to be buried in his beloved Sligo, Joyce's remains lie permanently in Zurich. Although, by the end of his life he famously said "When I die, Dublin will be written on my heart."

Modern Ireland has come to revere Joyce. Changing Irish attitudes towards Joyce reflect changes in Irish society. We now see ourselves and our country reflected intriguingly in his work. I would trace our renewed national enthusiasm for Joyce's work back to the centenary of Joyce's birth in 1982, and to the fictional centenary of *Ulysses* in 2004, both of which were marked with great gusto. In recent decades, Bloomsday has become a popular event on Ireland's cultural calendar and internationally, including here in Hungary.

As a final thought, I always found it interesting that the last three words of *Ulysses* are not "I will. Yes" (the famous final words of Molly Bloom's soliloquy), but "Trieste-Zurich-Paris," the three cities where the novel was written between 1916 and 1921. Joyce's decision to specify where the novel was written tells me that it is a European novel with Dublin as its source of inspiration. Joyce wanted Ireland to become more European. I believe that he would be comfortable with today's Ireland which is proudly and thoroughly Irish while also embracing a European identity, most concretely demonstrated through our membership of the European Union.

Go raibh mile maith agat. [Thank you]

Ronan Gargan, Ambassador of Ireland to Hungary