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TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

The Curse of the Ballyhoura Hills: Imagery of National  
Myth in Dunsany and Joyce

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## ABSTRACT

James Joyce stands as a one of the most internationalized literary figures of the twentieth century. His voluntary exile led to divergent debates over his Irish identity. This study will pay close attention to the paradox involved in the convulsed relationship of the writer with Irish society and mythology, taking into account that his homeland was always in the spotlight of his novels. Similarly, Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18<sup>th</sup> Baron of Dunsany, the pioneer of fantastic literature and “weird fiction”, seems to show a detached attitude towards specific Celtic motifs and Irish matters. Both authors lived in a period in which Irish mythology was almost a *must* for any author who intended to be considered genuinely Irish in the literary sphere of the time. Thus, departing from the hypothesis that Irish mythology functions as a structuring motif underlying both Dunsany’s and Joyce’s narratives, I will examine the role of this mythological imagery in the authors’ *bildungsromans*. The final goal of this dissertation is to prompt a reevaluation of the identity and location of both authors in the Irish literary tradition.

Keywords: National Myth, Irish Mythology, Identity, James Joyce, Lord Dunsany, Revival.

## RESUMEN

James Joyce destaca como una de las figuras más internacionalizadas del siglo XX. Su exilio voluntario dio pie a debates dispares acerca de la identidad irlandesa del escritor. Este estudio prestará especial atención a la paradoja que supone la relación, para muchos convulsa, del escritor con la sociedad irlandesa y su mitología, cuando, no obstante, su obra tuvo siempre en el punto de mira a su país natal. A su vez, en sus obras literarias, Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, XVIII Barón de Dunsany, pionero en el campo de la literatura fantástica y la denominada “ficción extraña” parece dar muestras de una actitud imparcial y distante respecto al simbolismo mitológico celta y específicamente irlandés. Ambos autores vivieron una época en la que el uso de dicha mitología era prácticamente imprescindible para cualquier autor que aspirase a ser considerado genuinamente irlandés por el ámbito literario del momento. Por lo tanto, partiendo de la hipótesis de que el mito nacional irlandés subyace a la obra de ambos escritores como motivo estructural, pretendo llevar a cabo un análisis que ayude a esclarecer el papel del imaginario mitológico irlandés en los *bildungsromans* de ambos autores. El objetivo final de este Trabajo de Fin de Grado es mover a la reconsideración tanto de la identidad como del lugar de estos escritores en la tradición literaria irlandesa.

Palabras clave: Mito nacional, Mitología irlandesa, Identidad, James Joyce, Lord Dunsany, Renacimiento irlandés.



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## Abbreviations

*CWW* Dunsany, Lord. *The Curse of the Wise Woman*.

*PA* Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man*.

*SH* ---. *Stephen Hero*.

*U* ---. *Ulysses*.





The lion, heard at night, is not more the voice of Africa, nor the nightingale the voice of romance, than the cry of the curlew seems to me to be the voice of Ireland. It utters a message so far and free from the shallowness of all phrases, that I like to think of it living, as surely it will, and nesting still in the heather, after all the follies of man. And the message? I do not know. But the messages that can never be put into words seem to me to be always the deepest, and those that words can at once express are seldom of any help; so that we seem to be sadly without guidance.

(Dunsany *The Curse of the Wise Woman* 486).



## Introduction

Ireland, the country of “Saints and Sages,”<sup>1</sup> home to James Augustine Aloysius Joyce (1882-1941) and Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18<sup>th</sup> Baron of Dunsany (1878-1957), presents in the definition of its very own literature a complication that has always haunted writers and critics alike: the definition of what it meant to be Irish. Both authors lived in a convulsive period of Irish history, in which the concepts of Irish nationhood and identity were still being forged. The attempt to locate the position of both authors in terms of Irishness and Irish nationalism is vexed by the difficulty to ascertain the concept of identity, and most importantly, “communal identity,” in their works. Moreover, if there is something that characterized the majority of the literary production of the period is the use of myth and folklore. There was an actual need to construct Irish identity in relation to national myth. In a country deeply ingrained in lore and unwritten history, it would be certain to admit it could not be otherwise.

In Joyce, the “mythical method,” to use Eliot’s terminology (175), has been studied in detail in an attempt to place the author in relation to the contemporaries of the Celtic Twilight. However, the implications of the actual use of Irish myth have been shrouded by the need to determine his position within or outside the domains of Revivalism and at a universal level. Similarly, the place of Dunsany in the Irish literary trends of the turn of the century remains unclear. The author’s work deviates from the traditional conception of mythology, and the difficulty to interpret the “pieces” and fill gap between him and the Irish literary Renaissance has led some critics even to dispute his status as an *Irish* author. In both writers, the embedded meanings of Irish myth are sometimes veiled behind the dormant dualism of the pseudo-dogmatic affirmations of the narrative voice or the

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<sup>1</sup>From James Joyce’s essay: “Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages” (1907) (*Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*).

characters. The ambiguity in the authors' works requires a contextual reading to understand the centrality of Irish history in the crafting of two novels hinging upon Irish mythology.

While the literary panorama tried to use the remnants of a quasi-lost Celtic, or rather Gaelic culture, to reconstruct the image of a country struggling for independence and offer Ireland "ideal images of a legendary heroic past" (Watson 148), the complexity of the historical context hindered the definition of Irishness. The authors lived in a country of fragmented identities in which religion and politics constituted a binding axis. As Willard Potts explains, there were two different Irelands: Catholic and Protestant, or people and Ascendancy; two factions the Revival tried to accommodate together (I). The division in the Irish population dates back to the increase of Protestant inhabitants in the island during the Norman Invasions (1169) and stretches all the way through the introduction of the Reformation in 1536 and the subsequent expropriation of land from the Catholics by the English settlers. Oliver Cromwell carried out a "transference of wealth and power from Catholics to Protestants," thereby creating a "protestant upper class" (Clarke 203). The Penal Laws that followed in the eighteenth century emphasized the situation of social unrest. The Catholics had to cope with severe restrictions that led to an oppressive state of loss of traditions and identity; the enforcement of Protestantism was the only hope for those who tried to seize the remains of a fading power.

The beginning of the nineteenth century was not uplifting for the Catholic morale; the Act of Union (1801) deprived Ireland from any freedom they had before (MacCarthy 11) and the Irish condition of suppression and cleavage became a cornerstone of Joyce's "nightmare of history" (*U* 28). Nevertheless, the Irish sentiment and identity did not fade out completely, and the century harbored figures that enlivened the dream of independence. First, Daniel O'Connell with the Roman Catholic Relief Act (1829) facilitated the access of the Catholics to the British Parliament. Later on, both Charles Stewart Parnell, the uncrowned king of Ireland—whose downfall James Joyce felt as a treason of his countrymen—and Gladstone, with the Home Rule, contributed to subserve the Irish aims of self-government (Watson 153). For many, as it was the case of the Young Irelanders, the progression towards the Irish Free State was necessarily bound to song and literature (MacCarthy 11). The second half of the nineteenth century was marked by the Great

Famine, emigration and constant insurrections (Livermore 29). However, despite the calamities that befell the island and the subsequent national trauma, the aforementioned figures stirred up the embers of an unrealized longing for a reconstruction of Irish identity and inspired the writers of the Revival.

The problem issued from the writings of this particular period was that the concept of *truly* Irish literature was no longer clear. Important personalities such as the poet and revolutionary leader Thomas MacDonagh pleaded that Anglo-Irish literature could not be considered “Irish”, for Irish literature, in order to reflect people’s costumes and speech, should only be written in Gaelic (MacCarthy *Search* 68). Similarly, the father of the Irish Free State, Éamon de Valera, as a member of the League, reimagined an idealized and sentimental Gaelic future for Ireland (MacCarthy *Identities* 80); this will be a recurrent topic in Dunsany’s work. On the part of the Anglo-Irish writers of the Revival, such as W.B. Yeats, one of the most influential Irish writers and founder of the Abbey Theater and the Irish Academy of Letters, literature should have an Irish theme and location for him to grant other writers a membership as Academicians—that is, those whose works were “Irish in character or subject” (Yeats and Shaw 9), instead of a regular membership as Associate.<sup>2</sup> These ideas provoked a literary reaction in Lord Dunsany, who wrote his masterpiece *The Curse of the Wise Woman* (1933) in response to Yeats’ avowal. Likewise, James Joyce brought the Revivalist image of Ireland into question; the *Dubliners* cross-examined the aesthetic value of certain publications which, according to him, were focused on political propaganda and blather sentimentality rather than on literature itself. Joyce, just like W.K. Magee, thought that the writers of the Twilight did not give “offence by any too direct utterance on the central problem of Irish life, the religious situation” (Eglinton 322); a problem that despite his sporadic participation in the Revival, Dunsany addressed in his work as well.

However, as Potts points out, “if Joyce really were indifferent [to the Revivalist ideas], would he have taken the trouble to write a piece proclaiming his indifference, paid to have it printed, then arranged to have it distributed to relevant parties?” (2). Similarly,

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<sup>2</sup> The only requirement for a membership as an Associate was to be of Irish birth or descent (Yeats and Shaw 9).

would have Dunsany explicitly stated his lack of concern (Joshi 184) and yet be a desultory contributor to the Revival? And therefore, could Joyce, with his presumed indifference, and Dunsany, with his label as an unconcerned fantasy author, somehow share the Revivalist aspirations? The analysis of the implicit dualism both authors present in the treatment of the situation of Ireland and the use of myth in their works may contain the answer to their position, in terms of identity, in the *Irish* literary tradition.

### State of the Art

James Joyce has always been the subject of study of many investigations; the bibliography on Joyce's studies is widely enlarged every year. Nevertheless, in relation to the topic herein analyzed, the multitude of academic papers that focus their attention on the construction and function of Greek mythology, especially on the myth of Daedalus and Icarus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), is remarkable. Nonetheless, there is a void left in the examination of purely Celtic or Irish mythology and its relationship with Irishness and Revivalism in the novel. Marian Eide's research article *The Woman of the Ballyhoura Hills: James Joyce and the Politics of Creativity* (1998) provides a survey of the role of the Ballyhoura woman and the politics of the period. In addition, Watson's *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival* (1979) serves as an introduction to the use of myth in the author, and Willard Pott's *Two Irelands* (2000) offers a revision of the main lines of research that could be extracted from Joyce's corpus in terms of politics, history, culture and mythology.

The analysis of Lord Dunsany constitutes a fruitful counterpoint. The author's works are still understudied; the scholar S.T. Joshi stands as a prominent figure in a field in which a wider bibliography is still to be developed. All of the works that investigate Dunsany's main topics and the crafting of his mythology do not devote more than a couple of pages to the study of his masterpiece: *The Curse of the Wise Woman* (1933). Joshi's book, *Lord Dunsany, Master of Anglo-Irish Imagination* (1995) and his collection of papers

on the Irish author, *Critical Essays on Lord Dunsany* (2013), reconstruct the vital themes explored in Dunsany's opus. Besides, the scholar's reference book *A Comprehensive Bibliography* (2014) helps to expand the knowledge on the existing works related to the author. Finally, Darrell Schweitzer's *Pathways to Elfland: The Writings of Lord Dunsany* (1989)—a thorough study of the subject matters of Plunkett's stories—and the renowned biography written by Mark Amory (1972) complement the study of an author yet to be explored.

### **Methodology and Objectives**

Having set out the topics I would like to explore in this dissertation and the main studies that have been carried out so far, I would like to present the purpose of my study. The main objective of this dissertation is to determine to what extent national myth and Celtic imagery function as a structuring point at issue in Lord Dunsany's and James Joyce's portrayal of Ireland, which was envisioned by some people as a paralyzed society. I have selected Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man* (1916) as a basis for my analysis: the aesthetic discourse of the novel imbues the mythical symbols with an inner duality, which will be hopefully disclosed with the examination of specific images. The novel's compactness, intensity, and semi-autobiographical mode of narration make of it an appropriate choice for the present study. Taking as a reference the social and political context in which the work was written, I will start the analysis with an investigation of alien mythological sources that will help determine the way myth structures the plot. Following a mythological, socio-historical approach, I will then proceed to a detailed examination of the actual use of Celtic images in the story. Additionally, the posthumously-published first version of *A Portrait*, *Stephen Hero* (1944), and Joyce's critical and political essays will assist the study.

Likewise, Plunkett's wide oeuvre and the diversity of themes enclosed in it, ranging from a mythopoeic world to war fiction, oblige to limit the scope of the analysis. The semi-

autobiographical short novel *The Curse of the Wise Woman* (1933) differs from Joyce's analogue in the aesthetic appreciation of nature compared to the ostensible urbanity of the latter, in which nature and myth underlies the narrative. Taking into account how the novel implied a turning point in the author's work and ideas, and a close examination of the underlying political situation, I will analyze the main religious and mythological symbols that provide the novel with the aforementioned ambiguity.

The organic nature of the present dissertation requires little subdivision in its structure; each author constitutes a homogenous network of interconnected elements and notions that demands a unitary reading. That is the reason why there are two main chapters, one devoted to each author, followed by a conclusion to bring together the main features analyzed in the works of both writers. In order to facilitate the location of different topics and symbols, an index has been created that will help the reader find specific elements in both authors.

Therefore, taking into account previous studies, my analysis of the use of mythological material intends to set the ground for a reassessment of the place of these authors within the Irish literary tradition. The examination of the semi-autobiographical novels of both writers will hopefully help elucidate the role of Irish myth—as a positive and evaluative leitmotif—in the construction of a genuine Irish identity separated both from the literature of the colonizer and the ongoing pronounced Revivalist framework.



## James Joyce: From Greece to Tara and Back to Dublin

In his essay “Ulysses, Order and Myth” (1923), T.S. Eliot stated that the use of myth in James Joyce’s masterpiece is a “continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity” (Eliot 483). Indeed, the modernist author brings the ancient Greek heroes back to life, and provides them with a renewed Irish identity. The same use of the mythical method<sup>3</sup> can be appreciated in his earlier work *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (*PA*), in which it is possible to see how the employment of mythology has a structuring function. The meanings embedded in Joyce’s mythical symbols reinforce the depiction of reality. By the time Stephen, the hero of the novel, starts to develop his artistic awareness, Ireland is striving for independence, and the literary panorama of the period is imbued with nationalism in its uttermost expression through the use of Irish folklore. Besides, the consequences of the history of the country were deeply rooted in the society of the early twentieth century, and the trauma provoked by the famines, emigration, insurrections, and oppression resulted in the fragmented society represented in Joyce’s semi-autobiographical work. Therefore, the analysis of the different representations of myth in *A Portrait* will help elucidate the function of ancient lore in the depiction of national myth and identity in a period in which the concept of “Irish identity” constituted the root of the problem (Watson 14).

The society of *A Portrait*, like the one from *Dubliners*, is populated by archetypical characters whose personalities match the different ways of thinking of the Irish people of that particular period (Cooper 13). Joyce describes Stephen’s perception of the characters of the novel, and their political and religious attitude are filtered and pondered by the young Irishman’s critical eye. Stephen’s artistic endeavor seems to be in direct opposition to the

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<sup>3</sup> Term used by T.S. Eliot in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth.” (1975)

aims of characters such as Hughes and Davin, who epitomize the nationalist points of view of that period.

The prevalent literary scene of those days was engaged with the political views of the nationalist body. The Gaelic League and the Irish Literary Revival were at their highest point, thus authors such as Yeats and Lady Gregory resorted to the heroes of the old religion and folklore in an attempt to construct a genuine Irish identity separated from the imperial power (Hawley 253). The Revivalist authors decided to portray the glories of their country in their works. In order to do so, they attempted to reconstruct the “lost” image of Ireland taking as a reference not the real world, but a glorified version of history and society. The poor and humble Irish peasant became the hero and the Irish language was often the medium to convey their ideas. In *A Portrait* and its earlier unpublished version *Stephen Hero* (*SH*), Stephen interacts with Davin—Madden in *SH*—and shows a critical attitude towards the ideas of his friend. Stephen considers Davin a “dull witted loyal serf” (*PA* 210), and as he shapes his artistic mind, the sympathies towards the Revivalist’s ways are weakened by the importance he places on beauty and individuality; Stephen states that the authors of the Twilight “had ever drawn out a line of beauty and to its unwieldy tales” (*PA* 210). As the story develops, it is possible to see how myth is used to carry out a demythologization of the identity of Ireland and the Irish peasant.

Through Stephen’s eyes, the reader is allowed to grasp Joyce’s concern about the way his contemporaries attempted to mold the concept of Irishness. The Irish author states the need of conveying an image of Ireland separated from what he calls his fatherland’s “arrogant mistress” (Joyce *Political* 146). However, Joyce also expresses his preoccupation with the fact that the idealized mythical method used by the authors of the Irish Renaissance may not only contribute to the impeding social paralysis Joyce’s portrays in all his works, but also, authors such as Lady Gregory run the risk of provoking an “infantilization” of Irish society (Joyce *Political* 74). In the same way that Stephen questions Davin’s ways, Joyce worries about the fact that the expression of an accurate and passionate “national temper” in Ireland has become a synonym of good literature, even if it lacks “literary sincerity” (Joyce *Political* 71).

Joyce's approach to the depiction of national identity departs from the "Cuchulanoid"<sup>4</sup> technique of glorifying Ireland (Watson 33). The author opts for "obliging the reader to contemplate what Ireland is and what it means to be Irish in the early twentieth century" (Loeffler 30). Hence, in the Irish journey from childhood to maturity, Stephen faces and describes the harsh reality of the traces of the national trauma without renouncing to the use of various mythological sources that underlie and give meaning and shape to the story itself. Nevertheless, the marked egotism in the hero's attitude towards his fellow citizens has led many critics to consider Joyce's knowledge and intentions as an accusatory or detached attitude compared to the one of his contemporary Revivalists (Joyce *Political* xxvii).

Many critics have studied the way the Irish author constructs his *bildungsroman*; authors such as Centola and Kenner notice how the turning points that determine the fate of the artist are expressed by way of epiphanies at the end of each chapter. Therefore, the whole novel can be read as a regular progression of "wavelike patterns" (Centola and Kenner 94) that leads both the reader and the young artist to a final moment of revelation. The mythical sense of quest and the structure of constant achievement and failure are present throughout Stephen's development as an artist. Each chapter can be compared to an attempt to fly until the ultimate decision of attempting a final flight at the end of chapter five. The identification of Stephen Dedalus with Daedalus, the Greek craftsman, has always been present in most pieces of criticism dealing with the use of myth in *A Portrait*. "The sustaining power behind the young man's rebellion is explicitly the old artificer Daedalus" (O'Leary 74); the symbols related to Greek mythology can be seen from the very first page of the book, and as the hero develops, the analogies that connect Stephen to Daedalus and Icarus strengthen the message enclosed in the plot.

At the beginning of the story, we are presented with a young Stephen who is starting to perceive the world around him. The narrative voice recalls a tale his father used to tell him, and even at that early stage of his life, the hero identifies himself with a baby "tuckoo"<sup>5</sup> (*PA* 1). Stephen is granted his "wings" at the very beginning of his life, and as he

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<sup>4</sup> From the Irish mythological hero of the Ulster Cycle "Cúchulainn".

<sup>5</sup> Or "Cukoo" (Bates 286)

grows as an artist and gives shape to his own ideas, he begins to learn how to use them. In this sense, the problem he faces is not having the possibility to fly, but a problem of identity. Stephen feels alienated from Dublin society. As a little boy, when he is asked what sort of name Dedalus is by a classmate in Clongowes, he finds himself unable to answer because his name is different to the name of any other classmate; he knows he is *Daedalus*, but at that point of his life he is not able to understand who he really is. However, right after that particular moment, Stephen identifies his father as a “gentleman” (PA 3). This moment in Stephen’s life is one of the most significant passages in terms of identity. Simon Dedalus is not regarded as “Daedalus” like Stephen is, he is labeled as a random gentleman instead; Stephen’s father is deprived of his identity. As Farrington states, “[t]he economic and intellectual conditions that prevail in [Ireland] do not permit the development of individuality” (Burr 502), and the fact that Stephen is provided with an individual identity different to that of the rest of the characters will determine the way he develops his ideas. From the very beginning, Stephen is regarded as the artificer. The roles of the Daedalus myth are reversed and the son takes on the mythical identity of the father: “the father fails in being a kind of initiatory priest who should guide his son Stephen into the larger adult world” (Maudhir 520).

As the first chapter finishes, Stephen starts to define his identity. There is an internal development from the moment when he is asked about his surname at the beginning of chapter to the end of the same episode, when Daedalus attempts his first flight. Even if it happens very early in his life, the analysis of the consequences of this passage reveal the extent to which Stephen’s fate is sealed at the end of each chapter, especially in the first one. Stephen remembers a Christmas dinner and the strong argument between Dante, Stephen’s Catholic religious guide, and his father and uncle, who act as Parnell’s advocates. The argument shows how Dante rejects the figure of Parnell and justifies the Church turning its back on him. Through the figure of Dante, Joyce portrays the deep connection between Church and politics in Ireland; the Catholic woman justifies the actions of the Church regardless of the consequences they might have for the country. Hence, even if Parnell could have meant Ireland’s “salvation” in terms of independence, she holds up to the premise that “God and morality and religion come first” (PA 40).

Stephen is just a child, thus he does not participate in the argument, but the clarity of his memory shows the great impact the quarrel has on him. Right after the description of the Christmas dinner, back in Clogowes, Stephen receives an unfair punishment by a member of the Church, Father Dolan. Stephen does no longer see the figure of the priest as the bearer of a “supreme” knowledge as he did when he affirms that a clergyman “knew more than Dante [just] because he was a priest” (*PA* 6). The yet-to-be hero sees himself deprived of his identity when he is compared to the school troublemakers and Father Dolan is not able to remember his name. Unlike Stephen’s lack of assertiveness at the Christmas dinner, the dispossession of identity allows him to identify the injustice involved in the priest’s actions. Stephen experiences the first change that begins to shape his individuality. Stephen sees how a figure of the Church sentences both the sacrilegious boys and him to suffer the same punishment. Therefore, the young Irishman restates his identity as a hero through a denunciation of Father Dolan’s misjudgment to the rector of the school:

The great men in the history had names like that and nobody made fun of them. It was his own name that he should have made fun of if he wanted to make fun. Dolan: it was like the name of a woman who washed clothes. (*PA* 60)

The fact that the incident with Father Dolan happens just after the description of the Christmas dinner and the way Stephen connects both episodes in his mind suggest a direct relationship between both moments of his life. Stephen identifies himself with Parnell; he recognizes himself as the leader, “leader of the Yorkists!” (*PA* 56); the hero sees himself as the model citizen betrayed by the Catholic Church. The figure of Parnell has a great influence on him in the same way the Irish revolutionary man had a great influence on Joyce himself. Just after Joyce left Clongowes, he expressed his sorrow for his death, and in the poem “Et Tu Healy” (1891), he compared Parnell with Julius Caesar and the Irishmen with Brutus (Joyce *Political* xliii). For the first time in the novel, Daedalus defies the divine authority. The connection between these two passages constitutes one of the most significant instances that explain Stephen’s self-imposed exile. Stephen, as the artificer, wants to keep his individuality to be able to provide his country with his artistic creation. Nevertheless, just like Theseus, he needs to slay the Minotaur to be able to extend his

wings and fly away like Icarus. Stephen's identification of the Catholic Church as one of the reasons for the paralysis in Ireland becomes more noticeable as he drifts away from his Jesuit vocation.

The hero makes this statement for the first time with the vindication of his rights after the issue with Father Dolan, and as he grows spiritually and finally rejects a religious life, he manages to openly acknowledge the censor's hand of the Church. "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" (*PA* 238). Stephen realizes he needs to reject oaths to his patria and religion to be able to keep his identity as an artificer and produce his theory of art (*SH* 77). *Stephen Hero* provides the reader with a final comment on this issue: a breakout girl from an asylum is found drowned in the river, and Stephen points out the presence of a Catholic excerpt of a magazine floating in the water. The emphasis put in the connection between the magazine and the drowning of the Irish girl reinforces Joyce's view of the Church as a force which *drowns* any possibility of breaking free and becoming independent. As happens in Dunsany, the hopeless character is drowned by her own "nation"; an image that is emphasized by the possible meanings of "drowning" as a return to the mother (Jamison 139).

The rejection of the oaths to Ireland does not mean an actual rejection to his identity as an Irishman. The young Stephen does not recognize Ireland as a colony. The list included in his Clongowes' geography book places Ireland in between County Kildare and the Universe; there is no place for England in the hero's list. As Howard Mezey explains, Stephen's decision of not including England in a list written on a school book, in which Ireland would appear as a colony, functions as an early statement against the imperial domination (Mezey 338). Joyce himself considered that England should be able to see that Ireland would become independent (Joyce *Political* 166) and Stephen realizes that art is beyond nations and religions: "no-one but the undogmatic artist would serve his generation better" (*SH* 76). Thus, the role of the threatening Minotaur or the role of Minos<sup>6</sup> holding the artist hostage and preventing him from flying are played by the imperial power and

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<sup>6</sup> According to Greek mythology, Icarus and his father Daedalus are held hostages by Minos, first in the labyrinth and then in a tower.

religion. In the earlier version of *A Portrait*, Stephen provides the imperial authority with “cow-like” attributes and makes both the Roman Catholic Church and England responsible for “a life of spiritual paralysis” in his island (*SH* 146).

The hero needs to leave to “get Ireland out of his system” (Watson 167) to be able to create a national literature detached from any influence that may distort reality. In this sense, the mythical motif used both in *Stephen Hero* and in *A Portrait* can be traced back again to Greek mythology, more specifically to the myth of Prometheus. If in the first tale of the book it is possible to see the way in which Joyce links his hero to Daedalus through the use of the “tuckoo”, it is also possible to link the story to the Greek deity Prometheus. The titan has a double nature; he has been regarded both as the benefactor of humanity and the fallen angel that defies the power of God (Leviton n.pag). Prometheus defies the divine authority; he is normally compared to Lucifer, whose actions lead him to purgatory until he is rescued from his punishment by Heracles. Stephen goes through the same process; he realizes that in order to set his artistic soul free, he has “to defy His majesty, to disobey His commands, to hoodwink one's fellow men, to commit sin after sin and to hide one's corruption from the sight of men” (*PA* 128). Once Stephen succumbs to temptation and succumbs to the prostitute's kiss, he regards himself as the fallen angel that has finally drifted away from divinity; the hero takes the priest's speech as his personal judgment, and faces “the hell reserved for his sins” (*PA* 159).

Nevertheless, Stephen's renunciation of his life as a future Jesuit as well as his refusal to the possibility of taking the vows in the future is made not because of the guilt of his sin, but because of his artistic endeavor. The hero has to become Prometheus in order to become an artist. The identity of Prometheus is revealed by Mary Dedalus at the same time that her son is invested with his identity as Daedalus. When the hero is old enough to sense the world around him, he is given two choices: either “apologizing” (*PA* 2) to Dante and his mother; the personifications of Ireland, the Church, and the literary tradition or freeing himself from the constrictions of nationality and religion. Stephen weighs both possibilities in his journey from childhood to maturity and through his descent to hell. Stephen, like in Zeus's punishment to Prometheus, knows that in the process of defying the divine authority, the eagles may “pull out his eyes” (*PA* 2). The hero's eyes, being a symbol of

god-like properties and enlightenment (Wilkinson 106) are threatened both by his motherland and the Catholic Church. Stephen's sin represents not only his divorce from the Church, but also his baptism as an artist. The eagles are seen as "symbols of her Church and the sexual repression it represents for Stephen's future" (Kimball 168), thus when Stephen succumbs to the woman's kiss, he symbolically closes his eyes and embraces his decision of becoming an artist; Stephen sees the embracing of sexuality as a medium to release his country from spiritual paralysis. The sin of the flesh releases his artistic spirit confined by the censorship of religion. Just like Prometheus, Stephen realizes that "our earthly fire was created by God for the benefit of man" (PA 138) and his decision of becoming an artistic messiah, "a priest of the eternal imagination" (PA 260), for his country may have caused his misfortunes.

The unifying thread of Stephen's life is based on the use of Classical myth. The identities of the Grecian Heroes, Daedalus and Prometheus, bestow his identity on Stephen. The use of Greek imagery gives the character a sense of internationalization and sexual liberation, which is precisely what the young man needs in order to avoid the influences that keep his country paralyzed. Joyce stated that there were two options: either the conquest of Ireland by the imperial powers, England and the Church, or the conquest of Ireland by a new version of Sinn Féin formed by a group of Irish people whose international background would allow the reconstruction of their country (Joyce *Political* xx). Neither Joyce, nor Stephen reject their Irish roots, they want to confer their country upon a renovated identity based on an understanding of both Irish present and past rather than on an idealization of reality. In *Stephen Hero*, we also see the young man learning Danish as a way to achieve this aim. Hence, Stephen embraces and acknowledges his identity as Daedalus and Prometheus when he professes "[o]ld father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead" (PA 299). This statement is directly linked to the young man's decision of self-imposed exile and functions not as a rejection to his *patria* or as a way of escaping it, but as a "way of learning how to treat Ireland and its art (Watson 163). Stephen and the foreign nature of his surname function as a direct link between the cosmopolitanism of Europe and the modern Irish society.



As seen before, the role of the critique to the glorified version of Ireland used by the Revivalists in their works cannot be ignored. Some critics such as Watson argue that apart from Joyce's rejection to the "blather and sentimentality" (Watson 242) of the Revival, he does not resort to Irish mythology in his portrayal of the urban Ireland of that period. In fact, many authors claim that Joyce did not turn to "the compensatory glories of Irish heroic myths" (Watson 242) and its divinization. However, a closer analysis of Stephen's relationship with Mother Ireland reveals an intrinsic use of the Irish myth. Even if Joyce's mythical method differs from that of the Revival in purpose or aim, it provides the narration with a central motif that together with the aforementioned meaning involved in the use of classical mythology helps us understand Stephen's Irish identity as a whole.

If classical mythology in *A Portrait* reinforces the identity of the artist, links Ireland to the literary tradition, and cosmopolitanizes it, the use of Irish myth reinforces the identity of Stephen in his relationship with his fatherland. The various references to Celtic myth provide us with the necessary pieces to put the puzzle back together and reconstruct Stephen's concept of national identity. Kenner affirmed that the main topics of Joyce's work are enclosed in the first pages of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Friedrich 147). This statement cannot be ignored: the aforementioned story that Stephen remembers at the beginning of the book contains the clues to discern the hero's connection to Daedalus, but it also connects him with his own country. Over the first lines, the little boy meets a "moocow", a cow. This particular symbol and the importance of the meaning it carries function as the first allusion to Irish myth in the novel. The cow has always been associated with Ireland, thus the importance of this symbol dates back to the Irish mythology and Catholicism, more specifically to the patroness of Ireland Saint Brigit of Kildare (Weber 181).

Ireland has traditionally been called Druimin Donn DÍlis, which has been translated as "the faithful brown, white-backed cow" (MacKillop n.pag). The association of Ireland with the figure of the cow comes from the Irish mythological creature "Glais Ghaibnean", a giant cow whose milk would never stop feeding the country, not only with its milk, but also with the butter it produced. The cow could cross the country in a single day to feed its inhabitants and it is believed that many Irish towns were named after this animal.

Therefore, this mammal has always been considered the personification of the land itself (Monaghan 232). The cow has been associated to several Irish goddesses such as Bó Find, whose shape-shifting abilities allowed her to turn herself into a white cow, but the most common association is with Saint Brigit. This particular saint has always been related to fertility and the cattle. Brigit was believed to have a white cow whose milk “never run dry”; there were several prayers that the people of the period praised due to the creature’s healing powers (Wright 205).

Besides, this saint is believed to have an Irish mythological background. Saint Brigit was born in the fifth century, and it was a difficult period in the country. Ireland was being converted to Catholicism, but there were still people faithful to the Old Religion. Hence, due to the miraculous nature of her existence, it is believed that the pre-Christian goddess of fire and fertility, later known as Saint Brigit, daughter of the great god Dagda, was converted to Catholicism. The duality of this saint or goddess allowed that both Christians and pagans praised her, and most researchers think she had a definitive role in the conversion of Ireland to Catholicism. Incidentally, some people think that the young Brigit refused to marry in order to fulfill her religious duties as a nun. The same duality allows the author to address the relationship between Ireland and Catholicism. In *A Portrait’s* fairy tale of the beginning, Stephen, in the form of a “tuckoo”, meets a cow.<sup>7</sup> According to Irish mythology, an encounter with a cow implies a communion with the patroness of Ireland Brigit, and a turning point in the life of the one who meets the creature (Weber n. pag.). Thus, by so doing, this moment suggests an encounter between his cosmopolite identity as the artificer and his identity as an Irishman and his nation, which is embodied by the cow. In other words, the encounter allows the author to portray in the narrative the need of his nation to match the rest of Europe.

Besides, the role of Mary Dedalus in this passage shows the way Stephen interacts with the figure of the mother. At that early stage of his life, Stephen acknowledges what has been read by many critics as an example of the Oedipus myth (Spinks 197), that “his mother had a nicer smell than his father” (*PA* 1). As previously stated, there is a rejection of

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<sup>7</sup> The encounter of a little boy with a cow is a recurrent image in Ireland. This passage could also be connected to the traditional tale told to small kids, especially in the West of Ireland, in which children are taken by a supernatural white cow to a realm in which they are relieved from their obligations (Gifford 131).

the real father, and an embracement of the mother as the embodiment of his nation. Shortly after this moment, the figure of Brigit—Brigid in the novel—makes her first appearance. This character is scarcely mentioned in the narrative; however, the implications of her insignificant role contribute to enhance the importance of this character in Stephen's life. The powerful goddess and influential Saint are transformed by the author into a mere servant who serves a Catholic family and brings Dante tea. The figure of the servant appears repeatedly in most of Joyce's work, and it is always somehow linked to Ireland's patroness, and consequently to Ireland itself. In *Exiles*, Brigit is also the servant of the Rowan family, and in *Ulysses*, not only is she a servant of the Catholic Irish man Buck, but also to the Imperial power represented by Haines towards whom she shows a better attitude. Moreover, her job as a milkmaid reinforces her connection with Ireland, more specifically with an Ireland who does no longer speak Gaelic and serves England and the Catholic Church rather than the young artist Stephen.

Both Brigit's are portrayed as a figure in decay associated with servitude, death, and paralysis. Besides, it is important to point out that Brigit's cow Druimin Donn Dílis appears in Irish folk songs as a lost Irish feature that has been replaced by the English Imperial cow. Brigit appears a second time in a Stephen's memory during his period in Clongowes' infirmary. In this passage, the little boy imagines a possible scenario for his funeral and remembers a song the servant taught him. The song which prays "Farewell, my mother!" (PA 22) invites the hero to an aesthetic journey to heaven, or to leave the country and "carry his soul away" associating once again the servant and the mother with death and lack of hope. In a moment of anger, the nationalist Davin tells him that nation comes first than literature, so Stephen states that Ireland is "the old sow that eats her farrow" (PA 238). This statement implies that Ireland, having lost its identity as the Irish Goddess Brigit, the guidance of poets and artist, has become a servant of the Church and the Empire and does no longer guide young artists like Stephen: Ireland either pushes creativity away or deprives young men who stay in the country from it.

Ireland has always been regarded as a guilty Devorgilla;<sup>8</sup> however, Stephen does not see his nation as a “degenerate daughter of Erin” whose infidelity provokes the first Norman invasions in 1169 (Wills 254). The image of servant Ireland surrendering herself to the foreign stranger is called into question by the author by means of an inversion of various Irish myths. There is a constant reconciliation of Stephen with the figure of the cow and the idea of nation. When Stephen comes back from Clongowes, he sees that as the seasons pass something “sickens” his heart. At first, the young man associates his uneasiness with the cows and the image of the milkmaid. Nonetheless, he soon acknowledges that the cause of his affliction is not the humble life of “mother Ireland”, but the realization of his father’s failure, both as a father and as an Irish gentleman who “dissipate[s] any vision of the future” (*PA* 70). Joyce unseats the *myth* created around the figure of Devorgilla as well as the identity attributed to his country as a whore-mother by placing the guilt somewhere else; this statement can be better appreciated by analyzing Stephen’s reaction to the interaction between Davin, the epitome of Catholicism and nationalism, and the woman of the Ballyhoura Hills who stands for the land as well.

One of the most popular features of Irish mythology has to do with the relationship between men and the land. In opposition to his contemporaries, Joyce brings up this through a quasi-ironic use of Irish mythological imagery. There are many goddesses attached to the idea of sovereignty and the land in Celtic mythology: from Eriu, the actual personification of Ireland, to Macha, whose powers are linked to the vicissitudes of the country (Cotterell 131). Normally, these goddesses appear in the form of an ugly hag who offers the hero a drink. In the case of the sovereignty goddess Mebh, the acceptance of her liquor sanctifies the union between the land and the warrior (Green 29). In *A Portrait*, Davin stops by the house of a peasant, who offers him a glass of milk and invites him to spend the night with her. The woman is married, half-dressed, and pregnant, thus not only does she embody Ireland, but also her pregnancy functions as a symbol of artistic creativity (Simpson 45).

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<sup>8</sup> Daughter of the king of Meath and O’ Rourke’s wife (king of Breffny), she was abducted by the king of Leinster, Diarmaid. O’Rourke declared war to Diarmaid, thus the latter asked Henry II for help. Legends related to this historical character have always pointed Dervogilla as the one to blame for the English conquest of Ireland (Sainero 59).

This passage could be traced back to several myths, but the myths of Niall and Morrigan are clearly interwoven in the narrative. In the tale of Niall of the Nine Hostages, the-soon-to-be-king of Tara makes a stop to drink some water and encounters an ugly hag guarding the well. The hag demands a kiss for them to drink, and all of them refuse, except for Niall; thus the hag turns into a lady and reveals her identity as a goddess of sovereignty by granting him the land. On the other hand, Morrigan is also linked to the land due to her sexual union with Dagda, the “Father of All” in Irish mythology. The goddess offers milk to Cúchulainn disguised as a milkmaid, but the hero refuses, thus provoking the Goddess’ wrath and sealing his failure in battle (Green 31). The woman of the Ballyhoura Hills is linked to Morrigan both in terms of sexual exuberance, through the milk offering, and because of the hero’s rejection represented by the Irish peasant Davin, who declines the sovereignty of *his* land. Moreover, the presence of a wading-girl just before Stephen’s departure can also be read as an allusion to Morrigan. Stephen’s girl functions as a prophetic epiphany of his future as an artist the same way that the Irish Goddess has often been described as a “superhuman bird-woman” (Monaghan 337) with prescient attributes.

Besides, in the case of Niall, apart from the connection to the sovereignty myth, the hero shares some similarities with Stephen. Both heroes are threatened by their mothers with a bird attack (*PA* 2); thence, in this passage, we encounter again Joyce’s use of both Classical and Irish myth in an attempt to address the Irish question. Stephen recreates the scene several times in his mind; the woman offers herself to Davin, and the hero sees this symbolic surrendering as Ireland choosing religion and nationalism over art. The rejection of the woman by Davin, who represents the ideal Irish Catholic peasant of the Revival, could be seen as a rejection to his own nation. The conservative ideas of Davin blind him, so he is unable to see neither the meaning of the woman’s offering, who is “as a type of her race and of his own” (*PA* 213), nor Stephen’s identity as an Irishman: “Are you Irish at all?” (*PA* 236), Davin asks at some point. The hero identifies himself with Parnell once again: Ireland turns its back on him the same way Irish people turn their backs on Parnell because of a woman’s scandal, thus being unable to recognize him as a “sovereign” that could lead them to independence. The young artist interprets Davin’s rejection to the

woman of Ballyhoura both as the Nationalists sealing their own fate, and as a servant Ireland rejecting the artificer; for Stephen “no woman's eyes had wooed.” (*PA* 281).

Therefore, Stephen questions the Revivalist claim that the peasant is the true Ireland's sovereign. The rejection of Emma Clery in the last section of *Stephen Hero* reinforces Stephen's view on this matter. Emma chooses religion and nation over the artist. Stephen shows his anger every time he sees her “flirting” with Father Moran, for he regards him and his circle of nationalists as hypocrites (*SH* 64). In the same way, Mary Dedalus stops her readings of Ibsen over his husband's prohibition and her religious beliefs even if those readings allow her to explore the issues of life and creativity in depth. Through the use of both Irish and Classical myth, Stephen brings up the paralysis provoked by the idealization of the past and the figure of the peasant, and especially the intervention of the Church, that patronizes the meetings of the Gaelic League in the fight for independence (*SH* 61). Religion provokes the spiritual paralysis that makes his nation unable to be independent neither from the imperial power,<sup>9</sup> nor in a literary way. Women embody a nation unable to move on and finally awake from “nightmare of history” (*U* 28). Stephen sees the peasant of the Ballyhoura Hills granting sovereignty to the Church, Emma Clery rejecting freedom of thought, and even his own mother rejecting her creative imagination. “The Roman, not the Sassenach, [is] for him the tyrant of the islanders” (*SH* 53), and the realization of this fact makes the young *Daedalus* leave his nation to be able “to express his nature freely and fully for the benefit of a society he would enrich” (*SH* 147).

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<sup>9</sup> Joyce himself emphasizes the connection between religion and empire as paralyzing forces by associating “priests” with “the police” in his own notes. (in *SH* 64)

## 2

## Lord Dunsany: Fading Myth and Ambiguous Realities

Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18<sup>th</sup> Baron of Dunsany (1878-1957) has often been depicted as a writer with a never-ending imagination, or as some critics have described him, as the “master of Anglo-Irish imagination” (Joshi n.pag). His stories are populated with imaginary gods and strange creatures, and the locations of his plots range from fairyland or invented worlds to the land of dreams. However, there is a turning point in his work in which the relationship with the fantasy world becomes troubled, and the author’s fairyland fades away as reality takes a central role. At that stage of his life, Dunsany poses the question of how “to chase with our fancies the rainbow” (Dunsany *Sheehy* 229), but the creator of Pegāna and the fantastic worlds of Jorkens himself answers “[I]et’s chase no more rainbows”, thereby stating a drastic change in his writing style.

Edward Plunkett was quite well-known in his life-time, especially in England and the United States; he even managed to be the first playwright in history to have five plays airing at the same time. Nevertheless, Plunkett was not that successful in Ireland, and he is barely remembered nowadays. Some critics have argued that the main reasons for his lack of recognition were the fact that he has always been considered a convinced Unionist, his writings did not bear a distinctive Irish mark, and his work has been labeled as horror fiction or weird fiction (Joshi xi). Besides, the author lived in a period in which either realism or the literature of the Revival was prevalent; thus, his imaginary vein would seem out of place. As Gogarty remarked, the reason why Yeats was successful and Dunsany was not is that the former established himself as interpreter of the national myth, whereas the latter did not explicitly used it as a focal motif in his writings (Joshi 15).

Even though some of Dunsany’s works, such as *The King of Elfland’s Daughter* (1924), were not specifically set in Ireland, the use of myth and the description of the Irish

landscape remind the reader of the ancient Irish myths the Revival tried to reawake. Nonetheless, it was that lack of specification in his works what made Dunsany's position as a member of the Irish literary circle unclear. Yeats affirmed that Dunsany was not meant to revive Irish myth and folklore, for his style and imagination could not be adapted to the creation of "truly" Irish Revivalist literature. Yeats acknowledged that, in spite of his attempts at convincing Plunkett to forget about the imaginary worlds of his writings and to use his imagination to support the Irish Cause, Dunsany could not do such thing (Yeats 28).

Plunkett, however, *did* write about Ireland, and one of the possible causes that triggered this change was his confrontation with the Revivalists. Yeats and Lady Gregory had created the Irish Academy of Letters and it had been announced that Dunsany had not been granted a membership as Academician because his writings did not have an Irish location or theme. The Anglo-Irish author did not understand this statement and acknowledged that he found it "surprising", thus he rejected his membership in the same way that James Joyce rejected his (Joshi 188). The discord between both Anglo-Irish authors resulted in the book that ironically granted Dunsany Yeats's award of the Academy of Letters: *The Curse of the Wise Woman* (1933) (Joshi 7). This semi-autobiographical novel follows the adventures of a young man, who, as Stephen Dedalus, faces the situation of the Ireland of his times; the hero, Charles, sets forth on a quest for beauty, and in this case, for a connection with nature. Unlike the urban Joycean hero, Charles Peridore's memories of his process from childhood to maturity provide the reader with a description of the Irish rural life of the turn of the century.

The use of national myth in *The Curse of the Wise Woman* (CWW) shows how the author separates himself from the traditional use of mythology and lets the reader explore the irony and symbolism enclosed in it in a more explicit way. If in Joyce's *A Portrait* the reader needs to look beyond the surface to identify the mythological allusions, in Dunsany it is possible to see how the author introduces the possibility of magic and myth almost from the beginning. In Plunkett's story, it is up to the reader to decide the truthfulness of the narration, but, paradoxically, as the plot unfolds and magic takes on special relevance, the critical comment involved in it becomes more noticeable. Dunsany's work is full of



paradoxes, thus the examination of the meaning embedded in the use of such dualism provides the reader with an insight into the critical nature of the novel.

The whole story revolves around the image of the bog. This symbol has a double meaning in the story. On the one hand, the hero associates the bog and the woods surrounding his demesne with the old religion and fairyland. The association is not instantly made, and it is not until Marlin, Charles' gamekeeper, starts to instill his pagan ideas in him that the bog acquires mythical significance. On the other hand, the bog is described as a dangerous place in which any men could get lost and whose deceitful and tricky nature leads Marlin to death. In Irish mythology, this type of wetland has that duality as well, and in Dunsany's words, the bog is the friendliest of the enemies of man: "Of all the enemies of man I think that the red bog, as we call in Ireland that wide wilderness of heather, seems the most friendly [*sic*]. It cannot be called a friend; it threatens him with death too often for that" (CWW 358).

Traditionally, bogs were considered entrances to Tír-na-nÓg, the Celtic Otherworld, and to a fairyland in which people could live an idle life without getting old (Monaghan 52), and this connection is made clear in the story. Marlin explains how nature and the bog make him turn his thoughts to the "Land of the Youth."<sup>10</sup> Besides, the gamekeeper prophesizes his death due to the presence of Jack O'Lanterns (CWW 575), which are the *ignis fatuus* that according to Irish folklore were damned spirits that lured men to bogs and lakes never to be seen again (Guiley 183). The mythical allusions of the bog allow the author to comment on various issues and function as a structuring symbol that provides the narrative with certain unity. The bog becomes not only a powerful symbol of the wilderness and ferocity of nature, but also the embodiment of Ireland. However, the wetland represents the country before the conversion to Catholicism rather than the Ireland of the 1980s described in the book. The lowlands are seen as "the heart of Ireland" (CWW 2362) itself and the plot has as focal point the threat that both the Catholic Church, progress, and the English Imperial power mean to the bog, and therefore to the nation itself.

The treatment of the Catholic Church in Dunsany is similar to Joyce's in the sense that both authors considered it as one of the main reasons keeping Ireland paralyzed and

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<sup>10</sup> In Celtic mythology, another name for Tír-na-nÓg.

living in a constant state of delusion. Dunsany has always been considered an atheist (Amory 33) and the analysis of his works reveals a strong criticism on the Church. In *The Curse*, both Charles and especially Marlin represent the conflict between Irish paganism and the Catholic Church. When the hero realizes that Marlin's beliefs might be sinful, he asks his friend to forget about Tír-na-nÓg; the answer constitutes one of the most significant moments in the novel. Marlin states that he has no salvation because of his pagan beliefs and that not even "the angels in Heaven" could forget the Irish's old religion (CWW 37). This moment functions as an epiphany that makes the hero face the possibility of renouncing to his Christian faith. The Catholic Church is seen as a force that destroyed the Irish roots and men's attachment to the land (CWW 2424), and despite his religious conservatism, the hero considers that "heaven" might be the "lawful land of [their] hopes" (CWW 2648) instead of Tír-na-nÓg. Nevertheless, as previously seen in Joyce's works, not even the exaltation of Irish folklore is free from Dunsany's critical assessment.

The figures of Marlin and his mother are developed in the novel in opposition to the rest of the inhabitants from Clonrue and the peasants, who work and live in the fields that surround the bog lands. Both Marlin's are depicted as the bog keepers, the guardians of the land. Their humble but heroic life could resemble that of the idealized peasant of the Revival, who shares with the ancient heroes "the vast and vague extravagance that lies at the bottom of a Celtic Heart" (Yeats and Wade 16). On the contrary, the description of the murderers and the bucolic life around the bog has both positive and strong negative connotations.

One of the best examples that illustrates Dunsany's ambivalence in the treatment of rural Ireland can be seen in the description of Charles' father's killers. In the same way that there is nothing but allusions to myth and magic in the story, there is nothing but veiled remarks on the political climate of the period. The story is supposed to be set in Ireland on the second half of the nineteenth century, and from the political tension described in the novel, it can be considered that Dunsany took his inspiration from one of the most outstanding conflicts of the period: the Land War. This was a period of social unrest between the 1870s and the 1890s, in which the Irish National League struggled to improve the situation of the tenants in relation to their landlords.

The political agitation and violence described in the passages related to Charles' father bear a likeness to this particular period of Irish history. Some researchers have also stated that the Troubles<sup>11</sup> could have been the basis of the conflict portrayed in the narrative (Maume 63); however, this could not have been the case because the *Na Trioblóidí* as such started years after the publication of the book in 1933. The murderers could be considered to be members of the Land League or any of the other groups of the period related to it. Given the condition of Charles or Dunsany himself as actual landlords and the murder of Mr. Peridore, their attitude towards the killers, even though ambivalent, is surprisingly positive. In order to understand the change in the attitude towards the murderers of Charles' father, it is necessary to take a closer look at the relationship between the young man and the rest of the inhabitants of the bog, as well as at the causes that lead the men to kill his father.

As previously stated, the story is supposed to be set in the period of the Land War. Hence, the nature of the murder of Mr. Peridore, as well as the fact that Dunsany explicitly explains along the novel that the crime is committed due to political reasons, suggests that his death is related to this specific conflict. Moreover, there is a crucial moment of revelation in the story. When the bog is directly threatened by the arrival of the English company, "The Peat Development (Ireland) Syndicate", the implication of Charles' father in the destruction of the bog is revealed as his son learns he had sold the rights of the land in exchange for fifty pounds. The hero automatically rejects the idea of being involved in the destruction of the bog. For Charles, the "very heart of Ireland appears to be threatened" (CWW 2362); he regards the bog as his native country, and there is a sudden inversion of roles in the story. The novel suggests that the Irish killers are redeemed as the figure of the landlord and of the imperial power take on the role of the villain; the young man sees his father's actions as an act of treason that leads to sell "Ireland piecemeal" (CWW 2087). The strong criticism to England and their lack of regards for the Irish matters underlies the narrative and makes the hero state his position against the fact that the survival of Ireland "depended on the intentions of men in a remote city" (CWW 2480) in England: "It seemed

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<sup>11</sup> In Irish: *Na Trioblóidí*.

so wrong that all that wonderful land, so beautiful and so free, should be brought under the thralldom of business by a city so far away” (CWW 2107).

Notwithstanding the acquired respect of the protagonist to the killers of his father, there is a sense of irony that permeates his relationship with the rest of the Irish people, and that it is extended both to politics and the Catholic Church. The gamekeeper’s strong beliefs sign his own death warrant; the same happens to the representatives of the nationalist party in the novel, the murderers, whose deep-rooted superstition sentences them to the same fate. On the very first pages of the book, in order to ensure his survival and knowing the profound faith of the Irish men, the hero makes the criminals swear on the cross that they will never attempt to take his life.

There are accounts that people used to swear on relics in ancient Ireland, even before its conversion to Catholicism,<sup>12</sup> and that such oaths were usually kept because of the implications the breaking of the oath might have for the soul of the one swearing (Lucas 22). The cross is depicted in the novel as a piece of the True Cross; the author plays with the Catholic tradition in Ireland and seals the killers’ future knowing that people used to “fear to swear or perjure themselves in making oaths on these much more than they do in swearing on the gospels” (Cambrensis 100). The Irish men prefer death rather than breaking the promise made before the cross and to the Irish cause. The men’s beliefs allow the author to comment on the way superstition and religion kept, according to him, Ireland subject to England. The question of the Irish Cause is emphasized by the fact that one of the actual murderers, the man in the long black coat, was admitted by Dunsany to be embodying Éamon de Valera (Maume 64).

The presence of de Valera<sup>13</sup> lets the reader see the same criticism to the influence the Church had in Ireland already mentioned in Joyce. He was a Sinn Féin leader, ex-

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<sup>12</sup> Prior to the arrival of Christianity, it was a tradition amongst the Celts, to swear oaths in the cemeteries before the bodies of the dead. Thus, as Lucas highlights, they kept their old beliefs after they were Christianized: relics of saints, such as the Bell of Ciaran, or the wood of the True Cross (Lucas 25) substituted the ancient swearing graves. Furthermore, there are still legends in Ireland that warn about the consequences of swearing in vain, such as the one that prays that the family of the one swearing in vain before the Cremave—a famous swearing stone—will be accursed to the seventh generation (Wilde 225).

<sup>13</sup> Éamon de Valera (1882-1975) was born in America; however his mother was Irish, and he was raised in Ireland. With the help from the previous president of Ireland, Arthur Griffith, he became the leader of Sinn Féin (he later abandoned it to create the Republican Party Fianna Fáil) thanks to his abilities as an orator and

president of Ireland, and active supporter of the Irish Revival. Nevertheless, de Valera is portrayed as a murderer, whose convictions and Irish character deter him from sticking to the cause and saving both the bog and fellow countrymen. Curiously enough, the ironic tone is combined with certain sympathy and admiration that culminates with the Irish leader offering Charles a job as minister of the Irish Free State. After the killer's death, Charles questions his own Catholic faith and the way it has determined his life: faith prevents him from marrying a Protestant woman, it causes the killer's imprisonment for twenty years and ultimately his death: "How, I thought then, if Heaven should judge like that?" (CWW 3192). As Joshi points out, this topic had already been tackled by the author in previous works such as "A Moral Little Tale" (1915) in which he describes "the social evil caused by religion" (Joshi 38). Hence, in a final moment of epiphany during his life in exile, the hero ends up by redeeming the man in the coat as well as aligning Imperialism, politics, and Catholicism as paralyzing forces:

"Haven't we got the nations by the throat? And we'll stand no bloody nonsense from any of them, not from the King of Rome himself. And wouldn't I get any job for you?" I explained that the Roman Empire was long since over. "Ah well," said he, "isn't there others as bad?" "There are," I said. (CWW 3186)

Similarly, the portrayal of the peasants from Clonrue is significant at the time of examining the ambivalence in the evaluation of Ireland and its people. Taking as a central motif the destruction of his country and the natural world, which is a topic that kept Dunsany obsessed throughout his life (Cervone 266), the reader can automatically identify the peasantry as defenders of the land in opposition to the English company as exploiters. The author exalts the function of the turf-cutters and the hunters.<sup>14</sup> Even though they have used the bog as a source of food and means for generations, they have kept the land and the bog intact; in Dunsany's words, the turf-cutters "would not have harmed the bog in a hundred years" (CWW 2969). On the contrary, through a comparison with the exploitation

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his involvement in the Easter Rising (1916). Eventually, he became president of Ireland and played a definitive role in its independence. De Valera is one of the most important figures in Irish history. (Dwyer n.pag.)

<sup>14</sup> This is connected to Irish mythology, in which the hunter and the hunt are closely related to nature and the divine. (Aldhouse-Green 56)

of the soil carried out by coal miners, Plunkett underlines the way the English company spoils the “the magic that lay over all that land, deep as mists in the autumn” (CWW 2330). Therefore, Dunsany constructs the figure of the invader through a whole series of allusions to the way they handle the Irish issues. Ranging from the lack of concern for Irish politics, the lack of understanding of Ireland of the Eton students (CWW 1139), to a critique on the way English people enjoy “to reduce” human beings to a mere formula on behalf of their country (CWW 1298), the author provides his novel with an enhancement of the Irish distinctive humility that Joyce himself highlighted in his lifetime (Joyce *Letters* 109).

There is, withal, another implicit dualism in the actions of the peasantry. The Anglo-Irish author demythologizes the Revivalist idea of the peasant as “pure and heroic figures” (Kelly 187) connected to their Irish roots. As previously seen in the description of the nationalistic killers, Dunsany stresses once again the definitive role of superstition in Ireland. After building the factory that will ultimately destroy the bog, the English workers start to be cursed by Mrs. Marlin. At that stage of the plot, the reader does not get to know whether there is actual magic or not. This state of flux allows the author to explore how suggestion works in the minds of the peasants and makes them give up their land on the English company. This use of superstition, as way of commenting on the way the ancient legends have affected Irish society, appears reiteratively in Dunsany’s work; he explores how the reawakening of exhausted myths is transformed into delusion in the modern world. In the short story “Helping the Faeries” (1947), the author mocks the delusion experienced by the peasants when an English man cuts a sacred thorn. The thorn-tree is a symbol known both for its importance in Christianity (Faulkenbury 96) and in the old Celtic religion, in which it was closely related to the world of the faeries: the legend says that “a great misfortune would befall” (Bane 221) anyone who harmed it. The characters await revenge from the faeries, but when they face the real world and realize the fays are not coming, they shoot the man to death for retaliation (Dunsany *Land* 261). Likewise, the theme of the demythologization of the peasant in relation to England and the role of myth can be seen in “A Let-Off” (1943), in which an ancient Irish belief makes Ireland lose, not only the chance to be free, but also the opportunity to conquer England. Consequently, the text encloses an idea of religion similar to the one mentioned in the analysis of *A Portrait*: Dunsany depicts

Ireland as a theocracy in which politics and religion are “fused together” (Touponce 46), thus provoking delusion and paralysis.

As mentioned before, Thomas Marling and Mrs. Marlin, the wise woman, are developed in a slightly different way to the rest of the inhabitants of the bog. The Irish woman, together with the bog, confers the story homogeneity and constitutes the most powerful mythological or fantastical element in the story. Nonetheless, in a similar way to the description of the peasantry, the relationship between both characters is suffused with a clear ambiguity. The dichotomy between fantasy and the real world provides the author with the ground to develop the main themes that define the story: how politics, superstition, and religion affect the nation.

Mrs. Marlin and Marlin are the only characters who seem to remain faithful to the old religion throughout the whole story. The description of the figure of the mother shows a great attachment to the land, she is depicted as the guardian of the bog and advocate of the Irish independence. Both the events related to this character and her behavior bear a mythological signature that cannot be ignored. On the one hand, Dunsany seems to suggest that Mrs. Marlin is the agent that provokes the storm and subsequent tide that saves the bog and frees the land from the exploitation of the English. There are several references to her as an actual “witch” and this uncertainty makes the hero doubt his own faith in the Catholic Church. The depiction of the wise woman suggests that the author could have taken his inspiration from one of the most emblematic beings of Irish mythology: The Cailleach. The resemblance with this particular mythological figure is too remarkable to escape notice.

This Irish deity is linked to the goddess Brigit—even some people think they are the same person—and as explained before, she also appears in Joyce’s work as the woman of the Ballyhoura Hills. The wise woman is linked to the old hag with confined and secret beauty who offers drinks to the hero in a basin as it happens to Charles in the story. “You know she has pretty dark eyes. [...] And if they got flashing it might look a bit like a thunderstorm to them.” (CWW 2693). The description of her eyesight is similar to the uncanny eyes of the Cailleach; besides, the allusions to Mrs. Marlin’s powers as a seer emphasize this connection (Monaghan 68). There are two outstanding aspects that relate Mrs. Marlin to its mythological analogue. Probably, the most important features that



characterize the Cailleach are her ability to control the weather (Matson 24) and her ability to confer sovereignty and stand for the land. Both aspects can be appreciated in the book's "old hag," who expels the foreign invader from the land.

The wise woman of the novel supposedly summons the wind of the north that provokes a storm. The tempest results in a devastating flood that washes over the English camp and saves the land from the Englishmen that intended to destroy the bog. The Cailleach has also been associated with this type of meteorological events (Monahan 473); the symbolic meanings of the flood in the story not only provide the narrative with the resolution of the conflict, but also with a final comment that emphasizes Dunsany's acute use of mythological material. Floods appear constantly in stories from different mythologies, but in view of the specific use of Irish myth in this author, it could be considered that some of his sources of inspiration were the early tales on the creation of Ireland, later collected in *The Book of Invasions*, and *King James's Bible* (Sandner and Weisman 500).

According to the pseudo-mythological stories that narrate Irish history, the actual flood from the Genesis was the direct cause of the arrival of the first settlers in Ireland. Christianity and Paganism are combined in the early accounts of the history of Ireland in the same way that Dunsany brings them together in the novel. It is believed that the granddaughter of Noah, Cesair, who is also considered an Irish goddess (Monaghan 85), went to Ireland before the flood because Noah forbade his apocryphal son, Bith, to enter the Ark (Matson 24). Besides, there is a symbol that dominates the narrative, especially, the ending of the story: the rainbow. This particular symbol is the agent that provokes Marlin's death; the wise woman explains to the hero that the rainbow has shown her son the way to Tír-na-nÓg (CWW 2198).<sup>15</sup> Rainbows have been associated with the magical spot where the leprechauns stored their gold (Monaghan 391). Nevertheless, the story implies that the author has taken on the Christian significance of this symbol as the announcement that there would not be more destruction carried out by God after the flood, which at the same time has a dual meaning, and it has been connected to war (Lee 7).

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<sup>15</sup> As a matter of fact, in Norse mythology, a rainbow, the Bifrost, is regarded as a bridge to Asgard (Valborg 44).



The interesting fact about the use of the flood and the rainbow is that the traditional order of events is reversed. The rainbow functions as a symbol of death and as preamble of the disaster that provokes both Mrs. Marlin's and Tommy Marlin's death. Both mother and son labor under the same delusion as the nationalist men. There is an ancient belief in Ireland that in that country "no one ever really drowned" (Monahan 170) because of the connection of water places to the fairy otherworld. Marlin's drowning is perceived both by Charles and by his mother as a return home.

Bearing in mind Menninger's interpretation of drowning as the return to the mother's womb (Jamison 139), Marlin's death would emphasize the attachment of these characters to Ireland's past. However, taking into account the Christian interpretation of drowning as a form of baptism (Browning n.pag), the fact that the pagan Irishman drowns would function as final comment on the dimensions of the character's delusion: Mrs. Marlin praises the drowning and "the gliding rainbow that had seen Marlin home" (CWW 2652). Marlin is disposed of the heroism of the Irish folklore and is presented to the reader as the only character whose convictions on Tír-na-nÓg are unquestionable. The argument between Tommy and his mother on the reason why the moon shines shows how Mrs. Marlin, supportive of the Irish cause, chooses to participate in the fallacy that prompts the death of her son, who is blinded by the enchantment of myth; "[i]t's for Ireland it shines," said his mother. "No other lands have such light from it. Not even Tír-na-Óg. And when Ireland's free we will build cities with golden spires that will flash back a light at which the moon will wonder" (CWW 1627).

The biblical story of the flood and the rainbow is inverted in the novel, thus the flood destroys the humanly representation of the Irish past in the novel, the Marlins, and it also challenges Catholicism. The idea of the ambivalence present in the use of other symbols and mythological allusions in the novel permeates this passage as well. The flood could be seen as a force, either natural or magical, that saves the Irish people from the exploitation of their soil by the Imperial power, but it also destroys the most genuine attachment of the bog people to the Irish past. This double-edged symbol is used in a similar way in the aforementioned account of the Irish invasions, in which the threat of the

flood allows the “discovery” of the island, but it also kills the first settlers.<sup>16</sup> The flood in Catholicism operates likewise: the purification of the land comes through destruction and in the story, the cost of saving the land results in a somehow tragic ending. The way the narrative is developed strengthens the idea of the power of superstition, and how the pursuit of ancient glories leads to nothing but to lethargy and death.

The late work of the Anglo-Irish author shows a reevaluation of fantasy and myth in the Irish context. The great variety of symbology allows him to construct an Ireland imbued with political and religious paradoxes. The writer uses a story rich in allusions in which symbols related to the Irish pagan past, like the bog, and to Catholicism, like the cross, give voice to a statement against the dangers of the glorification of the past and the exaltation of ancient beliefs. In the story, we see how in a typical Irish “hunting of the fox”, the animal misleads the hunters and ends up in the town. Being a symbol of the consequences of adopting false doctrines, Dunsany makes the reader evoke the traditional images of the fox<sup>17</sup> disguised as a priest lecturing the foolish wild geese<sup>18</sup> (Pfau 1) that the hero is so eager to hunt. None of the characters is free from the consequences of superstition; all of them are in a way “foolish wild geese”. Dunsany “[c]hallenges the literal interpretation of Irish heroic myths that was being undertaken by Padraig Pearse and other nationalists” (Younger 138) and constructs an alternative version in which both glorification and critique are possible all at once.

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<sup>16</sup> Except for Fintan, Cesair’s husband.

<sup>17</sup> The fox is an important symbol in ancient bestiaries, such as the *Physiologus*. It is normally depicted as a crafty, misleading animal, who tricks the birds to haunt them. Additionally, images of foxes in conflict with the Church, such as the Reynard Fox, are found quite often in English carvings and sermons (Varty 153).

<sup>18</sup> The wild goose is a recurrent symbol in the story. The animal’s ambivalent nature as a representation of the Holy Spirit and as an omen of death and destruction, as seen in the accounts of the Gallic wars and the Celtic folk stories, emphasizes the author’s ironic use of myth (Monaghan 224).

## Conclusions

Lord Dunsany and James Joyce, two prominent figures of Irish literature, portray in their writings a colliding reconstruction of Ireland, in which Irish myth and Catholicism, reality and fiction coexist: delusion exists side-by-side with glorification. At first sight, it might seem that both authors should be located at a universal scale, with “internationalizing” aims, and foreign to the Twilight enterprise mentioned at the beginning of the present dissertation. Nevertheless, an identification of the most recurring images supports the prediction that their image of Ireland revolves around the determining forces of religion, historical trauma, and politico-literary trends of the period. Therefore, after an analysis of the paradox involved in the inner significance of the symbols, I can assert that the use of national myth in the novels herein discussed shares the revivalist endeavors of the period and reworks them. The critical use of myth does not express alienation or indifference, but a critical concern and a call for attention to the necessary factors to reassert the thoroughly Irish distinguishing trait of the literary tradition of their country.

The protagonists, Charles and Stephen, both heroes in exile or in their way to a voluntary exile express in their memories an appreciation for art and literature: in Dunsany for the sake of the land and in Joyce to “forge in [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his race]” (*PA* 299). A *race* needed of a literature of its own, something that according to the author could be done by estranging himself from the stifling influence of religion. O’Leary asserts that Joyce crafts a “new mythology” (66). In my view, the Irishman does not craft a new mythology, but a revisited one to avoid the old sow from eating a farrow needed of salvation; “[n]o God for Ireland!” (*PA* 40) he claims, a statement backed up by the sarcastic role of the mythical and the religious in Plunkett’s story. The Anglo-Irish author knits a web of suggestion and superstition that leads the characters to a state of disillusionment. The deceitful bog, the presumed curse, and the consequences of Catholic faith dominate the action, thus threatening the land and inflicting ill-founded fears that fill Charles with

resentment and impotence. A similar feeling is found in the analysis of Stephen's underlying involvement with Irish mythology in *A Portrait*.

The Joycean concealed hag, who grants the sovereignty of the land to the wrong Irish man, to the paralyzed peasant rather than to the concerned artist, is the same delusional wise woman that embraces the ancient lore before the life of her own son in Dunsany. The drowned girl with a Catholic magazine in *Stephen Hero* is Marlin in *The Curse*: two motherless, in terms of national identity, and presumably deranged characters drowned by the impeding power of religion and superstition. Hence, it is undeniable the progress both heroes, Joyce's and Dunsany's, follow in their aesthetic growth to strive away from a country immersed in a hierocratic state of paralysis. A country that, as it can be concluded from both texts, is only salvable by a literature in peace with politics, religion and history. Both authors depict in their writings the "curse" that coerce their country from an individualized literature, and they both know that for Ireland to break free from the constraints of the paralysis, the curse of the Ballyhoura Hills must be lifted.

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