

“Identities in the writer complexus”: Joyce, Europe and Irish Identities

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Abstract

This chapter examines forms of negative identity in terms of two intersecting verbal axes: Joyce’s own term, *gnomon* and Jacques Derrida’s term *hauntology*. Both terms gesture towards forms of negative identity which are the very antithesis of foundational or fundamental identity and I will trace this argument through some of Joyce’s writings.

The point at issue of the concluding sections of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is the conflict between different notions of Irish identity. In lines that have become a *credo* of Joyce’s own exile from Ireland, he puts into the mouth of Stephen Dedalus this astute summary of the effect of essentialist notions of Irishness on an individual consciousness. Here, speaking of the soul, Stephen makes the point that:

The soul is born, he said vaguely, first in those moments I told you of. It has a slow and dark birth, more mysterious than the birth of the body. 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.¹

This can be seen as a programmatic statement of what I will term a negative sense of identity. It is very different in theme and in style from the preceding stories of *Dubliners*, where the style was covert and implicit, as narrative voice tended to blend with that of different characters in free indirect

discourse, with little personal input from any central narrative presence. Here, the narrative voice expressed in the personal pronoun first person singular, is actively embracing the outward heteroglossic movement towards Europe which will be seen as creative of a new form of cosmopolitan and complex Irish identities.

I will examine these forms of “identities in the writer complexus”² in terms of two intersecting verbal axes: Joyce’s own term, *gnomon* and Jacques Derrida’s term *hauntology*. The word *gnomon* appears in the opening story of *Dubliners*, entitled *The Sisters*.³ The term derives from Euclid’s *Elements*, Book II, in which a *gnomon* is defined as what is left of a parallelogram when a similar parallelogram containing one of its corners is removed. However, it can also refer to a pointer on a sundial which, by its shadow, indicates the time of day.⁴

I would suggest that both meanings of the word, that of a geometrical figure and that of a pointer on a sundial, provide symbols of the Joycean concepts of negative identity. The figure of a parallelogram, with a smaller parallelogram removed, suggests a desire for closure and completion that can never be achieved, for, if the parallelogram in the corner is filled in, then the shape will cease to be a *gnomon* and instead will revert to being a parallelogram. To this extent, the *gnomon* defines a process which tends towards closure, but never quite achieves it, always seeming to have a phantom dotted line haunting its ontology, and always tending to be what it is not. It is a diagrammatic and conceptual signifier which stresses that identities and definitions are always processes of becoming, as opposed to positions of fixity. It is also an indication that identity as a self-present essentialism is not what Joyce has in mind; for the *gnomonic* view of identity, what I term “identities in the writer complexus”, self is always defined in terms of the other. In ethical and political terms, such a

¹ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, edited by R. B. Kershner, Boston, 1993, 177 .

² James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, first published 1939, London, 1975, 114, 33.

³ James Joyce, *Dubliners*. Introduction by Anthony Burgess. London, 1994, 1.

⁴ Don Gifford, *Joyce Annotated: Notes for ‘Dubliners’ and ‘A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man’*, Berkeley, 1982, 29.

position is the very antithesis of the fundamentalism that has been seen, world-wide, in the Drumcree standoff in recent years in Northern Ireland, where self and other were in violent opposition. I think this example is an eloquent synecdoche of the dangers that fixed and simplistic definitions of identity can bring into being. Indeed, I would argue that it is such fundamentalist identificatory attitudes and ideologies that have been the terminus a quo from which much of the violence in Northern Ireland over the past thirty years has originated.

In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida discusses what he terms *hauntology*. In this book, he explores the spectrality of many areas of meaning, seeing ghostly hauntings as traces of other possible meanings. Derrida's spectrality involves acknowledging the other that haunts the self; it involves acknowledging the possibility that the "h" in *hauntology* is a hovering presence over the certainties of ontology (in French phonology both words sound remarkably similar when spoken).⁵ In practical terms, this means that Joyce's Irishness is always inhabited by spectral presences of other languages, other cultures and other mindsets.

To be a *gnomon* is to have a *hauntological* relationship with a parallelogram, and yet never to become that parallelogram; it is to have an independent ontology of *self* which is, at the same time, imbricated in terms of the *other*. It is to be defined, negatively, by an other which, while not a part of the self, is nevertheless *hauntologically* present in relation to that self. It suggests a metaphor of identity which is open to other identities, other ideologies and to notions of plurality – hence the plural form of the noun "identity" in this discussion. In Joyce's case, Ireland is defined *gnomonically* and *hauntologically* by Europe, and European language and culture. This definition complicates and deepens any simplistic desire for an *echt* Irishness which is simply Gaelic, Catholic and nationalist.

⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning & the New International*, translated from the French by Peggy Kamuf, introduction by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg, London, 1994, 10.

The desire of Joyce, and of Stephen, to seek out such new dimensions and new modes of identity should not, however, be seen as a flight from his own country or his own sense of Irishness. Rather is it an attempt to create a new sense of Irishness which acknowledges alterity. This contradictory position, of being part of a culture while at the same time attempting to offer a critique of the ideology of that culture, is discussed by Theodore Adorno, in his essay “Cultural Criticism and Society”. The two subject positions from which criticism may be offered are seen by Adorno as being either those of immanence or transcendence, and both positions are fraught with difficulty. The immanent critic participates in the culture: he or she is shot-through with the ideologies and attitudes of that culture and hence has little chance of making any real objective statements about this position of “total immanence”⁶ and therefore is doomed to repeat the errors of the culture. The transcendent critic, on the other hand, “aims at a totality” and assumes an “Archimedean position above culture and the blindness of society”. However, such a position “outside the sway of existing society”, is “fictitious”,⁷ and ultimately as monological as that of the immanent position within ideology. Adorno’s answer to this dilemma is the notion of “negative dialectical criticism”, which takes up a position in culture and yet not in culture at the same time. In this sense, the position of transcendence is achieved dialectically by looking at a microcosmic part of a totality, and by then relating that to the cultural macrocosm. The knowledge achieved is negative and it is in search of such a negative sense of Irishness that Joyce, and fictionally Stephen, leave Ireland. It is in the cause of some redefinition of Irishness that he feels he must achieve a quasi-transcendent position, and move to Europe; here he will attempt to redefine a sense of Irishness within a European context.

What Joyce, through Stephen, is attempting to do is to create a negative portrait of Irish identity. To create this, he must have some regulative point from where he can begin to dialectically juxtapose the immanent and the transcendent so as to create these more complex forms of identity. Two tropes

⁶ Theodore Adorno, *Prisms*, translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber, Cambridge, Mass., 1981, 26.

⁷ *Prisms*, 31.

allow him to achieve this, Stephen's unusual name and the trope of emigration, as both combine to offer a transcendental perspective on Ireland, and both imbricate Irishness *gnomonically* with Europe.

Stephen's name is a signifier of otherness from the very beginning of the book. Nasty Roche, on first hearing it asks: "[w]hat kind of a name is that?";⁸ while later in the opening chapter, Athy says: "you have a queer name, Dedalus".⁹ This strangeness of name allied to Stephen's early preoccupation with words, names, and stories marks him out as different from the other boys. It places him within a Greek frame of reference, alluding to another artist and artificer who combined immanence and transcendence (through flight) on his own culture, namely Daedalus.

From the earliest stage, Stephen situates himself in terms of a society and a *Lebenswelt* that reaches out beyond Ireland, and nomenclature is a seminal trope of this situation. His friend, Fleming inscribed the following doggerel on his geography book:

*Stephen Dedalus is my name,
Ireland is my nation.
Clongowes is my dwellingplace
And heaven my expectation. [italics original]*¹⁰

In Fleming's placement, Stephen has been slotted into an expected range of definitional identificatory parameters: he is Irish and Catholic, and his future path is predetermined. Here, there is an anticipation of Davin, who tells him that his country must come first. The identificatory epistemology is foundationalist in that there is no room in this narrow prescriptive paradigm for alterity of any sort; again one is put in mind of the essentialism of Drumcree and the Garvaghy Road, where self is defined in contradistinction to the other.

⁸ *Portrait of the Artist*, 21.

⁹ *Portrait of the Artist*, 34.

¹⁰ *Portrait of the Artist*, 27

However, on the flyleaf of his geography book, Stephen inscribes his own name, but in a manner which redefines himself within a far wider set of parameters than the above, and which anticipates his later flight to Europe in the closing chapter:

Stephen Dedalus
Class of Elements
Clongowes Wood College
Sallins
County Kildare
Ireland
Europe
The World
*The Universe.*¹¹

Here, Stephen is locating himself within a far broader spatial span than that allotted him by Fleming. Here, the self is defined very much in terms of an otherness that is part of the defining constituents of that self. For Joyce, the *hauntological gnomonic* definition of an identity “complexus” will always see the present Ireland defined dialectically against the hovering alterity of Europe, and the world.

The proper name, as synecdoche of identity itself, is central to any epistemology of identity; one’s name is that which locates one as part of a language and a culture. Just as the signifier “Dedalus” conjures up mythic images of a spectral father who will provide his foster-son with a means to fly above the maze, and also the nets of nationality, so the name of God, itself a potent signifier of Catholic essentialism, is invoked in the opening chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but the evocation is through the ironic eye of Joyce, telling us from a transcendental perspective, about the young Stephen’s immanent participation in essentialist modes of thinking:

God was God’s name just as his name was Stephen. Dieu was the French for God and that was God’s name too; and when anyone prayed to God and said Dieu then God

¹¹ *Portrait of the Artist*, 27.

knew at once that it was a French person that was praying. But, though there were different names for God in all the different languages in the world and God understood what all the people who prayed said in their different languages, still God remained always the same God and God's real name was God.¹²

Through Joyce's ironic eye, an eye which will, in *Finnegans Wake*, speak of a "thousandfirst" name,¹³ the essentialism of seeing the name for God in one language as somehow "better", as somehow more authentic, than others is expressed through the simplistic thought processes of a small child. Indeed, such dogmatism is ironically amusing, until we extrapolate from such essentialist ideas of religion, the mindset that allowed people to petrol-bomb a house in Ballymoney, in the Summer of 1999, and murder three young boys who happened to adhere to a different view of "God's real name" from that of the petrol-bombers, or of the ten protestant workers lined up and shot by the IRA at Kingsmills, in 1976, merely because they were Protestants.. Through the ironic positioning of the narrative voice, Joyce the author, achieves a transcendent perspective on Stephen the character, and as such can achieve something very like Adorno's notion of negative dialectical criticism.

Joyce as author will make a space and a time for alterity, a point that is abundantly clear in the *hauntological* evocation and transformation of the opening lines of *Portrait* in a later passage from *Finnegans Wake*:

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo...¹⁴

Eins within a space and a wearywide space it wast ere wohned a Mookse. The onesomeness wast alltolonely, archunsitslike, broady oval, and a Mookse he would a walking go...¹⁵

¹² *Portrait of the Artist*, 27.

¹³ *Finnegans Wake*, 254, 19.

¹⁴ *Portrait of the Artist*, 19.

¹⁵ *Finnegans Wake*, 152, 18-20

It is clear that the childish narrative certainties are *hauntologically* redefined in the analogous piece from *Finnegans Wake*, which in Bakhtinian terms, is *heteroglossic* in that different voices and different languages are allowed to confront each other and achieve some kind of dynamic interaction, or dialogization.¹⁶ In the quotation from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, there is an experiential familiarity evident throughout the piece. The opening, borrowing from the *topos* of the fairy or folk tale, is comforting and recognizable, as is the baby-talk which is the frame of reference of the story. There is *one* time, *one* road, *one* cow and *one* “nicens little boy”. There is no problem with complexity of identification here; temporally and spatially the reader is in familiar territory. One could see such a simplistic narrative as analogous to the already created conscience of Joyce’s race, where as Davin puts it, to be Irish is to be nationalist, Catholic and Gaelic only. To again advert to Mikhail Bakhtin’s terminology, this notion of narrative is monologic as opposed to dialogic. By “monologic”, he means the denial that, outside one particular opinion or reading, there exists “another consciousness, with the same rights, and capable of responding on an equal footing”.¹⁷

However, the granting of an equality of rights, as seen in Northern Ireland in recent years, is an extremely difficult and complex exercise in reality – both sides often seem to be speaking in different languages. Perhaps the *Finnegans Wake* quotation articulates this by subjecting the opening lines of *Portrait* to a destabilizing linguistic polyglossia. In the case of the German words “eins” and “wohned” (the latter also deriving from Old and Middle English sources), there is an opening up to alterity voiced in the language of Europe and in the language of difference. The *Finnegans Wake* quotation, then, offers a negative critique of the epistemological assumptions regarding narrative, teleology, and language that are inherent in the *Portrait* quotation, as the *hauntological* presence of languages and stories destabilizes the seeming singularity of *one* story and *one* language. Thus, different languages provide a perspective from whence to mount an immanent critique of one’s

¹⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin, Texas, 1981, 263.

¹⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*. Minneapolis: 1984, 107.

culture. However, there is another perspective from where a parallel critique may be offered, and that is through a sense of Irishness which is spatially negative, namely, an Irishness which is not, of necessity, located in Ireland.

Near the end of *Portrait*, Stephen is recalling a conversation with Davin, the young fenian, and a symbol of a narrow vision of Irishness. Davin sees himself as “an Irish nationalist first and foremost”, and he asks Stephen if he is “Irish at all?”,¹⁸ before enunciating his own green nationalist view of Irishness: “be one of us....Why don’t you learn Irish?”.¹⁹ Stephen retorts, on being asked why he is going to emigrate that he told Davin that “the shortest way to Tara was *via* Holyhead”,²⁰ and this aphorism, I would argue, gestures towards the epistemological position of emigration as a trope for the creation of a more complex form of Irishness which does not become subject to closure or totalization.

Tara was the traditional seat of the high-kings of Ireland. It is a placename commonly featured in the Celtic, heroic tales of the revival, and associated with the coming of Christianity to Ireland through stories of Saint Patrick. Symbolically, Tara would be the epicentre of an Ur-Ireland, a place of pre-invasion purity, where Irish language and culture were the norm. Holyhead is that port in Wales where Irish emigrants traditionally alight in Britain, before moving on to mainland Europe. The core point here is that Stephen is not leaving Ireland because he is in some way renouncing Irishness; he is leaving so that he can discover a new form of Irishness, and express it, as he famously puts it at the end of the novel:

Mother is putting my new secondhand clothes in order. She prays now, she says, that I may learn in my own life and away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels. Amen. So be it. Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth

¹⁸ *Portrait of the Artist*, 176.

¹⁹ *Portrait of the Artist*, 176.

²⁰ *Portrait of the Artist*, 216.

time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.²¹

Here, Stephen is espousing emigration as an epistemological perspective through which a more complex sense of Irish identity can be created. By adopting a perspective that is outside the culture, he hopes to achieve a twofold aim: to distance himself from the “nets” of “nationality, language, religion”,²² and to give a voice to those of his “race” who are physically outside Ireland. Interestingly, he equates the “nets” with being born in Ireland: “[w]hen the soul of a man is *born in this country...*” [*my italics*],²³ and would seem to be attempting to transform the fixed categories of identity through the experience of European culture, an experience which is enunciated through the trope of emigration. Stephen, in attempting to define some sense of Irish identity, feels that he can only achieve this by moving away from the fixed centrality of the Irishness of the revival, and instead attempt to create a *hauntological*, plural view of Irishness and of complex identities, which contrasts sharply with that of Davin. He is attempting to define the culture of Irishness in a way which is “to be not identical to itself” but rather to be “different *with itself*”,²⁴ in short, he is attempting to define Irishness *otherwise*.

In this context, and in the context of Adorno’s dialectical criticism, the verbal construction of the *credo* “I will fly by those nets” is ambiguous. “By” can mean around or past, indicating a desire for the avoidance of the entrapping nets. However, “by” can also mean “by means of” or “using as an aid”, and in this sense, the term implies a dependence on, or an attachment to, such notions almost as a mode of articulation. I would suggest that the dialectical interaction of these two meanings acts as a further metaphor for the Joycean concept of identity “complexus”. Bypassing the nets still involves taking them into consideration, just as the moving shadow of the sundial is still dependent upon the static pointer of the *gnomon*. Similarly, making use of the nets to achieve something beyond them

²¹ *Portrait of the Artist*, 218.

²² *Portrait of the Artist*, 177.

²³ *Portrait of the Artist*, 177.

also involves a dialectical progression. So, in both cases, the nets can never be totally destroyed or done away with; their function is to provide some limits in terms of self identity, but also to allow for the opening to alterity that is so necessary to the Joycean project. To be inside these nets is to be delimited by past concepts of nationality, language, and religion. To bypass them, or to use them to move on, is to be open to a future that will, while taking on board some of the baggage of the past, travel to new destinations, redefining itself in the process.

His attitude to history is different to that of Davin; he sees not a glorious Gaelic past, but the reality of linguistic metamorphosis which in turn led to cultural metamorphosis: “[m]y ancestors threw off their language and took on another....They allowed a handful of foreigners to subject them”.²⁵ Between these personal pronouns – “my” and “they” – is the interstitial position, what Bhabha terms “liminal” spaces,²⁶ which the trope of emigration offers Joyce. In this “in-between” is the Derridean notion of an identity which, in the case of culture, person, nation, or language is “a self-differentiating identity, an identity different from itself, having an opening or gap within itself”.²⁷ In his later books, especially *Finnegans Wake*, this gap is symbolized by Joyce in terms of a self-differentiating language, wherein meaning is never self-identical.

Finnegans Wake's multilingual spectralization of the beginning of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, further underlines this transformation. English is no longer seen as the property of the colonizer; instead it is defined *gnomonically* in terms of its negative relationship with the many other languages and discourses in *Finnegans Wake* (over 50 at the last count). As Joyce puts it in the above quotation, the “onesomeness wast alltolonely”;²⁸ this “onesomeness” is precisely that monological strain that has given rise to the ideological ossification that is defined, in Northern

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Bloomington, Indiana, 1992, 9-10.

²⁵ *Portrait of the Artist*, 177.

²⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London, 1994, 4.

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, edited with a commentary by John D. Caputo, New York, 1997, 14.

Ireland, as unionist and nationalist, or as Orange and Green. Such “onesomeness” is, of course, practically impossible in terms of the modern world, a point which is mimetically demonstrated in *Finnegans Wake*, where an indigenous Irish person has no readier insight into the range of meanings codified in the text than has a person of any other nationality.

In this sense, the text itself functions as a critique of all essentialist epistemological positions. Earlier in the same text, Joyce pointedly refers to the tale of Shem a “blind blighter”²⁹ who is also a “fain shinner”,³⁰ and the blindness of immanent simplistic nationalism, be it political, linguistic, or cultural, is clearly the source of such parodistic reference, especially given an address that comes slightly later in the same section: “[g]entes and laitymen, fullstoppers and semicolonials, hybreds/and lubberds!”³¹ Here, Joyce is addressing his “nation” and the address could be seen as an echoing answer to the question of Irishness – “Hush! Caution! Echoland!”³² – with which our discussion opened, but here the Irishness in question is an example of “identities in the writer complexus.”

For Joyce, his nation is a transactional blurring of the binarisms of essential identity. “Gentes and laitymen” can refer to people, deriving from the Latin noun *gens*, or to ladies and gentlemen, or to the people sharing descent along the male line, or to class distinction between some form of aristocracy and those who are “ordinary”, or to clergy (in the sense of patriarchal power in the church), and the laity. The words “fullstoppers and semicolonials” can refer to the rules of grammar, which make meaning and nationhood possible by delimiting the play of language, or to the ongoing dialectic of colonialism and colonization, or to the ambiguous position of Ireland in terms of its status as a postcolonial country. The final phrase, “hybreds and lubberds”, conflates land and sea with differences of identity in a pairing that is very much at odds with the “onesomeness” noted earlier. Here, hybridity, complexity and above all plurality, are seen as natural conditions of modern

²⁸ *Finnegans Wake*, 152, 19.

²⁹ *Finnegans Wake*, 149, 2.

³⁰ *Finnegans Wake*, 149, 7.

³¹ *Finnegans Wake*, 152, 16-17.

identities, a perspective which completely contradicts Stephen's earlier comments regarding God and *Dieu*.

In short, each word is signifying "otherwise" inasmuch as there is a constant openness to alterity of all sorts. The language of *Finnegans Wake* offers a *gnomonic* epistemology of Irishness in that it allows for the voice of the other to fill the gap in the *gnomon*, while never allowing any form of closure. The "writer complex" creates *hauntological* Irish "identities complex" through the achievement of a position outside Ireland, and through the creation of an "English" language (and never were inverted commas more deserved) which is shot through with traces of European languages. In the face of the essentialism that we have all seen in evidence at Drumcree in recent years, perhaps there is something to be said for what Joyce (the writer complex *par excellence*) is attempting, namely the avoidance of what he calls "life's high carnage of semperidentity by subsisting peasemeal upon variables".³³ "Semperidentity", an identity that is always the same, is by definition unchanging. The memory of the most recent "high carnage" brought about in Northern Ireland in the name of such "semperidentity" is still fresh in all of our minds. Such a simplistic and fixed identity is necessarily temporally focused on the past. Its sense of definition derives from the past, and its whole *raison d'être* is predicated on conserving the trans-temporal nature of its own identificatory characteristics. Change, in such a *Weltanschauung*, is to be blocked at all costs, including those of "high carnage", in order to preserve this simplistic form of selfhood. Arguing for a more complex form of Irishness, as created through literature, Joyce suggests an avoidance of such simplicity and instead argues that the "variables" of alterity should be embraced as they occur, "peasemeal", in order to constantly redefine our notions of selfhood.

³² *Finnegans Wake*, 13, 5.

³³ *Finnegans Wake*, 582, 15-16.

I would finish this paper with a quotation from *Ulysses*. Leopold Bloom, a Hungarian Jew, symbolic of the European influence on Irishness, enunciates the complex form of Irishness that is the subject of this paper, and I would argue one of the aims of Joyce's project:

What is your nation if I may ask? says the citizen
Ireland, says Bloom. I was born here. Ireland.³⁴

What is at stake here is that very sense of *gnomonic* and hauntological identity that we have been discussing, with Bloom, like Stephen before him, functioning as Joyce's *raisonneur*. The point at issue is that, for Joyce, Ireland, or to be more correct notions of Irish identity, must be sufficiently complex and plural to include those, like Leopold Bloom, who are not Irish in any essentialist sense. Writing at the time of the Gaelic, Celtic and Irish revivals, Joyce was making a point which was unlikely to be popular given the notions of postcolonial self-fashioning that were taking place in an Ireland about to go through the throes of decolonization. These notions were simplistic in the extreme, with members of political and cultural groups mining a narrow seam of Irishness for the essential qualities of nationalism, Catholicism, Gaelicism and a strong sense of anti-Britishness. Looking back on this period, another writer who enunciated a similar complex sense of identity, John McGahern, gave the following account of a simplistic form of Irishness:

It was a young, insecure state without any traditions, without any manners, and there was this notion that to be Irish was good. Nobody actually took any time to understand what to be Irish was. There was this slogan and fanaticism and a lot of emotion, but there wasn't any clear idea except what you were against: you were against sexuality; you were against the English.³⁵

It is against such simplistic definitions of Irishness that Joyce sets up his own complex sense of Irishness, an Irishness which defines itself negatively in terms of European culture.

³⁴ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, edited by Hans Walter Gabler, Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior, London, 1989, 272.

³⁵ Julia Carlson, *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer*, Julia Carlson ed., London, 1990, 63.

The drive towards unity, fuelled by literature about Celtic heroes and *prosopopeic* female embodiments of Irishness (Erin, Cathleen Ni Houlihan, Banba, Mother Ireland, the Shan Van Vocht), tended to make Irishness monological and essentialist, and as such, part of a politics of the *unum*, of a notion of “oneness”, which, as Derrida notes, can be “a terrible catastrophe” in a state or a country.³⁶ However, as Mikhail Bakhtin has perceptively observed, language, especially in its literary incarnation, is a powerful tool in the deconstruction of such centralizing drives, as the “uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward” alongside the language of “verbal-ideological centralization and unification”.³⁷ It is these processes, I would suggest that underpin the Joycean notion of *hauntological* and *gnomonic* identities that have been the subject of this essay.

Like Derrida, Joyce is unwilling to see an identificatory politics predicated on the simplistic notions of “semperidentity”, of an *unum* which brooks no other notion of selfhood. If we take the cultural context of Joyce’s work into account, the dangers of such notions of semperidentity would have been all too clear to him. Much of the writing of the Gaelic and Irish Literary revivals would have been attempting to validate a Celtic self-fashioning by foregrounding core values in terms of a politico-cultural version of Irishness. Elsewhere, I have made the point that such a simplistic notion of Irish identity:

seeks to ground itself vertically in terms of historical development along a single ethnic and identificatory wavelength; the past has defined Irishness, and the contemporary function of literature is to conserve and preserve this handed-down heritage; its spatial dimension is narrow in the extreme, encompassing the verities of the transcendental signifiers of Irishness, Catholicism, Celtism, republicanism, nationalism, and language.³⁸

For Joyce, however, the role of the writer is very different. Rather than seeing writing as validating the socio-cultural *status quo*, he sees his role as offering new paradigms of identity, identities

³⁶ *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 15.

³⁷ *The Dialogic Imagination*, 272.

complexus, for his own culture. It is no accident that, at the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, he sets out his artistic *credo* as the forging in the smithy of his soul of the *uncreated* [my italics] conscience of his race. It will be his role to create that conscience by opening up the seeming certainties of identity to an ongoing critique which will allow for a definition of Irishness that will be “not identical to itself” but rather “different *with itself*”,³⁹ in short, he is attempting to define Irishness *otherwise*, and this, I conclude is the Joycean definition of the role of the artist. It is the creation of “identities in the writer complexus”, with the stress on the plural form of the noun. If selfhood is to be defined in terms of alterity in an ongoing process which will encompass the “variables” of both, then simplistic identity, as enunciated in the opening of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, must be transformed into the linguistic and cultural polysemy of *Finnegans Wake*, if the pluralization and complication of “Ireland untranscended”⁴⁰ is to be achieved.

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³⁸ Eugene O'Brien, *The Question of Irish Identity in the Writings of William Butler Yeats and James Joyce*, Lampeter, Wales, 1998, 33.

³⁹ *The Other Heading*, 9-10.

⁴⁰ *Finnegans Wake*, 429, 17-18.