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MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY


by

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A Master’s Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts, English

January 2012

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of English

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Abstract

Analyzing the colonial/postcolonial significance of Irish homes in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Samuel Beckett’s *Molloy*, and Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds* requires an analysis of the spaces outside the home and the underworld each of the main characters traverses. These three interrelated spaces, and the characters’ experiences in them, reveal distinct versions of Ireland in each novel. An analysis of *Ulysses* unveils an Ireland of self-alienation and figurative exile in each space, which seems to lead to an actual exile. Examining *Molloy* reveals an Ireland of intense attraction and repulsion, which results in perpetual colonial-like oppression and psychological paralysis. And a study of *At Swim-Two-Birds* uncovers alienation which blooms into an acceptance of Irishness, as a manifestation of personal and national identity. Because Beckett’s and O’Brien’s books are in conversation with Joyce’s, this thesis highlights several similar themes, but ultimately acknowledges three distinct versions of Ireland and Irishness.
NEGOTIATING NATIONAL IDENTITY:
"BETWEEN THE SAXON SMILE AND YANKEE YAWP, THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP SEA."

A THESIS
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Introduction

Despite their many differences, James Joyce *Ulysses*, Samuel Beckett’s *Molloy*, and Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds* share important characteristics, among them a prominent portrayal of both ideas of Irishness and the idea of home. These ideas are complicated by the texts’ status as colonial and postcolonial works. The idea of home is of added significance when read from a colonial, or postcolonial, critique. Pui-lan Kwok highlights the importance and complexity of the home in a postcolonial context:

For postcolonial critics, the interrogation of the construction of the “home” is significant because home often reveals our desire, our construction of identity, even our sense of longing and belonging.

Furthermore, the home and the outside—or the home and the world—must be read together simultaneously because these categories are mutually constitutive and contingent, whose content and meaning cannot be predetermined ... without examining how they are deployed in specific discourses. (102)

Thus, in order to determine the home’s significance, it is not enough to merely examine the home; in order to fully comprehend the significance of the home, the space outside the home must be examined and analyzed as well.

These three texts share one more significant feature: each text contains a figurative descent through an underworld. On the one hand, a descent through an underworld could be placed under the larger category of outside the home, but to do so would be to deny its special distinction. An underworld represents the antithesis of the home. If home “reveals our desire ... [and] our sense of longing and belonging” (102),
then an underworld necessarily reveals our aversions and our sense of abhorrence and alienation. The use of the underworld alludes to a rich literary tradition, in which a character has to go there before returning home.

One additional factor must be considered in the analysis of the home. It may seem to go without saying, but it is impossible to discuss the home without discussing the character who regards the dwelling as such. Several more versions of Ireland would be found if more than one character from each novel were examined at length, but except for *Molloy*, in which Molloy and Moran are so similar as to spark debate as whether or not they are in fact the same “person,” my analysis will focus on one character per chapter.

By examining depictions of the home, places outside the home, and the underworld I reveal three distinct versions of Ireland, one for each text. In *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus longs for acceptance both in and outside his home, but expresses estrangement on all three fronts. This estrangement results in a figurative exile and ultimately, possibly an actual one. In *Molloy*, both Molloy and Moran demonstrate and profess repulsion toward their homes and everything outside their homes, but they are unable to escape the pull of their domiciles. At times, their repulsion results in estrangement like Stephen’s, but their distaste with home and Ireland stems from a deep-rooted self-hatred. The unnamed narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds* begins the novel with experiences of alienation in and outside his home, but ultimately finds acceptance, in part, because of his success outside the home. His situation is very much the opposite of Stephen’s. Whereas for Stephen everything goes wrong, for the unnamed narrator of *At Swim* everything goes right.
Chapter One

Considering Stephen Dedalus's socioeconomic status and the people he encounters in *Ulysses*, one is hard pressed to find a reason for him to stay in Ireland: Ireland is infested with English soldiers, Stephen's friends do not respect him, his boss is an anti-Semitic know-it-all, his father is a spendthrift-drunk, and if that were not bad enough, the ghost of his dead mother haunts him. Of course, this is an oversimplification of his problems because emigration requires money, Stephen has younger sisters who can benefit from both his assistance and his presence, occasionally he and his friends see eye-to-eye, and there is no guarantee that his dead mother's ghost would not gather her things and track him down in another country. As for his boss and the English soldiers, they could be confronted and possibly overcome, but there is only a possibility of success in those matters. But then there is Bloom, a middle-aged man who befriends Stephen, and attempts to advise him, but at times appears to wander as aimlessly as Stephen. The disenfranchisement each man experiences can be described as figurative exile. Although normally exile is defined by a person leaving his home country, the text's allegorical connection to *The Odyssey* suggests that what Stephen and Bloom experience is best described as a figurative or internal exile.

But there is an important difference between Stephen's and Bloom's exiles. John G. Cawelti describes the wanderings of Stephen and Bloom as figurative exiles and touches on that difference. He contends that Stephen and Bloom begin the novel as exiles and have a choice to remain so at the novel's end:

Bloom and Stephen are ... exiles in a very specific sense: They have given up (Stephen) or forgotten (Bloom) the keys to their homes .... Much of the
action of the novel, like that of its prototype, Homer’s *Odyssey*, deals with the perils faced by the protagonists in their attempts to return home. In the end, Stephen refuses Bloom’s offer of a home, perhaps to go into the permanent exile that was Joyce’s own chosen lot. Bloom does finally return home, making his way in even without his key. However, this ending is ambiguous enough that readers still argue about its meaning.

The ending exiles of Stephen and Bloom are both equivocal, but their exiles are significantly different. Stephen chooses between life in Ireland and an actual self-exile in another country, whereas Bloom’s choice is between reconciling with his wife or not. Bloom’s encounter with the Citizen complicates how others view his place in Ireland, but his sense of nationality seems mostly unaffected by how others view him. That is why, although I occasionally make references to Bloom, he will not be the center of this discussion. My references to Bloom will serve to juxtapose him to Stephen because although his wandering is as real as Stephen’s, it stems from different sociopolitical and psychological forces.

Exile is a key component to understanding *Ulysses*, but as Cawelti points out, its connection to the home is also an essential part of that understanding. Knowing what one is exiled from is necessary for knowing what one has lost. Stephen’s ultimate choice of actual exile is a reaction, not only to his home, but to the space outside the home. Analysis of these spaces will show that, for Stephen, there is essentially no qualitative difference between them. Ignacio López-Vicuña suggests just such a paradigm when comparing the text to Joyce’s own life:
Because Joyce made self-exile a personal as well as an aesthetic choice, *exiles* permeate and repeat themselves in his texts. Joyce’s heroes ...are men who are not fully at home even at home. Exile is an essentially ambivalent form of absence— it means being there, but not altogether. If *Ulysses* dramatizes a quest to return to the home, then this return means coming to terms with the unfamiliarity of “home” and with estrangement as a precondition for finding oneself. (141)

I would suggest that the feeling of “not being at home” requires the additional criterion of “discomfort.” After all, Bloom is familiar with Molly’s affair; being more familiar with her infidelity would not make him feel more at home, but rather less at home because it would increase his level of discomfort. In order for Stephen to return home he would not only need to become more familiar with the ambience of his home, but his level of discomfort would need to decrease. Examining the atmosphere of Stephen’s home, and the major events that occur during his disappointed track back home, including his figurative descent into Hades, reveals a journey that begins with a figurative exile and ends with a physical one.

In the first chapter of *Ulysses*, Stephen’s home is marred by the theme of oppression and of his struggle to overcome his three oppressors. That colonizers oppress the colonized is inherent in colonial studies. Indeed, Stephen sometimes directly speaks of his oppression. Within the Martello tower, where Stephen and Buck Mulligan live, Stephen is confronted by the Englishman Haines, who has spent the night in their home, and Buck who is imitating a Catholic Priest. Despite Buck’s playfulness, he takes on the role of oppressor with the first words he directs toward Stephen, “Come up, Kinch! Come
up, you fearful jesuit!” (I.8). Both sentences are imperatives, commanding Stephen to act, and Stephen’s submissive response to Buck’s beck and call establishes a clear pecking order between the two. In the first sentence Buck calls Stephen by the nickname he has given him. Although nicknames can be used as terms of endearment, Stephen does not share Buck’s enthusiasm for it. The use of the nickname is a type of figurative exile. Buck exiles Stephen from his born identity. Buck’s boast, “O, my name for you is the best: Kinch, the knife-blade” (I.54-55) is not acknowledged by Stephen, who returns to the topic of his displeasure with the arrival of Haines. The knife-blade might be associated with Stephen’s incisiveness or his sharp aphorisms, as Sara K. Crangle points out in “Stephen’s Handles” (57-58), but this nickname and its function as a synecdoche have the effect of denying Stephen’s existence as a whole person, by accentuating and identifying this one quality as if it were the only one he possessed. Crangle confirms Buck’s implicit derision while running the gamut of possible meanings of “Kinch”:

“Kinch” is Buck’s nickname for Stephen and the summons by which he enters the book. The OED defines “nick” as something pilfered or critiqued; it can also mean a precise correspondence or resemblance. In a similar way, Buck’s nickname depreciates Stephen even as it is ... an “aptonym,” a name that suits its bearer. Critical approaches to the word “kinch” consider its relation to the German kindchen or child. Richard Ellmann suggests it bears aural resemblance to the sound made by a cutting knife (JJII 131), while The New Bloomsday Book asserts that “Kinch” refers to Stephen’s intellect, presumably because it is incisive. According to the OED, “kinch” can also refer to a looped or twisted rope,
particularly a slip-knot or noose. (57-58)

Crangle’s research, while lengthy, is not entirely exhaustive. Crangle considers the root of the work “nickname,” but if we consider the French word for nickname, “sobriquet,” a word which Joyce uses in *Ulysses* (XII.715), in conjunction with Buck’s actions at the moment he utters “Kinch,” another possibility emerges. The *Dictionary of English Etymology* of 1865 reveals:

Sobriquet. Fr. sobriquet, a nickname. Norm. bruchet, the bole of the throat, breast-bone in birds. Fouler sus' bracket, to seize by the throat. Hence soubriquet, sobriquet, [properly a chuck under the chin, then] a quip or cut given, a mock or flout, a jest broken on a man, [finally] a nickname.

(264)

Even if it were meant as a term of endearment, when the person being called by the nickname does not approve, as Stephen does not appear to in this case, a sobriquet is essentially “a quip or cut given.” Buck’s actions while discussing the nickname suggest that the sobriquet (as well as his friendship with Stephen) function for Buck more as means, rather than an end. Immediately after discussing Stephen’s nickname, or sobriquet, Buck “shave[s] warily over his chin” (1.56). Joyce, draws the reader’s attention to Buck’s actions, which amounts to his speaking the sobriquet and acting the definition of “sobriquet” while using a type of knife in order to improve his appearance. In the context of the scene, “Kinch” is merely a tool for Buck to improve his appearance, quite the odd job for a so-called friend. Thus, even in Stephen’s home he is first an advocate of Buck and second of himself.

The second part of Buck’s initial statement to Stephen is far less complicated, but
continues to reinforce Stephen’s feelings of disempowerment by treating him as the oppressed, which adds to his feelings of estrangement, itself a form of figurative exile. By commanding Stephen as if he were a subject or a soldier and identifying him as a pious parishioner of Catholicism, Buck corroborates Stephen’s identification of the Catholic Church as an oppressor. Crangle argues that not only is Buck Mulligan impersonating one of Stephen’s oppressors, but he is, in fact one of them (58). Buck’s next statement to Stephen both strengthens the connection between oppressor and Church and Buck’s objectification of Stephen with an actual military command: “Back to barracks! he said sternly” (I.19). This next command enmeshes the church with imperial military authority and confirms Buck’s position of power in their relationship. By connecting Buck, Stephen’s friend and flatmate, with the entities Stephen establishes as oppressors, Joyce establishes a strained relationship between the two friends and thus a home in which the parties should be equals, but are not. Stephen understandably is uncomfortable with the role he is forced to play. Forcing Stephen to play the role of someone other than who he is further alienates him from his own “home.”

Buck’s mock-mass mocks the Catholics of Ireland, but mocking the country’s dominant religion is a form of self-alienation. Besides subjugating Stephen as a “fearful Jesuit,” Buck’s mass serves to mock all Jesuits, and the Catholics of Ireland in general. This point is clarified when Buck reacts to the milk woman’s obsecration, “Glory be to God” (I.390). Buck mockingly asks, “To whom?” (I.391), and then sardonically answers his own question with, “The islanders ... speak frequently of the collector of prepuces” (II.93-94). Buck’s choice of circumcision used as an antonomasia for God, which when separated from its religious context can sound nothing but vulgar,
exemplifies his disrespect for Christianity and its Irish followers. This is, of course, not a one-time occurrence, and in part prepares the readers for his “Ballad of Joking Jesus” (I. 584-89). Buck’s disapproval of Catholicism, and Stephen’s silence toward that disapproval, indicate how both feel alienated from the population at large.

Buck’s acrimonious witticisms about the Irish are not limited to religion. Buck finds fault with everything in Ireland, from the surrounding sea to the artifacts in the tower. Buck’s tone is playful but churlish when he borrows Stephen’s handkerchief and exclaims, “The bard’s own noserag! A new colour for our Irish poets: snotgreen. You can almost taste it” (I.73-74). Buck’s statement raises Stephen to the status of Bard, but debases him by claiming it is a color for all the “Irish poets”; dismissing the rank of Bard by suggesting the field of poetry, or at least Irish poetry, is absurd. Holding the title of bard, in this instance, amounts to being the distinguished figurehead of a ridiculous fraternity. Stephen is included in the ranks of his countrymen, but that inclusion is no compliment.

When Buck next speaks, he begins to praise the sea, but between his praise he jams, “The snotgreen sea. The scrotumtightening sea” (I.78). Buck’s parody of Homeric convention demonstrates a familiarity with the Greeks whom he idolizes, but it also demonstrates something about his character. For Buck, it seems, for every praise there is a curse. Later, Stephen joins the rhythm of his mockery by asserting, “It is a symbol of Irish art. The cracked looking glass of a servant” (I.146). The idea of art as a “cracked looking-glass” comes from Oscar Wilde’s “The Decay of Lying: An Observation” (29). In Wilde’s dialogue, Cyril makes the keen observation that if one considers art a reflection of life then he “reduce[s] genius to the position of a cracked looking-glass” (29). By
alluding to Wilde, Stephen’s words both celebrate one of Ireland’s great writers and deflate the importance of any culturally creative people. By adding the words, “of a servant,” he defines Irish art in both aesthetic and political terms. “The cracked glass of a servant” suggests a paradigm of Irish art, which, in one sense, is always a failed imitation of the English tradition. Whether it is by writing in the same language as their colonizers or the fanatic admiration of writers like Shakespeare, Stephen’s words suggest a failure that is due to the English’s continued oppression of the Irish, which results in a literary paradigm in which the oppressed perpetuate their oppression by explicitly, or implicitly, praising the tradition of their oppressors.

Attempts were made to create a new paradigm during the Irish revival, but Buck would not be a likely participant of the movement. In the Irish National Library Stephen attempts to join just such a movement, but feels slighted by those within it, which furthers his figurative exile. In *Modern Ireland*, R.F. Foster explains how literature, culture, and language were politically connected in Ireland at the time:

Collections of folk-tales like Lady Gregory’s *Gods and Fighting Men*, meant more than the scientific study of early Irish history ... the origins of Gaelic society retained the romantic gloss endowed by zealots like Alice Stopford Green. And this was closely connected with the campaign to re-establish the Irish language, Irish pastimes, and an Irish ethos, which developed from the 1880s. (447)

Involvement in such a movement could have helped Stephen to assimilate into his own culture. Buck, on the other hand, is not interested in Ireland’s old ways, but he does hope to “do something for the Island” (I.158). Buck wants to “Hellenise” Ireland (I.158). Such
an endeavor potentially could improve the political situation for the inhabitants of Ireland and alter the Irish artist’s paradigm. Although the Irish would be throwing off one culture’s artistic tradition for that of another, it would be an active choice rather than passive acceptance. Buck’s desire to alter the face of Ireland suggests he has adopted the mentality of his English oppressors, Haines excluded, who believe that Ireland and its inhabitants need improvement. In a sense, the revivalists believe that Ireland needs improvement, but that improvement will come from embracing their traditions, which were not infected by English influence. Buck suggests that Stephen should join him in his campaign of Hellenization three times (I.79, I.158, I.176), but each time, Stephen either says nothing or changes the subject. Stephen’s lack of a response is indicative of his, and Joyce’s, own position on how to overcome the paradigm of the servant’s cracked mirror and the island’s need for improvement, which is that nothing can be done but to leave the island altogether.

Ironically, it is Haines, the Englishman, who seems to view Ireland as home and good, at least by how it was once envisioned by the “gloss endowed by zealots” of which Foster speaks. In spite of his national identity, Haines holds opinions that might be mistaken for those of the Gaelic League or the Irish Revival. When Haines speaks Irish to the milk woman, Buck points out the irony lost on her: “He’s English ... and he thinks we ought to speak Irish in Ireland” (I.431-32). Instead the woman agrees with Haines and confesses, “Sure we ought to ... and I’m ashamed I don’t speak the language myself” (I.433-34). She finishes her statement on the importance of Gaelic by explaining, “I’m told it’s a grand language by them that knows” (I.434). Although Douglas Hyde’s 1892 speech, “The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland,” suggests such sentiments, the idea
that adopting Irish as the national language would cure the country of all that ails it 
borders on the absurd. The milk woman should feel no more ashamed for not knowing 
Irish than she should for not knowing French. The notion of Irish being “grand” could 
only be assumed by her nationalism. While academics and polyglots might find the 
features of grammar and diction from one language more appealing than that of another, 
one would be hard pressed to offer forth an argument explaining how knowing Irish 
would better the life of an agricultural worker.

Haines’s belief about the importance of Gaelic may not be thoroughly thought-
through, but that too fits his character. Items like his emerald-studded, silver cigarette 
case suggest his desire to belong in Ireland. In one sense, the souvenir demonstrates the 
attitude of a typical tourist. It could also be construed as the sort of immersion into a 
foreign culture one might aim for while learning a foreign language. However, something 
different is suggested in the Irish National Library. Mr. Best explains, “[Haines]’s quite 
enthusiastic, don’t you know, about Hyde’s Lovesongs of Connacht. I couldn’t bring him 
in to hear the discussion. He’s gone to Gill’s to buy it” (IX.93-95). On the one hand, this 
might be construed as simply another possession for Haines to acquire, but on the other 
hand, his enthusiasm in conjunction with John Eglinton’s comment on the subject offers 
another view. Eglinton remarks, “The peatsmoke is going to his head” (IX.100). Eglinton 
seems to suggest that Haines’s immersion into Irish culture is making him forget his 
Englishness and that he’s “going native,” as it were. All of this does nothing for Stephen’s 
opinion of Haines as a usurper.

Stephen understands Haines’s presence in the tower as a synecdoche for the 
English occupation of Ireland. Haines’s “raving all night about a black panther ... [and]
his guncase" (I.57-58), implies the imperialistic impulses of the English who colonized portions of Africa, Asia, and North America (places where panthers are indigenous) as well as the places where there are no panthers, such as the places north and west of England where their Celtic neighbors live. When Haines secures the key to the tower, Stephen sees himself as exiled from his home: “I will not sleep here tonight. Home also I cannot go” (I.740). This particular instance results in an actual instance of exile. The final, vehement word of the chapter, “Usurper” (I.744), would seem Stephen’s final word on the matter, but the origin of that word is ambiguous.

As with all dialog, who says what is often as important as what is said. If “Usurper” were to come from Stephen then nothing would change, but if it were to come from the voice that “called out to him from the sea” (I.741), then it would serve to reinforce Stephen’s feelings of alienation, while suggesting that there were a place in which he might not feel alienated. While it would be reasonable to deduce that Stephen has uttered or thought the word because of Haines’s request for the key and Stephen’s unspoken response, it would also be reasonable to deduce that the sea itself has uttered the word, as it would not be the only personification of nature in the chapter. Besides Buck’s labeling the sea as “a great sweet mother” (I.77-78), the narration describes Buck as having “blessed gravely thrice the tower, the surrounding land and the awakening mountains” (I.9-10). Imbuing the mountains with this human, or at least animal, characteristic is no doubt intended, in part, to establish the time as morning. However, by setting the precedent of a living land, Joyce makes it all the more plausible that “Usurper” comes not from Stephen, but from some other entity. Like any form of animism, it elevates the status of the non-human, but in these instances that elevation has the effect of
elevating the status of Ireland and its surrounding sea. This is particularly significant because much of what Buck and Stephen say about Ireland, as well as what they imply with their speech, thoughts, and actions, is negative. Whether Stephen or the sea is the origin of the word, “Usurper” and the sea are telling Stephen to leave Ireland. “Usurper” implies that Stephen should leave Ireland because he no longer has a home and the sea because it is already calling him away.

Stephen’s feeling “at home” in his place of residence becomes therefore all the more tenuous with the unannounced arrival of Haines. On the one hand, Stephen’s dislike of Haines is simple: the dislike of an unannounced guest who seems to suffer from night terrors and bosses his hosts around is easy enough to understand detached from the political implications. Stephen’s complaint of being “Out here in the dark with a man I don’t know raving and moaning to himself about shooting a black panther” is frightening whatever Haines’s ethnicity may be (I.60-62). While Haines’s insistence to Buck that “We had better pay” for the milk (I.440), elicits a response from neither Buck nor Stephen, it has interesting implications. First, by including himself in the “we” and taking it upon himself to announce that the milk should be paid for, he further establishes himself as a resident of the tower. The need to clear up the debt also has political implications when considering what Mr. Deasy describes as “the proudest word you’ll ever hear from an Englishman’s mouth” (II.244-45), namely, “I paid my way. I never borrowed a shilling in my life” (II.253-54). Mr. Deasy’s statement adds a political dimension to Haines’s behavior. Although Buck and Stephen seem untroubled by Haines’s intrusion into their finances, even reading the passage absent of any political overtones, Haines’s sudden domineering behavior shows him overstepping his boundaries
for someone who has spent only one night in a house as a guest.

Mr. Deasy's assertion of English pride not only induces Stephen's shame but also suggests that the Irish in general should feel shame. Although Mr. Deasy complicates the definition of being Irish by claiming both English and Irish heritage (II.278-80), in this instance, he clearly identifies with his English heritage. The unproblematic extrapolation of his statement is that if to be an Englishman is not to owe money, then to be an Irishman is to owe money. In a legal sense, one way that a creditor can collect the money he is owed is by placing a lien on the debtor's house. As such, being in debt is another way in which one can never be properly at home: If one owes money to another, then his home is never truly his own. In essence, one can feel exiled from his home, even while in it.

Because Mr. Deasy is in a position of power, his claim of Irish heritage does not diminish his ability to identify with the English. He is able to use his Irish heritage among those with less power and who identify themselves as Irish (like Stephen), to claim that his opinions are not those of an English oppressor but those of someone who sees things from both sides. In "Nationalism: Irony and Commitment," Terry Eagleton speaks to the unique quality the Irish possess, which allows Mr. Deasy to claim his Irish heritage and still speak from an English perspective:

it was never of much interest to British imperialism whether the Irish were Irish or Eskimo, white or Black, whether they worshiped tree gods or the trinity. It is not their ethnic peculiarity but their territory and labor power that have entranced the British. The Irish are simply denizens of a convenient neighboring island; as long as they are other than the British
they do not, like women, require certain specific innate characteristics to be ruled over. (28-29)

Ironically, because the English colonization of the Irish is based on such a vague definition of the Irish as Other, Mr. Deasy's claim about the Englishman's greatest boast would seem to cement the Irishman's greatest lament, rather than loosen it.

Stephen's preoccupation with money is understandable, considering that the novel takes place on the day he is paid. On the other hand, the fact that he owes more than the sum of his check is unfortunate and burdensome. In "Mourning, Owning, Owing," Ravit Reichman relates the "burden of owing" to Haines's failure to own up to his history:

Unlike the ideal Englishman, Stephen feels the weight of debt, the burden of always owing something to someone. Moreover, these debts are exceedingly personal, in contrast to the accountability expressed by his English friend Haines in the first episode. "'We feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly,'" Haines declares. "'It seems history is to blame'" (1:648–49). But if history is to blame, then no one needs to feel responsible after all; something greater than the sum of individual actions has driven the story of oppression forward. Haines's lordly admission, "'We feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly,'" turns out to mean instead, "we need not feel very much at all." (444)

Reichman's comparison demonstrates how Stephen's debt is felt personally while Haines does not feel personally responsible for history because he thinks about it objectively. Both Haines and Mr. Deasy share the ability to think overly objectively about their affairs. Perhaps the Englishman's greatest boast is that he can think objectively about
In the previous examples, colonization and oppression are discussed theoretically and objectively. However, the reality of oppression is that one group of people is dehumanized by another. It is important to discuss exactly what that entails, in order to demonstrate the institutionalized forces Stephen would have faced. While Eagleton and Reichman speak on theories of otherness, in "Race Against Time: Racial Discourse and Irish History," Luke Gibbons demonstrates that, although the colonization of the Irish may be unique, as Eagleton asserts, it is still the same as other kinds of oppression in the way that matters. Gibbons begins by addressing how the colonization of the Irish was unique:

During the twilight of colonialism, a children’s toy circulated in the “Big Houses” of the Irish ascendancy which purported to give the “British Empire at a glance.” It took the form of a map of the world, mounted on a wheel complete with small apertures which revealed all that was worth knowing about the most distant corners of the empire. One of the apertures gave a breakdown of each colony in terms of its “white” and “native” population, as if both categories were mutually exclusive. When it came to Ireland, the wheel ground to a halt for here was a colony whose subject population was both “native” and “white” at the same time. This was one corner of the empire, apparently, that could not be taken in at a glance.

(207)

Gibbons’ research would seem to confirm Eagleton’s point, but he goes on to quote a passage in which Charles Kingsley recounts his trip to Sligo in 1860:
I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don’t believe they are our fault. I believe ... that they are happier, better, more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours. (208)

Despite the initial difference the familiar pattern of colonization stays the same. Gibbons’s research demonstrates that the English view of the Irish as other despite their shared skin color and their shared practice of Christianity (albeit different sects), seemed to require a delusional dehumanization of the Irish, perhaps because of a need to more objectively distance themselves further from those they oppressed.

Joyce presents Bloom as an Irishman who overcomes debtorship. Mr. Deasy does not get the final word on Irishness in its relation to debtorship. Although Stephen is in debt and the spendthrift habits of his dead-beat father force his siblings to pawn Stephen’s belongings just so they can remain afloat (X.874), *Ulysses* presents contrary examples of wherewithal of the Irish. After an eventful and expensive day, Bloom compares his credits to his debits and finds himself 16 shilling and 6 pence in the black (XVII.1476). By showing Bloom’s calculations, Joyce conveys Bloom’s fiscal responsibility in defiance of Mr. Deasy’s adage. Stephen, himself, despite his debts, manages to defy Mr. Deasy’s remarks, by drawing attention to Mr. Deasy when, despite his debts, he loans a half crown to a friend. Before Stephen loans John Corley a half crown, he informs him of a position opening up at Dalkey: “There’ll be a job tomorrow or next day, Stephen told him, in a boys’ school at Dalkey for a gentleman usher. Mr. Garrett Deasy. Try it. You
may mention my name” (XVI.157-59). Stephen attempts several different things with this statement. He may merely be trying to forestall parting with his would-be pence. On the other hand, by doing so he would also spare Corley the pain of being in debt to another. Corley asks for money and Stephen offers him a job. In essence, Stephen begins by offering to teach Corley how to fish, but when he refuses, Stephen gives him the fish anyway. The first example stands in opposition to the pride of the Englishman by demonstrating that financial independence is, in no way, indigenous to England. But the second example demonstrates the difficulty for Stephen and those like him to achieve financial independence. Corley’s refusal to apply for the position and his acceptance of Stephen’s loan merely perpetuates his debt. One possibility, which does not bode well for Stephen’s financial independence, is that it is his own position that will be opening up, because he is preparing to leave his position at the school and return to Europe.

Outside his home, Stephen continues to experience alienation. Stephen’s visit to the National Library epitomizes his difficulty overcoming the influence of colonization. The irony is palpable when, within the Irish National Library, Stephen proposes his theory of the most English Englishman of English letters, Shakespeare, in an attempt to convince an Irish literary coterie that he is worthy of their company. The irony increases as Stephen urges himself to depict the “Local colour. Work in all you know. Make them accomplices” (IX.158). Joyce’s Irish epic not only brings Dublin to life, but one of the characters brings the English Renaissance to life, as well. The details Stephen adds do nothing to convince his audience of his theory, but they do suggest an ability to compose, which is made all the more impressive because this portion of his performance is unrehearsed. Despite his impromptu lyricism, Stephen can neither convince his audience
of his point nor gain their respect with his rhapsody. Stephen is made keenly aware of their lack of respect when he overhears them discussing the prospect of “younger poets’ verses” being collected for publication, yet Stephen is not urged to submit anything (IX. 289-91). An extra slight is added when Buck Mulligan, who earlier that morning was singing the praises of Stephen’s Shakespearian theory, pretends not to know who Shakespeare is (IX.508). Once again, Stephen is without a friend to buck him up, as it were. The importance of this scene should not be underestimated. For an aspiring writer, whose home is uncomfortable and whose interactions with his family are both uncomfortable and unfamiliar (as they are limited to chance meetings on the street and the occasional ghostly haunting), the affirmation of his literary abilities could have provided him with comfort for the thing he feels most familiar. Of course, this never happens.

Stephen’s allegorical track through Hades confirms not only his alienation and figurative exile, but also a desire for an actual exile. Because, as López-Vicuña points out, “estrangement [is] a precondition to finding oneself” (141), and no place allows for the possibility of more estrangement than Hades, whose innate qualities dictate there be the most unfamiliarity, as well as the most discomfort. Bloom experiences his own figurative descent in “Hades.” His thoughts wander to his deceased father and son. Bloom’s thoughts too suggest alienation and guilt, but Bloom does not desire exile. In the earlier episodes of *Ulysses*, Stephen’s memories of his mother dishearten him, but in “Circe,” the ghost of Stephen’s mother addresses him in such an unsettling manner that his thoughts provoke a violent outburst. Even in the midst of a scene in which one might assume Stephen would be able to forget his grief, he is still consumed by it. Then again,
the palpability of Stephen’s grief in the brothel is not entirely surprising if one remembers how, earlier that day, Stephen has had two vivid memories of his mother when Buck broaches the subject. In each instance Buck brings Stephen out of his “moody brooding” (I.235-36). In the first instance, Buck merely wipes his razor blade and Stephen returns to the present, but the action has special significance, considering that Stephen, or Kinch, is the “knifeblade.” By wiping the razor blade clean, Buck seems to wipe Stephen’s brooding away, if only for a moment. In the next instance, a shout from Buck awakens Stephen to the world. Buck’s required rise in intensity suggests a rise in intensity of Stephen’s grief. In fact, Buck’s intensity requires more than one shout to jolt Stephen back into reality. Not only does Buck shout, “Kinch Ahoy!” (I.280), but Buck needs to “come nearer up the staircase, calling again” to break Stephen’s trance (I.281-82). Thus, considering the growing intensity of Stephen’s grief in the morning, it is not surprising that his grief, when fueled by alcohol, might require the “cold water” Florry suggests in order to bring Stephen back to reality (XV.430). No one succeeds in getting Stephen the water. It is only the beating from a British soldier and time passing that bring Stephen back to reality. The fact that Stephen is first accosted by his mother’s ghost and then beaten to his senses by a British soldier, is emblematic of the scope of Stephen’s figurative exile.

However, before Stephen returns to the present with his senses more or less intact, he utters a phrase that indicates a change in his status from that of a figurative exile to potentially being a literal exile. When Stephen shouts “I’ll bring you all to heel” (XI.4235-36), upon rejecting his mother’s urgings to accept God and before he “smashes the chandelier” with his ashplant (XI.4243-44), he conveys the idea that he literally will put
everyone behind his heels. With this single action, he rejects God and by extension Catholicism, his mother’s ghost and by extension his entire family, and his friends who are with him and by extension all of his friends. Exactly where Stephen is off to is confirmed by the last words of the novel, which are not Molly Bloom’s, but those of James Joyce:

Trieste-Zurich-Paris

1914-1921 (XVIII.1610-11)

It is in the final words of the novel in which Stephen and Joyce are nearly identical and it is in the light of those final words that Stephen and Joyce reject two of their oppressors. When Stephen warns Buck in “Telemachus” that if Haines, who represents England, stays in the tower, then he will go (I.62-63), it can be read as, “If England continues to occupy Ireland, then Stephen will leave.” By smashing the chandelier, he shows what he thinks about God. When Stephen discovers in “Proteus” that he has forgotten his handkerchief (III.499), the same one which was said to be symbolic of Ireland because of its color, and Stephen thinks that he will get another one, he is, in effect, demonstrating the ease with which he will throw off his national identity in favor of another. Although this last action is more difficult than the two prior, it is corroborated when Stephen explains his ideas about nationalism to Bloom.

In Stephen’s most overt statement about his national identity, he reveals that he feels Irish, but lacks a sense of belonging to Ireland. Stephen juxtaposes Bloom’s opinion with his own explaining, “You suspect ... that I may be important because I belong to the faubourg Saint Patrice called Ireland for short .... But I suspect ... that Ireland must be important because it belongs to me” (XVI.1160-65). Stephen paints his relationship with
Ireland with the brush of a pragmatist. The way Ireland belongs to Stephen is the way any country belongs to someone who is raised there; Stephen realizes that whatever special significance he feels toward Ireland is because he was raised in Ireland and not because of any intrinsic value of it. More important Stephen does not feel a sense of belonging with his fellow Irishmen.

Although Stephen is momentarily taken under Bloom’s wing, it is clear that whatever sense of belonging he feels will be fleeting. In Joyce’s Modernist Allegory, Stephen Sicari likens the scene to “The traditional plot of the English bourgeois novel” (142). Sicari contends that Stephen “the ‘orphan’ is about to discover his true identity and as the son will now begin a relation with a man who will become his father; and perhaps, on taking him home, Bloom will introduce Stephen to Molly, who then can become his mother” (142). That, of course, does not happen. That is not to say that Sicari is wrong in suggesting that Joyce prepares the reader for this possibility, but Stephen’s final homecoming does not occur in the text. It must be extrapolated from the text. Through all of Ulysses, Stephen wanders, not only through physical space, but through emotional space, as well. His ambivalence to his mother’s dying request haunts him; Buck saddens him; Haines irritates him. But ultimately these are all things that Stephen must let go.

In one way, understanding what Joyce wanted readers to know about Stephen and himself gives us an understanding of what will happen to Stephen after the text ends. Hugh Kenner reflects:

What the first readers of Ulysses were meant to know of its author may be gathered from A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, in which a youth
named Stephen .... develops a subtle dogmatism about aesthetics, defines
the terms of a struggle in which “silence, exile, and cunning” will be his
weapons .... We learn all this ... about Stephen, and to some extent we
know it of Joyce, too .... While there can be no doubt that the book mirrors
James Joyce’s childhood and adolescence, we cannot feel confident that
the mirroring is steady and whole.  (187)

But the one thing that the text does tell us with the final words of the novel, is that Joyce
did leave Ireland; the text that depicts Dublin so closely was composed entirely outside
the country.

The threat of violence can be just as terrifying as actual violence. Analogously,
figurative exile can be just as painful as actual exile. After all, the pain of exile is not
measured in miles; it is measured in the loss of friendships, casual acquaintances, family
members, affiliations and familiar sights. It does not matter if one is exiled one mile
from his home or a million, either way, he loses those things and suffers because of that
loss. In *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus has lost most of these, some he has never had, and
others he has thrown away. Stephen is of Ireland, but he no longer lives in it. To live in a
place requires the ability to affect others and be affected. His closest familial relationship
is with his dead mother. His best friend is a self-interested scrounger. His strongest
affiliation is his job at Dalkey, which he dislikes. Stephen’s figurative exile is more actual
than many actual exiles’ exile.
Chapter Two

Samuel Beckett’s *Molloy* is one of his last texts in which Ireland positively can be identified as the setting. Because of that fact, the text represents an interesting fork in Beckett’s oeuvre, a point at which Beckett the Irish writer becomes Beckett the Irish exile. But as John P. Harrington points out, for example, “of more interest than specific identifications, of Bally with Baile Atha Cliath... is the representation in the novels of a dynamics of place that is self-evidently derived from Ireland and abstracted into a new form of that attraction and repulsion from home” (156). While later texts maintain the theme of “attraction and repulsion from home,” the absence of a national setting and their original composition in French makes reading them as postcolonial Irish texts a more convoluted and tenuous task. A quick glance of the town names in *Molloy* (Bally, Hole, and Turdy) would seem only to indicate repulsion. Of course, *Molloy* is more than the names of the towns it takes place in. Despite the seemingly inhospitable place names, Molloy’s entire journey is composed of attempting to return to his home in Bally and the bulk of Moran’s journey consists of failing to find Molloy in Bally and his subsequent return to his own home in Turdy. Because of his excessive repulsion toward home, Molloy’s longing to return there is somewhat mysterious, and although Moran is ordered home by Youdi, both he and his reasons for doing so are mysterious, as well. However, analyzing the text with a postcolonial lens will help to demystify the forces of “attraction and repulsion from home” (Harrington 156). Inherent in these forces are the degrees of subjugation by various oppressors both inside and outside the home. While their homes are safer than the space outside their homes, they are by no means secure and their walls do little to prevent the arrival of unwanted guests. As with *Ulysses*, the home is of added
significance because of the postcolonial context. Unlike Stephen in *Ulysses*, who finds freedom in self-exile, Beckett’s characters cannot free themselves from the attraction of their homes. Thus, despite the repulsion, they never manage to escape Ireland. Like Stephen in *Ulysses*, both Molloy and Moran enter figurative underworlds. But their reemergence from these underworlds is not entirely clear and as such the depiction of Ireland is rather bleak. Overall, Ireland is depicted as a fascist state, whose residents are quick to anger and are forever propagating. Propagation serves as a counterpoint for the deaths which Molloy and Moran look forward to as a means of escaping their lives of subjugation and torture, but those escapes do not come. In lieu of death, Molloy’s lack of propagation and both characters’ disdain for their countrymen can be explained through their perception of their sociopolitical problems being perpetual and inescapable. The persistence of this nihilistic perspective in *Molloy* will be explained by the philosophy Beckett enjoyed reading and how it resonates with postcolonial theory.

Molloy’s depiction of home relates directly to taking his mother’s place in it. Molloy’s description of displacing his mother is telling in what he considers in his analysis and what he leaves out. Molloy reports, “In any case I have her room. I sleep in her bed. I piss and shit in her pot. I have taken her place. I must resemble her more and more” (7). Molloy’s account focuses entirely on the physical, specifically on how his body has taken the place of his mother’s body. His mother’s room is the space that his body will occupy until he dies. Even though the story Molloy is about to relate to the reader is his search for his mother, he does not seem particularly concerned with whether she died before he returned home or if she was buried (7). The only thing that matters is that she is dead. Similarly, since he has taken over his mother’s home the only future
event that matters to him is his death. The idea that life amounts to nothing more than simply waiting to die resonates in much of Beckett’s work, as well as in nihilistic philosophy. However, postcolonial theory suggests why Molloy exhibits apparent indifference toward the major life event of inheriting his mother’s home. His mother’s death, and his apathy towards it, are allegorical for the transition of power from colonizer to previously colonized that Deepika Bahri describes in *Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature*. Bahri cites J. Nozipo Maraire’s novel *Zenzele*, which describes the symptoms of “the postcolonial syndrome” thus: “acquisition, imitation, and a paucity of imagination.” This syndrome has ensured the perpetuation of a preordained maldevelopment trajectory that maintains the dominance of a certain class and the progressive impoverishment of others. (51)

Molloy’s appraisal of his future demonstrates a “paucity of imagination” when he focuses entirely on his physical displacement of his mother and his future removal from their home. His philosophical outlook could be described as “nihilistic by default.” Instead of Molloy weighing all the possibilities of life and finding each to be as meaningless as the next, he is not aware of any possibilities to weigh and therefore finds life meaningless.

Molloy’s preoccupation with the physical shows a lack of insight on his own part, but his preoccupation with the past is not entirely his own fault. Molloy would prefer “to speak of the things that are left, say [his] goodbyes, [and] finish dying. [But] they don’t want that” (7). Instead of focusing on his future (what little he sees), Molloy is forced by the unnamed “they” to retell the story of, in Maraire’s words, the “acquisition,” of his
freedom, instead of focusing on what he will do with his newfound freedom. Similarly, when Moran returns home, he thinks he “was done with people and talk” (175), but Gaber and Youdi insist that he write the report which tells how he has returned and reacquired his home.

Molloy’s and Moran’s view of the acquisitions of their homes as the end of their stories, instead of the beginning, is allegorical of the plight of the newly liberated postcolonial nation. When Molloy regains his home, he would like to “finish dying,” and when Moran regains his home, he thinks, “I have been a man long enough, I shall not put up with it any more, I shall not try any more” (175). Even smaller victories elicit similar responses. When Molloy “escapes” from Lousse’s home, one of the first things he does is to use his “vegetable knife from [his] pocket and set about to open [his] wrist” (61). Instead of a “live free or die” motto, Molloy’s philosophy seems to be “get free and die.” Each time Molloy and Moran face freedom they collapse under the weight of the challenge. This collapse is due, in part, to “a paucity of imagination,” but also the single-mindedness that propels them to their homes. They focus so intently on acquiring their homes that they barely consider what they will do once they are there. Moran considers studying his bees, but when he finds them dead (174), he makes no plans to rebuild the hive.

Molloy’s and Moran’s near catatonia is only one response to the acquisition of freedom. The minor characters in Molloy are much more functional than Molloy and Moran, but they possess tyrannical tendencies. In Inventing Ireland, Declan Kibred cites the apprehension Patrick Pearse (one of the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising) expressed toward the ultimate form of the Irish Free State:
Patrick Pearse had always feared that the shapes of an independent Irish State might consolidate the order which they had set out to overthrow. He had, after all, opened *The Murder Machine*, his essay on educational reform, with a warning that freedom was so little experienced or understood that “the very organizations which exist in Ireland to champion freedom show no disposition themselves to accord freedom; they challenge a great tyranny but they erect their own little tyrannies.” (551)

With no proper role models to imitate, the minor characters in *Molloy* imitate the type of fascist behavior one might expect under the rule of a colonizer or imperial state. For instance, Molloy’s arrest by the police for violating “public order, [or] public decency” because of the manner he rests on his bicycle seems to find its origin in Nazi Germany (20). In a letter to Brian Coffey in December of 1936 from Germany, Beckett writes, “I have just had a small fine (1 RM) imposed on me for walking in a dangerous fashion. As a result, I am leaving for Braunschweig, in golden silence” (Beckett, *Letters* 395). Beckett’s citation for “dangerous” walking by the authoritarian Nazi regime mirrors Molloy’s arrest for his violation of “public decency.” For Beckett, who was later a member of the French Resistance, to draw a parallel between Irish police and the Gestapo is, on one hand, an instance of hyperbole. On the other hand, Deepika Bahri might argue that this parallel represents “the dominance of a certain class and the progressive impoverishment of others” (51). Furthermore, Beckett would have been in a position to know if such a comparison were warranted. The absurd code of conduct, of order for order’s sake, is analogous to the principles and implementations of fascism that are best because they are said to be best.
Although Molloy’s home may not be so sweet, Irish towns continually are depicted as dangerously sour places to wander. One need not be a policeman in order to reenact one of the paradigms of colonized and colonizer. When Molloy accidentally kills Lousse’s dog, Beckett exhibits two problems of a recently empowered postcolonial Ireland. After Molloy runs over Lousse’s dog, he attempts to flee, and a mob forms immediately. Molloy is allowed to leave because the mob believes Lousse’s story, but the incident has the feel of a thwarted revolution. Later, Moran’s encounter with the farmer, on whose property he is caught trespassing, shows that anger and violence in Ireland are not exclusive to urban landscapes. Like the mob Molloy encounters, the farmer is easily duped and dispatched, but the incidents would hardly promote Irish tourism. What is perhaps most interesting about these two scenes is how they mirror the many, unfortunate, bloody, rebellions of the Irish throughout history. Although the Irish would continually rise against the English, each revolution was short lived. The inhabitants of Ireland seem unable to break free from acting in a way that does not repeat this aspect of their history.

The second aspect of this scene that depicts a problem of a recently empowered postcolonial Ireland can be seen in the existence of the mob itself. Andrew Kincaid shows how Molloy’s encounter illustrates one of the problems facing the newly empowered Irish government. Kincaid explains the sudden appearance of this pre-instant-messaging flashmob:

It is hardly surprising ... that the expansion of the housing industry was a top priority for the new government during the 1920s and 1930s. For the British ... slums had housed disease, crime, and rebellion; urban
improvement had provided an ideological rationale for a range of colonialist interventions. In the new Irish Free State the construction of suburbs was, for some, motivated by many of the same urban fears. The conditions that were seen as producing urban discontent had not been solved by the formality of handing over power. (80)

The mob that assembles and attacks Molloy appears to be an aggregate of otherwise idle urbanites lying in wait for an incident to incite their anger. If it had not been Molloy, then it would have been some other person who had the misfortune of upsetting their sensibilities. The sudden appearance of a mob corroborates the historical allusion to revolution because it demonstrates how a seemingly innocuous group of unaffiliated people suddenly can be galvanized into rebellion and revolution.

These incidents speak of the clear inhospitality outside the home and the ambiguity felt in the home, but they do not account for the eventual return home. Explaining why Molloy returns home requires an examination of his relationship with his mother. This relationship is of considerable importance and is connected to the home. After all, Molloy only returns home to see his mother. The strained relationship between Molloy and his mother has prompted some critics to question Molloy’s need for companionship. Inger Christensen believes that Molloy’s motivation to get to his mother has more to do with money than companionship. In The Meaning of Metafiction, Christensen critiques the inimical language Molloy creates to communicate with his mother, i.e. a “code of knocks, aimed at her skull” (Christensen 100) and questions the strained and ambiguous relationship he has with her:

Molloy’s motives for seeking his mother seem to stem from a genuine
“craving for a fellow” ... But his description of the visit makes one suspect that his reasons are of a pecuniary nature despite his protesting that “I took her money, but I didn’t come for that” ... On the other hand, his mother has never felt too warmly towards him either, and she has been trying to get rid of him from the time of his conception. (100)

If one considers that Molloy returns to his mother so regularly that he needs to create a language to communicate with her, then the money he takes from her loses significance. If his only reason for visiting her were to take her money, then he need only come once to take the money and be done with the matter; his mother is in a position neither to prevent nor to report him. Yet, Molloy continually returns to the woman who, as Christensen points out, “has been trying to get rid of him since the time of conception” (100), demonstrating that although their relationship is strained, there is something about their relationship that pulls him back to her.

Charles Peake further questions Molloy’s motive in “The Labours of Poetical Excavation.” Peake notes how, when Molloy sees two people come in contact and begin talking with one another, he has a sudden impulse to find his mother. From this point on, Peake explains, “Whatever he does, wherever he goes, what prevents him from resting still and gives a vague direction to his wanderings is the compulsion to return to his mother, whom he describes as a blind, deaf, dumb, stinking, shriveled, immobile, senile hag, whose head is forever ‘veiled with hair wrinkles, filth, slobber’” (Peake 51). While Molloy’s description is by no means flattering, it does accurately depict someone in the latter stages of senility, who is not being taken care of properly. However, Peake continues to struggle with why Molloy would want to see her. There are two ways to
reconcile this problem: one is to concede that Molloy’s actions are illogical (and thus, an accurate portrayal of human behavior) and the second is to consider what Molloy’s mother might represent to him. However, Peake continues, “No purpose of desire is involved, merely the imperative to return to his point of origin, as though this would throw some light on what he is and why he is engaged in this aimless and painful journey” (Peake 51). Peake’s critique of Molloy’s purposeless impulse to return to his mother and his home is frustrated because of the difficulty of identity and his own overly rigid thinking. Who one is and what makes him, or her, so are difficult philosophical questions. Is the woman who no longer speaks, sees, or hears still your mother, even if she does not know she is your mother? It is a difficult question to answer emotionally, ethically, and philosophically, but Peake seems infected by the same rigid logic that keeps Molloy shifting the balance of stones in his jacket. Molloy’s search for his mother despite their strained relationship can be explained by acknowledging that it is possible for someone to hold two opposing beliefs at the same time. Psychologists refer to this state as cognitive dissonance. Both Molloy and Moran suffer from this state in regard to their simultaneous repulsion and attraction toward their respective homes.

Molloy’s attraction to his mother, despite his repulsion toward her, also can be explained by analyzing the names he gives her and his use of them. Molloy refers to his mother by two different nicknames. The nicknames Molloy uses are important because they allow the reader a clear look into the psychology of a character who routinely masks clarity with equivocation and it allows us to determine if Molloy exhibits any cognitive dissonance. Speaking of his mother, Molloy explains:

I called her Mag, when I had to call her something. And I called her Mag
because for me, without my knowing why, the letter g abolished the syllable Ma, and as it were spat on it, better than any other letter would have done. And at the same time I satisfied a deep and doubtless unacknowledged need, the need to have a Ma, that is a mother, and to proclaim it, audibly. For before you say mag you say ma, inevitably. (17)

These nicknames are, to be sure, not terms of endearment. The above passage relates rather precisely how Molloy feels about his mother. Molloy has a "need" to have a mother and proclaim that possession, but the word "love" is never uttered. Yet it is his mother who is the motivation for his entire journey, which is the subject of his narrative. Molloy knows that his home is neither particularly safe nor comfortable and that his mother is not particular motherly. In a sense, every time he refers to his mother as "mother" he is not referring to his own mother, but to the fantasy of motherhood. After all, despite his renaming her "Mag," he never claims to be returning to "Mag," or refers to her as such, except in the above passage. Thus, Molloy's inability to find his mother might be explained by the tension between his actual mother and an idealized one. If a mother is someone who loves Molloy and will protect him, then it makes sense that Molloy does not know how to get to the person who possesses those characteristics, because she does not exist. But that does not stop him from wanting to get to such a person.

The second nickname Molloy gives his mother shows more disdain toward the institution of motherhood in general than his mother specifically. The "countess caca" is the name that Molloy offers for his mother out of the desperation he feels after attempting to think of a name for her other than the one he knows her by. Moran creates a similar
nickname with the “Turdy Madonna,” which is a fictitious statue of Mary he pretends to be traveling toward in order to outwit a farmer whose field Moran has trespassed. Thus, both men are supposedly traveling toward idealized but debased archetypes of femininity. Much in Molloy could be construed as simply misogynistic if it were not for the equal debasing Beckett gives to both sexes. Molloy explains:

I was virtually onelegged, and I would have been happier, livelier, amputated at the groin. And if they had removed a few testicles into the bargain I wouldn’t have objected ... So that non che la speme il desiderio, and I longed to see them gone, from the old stand where they bore false witness, for and against, in the lifelong charge against me ... And, worse still, they got in my way when I tried to walk, when I tried to sit down, as if my leg was not enough, and when I rode my bicycle they bounced up and down. So the best thing for me would be for them to go, and I would have seen to it myself, with a knife or secateurs, but for my terror of physical pain and festered wounds ... (35-36)

Both the male and female bodies are depreciated and debased as a hindrance and a thing that breaks down – indeed, life itself is a problem throughout much of Beckett’s oeuvre. Molloy not only metaphorically alters the way women give birth, but he also longs for the prevention of pollination by nipping things in the anther, so to speak. He refuses to be fruitful and multiply. For Molloy, life is suffering, and thus, if one chooses to have children, he is, in effect, sentencing his own children to suffering and torture. This idea is not particularly postcolonial in nature; however, the hopelessness in breaking the cycle of oppression in a postcolonial nation is somewhat analogous to the hopelessness that one’s
children face in life.

These ideas did not necessarily begin with Molloy. One might surmise that his feelings about reproduction could have been written by his mother about the unhappy union of his conception as evidenced by her attempted abortion during his gestation. Of course, both of these characters found their birth in Beckett, but the ideas about life and birth find their origins in the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, whom Beckett began reading well before beginning work on *Molloy*. Beckett explained in a letter to Thomas McGreevy in July of 1930:

I am reading Schopenhauer. Everyone laughs at that. Beaufret & Alfy etc. But I am not reading philosophy, nor caring whether he is right or wrong or a good or worthless metaphysician. An intellectual justification of unhappiness – the greatest that has ever been attempted – is worth the examination of one who is interested in Leopardi & Proust rather than in Carducci & Barrès. (Beckett, Letters 32-33)

Beckett’s endorsement of Schopenhauer would endure, but not his academic detachment towards Schopenhauer’s philosophy. On September 21, 1937 Beckett wrote another letter to McGreevy. In this later letter, Beckett does not claim a mere academic admiration for the philosopher and instead exalts the philosopher’s virtues:

When I was ill I found the only thing I could read was Schopenhauer. Everything else I tried only confirmed the feeling of sickness. It was very curious. Like suddenly a window opened on a fug. I always knew he was one of the ones that mattered most to me, and it is a pleasure more real than any pleasure for a long time to begin to understand now why it is so.
And it is a pleasure also to find a philosopher that can be read like a poet, with an entire indifference to the apriori forms of verification. Although it is a fact that judged by them his generalization shows fewer cracks than most generalizations. (Beckett, *Letters* 550)

Beckett conveys a comfort with Schopenhauer’s philosophy that most people would reserve for their religious texts. So what was it that gave Beckett comfort during his hour of need? The editors of Beckett’s letters are unsure, noting, “It is not known what work(s) by Arhur Schopenhauer SB read at this time” (Fehsenfeld & Overbeck 6); however, when we examine Schopenhauer’s “Essays and Aphorisms,” we find a striking likeness to *Molloy*.

“Essays and Aphorisms” speaks to the ideas of old age implied by the failing health of Molloy, his mother, and Moran. Schopenhauer not only speaks of old age, but directly connects it to having children in two different passages:

For to him who does know, children can sometimes seem like innocent delinquents, sentenced not to death but to life, who have not yet discovered what their punishment will consist of. Nonetheless, everyone desires to achieve old age, that is to say a condition in which one can say: “Today it is bad, and day by day it will get worse – until at last the worst of all arrives.” (47)

Schopenhauer continues by directly relating his philosophy of unhappiness with the prospect of having children:

If the act of procreation were neither the outcome of a desire nor accompanied by feelings of pleasure, but a matter to be decided on the
basis of purely rational considerations, is it likely that the human race
would still exist? Would each of us not rather have felt so much pity for
the coming generation as to prefer to spare it the burden of existence, or at
least not wish to take it upon himself to impose that burden upon it in cold
blood?

For the world is Hell, and men are on the one hand the tormented
souls and on the other the devils in it. (47-48).

The idea that giving life to another “imposes [a] burden” on one’s children, resonates
with the nihilistic philosophy Molloy and Moran express and it also relates to the
unsolved cycle of oppression of a postcolonial nation. Beckett makes this point implicitly
with his non-sensual descriptions of Molloy engaging in coitus (56) and explicitly when
Molloy exclaims, “Good God, what a land of breeders, you see quadrupeds
everywhere” (29). Schopenhauer’s logical grounds for not having children lend added
significance to Molloy’s insistence that he could have never had a child (7). After all,
Molloy, who is often logical to the point of absurdity, finds sex to be “a mug’s game and
tiring on top of that” and therefore would have no reason to procreate (56). And if he had
no reason to procreate then, logically speaking, he would not have. If he didn’t, then he
could not have had a child.

Molloy’s statement and Schopenhauer’s philosophy fly in the face of Youdi’s,
who claims, “Life is a thing of beauty ... and a joy forever” (164) Interestingly, these
same words are thought by Molly Bloom in the final chapter of Ulysses (XV.), which, in
fact, find their origin in the opening lines of John Keats’s “Endymion”:

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing. (61)

Both layers of the allusion operate almost entirely by contrast and irony to Moran, who hears them from Gaber. In the final chapter of *Ulysses*, Molly Bloom conveys connotations of sensuality and fertility which run contrary to both Molloy and Moran. In regards to Keats, Beckett’s entire trilogy runs contrary with his characters who are notably unhappy, unhealthy, “full of [bad] dreams,” and who are in the process of “Pass [ing] into nothingness.”

The allusions only give part of the context necessary to understanding the significance of Youdi’s statement. We must also examine how the hell that Schopenhauer describes fits into *Molloy*. Schopenhauer’s final words are crucial to understanding how, and to what purpose, Youdi holds his opinion on life. *Molloy*, like *Ulysses*, contains a figurative underworld, but the survey of *Molloy*’s underworld is far less defined than that of *Ulysses*. Although Stephen Dedalus imagines his mother in "Telemachus," it is not until “Circe” that Stephen acts upon the image; once he does, he definitively returns to the real world. However, in *Molloy*, the entrance to the underworld is obscure and the departure even more so, which fits with Schopenhauer’s concept that “men are on the one hand the tormented souls and on the other the devils in it” (48). In *Molloy*, hell does not have distinct physical boundaries. One is always in hell, although sometimes one is tortured and sometimes one is the torturer.

*Molloy*’s description of the body of water the barge rides on, the boatman and the
surrounding setting are figurative representations of the river Styx and Charon. Molloy describes the boatman and the setting: “The boatman rested his elbow on his knee, his head on his hand. He had a long white beard. Every three or four puffs, without taking his pipe from his mouth, he spat in the water. I could not see his eyes. The horizon was burning with sulphur and phosphorus, it was there I was bound” (26-27). The old boatman, with his “long white beard” is Charon crossing the river Styx, and the horizon, “burning with sulphur and phosphorus,” represents a Christian understanding of the underworld, made up of fire and brimstone. Before this description, Molloy conjectures that the barge, with its “cargo of nails and timber, [is] on its way to some carpenter” (26), another obvious connection with Christianity, specifically Jesus. In an analogous scene, Moran encounters a pipe-smoking Shepherd; the Shepherd is, of course, another symbol for Jesus. These representations of Christ seem to allude to the altering personae of Jesus as martyr in the Gospels and judge in *Revelations*, and are similar to the way in which both Moran and Molloy switch from sufferers to causers of suffering, becoming both devils, as well as the damned. Moran meets the Shepherd near sunset, but he describes the horizon in a slightly different way than Molloy. This might be because Moran leaves the forest at this point and when Molloy encounters the barge he is only just entering the forest. In either case, there is a comparison to be drawn between the two men’s descriptions. Moran explains:

I distinguished at last, at the limit of the plain, a dim glow, the sum of countless points of light blurred by the distance, I thought of Juno’s milk. It lay like a faint splash on the sharp dark sweep of the horizon, I gave thanks for evening that brings out the lights, the stars in the sky and on
earth the brave little lights of men .... And I knew I was all alone gazing at that distant glow that would get brighter and brighter, I knew that too, then suddenly go out. (159)

Besides the two men smoking pipes and the analogous symbols for Jesus, the time of day is of considerable importance. After all, in Molloy's description, it is the colors of the sky, "sulphur and phosphorus," that give the clearest indication of a descent into the underworld. Moran's description of the sky might seem far different than Molloy's, but really the only difference is that Molloy speaks of the colors of the sky and Moran speaks of the contrasting brightnesses. It is as if Moran does not see color at all, but instead sees the world in black and white and shades of gray. Corroborating Moran's entrance, or continued journey, through the underworld is the feeling he experiences preparing to depart from the shepherd. Moran explains, "I was wondering how to depart without self-loathing or sadness, or with as little as possible" (159). His feelings mirror the inscription on the lintel of the gates to hell in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*:

Through me the road to the city of desolation,

Through me the road to Sorrows diurnal,

....

Lay down all hope, you that go in by me. (III.1-9)

Moran's feelings of hopelessness toward his situation are akin to the abandoning of hope that Dante feels as he enters the gates of hell because Moran is, figuratively speaking, descending deeper into hell.

Molloy encounters the boatman before entering the forest and Moran encounters the shepherd while leaving it, but while in the forest they both kill men who resemble
themselves. Their actions represent the formerly colonized’s subconscious acceptance of the colonizer’s superiority. Molloy describes the man he encounters as “sick with solitude” as Molloy was when he first decided to find his mother (84). He also describes him as a “dirty old brute” and explains, “He was born in the forest and had spent his whole life there” (84). These words reverberate with the valet’s at Louse’s home who initially claimed Molloy’s clothes “had been burnt” (42). The obvious suggestion is that his clothes were in such shabby shape that cleaning them would do no good. As for his residence in the forest, Moran’s description of “Molloy country” is obviously relevant. Moran explains, “By Molloy country I mean that narrow region whose administrative limits he had never crossed and presumably never would, either because he was forbidden to, or because he had no wish to” (133). Those factors, in conjunction with Molloy’s overall decrepitude, leave little difference between him and the man he kills. Moran overtly proclaims that the man he kills has nearly the same face as himself. Moran explains, “all this was nothing compared to the face which I regret to say vaguely resembled my own, less the refinement of course, same little abortive mustache, same little ferrety eyes, [and] same paraphimosis of the nose” (151). The man even seems to be an agent, of some sort, as evidenced by his search for the man with the wooden stick and his ability to track him.

The likeness each man shares with his foe results in an uncanny experience, which is, by definition, both familiar and strange. This feeling perfectly encapsulates the attraction/repulsion dynamic that Molloy and Moran feel for their homes. This time, however, the dynamic hits closer to home than home; this time, Molloy and Moran are attracted to and repulsed by images of themselves. The unknown men could be
considered Molloy’s and Moran’s doppelgängers, except the unknown men are not the ones who become violent. It is Molloy and Moran who are their own evil twins. Molloy and Moran are as much look-alikes as their look-alikes. Thus, the feelings of attraction and repulsion are felt in two ways: both toward the look-alike and toward the self. Their homes are familiar yet unwelcoming, but the antitheses of their homes overwhelms them with familiarity and welcoming. In a novel where little happens, the murders represent (except to themselves) an unparalleled example of action. This is how Molloy and Moran act when free; they cannot bear the sight of themselves

However, the actions of Molloy and Moran in the forest are more than overreactions to their uncanny look-alikes. In these instances, it is Molloy and Moran who take on the role of the colonizer. While at home and in the public sphere the men bow in the presence of authority figures, but with the anonymity the forest provides, the men act in accordance with their internalized notions of how people like themselves should be treated. In “Encountering the Other,” Gary A. Olson describes the internalization of the colonizer’s perspective by the colonized. Olson explains, “This ‘epistemic violence’ is a means by which the oppressed subject, through a process of internalizing the discourse of the master, learns to construct his or her identity as Other, to rewrite the self as the objects of imperialism” (Olson 89). In this instance the victims of “epistemic violence” become the perpetrators of actual violence, in imitation of their colonizers. The two men, as “objects of imperialism,” come across two men whom they recognize as possessing inferior status, i.e., not of the status of colonizer. When the men of inferior status interfere with Molloy and Moran, they deal with those men as objects. Molloy even takes the time to give his opponent equal, longitudinal kicks to the ribs.
Molloy assaults the man with the same measured and analytical thinking he applies to distributing his sucking stones in his pockets. The assault becomes, for Molloy, less an act of violence and more of an intellectual exercise to complete rationally. Nonetheless, it is an act of violence and the methodical and mechanical way Molloy goes about it only makes it all the more horrifying – hilarious (or both), depending on one’s sensibility.

When Gaber finds Moran in the forest and tells him that Youdi has said, “Life is a thing of beauty ... And a joy forever” (164), Moran is at his lowest point. He is even physically unable to sit up. This is, of course, ironic when read from Moran’s perspective, but it is not necessarily ironic from Youdi’s perspective. Interestingly, a pattern emerges if we take into consideration the various degrees of power each character has. It is unclear if Gaber agrees with Youdi’s statement, but that is unimportant because his level of power is essentially the same as Moran’s: he is still in Youdi’s favor, yet both men are at the beck and call of Youdi. Moran explains, “we agents often amused ourselves with grumbling among ourselves and giving ourselves the airs of free men” (95). Similarly, Moran describes Gaber, “inveigh[ing] against [their] employer” (94), but neither man airs his negativity to that employer, Youdi. For Youdi, Life is, no doubt, “a thing of beauty and a joy forever” but then again, Youdi is not at the beck and call of another.

Who Youdi is and what he represents is crucial to understanding why what he says about life is not ironic to him. Hélène L. Baldwin explains, “John Fletcher has already pointed out that Youdi is a variant of Yahweh, and Gaber is derived from Gabriel” (47). Hugh Kenner is aware of this allusion, but asserts, “We shall do well to make little of this. Like the hints of detective-story format, it is one of Beckett’s devices for imparting to the narrative near-familiarity, near-intelligibility” (35). In
“Disillusionment with Knowledge and Action” Eugene Webb seems to heed warnings of “near-intelligibility,” but advances the understanding of Youdi by stating, “There is no reason to suppose that Youdi simply is God; what is important is that, whatever Youdi may be in reality, he looks like God to Moran” (99). This is exactly the type of warning Beckett gave Sir Ralph Richardson in preparing for a production of *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett said, “That if by Godot I had meant God I would [have] said God, and not Godot” (Knowlson 372). The difference is more than mere semantics. That Youdi and Godot resemble God in many ways is undeniable, but by denying their existence as non-deities, critics erase the distinctions between signified and signifier. Youdi, who on some level is God, stands above the struggle of the world, which is hell, home to the tortured and the torturers. For Youdi, who is free and powerful, “Life is ... a thing of beauty and a joy forever,” even as he allows suffering to exist. But on another level, Youdi, is merely a man, and it is his status as an elite man which perpetuates the misery of other men.

Ireland, for Molloy and Moran, is a place haunted by the past; but the past is not a friendly ghost. Ireland is a place where the lives of children will be as cursed as the adults who conceived them. It is a place that is as dangerous in the city as it is in the forest. It is a place where the authority of the police is as unquestionable as it is unjustifiable. Ireland, for Molloy and Moran, is an island that has collected its broken legacy from its former colonizer and is condemned to repeat the cycle by the powers that be. If this is how Beckett perceived Ireland, then it is no wonder why he preferred “France in war to Ireland in Peace” (qtd. in Kearney 152). Peace, in the Ireland of *Molloy*, is potentially as dangerous as any war zone. In this case, it is no wonder that Molloy and Moran cannot bring themselves to sever the tethers that tie them to their homes; their homes, as
inhospitable as they are, serve as bunkers to the “peace” outside their walls.
Chapter Three

The unnamed narrator of Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds* shares conflicts with Stephen Dedalus, Molloy, and Moran. Like those characters, he is both attracted and repulsed by his home and Ireland. The narrator is uncomfortable in his uncle’s home, he does not fit in with his classmates, and although he is more than familiar with the legends of Finn MacCool, he is more inclined to parody than praise. But unlike those characters who, at most, view Ireland and Irishness as a two-faced, monolithic entity, O’Brien’s unnamed narrator sees Ireland as a crowd made up of both heralded and unheralded Irish faces. This bounty of identities allows the narrator the freedom to make a genuine, informed choice of who he will become. Stephen chooses between staying in Ireland or leaving, Molloy and Moran choose between being oppressed or oppressing, but O’Brien’s narrator has several Irish identities from which to choose. Because the conflict the narrator experiences is one of growth, it will be useful to discuss the novel as a bildungsroman and because the identities that he chooses between are each decidedly Irish, the conflict of the narrator’s growth is analogous to the conflict of growth his nation experiences as a recently liberated postcolonial nation. This multidimensional perspective of nationality is accomplished through the narrator’s intertwined stories-within-stories. Each of the stories represents a different identity, and together they represent a figurative descent into Saint Patrick’s Purgatory. As in *Ulysses* and *Molloy*, the descent into the underworld constitutes a pivotal aspect of the text, and it will also be necessary to examine the narrator’s home and his relationship with uncle, but unlike the characters in the previous texts, the unnamed narrator’s relationship with his cohabitant changes profoundly by the novel’s end. Analyzing the defining characteristics of each of the
stories-within-stories will demonstrate how they represent the narrator’s choices of identity and their relationship to Saint Patrick’s Purgatory, while also explaining the narrator’s changing relationship with his uncle and his changing status in his home.

I am not the first to point out the bildungsroman structure in the *At Swim-Two-Birds*. Joseph Brooker acknowledges the markers of a coming-of-age story in *At Swim-Two-Birds*, but insists that they are insignificant. Brooker explains that the novel has “the trajectory of the bildungsroman. The student offers the frame-story, but we cannot necessarily say that his fate is at the center of the novel. On the contrary, we might say, the ‘frame’ is just where one would expect it to be: on the edge, a mere structure for holding something else in place” (32). Brooker’s analysis suggests the frame is all function and no form. Implicit in his statement is the idea that what is framed does not convey meaning to the frame and that the frame itself is unimportant and perhaps devoid of meaning. But if this were the case, then the discontinuity between frame and framed would be such that anything could take the place of the frame. Furthermore, if there were no relationship between the two, it might suggest that the novel is not coherent enough to be considered as literature.

Contrary to Brooker’s argument, I contend that the frame and what is framed impart meaning to one another. The stories-within-stories represent the narrator’s fears of what type of adult he might become. On the one hand those fears are the benign and mundane anxieties of a rebellious, urban youth who does not want to grow up to be like his uncle. The narrator’s description of his uncle’s occupation, “Guinness clerkship the third class” demonstrates his disdain for his occupation (2). On the other hand, the stories also represent fears aligned with an emerging postcolonial nation that is struggling with its
identity. This particular bildungsroman tells the coming-of-age of the narrator, and the narrator’s understanding of Ireland’s coming-of-age. But we must begin by examining the narrator’s coming-of-age.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator is engaged in an extended adolescence while he works toward his college degree. The narrator’s schooling is essential to the novel. The successful completion of his exams precipitates the novel’s ending and heralds the narrator’s accent to adulthood. Roberta Seelinger Trites examines the significance of the defining characteristics of a bildungsroman, many of which *At Swim-Two-Birds* meets, in *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*. Two of these characteristics are particularly important because of the crucial role they play in the novel. Trites explains, “The concept of school as a social institution is omnipresent in adolescent literature. The classic Bildungsroman describes the protagonist’s education, and many Entwicklungsromane are set in school environments” (32). Trites goes on to explain, “Two types of adventures occur: competition at physical activities, such as sports, and some sort of social conflict that allows the text to explore morality. The tale may conclude with an affirmation of the school’s purpose in training young people to take their place in the status quo of the social order” (32). While the narrator does not compete in any physical activities (except for maybe his consumption of pints of plain), the successful completion of his exams might qualify as such, especially considering its significance to him. After all, this is a person for whom physical feats mean little, but mental feats are of the utmost importance. While the stories-within-stories are a forum for the narrator to struggle with notions of what kind of Irishman he will become, his studies prepare him “to take [his] place in the status quo of the social order” (32). The primary
“social conflict” is the one the narrator experiences with his uncle, who continually questions the narrator whether he ever studies.

There is little evidence of the narrator’s progress. One could point to the sense of shame he feels in discovering he is infested with lice and his subsequent commitment to proper hygiene and his all-around physical well-being (41). The commitment to personal hygiene juxtaposes him with Stephen Dedalus who prefers to be “washed by the gulfstream” (1.470). The allusion indicates that the narrator and Stephen are different, despite their similarities. For the narrator’s development, this instance is followed by more backsliding than a steady improvement. Limiting the search of the narrator’s development by examining him at the beginning and end of the novel is a far more fruitful endeavor because his most pronounced change comes suddenly at the end with the successful completion of his exams (234). No place is this more clear than in the narrator’s first and last descriptions of his uncle. The narrator’s first description of his uncle characterizes him as, “Red-faced, bead-eyed, ball-bellied. Fleshy about the shoulders with long swinging arms giving ape-like effect to gait. Large moustache. Holder of Guinness clerkship the third class” (2). The narrator’s final description of his uncle is far more complimentary, “Simple, well intentioned; pathetic in humility; responsible member of a large commercial concern” (236). This shift immediately follows the completion of his studies and the narrator’s acceptance of the watch his uncle gives him as a reward for his high marks.

The acceptance of the watch, in conjunction with the shift of his description of his uncle, indicates the narrator’s acceptance of his “place in the status quo of the social order.” The utilitarian purpose of the watch is one of the accouterments of adults with
gainful employment. This transformation also elicits a change in the way the uncle interacts with the narrator. Following the narrator’s first description of his uncle, he is ridiculed by him for the time he spends locked in his bedroom. His uncle comments, “I know the studying you do in your bedroom ... Damn the studying you do in your bedroom” (4). Following the narrator’s final description of his uncle, he is allowed to slip away to his bedroom without harassment at sundown, as indicated by the “Angelus” (236). Although he no longer has a need to study for his exams, his uncle’s initial disapproval of him locking himself in his room seems to indicate that he believed the narrator was guilty of some sort of illicit behavior, possibly masturbation. Whatever we may read into what the uncle thinks of his nephew’s secretive behavior at the close of the novel, we are presented with a scenario in which the uncle no longer protests his retiring to his bedroom well before bedtime.

The conflict between parent and child is the second important characteristic of the bildungsroman that Trites examines. Trites identifies three types of parents: in parentis, in loco parentis, and in logos parentis (58). Although in parentis and in logos parentis are applicable to the stories-within-stories, only in loco parentis is applicable to the narrator and his uncle. Despite their different classifications, they all result in the same ultimate outcome. Trites explains, “Even if the parental figures are surrogates rather than actual, it seems that adolescents must rebel against them in order to grow” (61). Thus, an inevitable conflict emerges in which the parent attempts to ensure proper growth of a child through control, but in order for growth to occur the child must rebel against the parent’s control. This is why it seems problematic not to regard the text as a type of a bildungsroman. If At Swim-Two-Birds is not regarded as a coming-of-age story, then the
relationship between the narrator and his uncle is likely to be analyzed solely through a Marxist lens. This is exactly what Robert W. Maslen does in “Flann O’Brien’s Bombshells: *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *The Third Policeman*.” Maslen writes of the narrator’s uncle:

> He seeks additional stakes in ruling-class culture by joining an amateur operatic society that performs the work of those representative Englishmen of the Imperial age, Gilbert and Sullivan. His part in their work requires that he wear a papier-maché replica of a policeman’s hat, marking him out as an eager mimic of Ireland’s former “land lords.” Not surprisingly, then, at the beginning of the novel the student-novelist sees him as the petty tyrant of his household, an enemy determined to exert power over him at every opportunity by every means at the disposal of his devious rat brain. (92)

Although I have cited similar dynamics in *Molloy* and *Ulysses*, *At Swim-Two-Birds* represents a shift in paradigm. Reading the narrator as oppressed is the product of misconstruing a specific type of power dynamic rather than misidentifying a power dynamic altogether. The question is not whether the uncle exercises authority over his nephew, but whether by exercising authority over his nephew, he oppresses him. In the case of *Molloy*, the police officer does not oppress Molloy by arresting him; the police officer oppresses Molloy by arresting him falsely. Although I can appreciate Maslen’s reading of the text because I know it finds its birth in the academy, which is obsessed by power structures and oppression, my life outside of the academy forces me to acknowledge that the narrator is essentially the uncle’s ward. As such, he not only has a
right, but a duty, to ensure his well-being, which is done by exercising authority over him to ensure that he does what he needs to do in order to graduate. Although the uncle is often guilty of having a snide manner, that is all he is guilty of.

My overly academic conditioned mind is inclined to analyze the Marxist implications of the narrator’s uncle forcing him to “press [his] Sunday trousers” (4), but pressing one pair of pants does not prove someone is oppressed. Iris Marion Young identifies five criteria of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence” (48-61). According to Young only one of the conditions needs to be fulfilled in order for a person to qualify as oppressed. In *At Swim-Two-Birds*, the narrator experiences none of them. The narrator is never threatened with violence by his uncle. The idea of cultural imperialism is intriguing, but it requires the oppressed and the oppressor to come from differing cultures, which is not the case with the uncle and the nephew. If anything, the narrator is in position to rise above his uncle. The narrator is not powerless. Although his uncle would prefer the narrator study in the dining room, the narrator has the freedom to pursue his studies in the privacy of his room. Instead of marginalizing the narrator’s actions, the uncle always focuses on them, as evidenced by the uncle imposing rules on his nephew. Children are not allowed the same freedom as adults. Instead of unlimited freedom, children are supposed to be afforded the type of environment that will lead to self-empowerment once they leave their childhoods behind. One would presume that after his stay with his uncle, which would last at least the duration of his studies, that the narrator would be in, if not a position of power, then at least a position to take control of his life. That leaves only “exploitation,” and, although one could certainly form an argument to support the idea that the narrator is being
exploited because his uncle has him press his pants and perform other chores, it would not be a compelling argument.

Although he is not oppressed by his uncle, his existence is not without conflict. The unnamed narrator exhibits uncertainty toward his place in Ireland and the importance of his nation’s history. Those fears are faced in an underworld; however, unlike the previous chapters; the unnamed narrator faces those fears in a purgatory of his own design, in the form of the stories-within-stories. Saint Patrick’s purgatory is the specific underworld that O’Brien employs for this task. A synopsis of the Saint Patrick’s Purgatory will illustrate the parallels between it and O’Brien’s text. Unfortunately, due to the number of legends and literary texts surrounding it, even the synopsis is rather lengthy. Thomas Wright explains that there is a vast history of legends and literary texts that use Saint Patrick’s purgatory as their subject or framework. In the legend most applicable to *At-Swim-Two-Birds*, Wright sometimes reproduces the Gaelic style that O’Brien replicated in his passages of Finn MacCool:

But who has not heard of St. Patrick’s purgatory? ... The lake did not always bear its present name, Lough-Derg, or the Red Lake—it was, we are told, before the arrival of St. Patrick on its banks, called Lough-Fin, or Fin Mac Coul’s Lake ....

Once there lived in Ireland an old hag, and a great giant her son .... Fin Mac Coul, the most famous and powerful of the Fions ... proceeded to hunt her.... The giant, the moment he saw the pursuers, threw his mother over his shoulders, and fled with astonishing speed through woods and bogs; but before he had gone far from them. Fin had let fly his silver
arrow, and pierced the old hag to the heart .... The giant threw down the
remains of his mother, continued his flight, and was never heard of
afterwards.

Some years after this, as the same party of Fiona were hunting a
broad-horned deer in that part of the country, they came to the spot where
lay the bones of the hag .... Cuneen Miul, who with a wild careless blade
broke the thigh bone with his hunting spear, and, truly enough, out
crawled a long hairy worm ....

[Fin Ma Coul] ... aimed with a short sword he hastened to attack it
and succeeded ... He left it straggling and bleeding on the shore of this
same lake, its blood streaming down and colouring the waters — hence it
was called the Red Lake. There the beast lay writhing and bellowing with
pain, till Saint Patrick came and found it, and, to show the power of the
faith he was preaching, ordered it to go to the bottom of the lake, where he
effectually secured it. (1-4)

This passage accounts for little more than the origin of Saint Patrick’s purgatory. The
stories of Saint Patrick’s purgatory are as wild as they are varied. There are relatively few
Western literary characters unconnected to the legends. Wright cites various connections
that critics have made to the Arthurian Romances, Homer’s Odyssey, and Dante’s Divine
Comedy (62,63,117), and other foundational texts from other cultures. It seems highly
unlikely that O’Brien would not have been aware of these stories while obtaining his
master’s in Medieval Irish Literature. Considering At Swim Two Birds in light of the
bizarre literary “history” that surrounds Saint Patrick’s Purgatory paints the structure of
O’Brien’s novel in tamer colors. But more important O’Brien’s Red Swan Hotel and his use of Finn Mac Cool reverberate with the legends of Saint Patrick Purgatory and its geography of “Lough-Derg, or the Red Lake” and “Fin Mac Coul’s Lake.” Understanding O’Brien’s stories-within-stories in connection with Saint Patrick’s Purgatory helps to render significance to an otherwise chaotic and fragmented plot, especially since the subject and the structure of the allusions’ sources are, themselves, chaotic and fragmented.

In the novel’s final scene, the narrator rejects the chaos of Saint Patrick’s Purgatory in favor of the life of a dutiful citizen. Nowhere is this clearer than in the last sentences: “Well-known, alas, is the case of the poor German who was very fond of three and who made each aspect of his life a thing of triads. He went home one evening and drank three cups of tea with three lumps of sugar in each cup, cut his jugular three times and scrawled with a dying hand on a picture of his wife good-bye, good-bye, good-bye” (239). This passage seems to convey the failure of an arbitrary order, specifically the stories-within-stories of which it is a part. However, Lorna Sage prefaces this same passage by stating, “The would-be artists in At Swim-Two-Birds are not to be trusted, their very urge to shape and control and possess the world springs from murky depths of envy and unreason. By the end they are being compared to those poor lunatics who pursue through life a phantom of order” (200). However, Sage fails to acknowledge that the narrator is the one who describes “those poor lunatics” and that the narrator has just experienced a transformation, in which chaos has been exchanged for order. Although I disagree with the Marxist critique Robert W. Maslen employs in his reading of novel, I do agree with the importance he ascribes to the novel’s penultimate scene. Maslen writes:
When the student passes his exams, the uncle presents him with a second-hand gold watch in token of his admission into the work schedule of the nation, of which the uncle himself is part. The enemy is the system that sets one class at odds with another in the same society, in the same family even, using knowledge as its instrument. The enemy, that is, is the class system, an import equally from England and from Rome. By the end of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, the malevolent machinery of that system stands poised and ready to consume the student-novelist and his reader as they reach the closing pages of the book. (92)

Perhaps that is how Maslen views capitalism and democracy, but the final scenes of the novel suggest the “malevolent machinery” that threatens the narrator is the chaos he replicates in his stories-within-stories. Once the narrator accepts the watch, the novel ends rather abruptly. The acceptance of the watch is the acceptance “into the work schedule of the nation” and as such, his “spare-time literary activities” come to a sudden stop (1). Accepting the watch amounts to rejecting the “phantom of order” which leads to the madness and death of the “poor German,” and accepting a meaningful life as a engaged citizen of Ireland. The “phantom of order” is order for order’s sake; accepting the watch results in accepting an orderly place in a peaceful society. One of the difficulties a democratic society faces is negotiating the harmony of order and personal freedom. A society cannot exist without order, but too much order results in the figurative death of the individual.

Each of the narrator’s stories relates implicitly to Saint Patrick’s Purgatory. These can be divided into three basic groups, none of which seem particularly promising in the
manner in which they are described: the legendary characters of Ireland, the cowboys, and Trellis, who is the “creator” of them all. Purgatory is particularly appropriate for the bildungsroman. Unlike Hades or Hell which are final destinations for the dead, one can come of age in Purgatory. Purgatory harbors the hope of earning subsequent paradise. Although the narrator experiments with rebellion and mocks some of the championed future identities of his nation, these acts function as a necessary means of development. They are substantiated as such in the penultimate scene when the reader learns of the narrator’s successful completion of his exams and his symbolic entrance into society as an engaged Irish citizen. The ultimate scene devalues and rejects the stories-within-stories by juxtaposing their chaos with his orderly success. In this coming-of-age story, the narrator’s relationship with his home (and his country) changes, as he himself changes. Examining the narrator’s status in his home at the beginning and end of the novel demonstrated his growth; now we will examine the possible identities he chooses from.

The legendary Irish figures of Finn MacCool, The Pooka, and Sweeny represent the pull of the past, with the same intensity that Molloy, Moran, and Stephen experience it. Sage’s comment on this force, as if it were never overcome by the narrator, seems particularly appropriate: “The Irish past lives on, indestructibly, denying the present its uniqueness: new adventures don’t merely recall, they repeat the old” (200). This identity, in effect, serves to mock those of the Irish Revival who embraced the past instead of the present. Like the milkwoman in Ulysses who feels ashamed for not being able to speak Irish, this return to the past is the product of a sense of nationalism that is almost fascist. In order to take them seriously, an Irishman must forget that they are nearly forgotten
legends and that although they may have been invented and believed by their ancestors, that alone does not make them worthy of revival or reverence. Revering these legends represents another "phantom of order." When they were created, these legends were a way for people to order their lives, but that time has passed.

Of the characters from the various stories-within-stories, the Irish cowboys are perhaps the most bewildering. In Flann O'Brien: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Postmodernist, Keith Hopper traces the emergence of the cowboys to the wordplay just prior to their materialization in the novel (78). While Hopper illuminates the way O'Brien introduces tropes and characters in the text, he does not investigate how they further function. Despite being spawned from puns, any cowboy, regardless of current nationality, can trace his lineage back to America. Irish cowboys suggest an Americanized post-colonial identity for the Irish, as America was the first postcolonial state in the modern world. However, the cowboys' inability to assimilate to life in Ireland seems to demonstrate the incompatibility of the two cultures.

The third and final identity the narrator interrogates is Trellis, who Brinsley, the narrator's friend, suggests is "a replica of the uncle" (25). Although the narrator does not answer this charge, his silence functions as an admission of guilt, as in the instance his uncle accuses him of illicit behavior in his bedroom and his denial is "inarticulate, of gesture" (4). However, the identification is not quite that simple. As the author of the other characters, Trellis is equally as similar to the narrator who is also the writer. This relationship is further complicated because, as the author of the characters, Trellis is a metaphorical father, and in one case a literal father. Trites would describe the narrator's rewriting of his uncle into a fictional character as in parentis logos. The creation of a
parent is common in Trites’s text, as evidenced by the existence of the classification, but
the creation of an additional parent when another type of parent already exists is without
precedent. Trites’s comment on in parentis logos by itself suggests the strangeness of this
choice:

What really strikes me as odd, however, is the propensity of adolescents
with neither actual nor effective surrogate parents to create imaginary
parents against whom to rebel in a classic reenactment of the Lacanian
principle of creating the Name-of-the-Father. After all, it would seem that
the parentless adolescent is the most free, that being parentless is the most
desirable imaginable state of adolescent wish fulfillment. Why would the
adolescent create a parent to make trouble for him- or herself? (61)

Of course, because the narrator already has one type of parent, the question is, “Why does
he need two parents to make trouble for him?” Trites’s conclusion to his own question
suggests the answer for the unnamed narrator as well. Trites explains the significance in
reference to Lacan. Part of coming-of-age is the acceptance of the rules of one’s society,
which can be defined as the Symbolic Order. Trites writes, “In Lacanian terms ... it is no
mystery why an adolescent would construct a parent to murder out of the Symbolic
Order: the child must come to terms with the Symbolic Order as a necessary precondition
to understanding [him]self as a subject constructed of language” (69). Perhaps one father
figure is not enough for a narrator who believes “A good book may have three openings
entirely dissimilar and inter-related only in the prescience of the author, or for that matter
one hundred times as many endings” (1). Or perhaps his actual uncle was too avuncular--
which may be why he fails in even symbolically killing his evil double, although he is
tried, imprisoned, and tortured. The reader is informed that the only reason Trellis
survives is that his servant burns his manuscript, and in so doing destroys the other
possible identities. Of course, the only identity that remains is Trellis, who is a
combination of the narrator and his uncle, whom the narrator accepts in every level of *At
Swim-Two-Birds*.

The unnamed narrator of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, unlike Stephen, Molly, and Moran,
has the means to secure a position of prominence in Ireland and the will to do something
good with that position. He questions many of the same institutions as his literary
counterparts and occasionally arrives at conclusions similar to theirs, but his ability to
choose affords him the opportunity to choose wisely. This opportunity is due, in no small
part, to the persistence and involvement of his uncle in his life. The novel ends with the
narrator comfortable and free in his uncle’s home, and the ability to one day be
comfortable and free in a home of his own. While Stephen is usurped from his home and
Molloy and Moran cannot escape their homes, the unnamed narrator’s home, which his
uncle graciously opens to him, is, perhaps, just right. O’Brien creates a model of home
and nation that is not merely antagonistic or pessimistic, but examines competing
identities of Irishness and chooses between them.
Conclusion

Many of the political movements of the early and mid-twentieth century concerned themselves with the unification of nations based on the supposed purity of ethnicities. Inherent in this concept of nationality was (and in many cases still is) the belief that citizens of a particular country share the same values, religion, and political interests. The combination of shared ideals is what constitutes a culture. The culture of a nation is a shared definition of what it means to be part of that nation. Yet each culture is composed of several subcultures, and each of these subcultures shares a definition of what it means to be a part of that subculture. What does not fit into the larger culture’s definition of what it means to be part of that nation is necessarily overlooked or thrown away by the larger culture. The Nazi regime and the Holocaust attest to the atrocities of such unchecked impulses, both nationally and internationally.

The reaction to such differences demonstrates that nationality neither was, nor is, as simple as ideologues would have us believe. People living in the west of a nation have different concerns from people living in the east. The same is true for people from the north and the south, any one of the four to each other, or the infinite radials in between the four, major points of the compass. To make matters worse, people who live in the same city, and even the same home, differ in their views of nationality.

The study of a nation’s literature often attempts to attribute to it a set of shared beliefs or characteristics. However, as with the people of a nation, the literature of a nation can prove unruly, refusing to be fitted into a pre-fabricated mold. Thus, in Irish literature, the question is not whether an author’s work demonstrates his affiliation with Irish literature, but rather which Irish literature.
The three texts examined in this thesis represent distinct visions of Ireland. Joyce's *Ulysses* depicts several types of Irishness, but positions Stephen's and Bloom's Irishness in the center of the stage. For Bloom, Ireland is a place where ingenuity and perseverance pay off, but Stephen defines being Irish as oppressed, mistreated, and in arrears. Not surprisingly, the importance each feels for Ireland correlates to how he views Ireland. For Bloom, Ireland is a good place, but for Stephen, Ireland needs to be escaped if one hopes to succeed.

In Beckett's *Molloy*, Moran and Molloy perceive Irishness in much the same way as Stephen, but they are unable to escape it. History is not a nightmare; history is a labyrinth without an exit, whose every corridor leads back to the beginning. Molloy and Moran are both the victims of oppression and the perpetrators perpetuating the paradigm. In *Molloy*, Ireland is a prison where one can be beaten, or one can be the beater, but release is not possible.

Unlike Molloy, Moran, and Stephen, the unnamed narrator of O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* views Ireland and Irishness as a multifaceted phenomenon; consequently, the unnamed narrator considers the same problems of Molloy, Moran, and Stephen, but ultimately, he reacts to those phenomena like Bloom. The narrator is familiar with the persecution and the cycle of oppression, as well as the nightmare of the past, but he also considers various inspirational figures from the past. The question of what type of Irishman to choose to become and in what Ireland, never escalates to the level where it overwhelms him, precisely because it is represented as a choice. For Molloy, Moran and Stephen, the only choice is between escape and surrender: escape and flourish or surrender and wither. The unnamed narrator need not choose between one archetypal
Irishman and another. Instead, like the innumerable radials of a compass, he chooses to be somewhat like his uncle and somewhat like the professors whose lectures he avoids. Most importantly, his choice represents the belief that a life led in Ireland can be successful.

When a book is categorized as belonging to the Irish tradition, we must further ask which tradition, or which Ireland. Unfortunately, this study has only scratched the surface of the Irish novel in the twentieth century. Examining texts written by women, as well as a more exhaustive representation of gender in general, would add to the validity of this study. A second shortcoming of this thesis is that it offers no clear and unequivocal pro-Ireland sentiment. Stephen, Buck, Moran, and Molloy have little nice to say about Ireland, and it takes O’Brien’s unnamed narrator so long to speak, that he is clearly more conflicted than pro-Irish. Examining each of these categories, and others, will help to give names to the innumerable radials on the compass of Irishness, of which this thesis examines three. It will help to shape not only how we discuss depictions of Irishness and Irish homes, but also homes of every nation.
Works Cited


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