

Best the Mythographer, Dinneen the Lexicographer: Muted Nationalism in “Scylla and Charybdis”

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Abstract

The “Scylla and Charybdis” episode of *Ulysses* has the greatest number of real characters in the book, and—*pace* Stuart Gilbert—the Irish literary movement is a more central concern to them than has been recognized. This claim is explored through consideration of two figures generally thought innocuous or insignificant: Richard Irvine Best, who participated in the conversation in the Library, and Patrick S. Dinneen, who remained just off-stage. For all the conversationalists, tensions between sexual orientation and public sexual identity serve as metaphors for participation in and/or attitudes toward Irish nationalism, a topic never explicitly addressed but seen only through the prism of English letters. Between a rock and a swirly place, no one in the Library rises above personal concerns to articulate a stance on the future of the Irish nation. Collectively, the Library conversationalists and patrons reflect Joyce’s own ambivalence.

In Joyce’s *Ulysses*, the section “Scylla and Charybdis” arguably has the greatest number of real characters, in the sense of having historically existed, in the entire book. With a historical backdrop against which to view them, I would argue, in a rejection of Stuart Gilbert’s dismissive remarks, that the Irish literary movement, fed by myth, legendary history, and life on the land, is a more central concern to the conversation in the Library than has been recognized, especially as underlined by the documented lives of the persons who appear there.¹ My present concern is two figures generally thought innocuous or insignificant: Richard Irvine Best, who was one of the conversationalists, and Patrick S. Dinneen, who, just off-stage, summons the officiously attentive Quaker librarian by way of

a library attendant who calls, “Mr. Lyster! Father Dineen wants ...” (*U* 9.967). Both men have been accurately identified in annotated editions of *Ulysses* and in reference works on the Joycean corpus, but their activities in the first half-decade of the twentieth century have not been scrutinized nor their specific relevance to the thematics of “Scylla and Charybdis” established.

Before turning to biographical details and how these are referenced, indeed, transformed in the fictional world of June 16, 1904, it is worth noting that the historical characters present in the room and others mentioned by them, e.g., James Stephens, are positioned or self-positioned along an English/Irish axis and are compromised or otherwise ambiguous as concerns what we might call “nationality” (“mummed in names” [*U* 9.412]).² T. W. Lyster, the director of the Library, is a Quaker in Catholic Dublin; John Eglinton is the English *nom de plume* of W. K. McGee, from an Ulster Scots family; George William Russell published under the initials A.E. (or, ideally, Æ; Yeats is referred to as W B); Oliver St John Gogarty is grotesquely incarnated in Buck Mulligan, scorner of all things native, while the absent Englishman Haines is infatuated with the Irish; Best’s name is bandied about in Stephen’s mind in puns and other extraneous references; Stephen sees himself as both Dedalus and Icarus; and, of course, some of the principal topics of the conversation are whether Shakespeare put himself into Hamlet or into the ghost of his father, “whether Hamlet is Shakespeare or James I or Essex” as Russell puts it (*U* 9.47), and whether, indeed, Shakespeare wrote the plays ascribed to him. Best and Dinneen will be seen to fit neatly into this play of masks, for which the larger context is the shifting frontier between Ireland and England, life and letters, and historical reality and fictional recreation in which both accuracy and invention may have equal shares.

Our view of Richard Irvine Best in the novel is determined by Joyce’s initial characterization: “Mr Best entered, tall, young, mild, light. He bore in his hand with grace a notebook, new, large, clean, bright” (*U* 9.74f.). Rhyme and parallelism (morphological and semantic) establish a ludic dimension, so that Best, in the ensuing conversation, can never quite shake the impression of eager schoolboy, the very image used by Eglinton and Stephen of Shakespeare in the conversation that brackets Best’s entry. In Joycean circles the real R. I. Best is remembered for his annoyance at being best-known as a character in *Ulysses*, rather than as the distinguished editor and bibliographer of Old Irish literature that he went on to become. In his own words from a time long after the publication of *Ulysses*:

People are entitled to criticize. I don't object to that. But I object to being described as a fool. Joyce makes me say "don't you know" all the time. I may say it sometimes, as you would, O'Hegarty. But I object to being described as a fool, don't you know.³

This would appear to be drawn from correspondence between P. S. O'Hegarty and Best, as reported by the distinguished Irish editor and author Terence de Vere White. De Vere White claimed a friendship with Best spanning twenty years. He is at pains to establish Best as "rich in idiosyncrasy ... very deeply a Victorian bourgeois," with a "nervous sense of his own dignity," a man having a "presence."⁴ The portrait is unfailingly flattering. De Vere White's assessment may well be a product of his generation and of his friendship with Best. I contend that Best's discomfort with Joyce's portrait in a professedly fictional work was not that he was shown to be a fool but that he was shown as gay.

In the following I review what the fictionalized Best says and does in the Library, what the author says and Stephen thinks about him, then turn as discreetly as possible to our scant information on the historical prototype for this character ("prying into the family life of a great man" [U 9.181]), and lastly to the significance of Best's contribution to the conversation in the context of its larger thematics and Joyce's purpose in staging the whole scene. Here I would recall the earlier statement on ambiguous and possibly conflicted identities. At the time of the conversation Best was a fairly recent addition to the staff of the National Library and thus was Lyster's junior colleague. He informs the group that Haines had gone to buy Hyde's translation, *Lovesongs of Connacht*. Best had also shown him "Jubainville's book" (U 9.93). Some years earlier, Best, who did not pursue a university degree, had been in Paris, where he met and befriended John Millington Synge. Synge, in turn, had recommended the lectures at the Collège de France of Henry d'Arbois de Jubainville, who in 1884 had published *Le cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique*.⁵ Best was enthused and later returned home to Ireland to begin his lifelong study of Irish. Best was surely a Protestant, raised in the north, although little is known of his childhood, so that his infatuation with Irish is at some odds with his cultural origins. He translated his mentor's book as *The Irish Mythological Cycle and Celtic Mythology*, and this had been published in the year immediately prior to the scene in the reading room.⁶ The translation, to which Best added additional notes of his own, had also been serialized in *The United Irishman*. Best draws on this source in a later comment, but first it is of interest to consider his "Translator's Preface":

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... I saw that on all sides there was an eager and growing desire to know something about the ancient Gods of Ireland, and the mythic races who are said to have peopled the island and fought and perished on it long ago ...

The ancient traditions of the Celtic peoples, which on the Continent have been almost completely obliterated by successive invaders, have in Ireland survived and been handed down as the particular inheritance of the nation. But the old vellum manuscripts recording these early traditions of the people, their thoughts about the world, and their own relation to it, have been suffered to lie in neglect, and a veil of obscurity hangs over them.⁷

Neglected heritage is never far from Stephen’s mind. Of Hyde’s translation, Russell remarks that lovesongs can be dangerous: “The movements which work revolutions in the world are born out of the dreams and visions in a peasant’s heart on the hillside. For them the earth is not an exploitable ground but the living mother” (*U* 9.104-07). He mentions the “decadent” French poet Stéphane Mallarmé, in contrast to the rural Irish, and it is this reference to the French writer that prompts Best to mention the author’s prose poem on Hamlet and a provincial French performance of Shakespeare’s work. Best recreates the billboard: “His free hand graciously wrote tiny signs in the air” (*U* 9.117). Yet Best contributes little to the discussion of “Who is King Hamlet?” Rather, his allusions lead away from the topic, as when he glosses the issue of the separation of work and life, more exactly, Shakespeare’s life and his *King Lear*, “immortal” in Russell’s view. Best cites a line from Russell’s play *Deirdre*, which had been performed two years previously, “Flow over them with your waves and with your waters, Mananaan, Mananaan mac Lir ...”⁸ Best has correctly identified the remote antecedents of the Lear story in Celtic mythology. Manannán mac Lir is the Irish god of the sea (treated in Best’s translation of Arbois de Jubainville, 182-94). In another story from the Ulster Cycle of tales, *Serglige Con Culaind* (*The Wasting Sickness of Cu Chulainn*), Manannán shakes his cloak of forgetfulness between former lovers.⁹ Here it is the ceaseless waves that promote oblivion, the oblivion that the conscience-stricken Stephen seeks but cannot achieve. This, too, is the topic of Best’s next interjection: “—But Ann Hathaway? Mr Best’s quiet voice said forgetfully. Yes, we seem to be forgetting her as Shakespeare himself forgot her” (*U* 9.240-41). When Stephen asks the assembly to come up with the location of Ann’s seduction of Will, Best is the clever one:

—Ryefield, Mr Best said brightly, gladly, raising his new book, gladly, brightly. He murmured then with blond delight for all:
—*Between the acres of the rye*
These pretty countryfolk would lie. (U 9.263-67).

Readers cannot escape the impression that the handsome, boyish Best is being cast as an intellectual lightweight.

The desultory conversation then turns to a possible evening meeting with George Moore and to the subject of Irish literature—exclusively literature in English. A number of contemporary authors are mentioned, but Best offers nothing on this topic. Later Eglinton muses over how little is known of Shakespeare. Best then makes a confused but perhaps personally revealing statement:

—But *Hamlet* is so personal, isn't it? Mr Best pleaded. I mean, a kind of private paper, don't you know, of his private life. I mean, I don't care a button, don't you know, who is killed or who is guilty ...

He rested an innocent book on the edge of the desk, smiling his defiance. (U 9.362-66)

These are the “don't you knows” that the historical Best resented, but it may have been the topic of disparities between one's public and private life that he would have preferred not to have seen ascribed to himself. Joyce then again stresses the boyish impression Best gives: “—Yes, Mr Best said youngly. I feel *Hamlet* quite young” (U 9.387). Another Shakespearean speculation reminds Best of Victor Hugo's *L'art d'être grand-père*, but self-censorship keeps him from completing the title (U 9.425f.). Best's three French connections—d'Arbois de Jubainville, Mallarmé, and Hugo—bring him, unwillingly, into Buck's fornication-centered frame of reference, when he later remarks on “Monsieur Moore, lecturer on French letters to the youth of Ireland” (U 9.1101f.).

While the subject of male homosexuality is not breached in the mention of the dark lady of Shakespeare's sonnets, in which William Herbert, earl of Pembroke is favored as the identity of the poet's rival, Lyster, who seems to have had a bit of a prurient nose for scandal, remarks, “I own that if the poet must be rejected such a rejection would seem more in harmony with – what shall I say? – our notions of what ought not to have been” (U 9.443-45).¹⁰ This concern for private behavior and public morality is consonant with Best's earlier remark.

The tone of the conversation then changes abruptly with the arrival of

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Buck Mulligan, who, after a pause, is able to identify the name "Shakespeare": "The chap that writes like Synge" (*U* 9.510f.). Best informs Mulligan of Haines' bookstore visit, and the conversation then turns to further questions of identity, now sexual: Hamlet played by an actress, Hamlet a woman. Best, who had earlier been stimulated to a remark by the mention of Mallarmé, now opines:

—The most brilliant of all is that story of Wilde's, Mr Best said, lifting his brilliant notebook. That *Portrait of Mr W. H.* where he proves that the sonnets were written by a Willie Hughes, a man of all hues. ... It's the very essence of Wilde, don't you know. The light touch. (*U* 9.522-30)

Again, Joyce makes Best faintly ridiculous by describing him with words from his own remarks, as if it were Best himself who were guilty of the redundancy, and by getting the reference to Wilde slightly but revealingly wrong (Wilde suggested the poems were written *for* not *by* W. H.). De Vere White has the anecdote of the youthful Best being ogled by Wilde on a Paris street.¹¹ Again, the matter of sexual orientation seems to keep pace with Best's verbal tic, "don't you know." Here, it is worth mentioning the real Best's appreciation of the writing style of Walter Pater, this also as recounted by de Vere White.¹² It is now that Joyce is at his most explicit with reference to Best: "His [Best's] glance touched their faces lightly as he smiled, a blonde ephebe. Tame essence of Wilde" (*U* 9.531f.).¹³ Bloom arrives to consult provincial newspapers, and Lyster is called away. This situation will be replicated shortly in Father Dinneen's demand. Conversation returns to Shakespeare's marriage, and his and Ann's possible love affairs. There is a reference to Whitman (*U* 9.626); from the Wildean context, Douglas's tag "Love that dare not speak its name" crops up again (*U* 9.659). As for Ann's inheritance after the dramatist's death, "—It is clear that there were two beds, a best and a secondbest, Mr Secondbest Best said finely" (*U* 9.714f.).

Associations of Shakespeare and Dublin continue, and Mulligan raises the matter of "the charge of pederasty brought against the bard." He repeats Dowden's judgment, "All we can say is that life ran very high in those days," to which Best makes one of his most revealing responses "—The sense of beauty leads us astray, said beautifulinsadness Best to uglung Eglinton" (*U* 9.735f.). A very Pater-like utterance. Eglinton replies that "The doctor can tell us what those words mean," and here we should understand Freud. Later, "—Gentle Will is being roughly handled, gentle

Mr Best said gently” (*U* 9.793). Then, Stephen launches his theory of the rivalry among the Shakespeare brothers, William, Gilbert, Edmund, Richard. Best twice hopes he will have a good word for Richard, for that is his name. It is at this point that Best makes his fullest contribution to the conversation, and it will merit a brief excursus:

—That’s very interesting because that brother motive, don’t you know, we also find in the Old Irish myths. Just what you say. The three brothers Shakespeare. In Grimm too, don’t you know, the fairytales. The third brother that always marries the sleeping beauty and wins the best prize.

Best of Best brothers. Good, better, best. (*U* 9.956-59)

Again, Lyster senses some impropriety (“I understand you to suggest there was misconduct with one of the brothers” [*U* 9.962-63]), but his remark seems to address the brothers Shakespeare, not those of Old Irish myth. Joyce’s and Best’s allusion to the myth of the brothers Éber and Éremon and the Milesian invasion as told in *The Book of Conquests (Lebhor Gabála)* has been recognized, but it should be noted that the account is also given in Best’s translation of Arbois de Jubainville, Joyce’s likely source.

According to d’Arbois de Jubainville and Best, the Milesians invaded Ireland on Thursday, 1 May, during the 11th century BCE, a precision that Joyce would have appreciated. The account of the Milesian invasions occupies some ten pages in the English translation, and it is noteworthy, for our purposes, that it is accompanied by a discussion of the legendary poet Amairgen, the equivalent of the Welsh Taliesin. On setting foot on Ireland, Amairgen equates himself with all forms of life there and, knowing it all, thus masters all. “I am the wind which blows over the sea; I am the wave of the Ocean; I am the murmur of the billows; ... I am a vulture upon the rock; I am a tear of the sun,” etc.¹⁴ Stephen’s shapeshifting musings in the Library (“the fire upon the altar”; “I am other I now”; “as we, or mother Dana, weave and unweave our bodies”; lapwing, Icarus, Dedalus, “seabedabbled, fallen, weltering”) may owe something to Joyce’s recollection of these pages and, indeed, not only did the Milesian lookout fall from the masthead into the sea, one of the leaders also drowned at sea (see below).

Before leaving Stephen, it is also of interest to note just how familiar he, called Aengus of the birds by Buck, appears to be with legendary Ireland. His evocation of the aging Ann Hathaway—“now her leaves falling, all, bare” and “gap-toothed Kathleen, her four beautiful green fields” (the four provinces of Ireland) (*U* 9.36f.)—is consistent with the imagery in the medieval lament of the Old Woman of Beare, in which the goddess of

territorial sovereignty is portrayed as a crone with an explicit equation of hair and cereal crops or grazing land.¹⁵ We have noted the “mother Dana” reference and the source of the Lear story in Celtic myth. *Tír na n-og*, the land of youth (more correctly *Tír na n-Óg*) also appears as a tag. The mention of Patrick and Oisín references *The Colloquy of the Ancient (Acallam na Senórach)* and the corpus of Fenian tales there. “I met a fool i’ the forest” could well be a recall of the tale of Mad Suibhne, a reflex of the Celtic wild-man-of-the-woods story. The pun on Fred Ryan and the two pieces of silver he lent Stephen, *fraidrine*, refers to the metallurgical term in Old Irish *findruine*, now judged a tin and copper alloy and often translated as “white metal” or “white silver.” Stephen’s rant about the “incests and bestialities” of the world (*U* 9.850-57) is strikingly consistent with the apocalyptic vision of the Morrigan at the end of *The Second Battle of Mag Tuired (Cath Maige Tuired)*:

I shall not see a world which will be dear to me: summer without blossoms, cattle will be without milk, women without modesty, men without valor, conquests without a king, ... woods without mast, sea without produce, ... false judgments of old men, false precedents of lawyers, every man a betrayer, every son a reaver, the son will go to the bed of his father ... an evil time ...¹⁶

Now for Best’s “brother motive ... in the old Irish myths.” The Sons of Mil fought a first battle against the Túatha dé Danann near Slieve Mish in Co. Cork.¹⁷ They then meet three goddess figures, Banba, Fodla, and Ériu, who welcome them in this hierogamy as the new consorts of the land, and each asks that the land be named after her. But the last of the three, Ériu, predicts that the eldest of the sons of Mile, Éber Dond “the Dark,” will die before the conquest of the country is complete. Negotiations with ruling kings oblige the Milesians to withdraw a symbolic distance to sea, and they are then victims of a storm, which the poet Amairgen quells with an invocation of the fruitful land of Ireland. Éber Dond, as presumptuous as Icarus, says he will put all Ireland to the sword, but this causes the storm to rise again and he is drowned at sea.

The Milesians mount another invasion, now under the leadership of the two remaining brothers Éber Find (“the Fair”) and Éremon. The Túatha dé Danann are defeated and retreat to the caves and depths of the mountains. Éber Find and Éremon contest the sole rulership of Ireland, then agree to share it. But this fails and they go to war. Éber Find is killed and Éremon rules alone. Thus the dark and light brothers (rather like dour dark Eglinton

and cordial fair Best) cancel each other out, and Éremon, a reflex of the root that we find in *Aryan*, rules (like Stephen? “my crown, my sword”) alone.

Best may also have a second tale of fraternal conflict in mind, this drawn from legendary history, not myth. It concerns the future king Níall of the Nine Hostages and his half-brothers. In the second of two trials to determine their suitability for the kingship, they are sent out hunting with new weapons. Thirsty after their meal of grilled meat, they search for water. Each young man goes in turn, finds a well guarded by a loathsome hag, is promised water in return for a kiss, and all but one reject her offer. Only Níall is prepared to kiss the crone and says that he will even lie with her. He throws her to the ground and kisses her, at which point she reveals herself as a beautiful young woman. She is, in fact, sovereignty personified and promises nearly undisputed single rule to Níall and his descendants.¹⁸ This is the “loathly lady” motif that we later meet in Gower, Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Tale*, and the fifteenth century *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*. The motif of the sovereignty of Ireland as a woman of varying fortunes is persistent in Irish letters and has an only recently recognized prominence in Joyce.¹⁹

Best’s comment on fraternal enmity is his last substantive contribution to the conversation and is soon followed by Lyster being called away to attend to Father Dinneen’s needs. But the idea of Irish myth continues to resonate, as when Stephen muses, “Why is the underplot of *King Lear* in which Edmund figures lifted out of Sydney’s *Arcadia* and spatchcocked on to a Celtic legend older than history?” (U 9.990-92). But a little more Bestiana can be gleaned from the text. “—Those who are married, Mr Best, douce herald, said, all save one, shall live. The rest shall keep as they are. He laughed, unmarried, at Eglinton Johannes, of arts a bachelor” (U 9. 1059-61). In encouraging Stephen to write up his theory on Shakespeare, Best says he “ought to make it a dialogue, don’t you know, like the Platonic dialogues Wilde wrote” (U 9.1068f.).

As he and Stephen leave the Library, Mulligan fantasizes on the unmarried state and its capacity for personal abuse in the form of masturbation. Stephen seems to hesitate and turn back, apparently seeing two of the conversationalists, Eglinton and Best, a last time. “The dour recluse still there (he has his cake) and the douce youngling, minion of pleasure, Phedo’s toyable fair hair” (U 9.1138f.). Phedo seems to reference the Phaedo of the Platonic dialogues. Nobly born, Phaedo was captured in the conquest of the city of Elis and was forced into a house of prostitution. Slipping out, he attended Socrates’ lectures, and the latter eventually convinced his friends to ransom Phaedo, who was then able to study philosophy. With this and other suggestions of an erotic tension between

Eglinton and Best (cf. *U* 9.731-39), this is our last view of Richard Irvine Best, although Mulligan will recall the topic of male homosexuality when they spot Bloom leaving the Library and Mulligan says that he looked on Stephen to lust after him.

Much of the foregoing interpretation is confirmed by the later grotesque appearance of Lyster, Eglinton, and Best in Nighttown (*U* 15.2244-60). Lyster, in historical Quaker garb, is again falsely discreet; Eglinton, wearing a yellow kimono, a plain man in search of the truth; and Best, tricked out in hairdresser's gear and his hair in "curlpapers," states that he has been beautifying Eglinton: "A thing of beauty, don't you know, Yeats says, or I mean, Keats says" (echoing his confusion over whether Wilde had said Shakespeare's sonnets were written by, or for, a certain Hughes).

Best stayed with the National Library, eventually rising from assistant librarian to the directorship in 1929. He published the first of his several editions of early Irish literature, *The Martyrology of Tallacht*, in 1931, and in 1942 produced the first volume of his *Bibliography of Irish Philology and Manuscript Literature, Publications, 1913-41*. All these and others, where pride of place should go to his co-edition of *The Book of Leinster*, have remained standard reference works and editions. Yet, Joyce would appear to have caught something of the real Best in crediting him in *Ulysses* only with the mention of parallel instances of details of the main topics discussed in the Library. Best never produced any body of criticism on old Irish literature. Although he was a competent writer, being consulted on various occasions by no less than Synge and George Moore for his sound knowledge of grammar and syntax (as well as of the lore of Old Ireland), Best was not much of a reader, not interested in modern letters, and gives little display of the intellectual curiosity that Joyce prized. De Vere White summarizes: "He never indulged in criticism or evaluations."²⁰

But one detail that Joyce would have known from the vantage point of 1922 was that, while Best is portrayed as a handsome if perhaps somewhat girlish bachelor of doubtful sexual orientation in June of 1904, only two years later he would marry. His choice fell on Edith Oldham, who had returned to Dublin after studying music at the Royal College of Music in London, where she had caught the eye of the director, Sir William Grove, and remained his correspondent from 1883 to 1889. An archivist's comment on the Grove letters is revealing: "In this sequence of long and emotional letters, he admitted to her his innermost thoughts and feelings, and to much of the workings of the RCM and the musical establishment."²¹ Edith's letters have not been preserved but the relationship was described as "passionately

platonic.” There was 45 years age difference between the two. Much against Grove’s will, Edith returned to Dublin in 1887. Like Joyce, Best was interested in music. He, Edith, who was associated with the Royal Irish Academy of Music for 70 years, and her younger brother, Charles Hubert Oldham, were instrumental in establishing the music festival *Feis Ceoil* in Dublin in 1896.²² Best became the festival registrar. (Joyce sang there on 16 May 1904.) At the time of her marriage to Best, Grove was dead (in 1900), Edith (the “sleeping beauty”?) was 41, and Best was 34 (cf. Will and Ann, *U* 9.240). Recalling Stephen’s comment on turning ourselves into ghosts (“through change of manners” [*U* 9.48f.]), we may ask whether this was not *mariage de convenance*, one which gave Edith Oldham an enhanced place in Dublin society and furthered Best’s career at the Library. De Vere White gives an account of Best informing George Moore of his forthcoming marriage, “adding that neither he nor his wife had any illusions about each other.”²³

The presence of Patrick S. Dinneen (Pádraig Ó Duinnín; Joyce writes *Dineen*) in the novel is substantially less than that of Richard Irvine Best, and indeed, he never truly appears on stage, only summons Lyster from the wings. But this is certainly no fortuitous detail. Born in 1860 in Co. Kerry, he was trained in the classics and entered the Jesuit novitiate in Dublin. In 1883 he began studies at University College, Dublin, soon after its administration had been assumed by the Society of Jesus. Ordained in 1894, Dinneen left the order in 1900 with the consent of his superiors. Although he never again celebrated mass, he continued to be known as Father Dinneen. About this time he also became interested in the work of the Gaelic League and began his long career as compiler, author, and editor of writing, initially poetry, in Irish.²⁴ Thus, Dinneen, unlike Best, had solid academic training when he began his work on the Irish language. He has been characterized as “gifted, industrious, a formidable controversialist, given to punning and earthy humour, cranky as well”²⁵—a pity he didn’t enter the reading room! But no, the librarian is called out to satisfy his needs. What might these have been in June of 1904?

Three years earlier, and only one year after leaving the Jesuits, Dinneen assumed the editorship of a dictionary project under the aegis of the fledgling Irish Texts Society, which had been founded in 1898. At that time, 12,000 entries were in hand, culled mostly from earlier dictionaries. On this base Dinneen, a native speaker of Irish, expanded the original concept of the work to comprise about 30,000 headwords in Irish. The completed work was entitled *Foclóir Gaedhilige agus Béarla - An Irish-English Dictionary, being a thesaurus of the words, phrases and idioms of the modern Irish language, with explanations in English*. The work was published in Dublin for the Irish

Texts Society by M. H. Gill.²⁶ Our best assessment of the circumstances of publication indicate that the work left the presses in July of 1904, thus a scant month after the conversation in the Library.²⁷ It would be fanciful to imagine that what Father Dinneen wanted of Lyster in June of 1904 had any practical bearing on the dictionary, which must already have been typeset and at least partially proofed by that date, but from the perspective of Joyce and *Ulysses* we can entertain the conceit that what Dinneen wanted was “More words!”

Joyce was a student at University College, Dublin, when Dinneen was Professor of Irish. If they were not acquainted, they certainly knew of each other. After Joyce had published his article “The Day of the Rabblement” on the state of the theater in Ireland, an article in which he referred to Giordano Bruno by his city of residence, Nola, Dinneen is reported to have amused his students by antics to which he appended, “Said the Nolan!”, as if this authority were an Irishman by that celebrated family name.²⁸ When the stereos of the first edition of the dictionary were lost in the Dublin fires of Easter 1916, Dinneen immediately started work on a revised and expanded second edition. Work was based on the continuously expanding collection of “slips” that were being compiled. In this Dinneen had followed the contextualizing practice of the *New English Dictionary* under the editorship of James Murray. Dinneen and his assistants had working space in the National Library, “where tables were spread for the growing mass of slips which accumulated as the work progressed.”²⁹ Dinneen is known to have walked about, his pockets spilling slips with lexicographical data. We might imagine these as the same kinds of slips that Lyster carried in *Ulysses*, that Mulligan scribbled on, and that Stephen planned to stock up on on his way out (*U* 9.1058). The slips, real and imagined, offer a nice counterpart to Best’s (and Joyce’s) notebook(s). Dinneen also had “his” seat in the National Library’s reading room. The revised edition of his dictionary appeared in 1927 and has been continuously kept in print since then. Thus Dinneen’s work in the Library could well have had a place on Joyce’s mental map of Dublin, even if some of the detail relates to work on the revised, rather than the initial, edition.

Dinneen’s dictionary, along with a number of other lexical works, was quickly reviewed. Father M. P. O’Hickey’s severely critical review was announced in the July-December 1904 volume of the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* and appeared in the subsequent volume the next year. Dinneen also responded in kind. Is it just a coincidence that the January-June 1904 volume of the *IER* has a brief review of the Rev. W. A. Sutton’s *The Shakespeare Enigma*, a 1903 work that advances Bacon as the true author

(cf. Joyce's mention of Bacon's candidacy, *U* 9.410 and 866)?³⁰

MacLochlainn provides an informative and amusing description of the dictionary, in particular in its dimension as thesaurus and encyclopedia of traditional Irish language and life on the land. To his observation that "[t]he array of associated meanings with which he [Dinneen] opens his typical entry can be quite intimidating,"³¹ one might add the take-off on the verbal noun *cur*, "put," etc., etc., that appeared in a Flann O'Brien column.³² How well might Joyce have known the dictionary? The incidence of Irish in *Ulysses* is quite limited and its treatment is almost uniformly dismissive via parody, the association with characters with negative attributes, etc. Yet, as Brendan Ó Hehir has shown for the *Wake* and other works, Joyce's knowledge of Irish (unlike Stephen's) was quite extensive and the result of formal instruction, even if not fully deployed until the *Wake* was well along.³³ An abridged version of Dinneen's dictionary of 1927 was among the books left in Joyce's Paris apartment.³⁴ But only a few tags inform "Scylla and Charybdis": *ta an bad ar an tir, taim in mo shagart* ("the boat is on the land, I am a priest") in Stephen's mind, some coarse, popular language from Mulligan. The very next line, "put beurla on it, littlejean" (*U* 9.368), can be glossed with Dinneen's entry for *béarla*: "language, speech, dialect; the English language," representing the development in British Ireland whereby English had become speech *par excellence*. Interestingly, the first pedagogical tools for Irish of the Christian Brothers, who gave Joyce his least memorable educational experience in the spring of 1893, began to appear in the same decade as the scene in the reading room.³⁵

There is also another ghost dictionary in *Ulysses*, one which may have made a rather different impression on Joyce. As early as 1852 the Irish scholars John O'Donovan and Eugene O'Curry, Best's predecessors in many respects, projected a *Dictionary of the Irish Language*. Robert Atkinson became the editor in 1880, but there was little true progress until 1907. But the focus of the dictionary sharpened as the decision was made to concentrate on Old and Middle Irish materials, not the contemporary language. During that same decade Whitley Stokes' and Kuno Meyer's *Arkiv für celtische Lexicographie* began to appear. In 1910 a talented Norwegian, Carl J. S. Marstrander, was named professor in the School of Irish Learning, and in the following year he assumed the editorship of the dictionary. In August of 1913 the first fascicule *D-degóir* appeared, although Marstrander had left Dublin a year earlier. Almost two decades would pass before the fascicule *E* appeared. Later fascicules would be entitled *Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language*. By a nice coincidence, an address that Best gave to the Royal Irish Academy in 1946 is our best source for the early history of the dictionary.³⁶ Although Dinneen would

have been able to draw on only Marstrander’s first fascicule in his revised edition of his own dictionary in 1927, it is curious that there is no explicit mention of it or the project, which, it should be noted, had a different sponsor, the Royal Irish Academy.

Given Joyce’s admiration for Henrik Ibsen and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, the contributions of such Norwegian scholars as Alf Sommerfelt, and Sophus and Alexander Bugge, plus Marstrander’s lexicographical labors and his *Bidrag til det norske sprogs historie i Irland* (*A Contribution to the History of the Norse Language in Ireland*), may have lent Irish a supplementary cachet in Joyce’s eyes, opening the way for Father Dinneen’s near-appearance in *Ulysses*.³⁷

We know that informal conversations were a regular feature of the reading room at the National Library in Dublin. Thus, however careful its organization by Joyce, the depicted scene would not have been unusual, and it is only Stephen’s verbal gymnastics and oft-derailed inner train of thought, the world seen through the prism of a hangover and remorse, that make it distinctive and rewarding. As for the characters, none of the portraits is particularly flattering. Eglinton comes off best, perhaps because he had published Joyce in *Dana*. The reading room of the Library, with its *chiaroscuro* effects, is in a sense the ideal place to discuss, meanderingly, literary identities, Shakespeare and Hamlet, but also to deploy and promote the conflicted, ambiguous, unresolved identities of the conversationalists themselves.³⁸ McGee aka Eglinton articulates the choices of the English-language writer in Ireland, A.E. the public and private faces of the writer. The historical Gogarty is cut down to a sex-obsessed parodist in the caprine Buck Mulligan. And to Best falls the role of the prissy androgyne, in the eyes of others and perhaps in his own as well.

In creating his characters with the hindsight available in 1922, Joyce could anticipate later developments in their careers. Best and Dinneen were on the cusp of change, the former about to become an editor and bibliographer rather than a critic, a library director and member of the establishment rather than a bachelor; the latter, word-hound and lexicographer rather than officiating priest. Reinventing himself through language, Best turns from his northern Protestant background to embrace Old Ireland. Dinneen judges that the language of that same Old Ireland (and his boyhood past) is best saved in a bilingual dictionary—he chose to put *beurla* on it.³⁹ Yet Joyce’s two characterizations, the one less than a thumbnail, give very little hint of the substantial contributions that Best and Dinneen, in quite complementary ways, were to make to the Irish Revival.

Just like the unresolved question of the identity of the author of

Shakespeare's dramas and the sex of his actors, tensions between sexual orientation and public sexual identity (heterosexual/homosexual, celibate/active) may be seen as another metaphor for participation in and/or attitudes toward Irish nationalism. The topic is never addressed head-on in the Library but is seen through the prism of letters—English letters. Everyone in “Scylla and Charybdis” is between a rock and a swirly place, and no one in the Library rises above personal concerns to articulate a stance on the future of the nation. Another love that dare not say its name. Collectively, the Library conversationalists reflect Joyce's own ambivalence, one that found partial literary resolution in *Ulysses* and a personal *modus vivendi* only in exile.⁴⁰

Notes

¹ “It is noteworthy that the only explicit reference ... which deals with the art of literature, to the Irish literary movement ... is placed in the mouth of ribald Buck Mulligan,” Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's “Ulysses”: A Study* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), 224 n1. I address some of these concerns from a different vantage point in William Sayers, “Molly's Monologue and the Old Woman's Complaint in James Stephens's *The Crock of Gold*,” *JJQ* 36 (Spring 1999) 640-50, in which my point of departure was John Eglinton's remark that “James Stephens is doing some clever sketches” (*U* 9.312).

² For an exploration of similar problematics in *Polyphemous*, see Fritz Senn, “Kyklonomatics,” *JJQ* 36 (Spring 1999) 485-506. On the real characters, see Alf MacLochlainn, “Those Young Men ... the National Library of Ireland and the Cultural Revolution,” in *Writers, Raconteurs and Notable Feminists: Two Monographs* (Dublin: Cumann Leabarlann Náisiúnta na hÉireann, 1993).

³ Terence de Vere White, “Richard Irvine Best and his Irish Literary Contemporaries,” *Irish University Review: A Journal of Irish Studies* 7 (1977) 169.

⁴ De Vere White 180, 183.

⁵ Henry d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Le cycle mythologique irlandais et la mythologie celtique* (Paris: E. Thorin, 1884).

⁶ *The Irish Mythological Cycle and Celtic Mythology*, trans. Richard Irvine Best (Dublin: O'Donoghue, 1903).

⁷ P. iv. Best also serialized his *The Old Irish Bardic Tales* in the *United Irishman*, 11 October, 1902-25 April, 1903.

⁸ Russell's play *Deirdre* was first staged in Dublin in 1902. These lines, spoken by a druid, mark the fall of the heroic order in Ulster after the king's betrayal and retribution against the returned lovers. Best can be imagined to have remembered them since he played the part of Ainle in a private production of the play in January of 1902. See “James Joyce's Dedalus Year 1898-1904,”

<<http://www.robotwisdom.com/jaj/dedalus.html>>.

⁹ *Serglige Con Culainn*, ed. Myles Dillon (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1953) 842f.; cf. Yeats’s *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, based on this tale.

¹⁰ The librarian’s name may have suggested Norwegian *lyste*, “lust, desire,” to Joyce, but there are also frequent puns on English *list* = *listen*.

¹¹ De Vere White 173.

¹² De Vere White 171.

¹³ In 1909 Joyce sent Best a postcard from Trieste with copies of articles that he had written on Shaw and Wilde (de Vere White 169). This nexus of motifs and allusions is most profitably explored in Joseph A. Kestner, “Youth by the Sea: The Ephebe in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*,” *JJQ* 31 (Spring 1994) 233-76, but neither the fictionalized nor the historical Best is factored into the whole.

¹⁴ *The Irish Mythological Cycle and Celtic Mythology* 137.

¹⁵ New edition and translation in Donncha Ó hAodha, “The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare,” in *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney*, eds. Donnchadh Ó Corráin, Liam Breatnach, and Kim McCone, Maynooth Monographs 3 (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1989) 308-31. On Stephen’s tag, see William Sayers, “Gat-toothed Alysoun, Gaptoothed Kathleen: Sovereignty and Dentition,” *Hypermedia Joyce Studies* 6 (2005), <http://www.geocities.com/hypermedia_joyce/contents.html>.

¹⁶ *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Maig Tuired*, ed. Elizabeth A. Gray, Irish Texts Society 52 (Dublin: ITS, 1982) 73.

¹⁷ The account has the anecdote of woman caught naked bathing by husband and dying of shame (143); cf. “You naughtn’t to look, missus, so you naughtn’t when a lady’s ashowing of her elemental” (*U* 9.72f.).

¹⁸ The text is found in “Echtra mac Echdach Muigmedoin: The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Mugmedon,” ed. and trans. Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique* 24 (1909) 190-203. Best could also have known the work from Robert Atkinson’s facsimile edition of *The Yellow Book of Lecan* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1896). A fresh translation of the key scene is found in Sayers, “Gat-toothed Alysoun, Gaptoothed Kathleen.”

¹⁹ See Maria Tymoczko, “Sovereignty Structures in *Ulysses*,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 25 (1988) 445-64, and other studies by this scholar.

²⁰ De Vere White 173.

²¹ See “Grove, Sir George (1820-1900); Oldham letters,” <<http://www.aim25.ac.uk>>. A fuller account is given in *To Talent Alone: The Royal Irish Academy of Music, 1848-1998*, ed. Richard Pine and Charles Action (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1998) 166-79.

²² C. H. Oldham became the first professor of National Economics at University College Dublin and is believed to have been instrumental in the founding

of the Irish Protestant Home Rule Association.

²³ De Vere White 183. De Vere White also notes Best's interest in Yeats's sexual rejuvenation after a vasoligation (the Steinach operation). Yeats recommended the procedure but Best is reported to have declined. De Vere White (roguishly? discreetly?) adds, "The nature of his work did not require any adventitious aid of that description" (173). Perhaps the myriad couplings of Old Irish literature were sufficient on that score. There are a number of possible allusions to Best in the *Wake*. The most explicit, "het best" (*FW* 256.16) comes just after the phrase "your wildeshawesshowe moves swiftly sterneward" (*FW* 256.13f.). There is no trace of Edith *née* Oldham.

²⁴ See *A Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 3rd ed., ed. Henry Boylan (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1998) 111f., which also has an entry for Best (26), and Alf MacLochlainn, also once a director of the National Library, "Father Dinneen and his Dictionary," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 91 (Spring 2002) 68-77. For complementary information on Dinneen, the man, see Noel O'Connell, "Father Dinneen: His Dictionary and the Gaelic Revival," <<http://www.irishtextsociety.org/dinneen.htm>>.

²⁵ MacLochlainn 68.

²⁶ In an unfortunate slip, MacLochlainn erroneously ascribes sponsorship of the work to The Gaelic League (68). A parallel edition appeared in London in 1904 from the presses of Nutt.

²⁷ I am grateful to Fergal Tobin of Gill and Macmillan, his colleagues, and officers of The Irish Texts Society for efforts to pin-point the time of publication. Records from the publisher were destroyed by fire in 1979, although the company's preserved books of advertisement clippings suggest that the dictionary was not marketed before February of 1904. The ITS report for 1904, on the other hand, states explicitly that the dictionary was launched from the press in July of 1904.

²⁸ As recounted by Stanislaus Joyce in *My Brother's Keeper: James Joyce's Early Years*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking Press, 1958) 145f.

²⁹ MacLochlainn 69.

³⁰ M. P. O'H[ickey], "Irish Lexicography," *IER* 16 (July-December 1904) 521-32, continued in 17 (January-June 1905) 63-85; W. A. Sutton, *The Shakespeare Enigma* (Dublin: Sealy, Bryers, and Walker, 1903), rev. in *IER* 15 (January-June 1904) 382f.

³¹ MacLochlainn 71.

³² Flann O'Brien, "Irish and Related Matters: The Gaelic," in *The Best of Myles: A Selection from "Cruiskeen Lawn" [by] Myles na Gopaleen (Flann O'Brien)*, ed. Kevin O'Nolan (New York: Walker, 1968) 278f.

³³ Brendan Ó Hehir, *A Gaelic Lexicon for "Finnegans Wake", and Glossary for Joyce's Other Works* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

³⁴ Ó Hehir viii.

³⁵ The Christian Brothers, *A First Irish Grammar* (Dublin: M. H. Gill, 1900), and *Graiméar na gaedhilge* (Dublin: M. H. Gill, 1902). Unlike Best, Dinneen does not appear in *Nighttown*, but since he is known to have been short, wizened and

appeared prematurely aged, we might see an inverted reflex in Old Gummy Granny, who both laments the “stranger in my house” (*U* 15.4578-89) and urges Stephen to armed revolt against the British, giving him a dagger to defend himself from Private Carr (*U* 15.4736-39). She is the parodic turn on the old woman (the *sean bhan bhocht*, Englished as *Shan Van Vocht*, of nationalist tradition) who in “Telemachus” provides milk to the “heroes” of the tower. She has lost her Irish (*U* 1.433-34), while Dinneen has his in more than full measure.

³⁶ See the “Historical Note” by E. G. Quin, prefaced to the completed *Dictionary of the Irish Language based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1913-76) iii-vi; Best reference, iii.

³⁷ Alf Sommerfelt, *The Dialect of Torr Co. Donegal* (Christiania: J. Dybwad, 1922); Carl J. S. Marstrander, *Bidrag til det norske sprogs historie i Irland* (Kristiania: I kommission hos J. Dybwad, 1915). Also worth mentioning is the work of the Dane Holger Pedersen, who published the German version of his and Henry Lewis’s *Comparative Grammar of the Celtic Languages* in 1909. For an overview, especially as regards Joyce’s interest in Scandinavian languages, see Kristian Smidt, “‘I’m Not Half Norawain for Nothing’: Joyce and Norway,” *JJQ* 26 (Spring 1989) 333-350. While on the subject of attitudes toward Scandinavia, it is interesting to note that Stephen cites, in positive fashion, the Danish critic George Morris Cohen Brandes on dating Shakespeare’s plays, while at least a superficial anti-Semitism is evident in the retort, likely Eglinton’s, “What does Mr Sidney Lee, or Mr Simon Lazarus, as some aver his name is, say of it?” (*U* 9.418). Brandes’ work on Ibsen and Bjørnson was also prized by Joyce (see Smidt).

³⁸ At every turn in the novel, Bloom’s identity (Irish, Jewish, vocational, familial, male, individual) is also questioned.

³⁹ Although in this context the past seems the best medium for recasting the future, Stephen’s tragedy is that he cannot effect a similar transformation with the same ease (cf. “Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past” [*U* 9.89]).

⁴⁰ Representative of current critical attention to “debates about Irishness, colonialism, nationalism, and language that so powerfully shaped Joyce’s thinking” (Sean Latham, pers. comm.) is Andrew Gibson, *Joyce’s Revenge: History, Politics, and Aesthetics in “Ulysses”* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).