

“Those years in Ireland may not have been the best of times or, indeed, the worst of times, but it was certainly a time when we did not shout from the rooftops of being related to the man [James Joyce]—it was a time to keep your heads below the parapet.” On the evening of 24 October 2002, Ken Monaghan, Joyce’s nephew, uttered these words as he described the relationship Joyce’s sisters and the Monaghan family had with the author. Because of Joyce’s insistence on writing as he pleased and offending the predominantly Catholic population, his family suffered for his reputation as a peddler of obscenity. Indeed Ireland, the country that had served as his uncle’s muse and adversary, had a complicated relationship with the man who would capture so realistically a day in the life of its largest cities inhabitants in his work, Ulysses. As Mr. Monaghan reminded those of us in attendance that night, Ireland was in a precarious position at the time of his birth—and Joyce’s creative period:

I was born in 1925 and grew up in an Ireland that was not greatly different to the country from which James Joyce and Nora Barnacle fled on 8 October, 1904. We [Ireland] had achieved an independence of sorts from England and twenty-six of the thirty-two counties in the country were now governed from Dublin. The umbilical cord, however, had not been cut and six northern counties remained and still remained under British rule which has resulted in the festering sore that is Northern Ireland today. We had also experience a particularly vicious civil war between the forces who, after the war of independence, supported the Treaty with England and those who opposed it. The civil war left bitter memories and divisions and these memories and divisions had an enormous and almost cataclysmic effect on the social and political life of

the country until comparatively recent times. During this period when we were slowly coming to terms with the difficulties of governing ourselves and grinding poverty for a large portion of the population, and the way of life was determined more than ever by the dictates of an autocratic Catholic Church. We had adopted existing British laws and taken on board their civil service and judicial systems and the only real difference was in the people who occupied the positions of power within these systems. The minions of the British government were replaced by members of the emerging Catholic middle class who looked for leadership and guidance to the hierarchy of that same Church. Molly Ivors¹ and her friends had come into their inheritance

While much of Mr. Monaghan's speech is duplicated in his article "Dublin in the Time of Joyce"², for those of us attending the Sixth Sedona Conference & Conversations held in Dublin, it was an apt and delightful finish to the first evening of the conference. He gave us a very personal context in which to place our own experiences of Dublin and reminded us that this city has evolved and yet remains surprisingly similar to the Dublin of Joyce's works.

Mr. Monaghan touches on the dynamic quality of Ireland—and Dublin. The Conference was held in the city for many reasons, I'm sure, not least of which is the dramatic upswing in its economy in the last decade—an upswing that earned the country the nickname, "The Celtic Tiger." However, Dublin, and the rest of Ireland, is watching that upswing turn downward these days. It is nothing new for

¹ A character in Joyce's "The Dead" from Dubliners. She is a nationalist who accuses Gabriel Conroy of being a "West Briton."

² See Thomas R. Staley's Joyces Studies Annual, volume 12, Summer 2001: pp. 65-73. My quotations are taken from this text. However, they represent Mr. Monaghan's speech almost verbatim.

Dublin. Indeed, the upswing that has provided for Dublin a boom in construction and its more “cosmopolitan” feel is much like those changes that ensued in the early 20th century. As Mr. Monaghan reminded us, the view of the Irish toward Joyce also has seen a shift; he is no longer the “Anti-Christ”³, no longer just the writer who,

. . .had written, as no writer had done, in a completely frank and honest way about Dublin and its citizens and had not depicted them as the paragons of virtue they obviously felt themselves to be. In his writings he had made fun of the Holy Roman Catholic Church and its ministers and mocked the holy cow of Irish nationalism which was probably the most grievous sin of all, and then his own lifestyle⁴ did not exactly conform to the norm of Irish life at the time.⁵

Joyce is now celebrated among the greatest Irish writers and is a major tourist attraction. The James Joyce Tower, operated by the Bord Failte, allows visitors to feel the presence of Buck Mulligan, Stephen Dedalus, and Haines as they ascend the very narrow, damp stairs to the gun turret on the roof.

And Joyce’s “attack” on nationalism has also been re-examined and may be undergoing some revision. For many scholars—and for the Irish—it has been easier to represent Joyce as an opposing force to the beliefs espoused by Irish poet W. B. Yeats. However, they focus only on the early works of Yeats, and they do not acknowledge the evolution of both writers from Romantic to Modernist. More recently, many of us are focusing on how these writers produced a unified Irish literary tradition, instead of a dichotomous one.

³ Monaghan 68.

⁴ Joyce and Nora Barnacle fled Ireland together and had two children, Giorgio and Lucia, before marrying several years later.

⁵ Monaghan 70.

But Mr. Monaghan's evening with us was not about scholarship. Indeed, he assured us he was no scholar, but merely someone who grew up in an Ireland that was hostile to his uncle's memory:

I do not remember when I first heard of James Joyce or learned that I was related to him but I cannot remember a time that I did not know of this relationship. It was not always comfortable to live with this knowledge though, on the other hand, I cannot remember encountering any overt antagonism just, on occasions, some sharp intakes of breath on people learning of my connection with the man.⁶

Mr. Monaghan used vivid language to convey the attitude of the Monaghan family to his mother, Joyce's sister: "My mother was not welcomed into this family who considered themselves to be a cut above buttermilk and no member of it attended the wedding which took place in Dublin."⁷ And he reminded us that Joyce spent much of his life in poverty and hunger in Dublin's north inner city. He helped us to recognize why Joyce reacted so violently to the calls for a renewed Ireland from the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and revealed for us Joyce's fragile ego that may have contributed to his somewhat confrontational character. Above all, Mr. Monaghan gave us a very personal look into the character of a writer who dominated the somewhat impersonal movement of Modernism.

This was my first Conference, and my first semester as full time faculty at MCC. For me, this opportunity meant so much as I've studied Irish literature and culture for 16 years, worked on the staff of the James Joyce Quarterly at the University of Tulsa, researched Ulysses copyright issues at the Library of Congress, wrote my dissertation on Yeats and Joyce, and received my PhD in Irish literature; yet,

⁶ Monaghan 68-69.

⁷ Monaghan 67.

I had never been to Ireland. Being able to sit next to Mr. Monaghan was an incredible experience as he was able to speak about Joyce's family and the personal side of the literary figure—a side, I believe, is very important for us to understand and to consider as we read his works. While speaking with him at dinner, we discovered a mutual friendship, as we both know Robert Spoo, former editor of the JJQ and my dissertation director. I was also fortunate enough to have Mr. Monaghan give me a personal tour of the James Joyce Centre, where he serves as Cultural Director. This centre serves not only as a museum of sorts for Joyce, but also as a place of study for students of Joyce throughout the world. So, for me, at least, much of the strength of the Sedona conference & Conversations was not only in its discussions and displays of digital media, but in the personal contacts I made. This conference allowed me to flesh out my understanding and experiences of the literature I love and to appreciate the city in which Joyce lived, struggled, and from which he fled, and to visit the Joyce Museum in Sandycove. I already have plans to return in June 2004 for Bloomsday, the centenary celebration of the book.