

LIGIA DOINA CONSTANTINESCU
Universitatea „Al. I. Cuza” Iași

The ‘Power’ of Dialogism and of ‘Troping’.

Case Studies:

W. B. Yeats’ Easter 1916 and J. Joyce’s The Dead

The issue of the relations between ‘centre and periphery’ has remained topical in literary and Cultural Studies, not to mention some additional acquisitions from trans-/inter-/cross-disciplinary studies, including psychoanalysis, post-/feminism, neo-Marxism, phenomenology or the canon debate/s, a s o. Admittedly, what is at stake remains the ‘power relations/forces’ between what used to be ‘at the centre’, and can now only ‘survive’ by acknowledging an interplay between it/self and alterity, in its many hypostases. ‘Power’ has been ‘revisited’ by different theorists, some of the most persuasive and cogent remaining M. Foucault, as assimilated, so to say, by analysts of New Historicism; some of their concerns – ‘panopticum’, subversion, resistance, dissidence, containment, representation, discourse – can be turned to good account, or placed in good stead, within the framework not only of feminism – more or less Post –, but also within the current one of Postcolonialist Studies.

1. The Peripheral Irish ?

Irish culture and literature for instance used to be ‘positioned’ as relatively ‘peripheral’ in relation to the powerful, central place of the colonizing British culture and literature; postcolonial analysts have demonstrated the fallacies of such an attitude of Eurocentrism, upholding by means of various arguments that the identity model/s –either in terms of structuralist frameworks (Ioana Mohor, 2005), or in terms of poststructuralist ones (Pia Brinzeu, 2007) – can become more feasible, salient and cogent if conceived as hybrid/s of (all) sorts; New Historicism can offer in this respect new arguments in demonstrating the ways by which ‘centrality’ can get dislodged, subverted in favor of the formerly ‘peripheral’ voices.

Along such a line of reasoning, this study aims at exploring this issue in terms of case studies; respectively, two texts at least from the early 19th century Irish literature are going to turn into ‘sites of ideological contests’, for an analyst able to accommodate contests by resolving them in different ways: the power of dialogism, double-voiced discourse and ambivalence, and the power of troping and of figurative discourse.

The perspective of the colonized, and respectively colonization, entails the stances of *resistance/subversion/dissent to power* – an epistemological dilemma. In this light, the issue to be considered is whether two Irish writers – W. B. Yeats and James Joyce – can be read as committed to bringing about the ‘downfall’ of the British imperialist domination in Ireland or not, in terms of the /literary practice – as homologous to other cultural, social and political acts/practices.

In this study, two texts, one of W. B. Yeats’ poems and one of J. Joyce’s short stories, are therefore taken as case studies, going to be read as forms of

representation, in which both power and its ‘other’ might be seen ‘at work’. For one thing, the relations between literature and history can be envisaged as *dialogic* or *double-voiced*. For another thing, the Irish historical consciousness in the early 19th century was undergoing a crisis, which some writers, such as Joyce, initially responded to in an ambivalent way, only to subsequently opt for *a/the third space/alternative*, of ‘professional (aesthetic) integrity, by means of which to come to be able to *negotiate representations*, so as to get empowered to re-assert/re-map/re-shape their sense of self, more or less emancipated from a confining and conservative sense of Irishness, by the agency of troping/metaphorizing an/his emotional commitment through love. In both cases, New Historicist strategies and arguments are likely to open up new discursive sites. It is worthwhile recalling here that the ‘other’ can potentially conceive ways of resistance, in terms of discourse use, so as to negotiate/map out the ‘dominant ideology’.

2. W. B. Yeats’ Dialogical and Ambivalent Third Space in *Easter 1916*

W B Yeats’ poem, *Easter 1916, in specie*, intervenes in the discourse of colonialism – along with two other poems by the same poet: *Sixteen Dead Men* and *The Rose Tree* – by debating on the meaning of the Easter rising¹ for/in national and colonial history; here, in the poem, this debate is engendered by means of *questions, expression of doubt, ‘conversational’ challenges, and other forms of dialogism*. The poem enacts the unresolved *ambivalence* of colonial(-ist) communication at work², in a way which makes resistance against the colonial power feasible and possible – as a force summoned up by the colonized to render apparent the brutality of the colonizer, and at once to employ the colonial ideology (chiefly cultural, political, military), so as to renegotiate power relations.

The poem subtly dramatizes and thematizes a/the ‘dialogue’ between the colonizer and the colonized, coming therefore to ‘converse’ with some/certain historical forces of colonization. As stanza one evidences³, the persona takes a subjective, individualized bias on the historical episode, although mention should

¹ Easter Rising is known as the episode of fighting against the British army in the centre of Dublin on Easter Week of 1916; among the victims/heroes stand out: Constance Markievicz (imprisoned), Padraig Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh (executed), John MacBride, Maud Gonne.

² The ambivalence of dialogism in colonial communication consists of its self-contradictory nature: colonialism depends on contradiction between (effective/successful) communication and miscommunication; as Homi Bhabha upholds, the colonizer needs to communicate elements to the colonized, while at once he must ensure miscommunication so as to preserve its superiority; the colonized must understand the colonizer in order to collaborate, but by always having to remain subservient, he comes to fail to ‘master/control’ the communication of the colonizer.

³ “I have met them at close of day / Coming with vivid faces / From counter or desk among grey / Eighteenth century houses. / I have passed with a nod of the head / Or polite meaningless words, / Or have lingered awhile and said, / Polite meaningless words, / And thought before I had done / Of a mocking tale or a gibe / To please a companion / Around the fire at the club, / Being certain that they and I / But lived where motley is worn: / All changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born.”

be made that in the context of the *Irish Revivalism*, W. B. Yeats is viewed as the legendary architect of *culture as agent of historical change*; he has been regarded therefore as source/agent of *power*, as well as of the medium through which language/discourse/power operates.

One source of *power* resides in *dialogism*, respectively the way in which literature/poetry can become fully active/'militant' in conversing with, and reformulating or converting power relations; by *polyphony* or the '*multiplication*' of meanings, the literary/poetic discourse can actively take part in re-mapping socio-cultural-historic spaces/'territory'. For instance, in stanza 4⁴, the persona's attitude is *ambivalent*: both doubting, reproaching or questioning the meaning of the Irish heroes' sacrifice, and at once cancelling these expressions. Implied reproaches seem to have several targets: the rebels' motives – 'excess of love', dreams, wild childhood fantasies –; the rebels themselves are suspected of being 'bewildered children'; rebellion itself could have been 'badly planned, misconceived'. Disapproving, if not altogether negative, overtones might be decoded/inferred in images such as: 'a stone of the heart', which metaphorizes the tenor about that kind of sacrifice that can render/turn one's heart cold and passionless; moreover, 'when may it suffice?' could get reformulated as 'when will nationalist insurrections with its rhetoric of martyrdom end?'; rebels are likened to children whose 'limbs...had run wild', that is, have got giddy with the excitement of adventure, or else, rebellion as a childish game(?); there might be inferred a lingering suspicion about their useless/needless rebellion, as England had already promised the Home Rule to Ireland.

Beyond such upsetting doubts/questions/reproaches/suspicions, the persona's faith resonates in an unmistakably confident/positive/optimistic way: 'All changed, changed utterly'. In this light, the same instances, images, key words might as well be interpreted according to an oppositional, if not contradictory, way. 'Too long a sacrifice' could refer not only to the rhetoric of nationalist martyrdom, but also to the sacrifices which Ireland has been pressured to make under colonialism; along the same line, the 'stone' could positively metaphorize the tenor of the heroes' determination, especially in the light of stanza 3⁵, where 'living stream' can

⁴ "Too long a sacrifice / Can make a stone of the heart / O when may it suffice? / That is Heaven's part, our part / To murmur name upon name, / As a mother names her child / When sleep at last has come / On limbs that had run wild. / What is it but nightfall? / No, no, not night but death; / Was it needless death after all? / For England may keep faith / For all that is done and said. / We know their dream; enough / To know they dreamed and are dead; / And what if excess of love / Bewildered them till they died? / I write it out in verse – / MacDonagh and MacBride / And Connolly and Pearse / Now and in time to be, / Wherever green is worn, / Are changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born."

⁵ "Hearts with one purpose alone / Through summer and winter seem / Enchanted to a stone / To trouble the living stream. / The horse that comes from the road, / The rider, the birds that range / From cloud to tumbling cloud, / Minute by minute they change; / A shadow of cloud on the stream / Changes minute by minute; / A horse-hoof slides on the brim, / And a horse plashes within it; / The long-legged moor-hens dive, / And hens to moor-cocks call; / Minute by minute they live: / The stone's in the midst of all."

translate the inevitability of historical forces, while the ‘stone’ metaphor in the ‘living stream’ alludes to some ‘elements’ which disturb historical forces; ‘when may it suffice?’ will correspondingly echo not only the note of despair about the ending to nationalist violence, but also one’s wonder about the rebels’ success/triumph - when their violent initiative is going to result in liberation - ; moreover, if the rebels are viewed like children, then, ‘our part’ – as ‘mother of children’ - is not supposed to be repressive, but gentle, loving, adoring, out of ‘excess of love’, that is, the opposite to the representation of ‘dysfunctional’, barbaric ‘children’ (of the colonial ‘mother’), current in British/Western imperialist stereotyping. There is an ironic suggestiveness about ‘England that may keep faith’⁶: for one thing, after the rebellion, there was fierce backlash and executions; on the other hand, ‘said’ rhymes with ‘dead’.

By such ambivalent instances of ‘back-answering’, or ‘conversing’ with history, the poem can be envisaged as ‘actively participating’ in re-/mapping history, by means of the way it ranges from endorsing nationalism to critique of rebellion, and implicit hope for Ireland or England (?); in other words, it can accommodate at once both colonial and anti-colonial readings, both nationalist and anti-nationalist interpretations. The literary space/site has become ‘new-historicized’ in the sense given by John Brannigan: ‘To historicize a poem is to find that there is more than one way in which the poem fits into, and participates in, history’ (John Brannigan, 1992:192).

Another strategy of dialogism in this poem consists of incorporating the voices of the ‘others’; for instance, in stanza 4, there are key words and metaphoric phrases specific to the rhetoric of Irish nationalism: ‘sacrifice’ with implications of both nationalism and martyrdom; ‘our part’ as language of duty and loyalty; ‘us’ – Ireland as mother, respectively the rhetoric of the rebels, in addition to which there is the allusion/echo to the first line of the Proclamation of the Republic, which Patrick Pearse read on the steps of the General Post Office: ‘Ireland, through us...’⁷. The metaphor of ‘death as sleep’, a distinctively Keats-ian topos, is dismissed: ‘What is it but nightfall?’, therefore the rebels’ death resists getting metaphorized.

Moreover, Maud Gonne’s voice/view is echoed in the ‘needless’ Easter Rising (and carnage), in view of the promised Home Rule to Ireland in 1914.

The refrain intimates a recurrent thematic concern in Patrick Pearse’s speeches, including the ‘graveyard’, as well as in one of O’Donovan Rosa’s: ‘Life springs from death, and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations’ (1915).

⁶ At the outbreak of the Great war in 1914, all bills at Westminster were frozen, including the 1913 Home Rule Bill which was awaiting final assent.

⁷ ‘Irishmen and Irishwomen: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood; Ireland, *through us*, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom. ‘The Easter Proclamation, 1916’, signed on behalf of the provisional Government, by Th. J. Clarke, Sean MacDiarmada, Th. Mac Donagh, P. H. Pearse, Eamonn Ceannt, James Connolly, Joseph Plunkett;

To tentatively conclude this sub-section, W. B. Yeats is embedded/entangled/entrenched in the gamut of social discourses and collective/public representations; this *double-voiced, dialogic* poem becomes effective especially, but not only, in/with stanza 4, with its four questions raised and unanswered. *Easter 1916* can therefore be reassessed as participating in, if not properly ‘operating’, historical change, viewed as a *third space*, in which power relations are re-/negotiated/mediated; thus poetry can perform actions in history, and can become part of history itself.

3. James Joyce’s Troped Third Space (for Love) in *The Dead*

At the center of Joyce’s novella is the relation between history and literary life: the interdependence and interplay of literary and non-literary discourses, the entanglement of personal and public life- through discourses, beliefs and emotions -; the intricate course of power and its concealed effects. In J. Joyce’s Ireland, there were ongoing colonial controversies and struggles that the writer was pursuing, and got committed to, ‘in his own way’, out of the conviction that literature was dependent on history and politics. Nevertheless, Joyce had *mixed feelings* about the political situation, as reflected in this text by the range of opinions about ‘separatist’ initiatives; specifically, he disapproved the extremist stances of both colonialism and Revivalism, almost coming to condemn them, in favor of developing his alternative – a third space – of personal and professional integrity through self-exile. While contemplating the Irish consciousness as ‘territorialized’/ *colonized*, Joyce could hardly see the possibility of ‘un-compromised resistance/subversion’; nevertheless, *power* was sensed/perceived as residing in the way discourse/*representation* was being under *control*, thus becoming *dominant*.

In *The Dead*, Joyce *negotiates* an internal personal conflict, as epitomized, among other things, by the issue between Gabriel Conroy and Miss Ivors: the issue of the priority between aestheticism (‘purified’ to such an extent as to disregard politics and cultural nationalism) and ideological commitment – demanding that art participate in the struggle against imperialism. In order to examine and explore the ‘entanglement of personal identity within the matrix of social discourses’, Joyce’s implied author comes to ‘use’ Gabriel so as to lay bare the psychic ‘price’ exacted by ‘all stresses and conflicts’, as inherent in an ‘unresolved Irish nationality’.

Some of the arguments in this respect can refer to: the Irish colonized consciousness; Gabriel’s ambivalent attitude; the social matrix of discourse/s; Gabriel’s identity in relation to the precarious/unstable historical consciousness; parallelism between Ireland and Gabriel; attitudes to power and Gabriel’s powerlessness; the final prospect of his reform-/ulat-/ing his identity through troped/metaphorized love.

Joyce’s refusal of the ‘militant’ triad *race, language and nation* can be interpreted as more than as cosmopolitanism; it is a/the reflection of the ‘delicate politics of culture’, which the writer tried to negotiate; his aspiration at professional writing was being jeopardized by the Revivalism of the Gaelic League, so that he got engaged in a ‘political struggle to preserve the conditions of professional writing identity’, by offering a *critique* of the emerging *Irish cultural identity* – itself open to critique.

Gabriel's consciousness seems to be overtly 'colonized': during the party, Miss Ivors attacks and accuses him of being 'West Briton' (that is, against the self-assertion of the Irish identity), because he reviews books for a journal supporting the British domination:

When they had taken their places she said abruptly:

'I have a crow to pluck with you.'

'With me?' said Gabriel.

She nodded her head gravely.

'What is it?' asked Gabriel, smiling at her solemn manner.

'Who is G.C.?' answered Miss Ivors, turning her eyes upon him.

Gabriel colored and was about to knit his brows, as if he did not understand, when she said bluntly:

'O, innocent Amy! I have found out that you write for The Daily Express. Now aren't you ashamed of yourself?'

'Why should I be ashamed of myself?' asked Gabriel, blinking his eyes and trying to smile.

'Well, I'm ashamed of you,' said Miss Ivors frankly. 'To say you'd write for a rag like that. I didn't think you were a West Briton'.

In self-defense Gabriel meditates on the relation between literature and politics, insisting on the irreducible difference between the two 'separate zones':

He did not know how to meet her charge. He wanted to say that literature was above politics. But they were friends of many years' standing and their careers had been parallel, first at the University and then as teachers: he could not risk a grandiose phrase with her. He continued blinking his eyes and trying to smile and murmured lamely that he saw nothing political in writing reviews of books.

Gabriel's aestheticism and Miss Ivors' involvement in culturally Revivalist politics (or else, nationalism deriding 'dreamy' artists) are rival positions, each disabling in/by itself. The story accommodates discourses of both ideological tendencies/stances, so as to subvert/contest each, by engaging them with each other, in favor of an alternative – a third stance/space beyond them.

By self-projecting onto Gabriel, the Irish writer dramatizes and enacts the pressures of the historical context, so as to take a distinctive side. The discourse of 'genteel aestheticism' is signalled by the views on art, as voiced at the party: solace/pleasure/delight, while Miss Ivors' combativeness metonymically refers to Irish nationalism, as challenge to both Gabriel and J Joyce. In fact, Gabriel Conroy's attitude to Ireland is *ambivalent*: at once commitment and critique. His precarious equilibrium, the unsteadiness, or the internal conflict of an unresolved Irish nationality, get exposed/disclosed in his acknowledgment: 'O, to tell you the truth,.. I'm sick of my own country, sick of it!' Joyce's alter-ego denies Irish as language, but implicitly accepts Ireland as (a) nation (even if he is 'sick of it').

As one's identity gets entangled with the matrix of social discourses, the individual's task of securing integral selfhood merges with that of re-mapping a cultural matrix, so as to survive. Gabriel Conroy's cultural matrix is the Morkan

party, with its values, customs, mythology; in brief, an *enclosed* social formation: patriarchal, Catholic, apolitical, with its own mechanism of self-preservation. As participants in the historical process, the family members become epitomes of traditionalism, in reaction against nationalist critique. As signalled by recurrent markers about the party, this hypostasis of the Irish historical consciousness turns out to be precarious, fragile or unstable, condition that implies Gabriel's failed conviction in traditionalism.

This social community is beset by many types of tensions, aging being uppermost; consequently, markers of the leitmotif of an '*age in decline*' accumulate, thus foregrounding a 'bounded' historical stage, unable to cover up its decay: Conroy's aunts, 'ignorant old women', are withering; Gabriel's rhetoric is pompous and strained; he views Ireland as losing hospitality, and regards Lily as losing her innocence; there are 'weather'-based images as well. Gabriel's colonized consciousness is self-defeating: he endeavors to shape up a stable identity from within a traditionally unstable community.

Initially, Gabriel Conroy seems to symbolize firm authority/power, this part being endorsed by his speech, his role of 'carving meats' on Christmas, his policing Freddy, or on the other hand, by a broader social desire, as testified to by Katie: 'It's such a relief that Gabriel is here. I always feel easier in my mind when he's here!'

Yet Gabriel's authority – ability to control disturbance and to promote civility – proves fragile, thus paralleling the political condition of Ireland. This fragility is rendered, among other ways, in the wavering rhythms of the party – where the triumph of festivity is juxtaposed to tensions/stresses. This suggests that even at its best colonial Ireland is in decline, its subjects only simulating autonomy: shallowness/'hollowness' is traced out through the allusion/s to the family's reliance on the English cultural tradition, as for instance the 'Romeo scene' on the wall; or else, at the climax, through Gabriel's inability to come to terms with (Irish) subversions/challenges – Ivors', Greta's. The conflicts intrinsic to colonialism prevent Gabriel from attaining self-fulfillment: Gabriel's repeated initiatives at emancipation and re-formulating his identity within an un-emancipated background/context fail, not without a relatively pathetic note.

Both individual and political uncertainty are conducive to a struggle over representation/s; that is, a battle *to control* wider social frames. The prevailing issue now becomes *how* to represent history, language, arts, with great effectiveness/resonance. Power, as the skill to control the texture of subjective responses through authoritative verbal acts, entails questions about whose speech/discourse triumphs in specific instances, such as: Conroy's dispute with Miss Ivors, his after-dinner speech, the supper discussion about some Irish tenors, or Gabriel's last conversation with Greta. There is thus foregrounded a *drama of representations*, through which the colonized subjects might cope with their 'fate': either by *resisting* the English colonial domination, or by submitting to it. Therefore, the urgent strife is over the 'elaboration' of a (third ?) space/discourse/representation, *within* which life could acquire meaning: if the nationalist Ivors gets control over political 'understanding', then Gabriel's life becomes an imposture; if Gabriel's

prevails, then nationalists could foster ‘thought-tormented’ representations of a ‘less spacious age’.

Gabriel’s precarious control over the movement of contexts, so as to get historically re-asserted, and thus become able to secure value-preservation, gets highlighted by Greta’s story – wider than her life with Gabriel, and enclosing *his-/story* - .Realizing what a poor part he has played in her life, Gabriel Conroy finally surrenders to powers wider than his own: ‘What links love and citizenship, marriage and Ireland is that they both entangle a self within surroundings that threaten to crush its struggle for identity.’ (M Levenson, 1994:176)

Gabriel’s final wave/s of love – as troped/metaphorized by the snow-falling - anticipate new ways of mapping out political history, within which to ‘re-/territorialize’ his marriage events; he longs to ‘recall to her moments, to make her forget the years of their dull existence together and remember only their moments of ecstasy.’ Therefore, Conroy wishes to rewrite the ordinary (hi/-)story of his marriage by figuratively positioning it within a more ‘*spacious*’ narrative: forgotten yet recovered passion.

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Summary

The power of colonization is argued to be able to get resisted/subverted/dissented from, in terms of the artistic-literary practice of dialogism, as powerful as any social-political practice; in this respect, the discourse of the 'other' (Irish) is explored in texts by W B Yeats and J Joyce: the texts turn into ideological sites of representation-negotiation, if not of mapping out the dominant ideology; when approached in the New Historicist light as accommodated by a postcolonial framework, literature turns out to be able to renew its potential by engendering a third space of double-voiced-ness (or 'answering back' the dominant voice), through which the sense of Irish self gets reasserted, as for instance, personalized through the hypostases of Yeats and Joyce; Yeats' poem 'Easter 1916' turns into a site for dialogizing the issue of the colonial(ist) discourse/communication, with its ambivalence/s, which at once can be decoded as enabling, through polyphony, resistance to the one-sided authoritative voice/ideology of the colonizer's power/stereotypical discourse/dominance; some arguments consist in the persona's ambivalent attitude, the oppositional/contradictory meanings/readings/voices of the same textual instances/images, key words, markers of the others' voices – all resonating as 'back answers' to history in an active way. By contrast to Yeats' central position at the time, as acknowledged agent of cultural power, Joyce's resistance was catalyzed by the energy of self-exiling – a third space of professional Irish integrity – channeled in the case of the novella 'The Dead' into representation-control/- dialogue/-negotiation, first dramatized on an internal personal level - as epitomized by the conflict between Gabriel and Miss Ivors –, then through the parallelism between Gabriel's colonized consciousness and Ireland's traditionalist consciousness; the novella is read therefore as a third space of at once encoding and subverting rival/opposite discourses –aestheticism and revivalism – in a drama of representations: Gabriel's drama –his precarious authority/control (Ireland's political condition and historical consciousness) gets resolved within the wider power-framework of love, able to map out political history, to reterritorialize hi-/story events, thus bringing new lease of life into the Irish self. The concerns of the New Historicists with power/control, discourse, subversion and representation turn out to become all the more fruitful when operating within a postcolonial framework – be it Irish or not – as the discussion of the two texts has proved; these are also arguments in favor of cultural poetics, as pleaded for by John Brannigan (1992) in chapter 'Cultural Poetics, after the New Historicism?'