

*“Has no-one made him out  
to be an Irishman.?”:  
Shakespeare in the Irish Revival*

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**I**N LATE-NINETEENTH-CENTURY IRELAND, the question of how to educate the people rose in importance as neo-Enlightenment Unionism battled neo-Romantic nationalism for an Anglo-Irish Ascendancy that was slowly losing its hold on the country. The study of English, which by the end of the nineteenth century came to be dominated by the study of English literature, is a prime site for this tension, particularly in the figure of Shakespeare, who after nearly two hundred years of expanding English literacy, culture commodification, and imperial promotion, had become the embodiment of English literature. The refigurations of Shakespeare in Ireland during the Revival provide a fruitful case for the study of the tensions of modernity and the postcolonial context for the institutionalization of English studies. Revivalists often took on Shakespeare as an exemplar, a positive symbol of the nationalist enterprise, detached from the violence of the Tudor, Stuart, and Commonwealth eras. This position was presented in opposition to one of the most influential scholars of the Victorian era, who was not an Englishman but a member of the Irish Ascendancy: Edward Dowden.

This paper starts with a look at how English came to be a discipline of education in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Founded in Enlightenment ideals of disinterested inquiry coupled with the desire for a corrective to its atomistic impulses, the history of English studies demonstrates contradictions that parallel the rise and fall of Habermas's bourgeois critical public sphere. Next, I look at the Shakespearean criticism of Edward Dowden as a late-Victorian manifestation of

those Enlightenment ideals in an effort to rein in an irresolute Ascendancy. Finally, I see Yeats's writings on Shakespeare in the context of the cultural nationalism that eventually manifested itself among non-elite classes as political nationalism. The relevance of the Yeats-Dowden debate to English studies today is a testament to the continued struggle of the modern identity in the twentieth century, a struggle which leads Charles Taylor to call the Victorians our "contemporaries," invoking the ideals of democracy, egalitarianism, progress, and reduced suffering (393-94).

### I. The New English Desire to Study a New English

Habermas has written that part of the conservatism of early capitalism comes from its profit from the continuation of feudal agricultural practices (15). A similar contradiction arose in early modern Ireland, a contradiction described by Norah Carlin as "the difficulty of reconciling an ideology of individual rights and liberty with the degradation and exploitation of a particular section of humanity. In 1649, the Independents sought to resolve this dilemma by reaching for the idea of Irish barbarism" (214). The notion of Irish barbarism as the "other" of English civilization, not new in 1649, was important in the establishment of English as a proper mode of study in the schools colonizers were establishing in Ireland. John Brinsley, in a 1622 pamphlet, calls for a methodological study of English in the grammar schools in Ireland to convert natives to the new faith and to establish an outpost of pure English civilization:

[W]e may haue . . . not onely the puritie of our owne language preserved amongst all our owne people there, but also that it may be readily learned in the Schooles, together with the Latin, and other tongues, and so more propagated to the rudest *Welch* and *Irish*, yea to the very heathen & sauage, brought vp amongst them, the more easily thereby to reduce them all (as was said) to a louing ciuility, with loyall and faithfull obedience to our Soueraigne, and good Lawes, and to prepare a way to pull them from the power and seruice of Sathan, that they may ioynly submit themselues to Iesus Christ. (n.pag.)

In his call to teach English culture to the Irish in order to reduce them to loving civility, however, Brinsley was progressive

for his time. When it was established during Elizabeth's reign in 1591, Trinity College, Dublin, focused only on the young adult children of settlers rather than natives. On the cusp of civilization, Trinity was founded on a charter promising that students "may be better assisted in the study of the liberal arts and in the cultivation of virtue and religion" — that is, the religion of the Established Church (qtd. in Casteleyn 123). Trinity was designed not to indoctrinate natives into the dominant culture, but rather to quell rebellion among settlers and supply them with an educated, Establishment clergy — partly to fight the semiliteracy and theological naïveté of settlers and partly to allay the threat of their assimilation with the natives, as described in Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland*.

The history of the establishment of English at provincial, colonial, and nonconformist academies is convincingly detailed in Thomas Miller's *The Formation of College English: Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the British Cultural Provinces*. Miller demonstrates that Scots, Irish, dissenters, and non-elite classes introduced modern language studies into higher education so they could learn a culture not comfortably or univocally their own, a history that "challenges the tendency of disciplinary histories to assume that change begins at the top among major theorists in elite universities and then is transmitted down to be taught in less influential institutions" (6). At the start, Miller claims, the British dissenting academies of the eighteenth century encouraged free inquiry and created a Habermasian public sphere where the middle class developed critical awareness (86). Habermas's concept of the public sphere is indeed very useful here, both for its potential and its shortcomings. Where Habermas has been most convincingly rebutted is his faith in the inclusivist impulse of the eighteenth-century public sphere; discussions at the salons and coffeehouses excluded participants according to gender, race, and class.

This restriction of power among the elite undercuts the promise of public access to power and transforms art from a catalyst for dialogue in the public sphere (assuming it ever existed) to a commodity for consumption: "The public sphere in the world of letters was replaced by the pseudo-public or

sham-private world of culture consumption" (160). After this transformation of the public sphere into a sphere emphasizing literature as a commodity of consumption, the discipline of English literature began to form at the "red brick" universities established in England throughout the nineteenth century. Most histories of English studies in higher education therefore begin in the early nineteenth century. In doing so, however, such histories ignore the importance of colonization, imperialism, and modernization in the concept of a self that makes rational, disengaged judgments — without which the professional study of literature as literature might never have appeared. Gauri Viswanathan argues that when education took a secular (though not amoral) turn in India in the 1850s, the British realized the moral relativism encouraged by historical analysis could provide a powerful tool in teaching colonials to discard native systems of thought (100-01). A similar process occurred with Ireland, as both Celtic languages and English literature were accepted as proper disciplines for scientific study.

## II. The Many Cheerful Facts of Edward Dowden

Based on this brief history, Edward Dowden appears less as the dawn of a new era in Shakespeare studies than the carrier of the Enlightenment legacy of two previous provincial professors of English: Adam Smith and Edmond Malone.<sup>1</sup> Dowden's landmark study *Shakspeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* continued Malone's Enlightenment emphasis on verifiable facts. For Dowden, interpreting *Hamlet* in its historical situation is useless: "We may at once set aside as misdirected a certain class of Hamlet interpretations, those which would transform this tragedy of an individual life into a dramatic study of some general social phenomenon, or of some period in the history of civilization" (*Critical* 127). Instead, Dowden places *Hamlet* in the context of the development of Shakespeare the man, whose faith in empirical, disinterested facts provides a model for Dowden's readers and students:

There is in every man of passionate genius a revolt against the insufficiency of the world, a revolt against the bare facts of life. Most of us surrender to the world, sign a treaty of alliance with



engagements of mutual service, and end by acquiescence. It is remarkable that Shakespeare's revolt against the world increased in energy and comprehensiveness, as he advanced in years.

(*Critical* 376)

Despite the promise not to reduce Shakespeare to a historical generalization, Dowden does claim Shakespeare as an exemplar of the English Renaissance, itself an exemplary period in the history of culture:

That which appears to be common to all [English Renaissance writers] is *a rich feeling for positive concrete fact*. . . . And assuredly, whatever be its imperfection, its crudeness, its extravagance, no other body of literature has amassed in equal fulness and equal variety a store of concrete fact concerning human character and human life. (*Critical* 23)

Shakespeare's confirmation of the importance of fact makes Hamlet not an expression of Shakespeare's own struggle, Dowden claims, but rather a straw man for the contemplative life Shakespeare counsels us to avoid: "He is not incapable of vigorous action, — if only he be allowed no chance of thinking the fact away into an idea" (*Critical* 146). Putting *Hamlet* in the context of Shakespeare's development as a man, Dowden claims the play demonstrates Shakespeare's maturity into greatness: "When Hamlet was written Shakespeare had passed through his years of apprenticeship, and become a master dramatist" (*Critical* 125).

Dowden's faith in the indomitable truth of disinterested, empirical fact makes him a torchbearer for the Enlightenment ideals that encouraged English as a higher education discipline. Dowden thus carries the legacy of early English professors in the provinces such as Smith and Malone. Like Smith, Dowden saw the work of literature as an opportunity to build the student's capacity for sympathy by projecting the figure of the individual author:

To come into close and living relation with the individuality of a poet must be the chief end of our study — to receive from his nature the peculiar impulse and impression which he, best of all, can give. We must not attenuate Shakespeare to an aspect, or reduce him to a definition, or deprive him of individuality, or make of him a mere notion. . . . I wish rather to attain some central principles of life in him which animate and control the rest. (*Critical* 2-3)

But Dowden took this figure of the individual author one step further than Smith did. For Dowden, Shakespeare was more than merely a person with whom his students could sympathize, he was an example of the potential of hard work and determination:

While others, Greene, and Peele, and Marlowe, had squandered their strength in the turbulent life of London, Shakspeare husbanded his strength. . . . Nevertheless he did not, in the fashion of idealists, hastily abandon the life which seemed to entail a certain spiritual loss; he recognised the reality of external, objective duties and claims, duties to his father, to his family, to his own future self; he accepted the logic of facts. (*Critical* 32)

Shakespeare here is the very model of the modern Victorian gentleman. When we consider who Dowden's students were — not the English aristocracy or the Gaelic natives, but the Anglo-Irish bourgeoisie, as anxious to overturn their secondary position in Britain as they were anxious to maintain their dominance in Ireland — we recognize the parallel between Dowden's exhortations and those of John Brinsley, 250 years earlier. Both Dowden and Brinsley addressed a mainly Irish Protestant, or Ascendancy, audience, a population whose distance from the cultural centre of England threatened the ability of that center to proclaim its dominance as "natural" or "common-sense." The threat Dowden and Brinsley address is less Irish-Catholic natives than irresolute Protestants who doubted the promises of modernity and the Empire. Dowden is trying to boost his students' resolve by appealing to Enlightenment values of self-evident reason, individualism, and nondogmatic dogma:

Let us not attenuate Shakspeare to a theory. . . . Shakspeare does not supply us with a doctrine, with an interpretation, with a revelation. What he brings to us, is this — to each one, courage and energy, and strength, to dedicate himself and his work to that, — whatever it be, — which life has revealed to him as best, and highest, and most real. (*Critical* 429-30)

In this exhortation, Dowden takes up an important legacy of the Enlightenment — the belief that it is self-evident that disengagement and procedural reason provide the surest path to knowledge of the "best, and highest, and most real" (and thus

to power), a belief which is the cornerstone of the modern identity (C. Taylor 161-76). For Dowden, Shakespeare merely reminds us of what we already knew but perhaps could not see through the distortions of socially scripted ignorance: the indomitable power of the autonomous, disengaged and inward modern self.

### III. The Revivalist Shakespeare

Dowden's faith in Unionism was based on a modern concept of *nation* as a sovereign people, compared to its earlier connotation of an educated elite who provided a community of opinion (Greenfeld 167). Charles Taylor notes that the modern concept of nation thus transforms the feudal state's emphasis on an external, pre-existent order to allegiance to a collective built as an expression of common individual inward sources (193). This premise is behind both the individualistic civic nationalism through which the early modern nation emerged in sixteenth-century England and the more collective, ethnic nationalism that arose in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, Russia, and Germany (Greenfeld 167-68). In either case, the goal of *nationalism* is less concerned initially with creating an alternative bureaucratic apparatus than with raising the consciousness of the people in order for them to recognize themselves as a *nation*. The distinction between the two phases of nationalism is important to our discussion because the first phase helped build the concept of "Great Britain" while the second phase provided the context by which Ireland could be recognized as a "nation." Nineteenth-century Ireland is a prime site for the tension between these aspects of nationalism and modernity because of the debate about whether Ireland would be better "modernized" as "British" or "Irish." The century begins with the Act of Union in 1801, designed in part to quell potential for further unrest in Ireland after the 1798 rebellion by making Ireland no longer a colony (technically) but redrawing it as "British." The century ends with the Irish Revival and the establishment of the Gaelic League, emphasizing the value of a uniquely *Irish* culture and tradition that could rejuvenate Ireland after the death of Parnell.

However, the Revivalists' use of Shakespeare was part of a radical break with the Gaelic League's insistence on recapturing a purified Irish past. Hutchinson notes that the Revivalists' emphasis on work in English betrays the forward-looking approach of cultural nationalism (128). When Yeats does appeal to the past, it is generally to claim continuity with a pre-modern collective imagination that the modern emphasis on autonomy and disengagement seeks to deny: "If we poets are to move the people, we must reintegrate the human spirit in our imagination. The English have driven away the kings, and turned the prophets into demagogues, and you cannot have health among a people if you have not prophet, priest, and king" (*E&I* 264). For Yeats, the last remnant of that pre-modern state is represented by Shakespeare: "Imagination, whether in literature, painting or sculpture, sank after the death of Shakespeare; supreme intensity had passed to another faculty" (*E&I* 396).

Shakespeare as national-consciousness creator was invoked often by Revivalists. Yeats compared the characters of Shakespeare's history plays to Greek gods (*E&I* 109), creating a mythic, national culture when "individualism in work and thought and emotion was breaking up the old rhythms of life, when the common people, sustained no longer by the myths of Christianity and of still older faiths, were sinking into the earth" (*E&I* 110). Even as late as November 1911, as the Revival was fading, *The Irish Times* described the Theatre of Ireland's new, spartan accommodations at Hardwicke Street Hall as "simple as Shakespeare's stage" (Hogan, Burnham, and Poteet 145).

This image of Shakespeare as embodiment of national culture is very similar to Dowden's view. But where Dowden used Shakespeare as an example of the moral identity to which all in the Empire should aspire, the Irish Revival used Shakespeare as a remnant of an aesthetic that the modern Empire could never recapture. This strategy allowed Yeats to refute the claims of neo-Enlightenment Unionists that the progress brought by an emphasis on taste and morality through consumption in a market economy was self-evident:

Shakespeare set upon the stage kings and queens, great historical or legendary persons about whom there is nothing unreal except

the circumstance of their lives which remain vague and summary, because he could only write his best — his mind and the mind of his audience being interested in emotion and intellect at their moment of union and at their greatest intensity — when he wrote of those who controlled the mechanism of life. Had they been controlled by it, intellect and emotion entangled by intricacy and detail could never have mounted to that union which, as Swedenborg said of the marriage of the angels, is a conflagration of the whole being. But great crowds, charged by popular education with its eye always on some objective task, have begun to find reality in mechanism alone, our popular commercial art has substituted for Lear and Cordelia the real millionaire and the real peeress, and seeks to make them charming by insisting perpetually that they have all that wealth can buy, or rather all that average men and women would buy if they had wealth. Shakespeare's groundlings watched the stage in terrified sympathy, while the British working-man looks perhaps at the photographs of these lords and ladies, whom he admires beyond measure, with the pleasant feeling that they will be robbed and murdered before he dies.

(*Explorations* 245-46)

Here, Yeats takes on directly the utilitarian aims of national education in Ireland, "popular education with its eye always on some objective task," emphasizing commercial skills over personal expression and aesthetic interpretation. Whether or not Yeats's description of the Elizabethan groundlings' "terrified sympathy" is accurate, his separation of that image from "our popular commercial art" seems prescient of Habermas's claim about the transformation of art and letters from a focus of engagement in the critical public sphere to a commodity of the private-focused false public sphere of consumption. The promises of the Enlightenment phase of nationalism, that is, the phase on which the British Empire was based, were not kept. Yeats's image of Great Britain as a fallen state was carried through the Revival. St. John Ervine defended his and the Abbey's portrayals of Irish peasants in the August 11, 1913, edition of *The Evening Herald*: "The moment a nation ceases to be national it ceases to be interesting; the moment a class ceases to be local, it ceases to be dramatic. When England was a nation it gave birth to Shakespeare; now that it is an empire it can only bring forth Kipling" (Hogan, Burnham, and Poteet 271).

The Elizabethan quirks of the dialect of English spoken in Ireland proved Shakespeare's relevance for the Revivalists and the possibility that the potential for such an upsurge of collective imagination existed only among the Irish. In a lecture in Manchester, Yeats is reported to have described the language of the Irish peasantry as "a speech to be compared only with that of the England of Shakespeare — 'The most beautiful form of English now spoken on earth'" (Hogan, Burnham, and Poteet 75). The use of Elizabethan English proved to the Revivalists that Ireland was not in the state of decay that stifled modern Britain. This colonial repossession meant the Revivalists saw themselves as carrying out the same work that Shakespeare did, only better, in a different time for a different nation. Writers of the Irish Revival were frequently compared by their contemporaries with Shakespeare. At an 1899 reception at the Shelbourne Hotel honoring the Irish Literary Theatre, George Moore used the figure of Shakespeare to compare Yeats favorably: "I should not have put myself to the inconvenience of a public speech for anything in the world, except a great poet, that is to say a man of exceptional genius, who was born at a moment of great national energy. This was the advantage of Shakespeare and Victor Hugo, as well as Mr. Yeats" (Hogan and Kilroy 51). Walter Starkie, professor of language and literature at Trinity, remembered in an autobiography Synge's posthumously produced *Deirdre of the Sorrows*:

To a youth from an English public school accustomed to plod through a Greek tragedy word by word in class and learn by heart passages from Shakespeare, *Deirdre of the Sorrows* was a revelation: it seemed as if some new kind of drama combining the qualities of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus and *Antony and Cleopatra* had been conjured up before me by the ghost of the departed dramatist whom I had seen three years before, a forlorn figure, sitting alone while pandemonium raged around him. (Mikhail, *Abbey* 109).

Yeats's portrayal of Shakespeare inverts a common argument that Shakespeare was the perfect example of the Celtic magic (personified by Arthur, whom British monarchs from the Tudors to Victoria claimed as a forefather) tempered by Teutonic resolve. In "On the Study of Celtic Literature," Arnold grants

his essentialized Celt an important place in the sensibility of England, pointing to lines in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice* as containing "the sheer, inimitable Celtic note" (3:379). But the place of the Celt is subordinate: "[N]o doubt the sensibility to the Celtic nature, its nervous exultation, have something feminine in them, and the Celt is thus peculiarly disposed to feel the spell of the feminine idiosyncrasy . . ." (3:347). For Yeats, this "Celtic nature" should be allowed to dominate, rather than be subdued. In "The Celtic Element in Literature," Yeats wrote:

"The Celtic movement" . . . comes at a time when the imagination of the world is as ready as it was at the coming of the tales of Arthur and of the Grail for a new intoxication. The reaction against the rationalism of the eighteenth century has mingled with a reaction against the materialism of the nineteenth century. (*E&I* 187)

Here, Enlightenment "rationalism" and neo-Enlightenment "materialism" are not the self-evident conquerors of tradition but the failed attempt to prevent a people from its fullest expression.

#### IV. Yeats vs. Dowden: The Tiffy by the Liffey

Yeats's refiguration of Shakespeare destined Dowden to be the object of his scorn. Frequently in Yeats's essays, he directs his bile toward education in Ireland. For Yeats, national education offered little more than indoctrination into the modern Empire, as noted in an article on the recent death of Samuel Ferguson in the *Dublin University Review* of November 1886: "The most cultivated of Irish readers are only anxious to be academic, and to be servile to English notions" (*Uncollected* 1:89). For Yeats, education in Ireland did not provide the stimulation of the imagination necessary for a great community. Rather than promote literacy and an aesthetic sensibility, Yeats claimed that education served to take away that potential: "I have read somewhere statistics that showed how popular education has coincided with the lessening of Shakespeare's audience. In every chief town before it began, Shakespeare was constantly played" (*Explorations* 245n).<sup>2</sup>

As the symbol of British higher education with respect to English literature, Dowden was often singled out by Yeats for

censure. In 1893, Yeats wrote against Dowden's insistence that literature be read without doctrine:

The belief of the typical literary man of the time, that you can separate poetry from philosophy and from belief, is but the phantasy of an empty day. Dante, who revealed God, and Shakespeare, who revealed man, must have spent their days in brooding upon God and upon man, and not upon the technique of style and the gossip of literary history. (*Uncollected* 1:266)

In "At Stratford-on-Avon" (1897), Yeats directly refutes Dowden's portrayal of Henry V as the ideal hero and Richard II as incapable of moral, political resolve: "I cannot believe that Shakespeare looked on his Richard II with any but sympathetic eyes, understanding indeed how ill-fitted he was to be king, at a certain moment of history, but understanding that he was lovable and full of capricious fancy" (*E&I* 105).<sup>3</sup>

The strongest confrontation between Yeats's and Dowden's ideas was based on an 1895 lecture Dowden gave on Samuel Ferguson, a confrontation that was dubbed by Yeats "the Dowden controversy." *The Daily Express* reported that Dowden "did not believe in an Irish literary renaissance. Of course he does not; how could anyone do so who thinks that an Irish poet is born out of due time because he is not acceptable to contemporary English taste" (qtd. in Ludwigson 140). A series of articles — many between Yeats and John Eglinton — ensued, Yeats arguing for nationalism, Eglinton for cosmopolitanism (Ludwigson 142-43). Dowden remained cryptically silent, a response that did not decrease the tension, as his withholding of support for the Irish Renaissance was puzzled over with as much fervor as Hamlet's reluctance to kill Claudius. Yeats, however, was not silent, and wrote of criticism like Dowden's:

It is too empty of knowledge and sympathy to influence to any good purpose the ignorant patriotic masses, and it comes with enough of authority to persuade the undergraduates and the educated classes that neither the history, nor the poetry, nor the folklore, nor the stories which are interwoven with their native mountains and valleys are worthy of anything but contempt. This would perhaps be no great matter if it drove them to read Goethe and Shakespeare and Milton the more and the better. It has no such effect, however, but has done much to leave them with no ideal enthusiasm at all by robbing them of the enthusiasm which lay at their own doors.

(*Uncollected* 1:384)



For Yeats, Dowden's criticism was part of the mechanism that was working to bury Ireland, rather than inspire it to expression. So when Dowden claimed that writers like Sterne and Swift be included in a canon of Irish literature, Yeats rebutted:

I prefer, though it greatly takes from the importance of our literature, to include only those who have written under Irish influence and of Irish subjects. When once a country has given perfect expression to itself in literature, has carried to maturity its literary tradition, its writers, no matter what they write of, carry its influence about with them . . . [as] Shakespeare [remained] an Elizabethan Englishman when he told of Coriolanus and Cressida. (*Uncollected* 1:360)

Ernest Boyd, trying to save a Revival that in 1918 was running out of steam, placed Dowden's failure squarely in the tension between Irish Catholics and Protestants: "The explanation of Edward Dowden's relation to the Literary Revival will be found in the fact that he was, as he jestingly called himself, a 'half-breed' Irishman" (153). The distinction Boyd makes is one that Dowden may have unwittingly encouraged; for in spite of his claims to be above politics in his criticism, from the 1880s onward, Dowden was an avid Unionist — attending demonstrations, founding a Unionist Club, participating in Unionist organizations. Ludwigson claims Dowden's activities came not because he believed the Union brought opportunity to Ireland, but because the Union represented order and the universal truth inherent in the moral characteristics of his heroes (45). But Eglinton writes more directly:

Dowden in his later phase . . . found himself on platforms from which Rome and all its works were denounced, to the satisfaction chiefly of Protestant old ladies. . . . Well, the Ireland contemplated by Dowden was a Protestant Ireland; that is to say, an Ireland in which Protestant ideals were paramount. And he was perfectly entitled to conceive of a Protestant Ireland. What is more, Protestant Ireland was really the proper name for the Ireland conceived of by the Intellectuals. It was in Irish Protestantism that Ireland, dumb through the ages, had found a voice. (81)

Yet for all Dowden's support, Eglinton admits his impulses were not theological: "The real joke was that Calvin or even Hooker would have held up his hands in horror at the notion of calling

Dowden's hesitating agnosticism by the name of Protestantism" (82). Protestantism here seems to be merely a synonym for empiricist modernity rather than theological reform. By 1918 in Ireland, it seemed Dowden's neo-Enlightenment modernity expressed in Unionism was going to lose out to Yeats's neo-Romantic modernity, expressed in nationalism.

However, Yeats's cultural nationalism did not make it to 1918 unscathed. As Hutchinson notes, while cultural nationalism may begin as a challenge to the state apparatus, it is often forced to adopt "state-oriented strategies" to institutionalize its ideals, otherwise supported by a minority (14-16). In this respect, the political state that the cultural nation desires to become threatens to repeat the contradictions of the bourgeois constitutional state against which it rebelled. This becomes the major contradiction of twentieth-century politics: fulfilling the modern constitutional state's promises of freedom, liberation, justice, and prosperity requires an apparatus more cumbersome than what it replaces. Yeats was profoundly ambivalent about this movement from nation to state, alternatively expressing support for the neo-Fascist Blue Shirts and disavowing politics altogether as his cultural nationalism filtered through the classes and was transformed into a political and ideological movement.

As the transformation took place, Revivalists began taking on their image of Shakespeare even more fiercely as a unifying force. By the end of the Revival, the Ascendancy was invoking Shakespeare not against England, but against the situation in Ireland. Yeats eventually took the controversy of the Abbey as a badge of courage, writing in the *United Irishman* in 1902:

[T]he drama has always been a disturber. The plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries had to be acted on the Surrey side of Thames to keep the Corporation of London from putting them down by law. The Corporation of London represented in those days that zealous class who write and read the *Freeman's Journal*, and the *Independent* and the *Irish Times* in our day. (*Uncollected* 2:297)

The *Irish Times* would attempt to place itself above the fray as well; Kiberd reports that, during the Easter Rising, the *Irish Times* responded to the chaos by asking, "How many citizens of

Dublin have any real knowledge of Shakespeare?" (268). When the Abbey began its deepest struggle for funds in 1910, Lady Gregory used the promise of Shakespeare to raise interest at a 1910 fund-raising event; the *Irish Times* reported, "They wished to extend the scope of their work. They wanted now to be allowed to play Elizabethan works, the plays of Shakespeare. At the present they could only stage a play of Shakespeare as 'a foreign masterpiece'. (Laughter.)" (qtd. in Hogan, Burnham, and Poteet 60). Although Yeats's initial appropriation of Shakespeare was expansionist in impulse — as part of the strategy to liberate Ireland from the imagination-dulling apparatus of the Empire, such as national education — as his vision of nationalism spread into forms he did not envision, Yeats called on Shakespeare to rein in the rebelliousness. In this respect, Yeats came to embody the tension on which the discipline of English studies is based: between an impulse to expand literacy and expressive potential in order to include more people in the public sphere, and an impulse to demand ideals and high standards to police who can speak and what can be said.

Yeats's neo-Romantic nationalism needed Dowden's neo-Enlightenment criticism as a foil to demonstrate the weaknesses of the modern identity that had become dominant by the end of the nineteenth century, but he needed its emphasis on a disinterested aesthetic in order to make claims for the emancipatory potential of his movement, a case study for how the modern concept of nationalism emerges in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hutchinson claims that cultural nationalism "presents a novel historicist cosmology of a humanity naturally divided into unique, autonomous and integrated territorial communities, each with its peculiar laws of growth and decay" (3), but implicit in his definition are transformations into the political sphere which are "rarely those envisaged by their progenitors" (4). To become a successful political movement, cultural nationalism must spread from the elite who develop it to the middle and working classes, whose experience forces a revision of this newly inscribed cultural tradition. Yeats was not ready to concede his cultural movement for expansion through the classes, but it was out of his hands. The education

reforms of the nineteenth century that brought Shakespeare and English into their classrooms also resulted in manifestations beyond their designs, teaching Irish Catholics, like Caliban, "how to curse" their masters. Pearse, for example, would eventually denounce the British educational system set up in Ireland as a "murder machine" that prevented the Irish from learning their "true history" (qtd. in Kearney 11).

Ultimately, Yeats could not convince the Irish that Shakespeare was one of them. Casteleyn notes that the Revival actually slowed the movement to establish public libraries in Ireland, especially in rural parts, because authorities feared the promotion of English literature (180). In his later years, Yeats grew ambivalent about Shakespeare as the manifestations of his cultural nationalism grew much different from what he expected. In a letter to Lady Gregory in 1913, Yeats wrote, "It was at the Renaissance that the devil got loose, and I do not know who is going to put him back in the bottle again" (qtd. in Desai 57). By the time Yeats was working on *A Vision*, he began seeing Shakespeare as embodying the disunity and fragmentation of the Renaissance, and included Shakespeare in Phase 20, where the self-mastery and control that allows for perfect order and form are on the wane (Desai 63-64). In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley in 1938, he reiterated how Shakespeare fell short of Yeats's ideals: "The Greek drama alone achieved perfection; it has never been done since; it may be thousands of years before we achieve that perfection again. Shakespeare is only a mass of magnificent fragments" (Mikhail, *Yeats* 240). This final sentence seems a more accurate description of modernism, or perhaps a modernist's view of a decayed civilization fallen to pieces. For Yeats, as for other modernists like Eliot, the past provided a repository of wholeness that isolated, modern mass society could not.

Dowden's legacy was perhaps not what he anticipated either. Eglinton paints a portrait of Dowden's final years spent in isolation and obscurity:

And there is no doubt that Dowden had something to learn from nationalism . . . something which he steadfastly refused to learn: and he paid the penalty, not only in the isolation of his last years,

but — if that matters — in the oblivion which descended upon his name and personality after his death. (65)

Dowden may have had something to learn from nationalism, but his effect on English studies today is greater than that of any Irish nationalist. As Dowden began his tenure, even though Shakespeare pervaded nineteenth-century national education from grammar school to higher education (slowly making inroads at Oxbridge), most Shakespeare criticism was produced mainly by private enthusiasts with no formal education in literary studies or English (McMurtry 27 ff.). Ludwigson claims Dowden was not hoping to overturn this status quo, but was “more interested that his students learn from literature about how to live mature lives than about how to become critical scholars” (21). Focusing on producing scholars for Dowden meant encouraging students to be more like Hamlet than Shakespeare: “He [Hamlet] has slipped on into years of full manhood still a haunter of the university, a student of philosophies, an amateur in art, a ponderer on the things of life and death, who has never formed a resolution or executed a deed” (*Critical* 133). Yet by his encouragement of literary study as morally uplifting, Dowden does represent a hinge figure in what would become the professionalization of literary criticism in higher education: “Shakspeare’s work, however, will indeed not allow itself to be lightly treated. The prolonged study of any great interpreter of human life is a discipline” (*Critical* 428). After Dowden, we see the seeds of the professional discipline of English literary studies as we have it today. Even Stephen Dedalus’s theories in *Portrait* and *Ulysses* seem to owe something to the Trinity professor who encouraged the image of Shakespeare as “A priest to us all / Of the wonder and bloom of the world” (*Critical* 40). While Stephen’s interpretation of *Hamlet* in *Ulysses* may not be exactly what Dowden had in mind, it does serve a similar function: setting up an image of an artist as one to be mimicked for his ability to transform experience into the woven and unwoven image of himself.

We would be remiss if we ended the struggle between Yeats’s neo-Romantic nationalism and Dowden’s neo-Enlightenment Unionism without mention of students. Although Dowden is

the first "Professor of English" mentioned in Gary Taylor's history of Shakespeare interpretation, Miller claims convincingly the first university professor to lecture on English literature was John Stevenson, professor of logic and metaphysics at the University of Edinburgh from 1730 to 1770. Stevenson's detached, belletristic approach to literature is demonstrated by his students' essays and their "anxieties about cultural assimilation . . . [which] lead the authors to distance themselves from public controversies and the rhetoric associated with them" (Miller 167). If two passages from student essays at British colonial universities in the nineteenth century are any indication, these anxieties persisted well after the Enlightenment:

The blessings that Europe now showers upon us are numerous and useful. Both in ancient and modern times Europe has been the seat of philosophy and civilization, but in consequence of there being no safe intercourse in ancient times, that civilization was confined to where it grew. But now that obstacle is removed, an entire change has taken place in the circumstances of countries; whatever is now or has been gathered in Europe or in any part of the earth receives an universal circulation.

England which is of all the countries of Europe nearest related to India by her present position in Asia, is particularly engaged in the cause of Indian improvement. She not only carries on commerce with India, but she is ardently employed in instructing the natives in the arts and sciences, in history and political economy, and, in fact, in everything that is calculated to elevate their understanding, meliorate their condition, and increase their resources.

The next important subjugation is that of race over race. Among human families the white man is the predestined conqueror. The negro has given way before him, and the red men have been driven by him out of their lands and homes. In far New Zealand the sluggish Maoris in conceded sloth, permit him to portion out and possess the land of their fathers. Everywhere that region and sky allow, he has gone. Nor any longer does he or may he practise the abuse of subjugation — slavery, at least in its most degrading forms or at all so generally. . . . Happily this could not continue and now any encroachment on the liberties of others whether by troublesome Turk or not, is met with resolute opposition and anger.

These passages might be more easily deconstructed were they made by some MP rather than the troublesome Turks them-

selves. The author of the first, Nobinchunder Dass, was a student at Hooghly College, Calcutta, responding to the topic "The Effects upon India of the new Communication with Europe by means of Steam" (qtd. Viswanathan 139). The second passage, a matriculation essay written at University College, Dublin, on 27 September 1898, was written by James Joyce (20-21).

Somehow, Joyce went from the 16-year-old author of the essay "Force" to the man in his thirties who wrote *Ulysses*. Both works are expressions of modernity from a descendant of the forcefully modernized — the second one demonstrating much greater resistance to that forceful modernization by its acknowledgment of Irish history. In "Force" the Irish have no history, or if they do, it would be preferable to detach oneself from it in order to participate in the global movement of progress. In this case, the principles described by Matthew Arnold still held — certain peoples are born outside this movement, but can advance themselves through assimilation with their betters:

A Pole does not descend by becoming a Russian, or an Irishman by becoming an Englishman. But an Englishman, with his country's history behind him, descends and deteriorates by becoming anything but an Englishman; a Frenchman, by becoming anything but a Frenchman; an Italian by being anything but an Italian.

(1:73)

Notice that the promise of assimilation comes at the cost of ethnic or national identity. As English literature studies finally became institutionalized at Oxford and Cambridge, the British educational system still enforced a hierarchy between elite and provincial academies, restricting civilization to the few who had developed the "taste" for it. For Irish university students at the start of the twentieth century like the 16-year-old author of "Force," the modern identity was always just out of reach.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> We may be surprised to think of the founder of market capitalism as an English teacher, but as Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow, Smith was instrumental in establishing modern rhetoric as a discipline worthy of study in higher education. Smith saw education as a political necessity rather than a privilege or

charitable endowment, and proposed the study of English literature as a way to build sympathy and thus correct the atomistic impulses of free enterprise (Court 19-23). His approach to literature, however, was less in support of an idealized critical public sphere; mainly Smith looked at how authors reveal their individual characters, which provide examples for students to copy and internalize (Miller 192) — an approach that clearly carries through in Dowden's approach to Shakespeare.

The Irish critic and editor Edmond Malone also provides an important influence. According to de Grazia, Malone's emphasis in his 1790 "authentick" edition on ordering the plays according to the dates of their probable completion promised the reader an opportunity to follow Shakespeare's development — at the cost of acknowledging collaboration, revision, and nonauthorial contributions (144, 150-51). De Grazia concludes that Malone's focus on authentic materials, exclusive ownership, and the individual, historical subject provides a distinctly Enlightenment apparatus that survives to this day (225).

- <sup>2</sup> No one has been able to locate the statistics Yeats cites.
- <sup>3</sup> For Dowden, Henry V was Shakespeare's greatest hero for his fidelity to morality and order: "If Hamlet exhibits the dangers and weakness of the contemplative nature, and Prospero, its calm and conquest, Henry exhibits the utmost greatness which the active nature can attain. . . . He feels that the strength he wields comes not from any clever disposition of forces due to his own prudence, but streams into him and through him from his people, his country, his cause, his God" (Literature Primers 100).

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