Untranslatable Characters: James Clarence Mangan and the English Language

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Abstract

Language still is a hotly debated topic in postcolonial circles. Both academics and writers strive to define which language should be used in postcolonial contexts and the impact of such choice. Two tendencies are prevalent. Detractors of the colonizers' tongue argue that using colonial languages offers a continuum of the colonial quest, reproducing its mindset and hierarchy. Defendants of deploying colonial languages as abrogation tools assert these offer a twofold opportunity: the language expresses the nuances of postcolonial societies while reaching wider audiences. Despite its ethnographic peculiarities, Ireland is no exception to this dichotomy. The discussion has, however, mainly focused on Irish writers' recent productions, to the exclusion of the early nineteenth century. By analysing James Clarence Mangan's attitude to language in his writings, this study sheds some light into an area which deserves further study, contributing to the overall understanding of how postcolonial writers counter colonial constructions via language.

Keywords: J.C. Mangan; postcolonial literature; nineteenth-century Irish literature; language abrogation; language appropriation;

Introduction

Language embodies and shapes both colonial oppression and subsequent postcolonial reactions. Not surprisingly, Ashcroft et al. (1989) define it as "the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established"[1]. It is understandable,

[1] Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back*, 7.

then, that a discussion on postcolonial writing is—in the main—a discussion on language. Colonial and postcolonial discourses, the importance of history, the relationship between the self and the other—all these principles revolve around the concept of language[2]. Walder (1998) explains that "[i]n the history of colonialism, the literary dimension is apparent not only in the themes and preoccupations of literary producers, but also and more profoundly in their chosen medium."[3] As recent scholarship has proven, this is far from being a recent concern, "the contemporary phenomenon of English literature being written out of and into the frame of other literatures, languages and cultures is not something new as is often suggested but intrinsic to its identity."[4] This paper examines how this controverted postcolonial conundrum is carried out in the Irish case by examining how James Clarence Mangan deployed English as a subversive tool in the context of nineteenth century Ireland.

One of the most hotly debated topics regarding language in postcolonial literatures—especially in those countries like Ireland, where a native language is available—is whether the language of the colonizer can be used as a means of expression for postcolonial writers.[5] The question is not gratuitous since many critics argue that by using the colonizer's tongue some features of the hierarchy which disempowered the colonized other are transferred and further reproduced.[6] In a similar line of thought, Inness (2007) asserts that "[l]anguages not only carry sets of association related to particular words . . .

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[2] Wisker, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature,* 107.

[3] Walder, *Post-Colonial Literatures in English,* 42.

[4] Young, "English Literature in its Encounters with Other Languages," 5.

[5] Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English,* 97.

[6] Wisker, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature,* 108.

but also particular ways of thinking and perceiving,"[7] an idea which is based on the structuralist and poststructuralist assumption that we are enclosed in the language we inherit and cannot, therefore, express ideas alien to that particular system of thought. Young further explores this problematic, setting it at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the identification between language and nations proliferated, implying that "speakers of a particular language, or version of the language, should find their political identity there. What that means in practice is that it encourages the proliferation of more and more languages as the basis for cultural and political identification."[8] Boehmer (2005) summarizes the problem by posing the question, "[d]oes literature in English signify a lasting colonial dependency, a cultural correlate for the neo-colonial economic relations which continue to exist between the metropolitan centre and the formerly colonized periphery?"[9]

Postcolonial writers—and academics—seem to have given two possible answers to Boehmer. On the one hand, there is an exhortation to return to the origins, thus rejecting the colonizer's tongue and recuperating a native code. Possibly, the paragon of this approach in contemporary postcolonial writing is the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, who rejected the use of English and turned to writing solely in Gikuyu. The choice of language is, in this case, also a choice of audience, since invariably when a postcolonial writer addresses the world in their native tongue, the scope of potential readers is diminished per force. The clearest advantage of doing so is to use a code which is intelligible for the immediate community the author is portraying. This rejection of the

[7] Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English,* 98.

[8] Young, "English Literature in its Encounters with Other Languages," 9.

[9] Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature,* 199.

colonizer's tongue is, ultimately, also a political stance not only of rejection of the remnants of an oppressive culture but also the ascription of their own native culture, which they are trying to privilege, "[a]s writers create in indigenous languages, the will to keep them alive and growing. Without this there is the likelihood that English will take over completely and the local languages, with all that belongs to them, will die out."[10] This idea of the alienation of local, native languages has been explored by other critics; in this sense, Ikram A. Elsherif remarks how many postcolonial writers "have been left alienated from their own mother language and thus unable to completely express themselves in it."[11]

This previous stance is opposed by the adoption and adaption of the colonizer's language to the local context, best known as hybridity, which is defined as "the creation of new transcultural rather than multicultural (crossing and fertilizing rather than fragmented) forms within the space produced by colonisation,"[12] or as "the blending of . . . different cultural influences, an upfront an active syncretism."[13] This current of thought asserts that the adapted usage of the colonizer's language is not only a valid form of expression but that it actually best represents the hybrid nature of postcolonial societies. Speaking from his own context, the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe defended the usage of English as a valid medium of expression for postcolonial nations based on two arguments: firstly, English worked as a lingua franca in a country where over two

[10] Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English,* 99.

[11] Elsherif, "English Literature or Literature in English: Appropriating the Language of the Colonizer," 44.

[12] Innes, *Ibid,* 189.

[13] Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature,* 194.

hundred languages are spoken; secondly, the presence of the English language in Africa had been long enough to consider it an African language.[14] There is, notwithstanding, a previous and more pertaining case closer to the present are of study for this paper, that of William Carleton (1794-1869), "the greatest imaginative writer in English to emerge from the native Irish community before James Joyce."[15] Several parallelisms can be established between the Kenyan and the Tyrone writers, but the most significant one is, without a doubt, their usage of English as their literary tool. Despite his bilingual upbringing, and his deployment of Irish myth and folklore for his stories, Carleton's literary language was English, a choice which was motivated by his intended audience.[16]

As with other countries like India, the Irish case presents a paradox, a midway option between these two possibilities which have been examined so far in terms of language. Culturally speaking, Ireland was blessed not only with a strongly differentiated culture form that of the colonizers' but—most importantly—with its own language, a language which is in all senses different from that of the metropolis. However, by the time Irish Revivalism emerged as a strong cultural force, Irish had long ceased to be the main means of education for the élite in the country: for most Irish intellectuals, then, the resource to Irish was simply not a viable option. This presented a problem since the issue of language and cultural recovery was central to the nationalist movement in Ireland, as was clear from Douglas Hyde's speech in 1892, "The Necessity of De-Anglicising Ireland," and the subsequent apparition of the Gaelic League, whose chief interest was

[14] Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature,* 199-200.

[15] Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture,* 43.

[16] Moynahan, *Ibid,* 52.

the revival of the Irish language.[17] W. B. Yeats found the solution by arguing that the key factor in a national literature was in its spirit and not so much in the language choice, a position which influences that of the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, who said that "[t]he African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost."[18]

This study will, therefore, consider how this postcolonial issue, this language dichotomy, is approached and resolved by nineteenth-century Irish writer James Clarence Mangan. In order to do so, it will first consider the different approaches which have been used in terms of language usage in postcolonial countries and as a postcolonial tool, since different critics have posed varied approaches to the problematic; it will also consider the cultural context of nineteenth-century Ireland, with its ethnic and religious divides, and the imprint of the incipient Irish nationalism. This background will constitute the kernel against which J.C. Mangan's perceptions and approaches to the language issue will be compared and which will be reflected in the final analysis of one of his short narratives, "The Thirty Flasks." As the analysis will unveil, J.C. Mangan's deployment of language predates that of many a postcolonial writer in appropriating and abrogating English as a postcolonial tool.

Literature Review

Boehmer (2005) asserts that colonial discourse "can be taken to refer to that collection of symbolic practices, included textual codes and conventions and implied meanings, which

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[17] Murphy, *Ireland: A Social, Cultural and Literary History,* 47.

[18] Walder, *Post-Colonial Literatures in English,* 52.

Europe deployed in the process of its colonial expansion and, in particular, in understanding the bizarre and apparently untranslatable strangeness with which it came into contact."[19] This "bizarre and apparently untranslatable strangeness" to which Boehmer (2005) alludes, refers, of course, to the need colonizers manifested to adapt and comprehend a foreign medium. However, the Irish case further complicates this issue. Language is not only a powerful tool for communication but also one for domination. It comes as no surprise, then, that "the issue of language is one of the most hotly debated topics among postcolonial writers, critics and readers."[20]

Broadly speaking, the question which troubles many a postcolonial writer is which language should be used for literary purposes, so much so that "as a consequence, postcolonial discourse analysis has been centrally concerned with redressing, or retranslating, this kind of linguistic, geographic, and cultural transformation of one thing into something else."[21] For some critics, the answer lies in a return to native languages and modes of expression while others—notably the critic Homi Bhabha or writers like Wilson Harris or Edward Brathwaite—have opted for "cultural syncreticity,"[22] in which "received history is tampered with, rewritten, and realigned from the point of view of the victims of its destructive progress."[23] The question is a complex one, and has driven many a critic to assert that "it is the relationship with English that defines the postcolonial

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[19] Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature,* 48.

[20] Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English,* 97.

[21] Bertacco, "The 'Gift' of Translation to Postcolonial Literatures," 137-8.

[22] Ashcroft, *The Empire Writes Back*, 15. According to Ashcroft et al., syncreticity is the process by which "previously distinct linguistic categories, and by extension, cultural formations, merge into a new single form."

[23] Ashcroft, *The Empire Writes Back,* 34.

condition, not just for the highly-educated elite or for anglophone writers but for entire populations."[24] The answers given are equally complex and have varied enormously depending on the situation of the different postcolonial countries. In countries sporting an indigenous language, like India or many African countries, a return to writing exclusively in a native language has been a constant claim over the years, since there is a viable alternative to the colonizers' tongue. However, detractors of this option have argued that to do so would be to reject the syncretic nature of these post-colonial societies.[25]

The debate is an ongoing problematic in postcolonial societies, a conundrum which is mainly centred in the choice of language and—to a lesser extent—in the suitability of the different literary genres to express the (post) colonial situation,

> The question of language choice will always have to be made, but whatever language they choose, many postcolonial writers nevertheless retain a certain anxiety in their relation to the particular language in which they write, the more so if this is a major European language such as English or French.[26]

Even within the same cultural and spatial domain, different writers have addressed the question in a multitude of ways, and in this J. C. Mangan is no exception. Nevertheless, the problem for a vast majority of Irish writers was (and still is) that for most of them the only means of communication was the language of the colonizer—English. Consequently, English had to "become a medium to write back at the Empire."[27]

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[24] Barber, "African-Language Literature and Postcolonial Criticism," 7.

[25] Ashcroft, *Ibid,* 30.

[26] Young, "English Literature in its Encounters with Other Languages," 12.

[27] Elsherif, "English Literature or Literature in English: Appropriating The Language of the Colonizer," 44.

Irish had, as a matter of fact, been in constant decline since, at least, the previous century, almost in reverse proportion to the spread of literacy among the poorer classes. Irish was progressively becoming a solely oral language. The introduction of the National Education System, which did much to enlighten the poor classes, both in England and Ireland, had as a consequence the effective disappearance of Irish from the kernel of its society. As Elsherif asserts, this is common procedure in the British colonizing process, where "education in English then was not only employed to displace the native languages of the colonized, but it was also a weapon"[28] to destroy and debase the national consciousness of colonial subjects. Despite the fact "the Irish nationalist narrative represented its decline as the direct result of British policy in Ireland,"[29] it would be wrong to assume that the decline of Irish was solely ascribable to British colonialism. Many sectors in Irish society at the time perceived Irish as an impediment to progress, something of the past which should be eradicated in favour of modernity. As Curtis (1965) explicates,

> the institutions of universal elementary school where English was the sole medium, combined with the influence of O'Connell, many of the priests, and other leaders who looked on Irish as a barrier to progress, soon made rapid inroads on the native speech and helped to extinguish that old 'Clanna Gael' pride and isolation which the mixed Norman-Irish race had long cherished.[30]

It is ironic that O'Connell, himself a native speaker of Irish, was one of the advocates for the adoption of English as the national language. Traditionally, it has been believed that the Famine was responsible for the demise of the Irish language. However, recent

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[28] Elsherif, *Ibid,* 43.

[29] O'Brien, "Rabindranath Tagore's India and William Butler Yeats's Ireland," 117.

[30] Curtis, *A History of Ireland,* 362.

scholarship has proven that its decline was well-rooted before the Famine, and that this acted more as a catalyst, accelerating the process. The aforementioned factors together with the appearance of national schools, whose medium of communication was English, caused that by 1851 there were just 1.5 million Irish speakers left, of whom just 319,000 were monoglots.[31]

Somehow fortunately, all this changed with the arrival of Protestant cultural nationalism and the need to justify the incipient nation by looking back on its Gaelic past, manifested mainly in Celticism. During most of the nineteenth century, the debate of the Celtic origins of Ireland was central for the Irish intelligentsia, enabling the Patriots, the nineteenth century nationalist movement, to establish a difference with England. As Lennon (2004) asserts, "[b]efore the eighteenth century, the Irish were rarely seen as Celts. Yet, by the dawn of the nineteenth century, the Gaelic Irish had come to signify the most authentic remains of a Celtic culture in existence."[32] Later in the century, part of the Ascendancy would embrace Celtic nationalism as a differentiating factor.[33] Despite this differentiating nature, Celticism also became a way to assert British rule in Ireland in the same fashion Orientalism had been in the East. In this sense, Matthew Arnold's theories—which equalled Oriental and Celtic cultures, levelling them to a child-like nature—acquired a great relevance, both at home and abroad. As an example of this foreign interest, Ernest Renan (1823-92) focused on the Celts as a race in his work *La poésie des races celtiques* (1860), a book which influenced Arnold's view of the Celts as presented in his *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867). Briefly speaking, Arnold (1867) explicates how Celtic races—like the Orientals—cannot aspire to autonomy since they

[31] Jackson, Ireland 1798-1998. War, Peace and Beyond, 83.

[32] Lennon, Irish Orientalism: a Literary and Intellectual History, 9.

[33] Murphy, Ireland: A Social, Cultural and Literary History, 1791-1891, 41.

have child-like qualities and need to be guided. This provided a new point of negotiation in the always complex English-Irish relations, since the English—due to their Teutonic character—felt it their duty to take the Irish under their wing and guide them through history. Though Arnold's views on the Irish were mild for Victorian times, they were, nonetheless, insidious since it is, after all, "easier to want to rule a people whom one can think of as likeable and amenable that as unpleasant and resistant."[34]

However, Celticism was at its best a force for cultural cohesion, inviting all those who considered themselves as Irish to live in a Celtic manner, while encouraging at the same time the use of the Irish language. As Murphy (2003) asserts, "Celticism . . . had turned firstly into a mode of delimiting Irish action before finally becoming a programme for building cultural cohesion."[35] It should not be overlooked, nevertheless, that Celticism was mainly a scholarly product and that it was indebted to James Macpherson's translations from the Gaelic in the 1760s. The fact that these turned out to be a forgery is what prompted a more serious scholarly study of Irish texts, producing works like Joseph Cooper Walker's *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards* (1786). It is ironic that most of the people who wrote these works had to rely on scholars from a Gaelic Catholic background due to the fact that, especially during the first half of the nineteenth century, Celticism was mainly in the hands of the Anglo-Irish, a detail which, however, changed as the century progressed.

Reference to Celticism is not gratuitous as to understand J.C. Mangan's work it is necessary to be acquainted with "the context of his close connections with scholars of the

[34] Murphy, Ireland: A Social, Cultural and Literary History, 1791-1891, 48.

[35] Murphy, *Ibid,* 41.

Irish past."[36] Celticism, however, was mainly an intellectual movement; the fact remains that, despite attempts at reviving Irish as a literary medium, by the mid-nineteenth century, English had become well established as the printing language par excellence in Ireland.[37] This notwithstanding, the debate as to what language to use was an ongoing one, with two opposing options at stake; a debate which would peak towards the end of the century and which—as mentioned in the introduction—can be summarized in the differing views on language expressed by Douglas Hyde and W.B. Yeats. For the former, as he makes clear in his 1892 speech, "The Necessity of De-Anglicising Ireland," the solution was for Irish writers to write in Irish for "upon Irish lines alone can the Irish race once more become what it was."[38] It is upon such lines of thought that the Gaelic League, a cultural association formed by Catholic teachers and writers, and whose main objective was to reinstate the Irish language, would be founded.[39]

For W.B. Yeats, however, the approach to the language question was different. W.B. Yeats viewed language as a secondary tool. For him, what made Irish literature Irish were its rhythms, its choice of subject matter and its attitudes over the material language in which these were expressed. It was, therefore, possible to "build up a national literature which [would] be none the less Irish in spirit for being English in language."[40] It is indubitable that—apart from his philosophical approach—Yeats' attitude was also very

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[36] O'Connor, Anne. *Translation and Language in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: A European Perspective,* 130.

[37] Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750-1850,* 155

[38] Hyde, Douglas. "The Necessity of De-Anglicising Ireland." https://ernie.uva.nl/upload/media/eb201b85e5cb00114d568245a59cc05f.pdf

[39] Murphy, *Ibid,* 47.

[40] Innes, *Ibid,* 99.

pragmatic—it is widely known that he could not read nor speak Irish—but it is also paradigmatic of a wide range of Irish intellectuals who had to contend with the ambiguity of defending the singularity of a language they could not—sometimes even wished not—express themselves in, and who yet felt there was something singular in the literature they could produce. The choice of Hiberno-English over Irish had also a very important side effect: by writing in the language of the colonizers, Irish writers were able to reach a wider audience than the one they could have ever reached had they done so in Irish. As has been mentioned, this was certainly the case of William Carleton (1794-1869), a contemporary of J.C. Mangan, who—unlike him—did know Irish, but chose English as a medium. As Boehmer hints at, "[f]ew turn up their noses at the large readership and more affluent market to which they have access by writing in English."[41] It would be misleading, however, to see Yeats' attitude as a mere act of self-justification. Far from it, and despite Anglo-Irish attempts at reviving the language, the novel prize winner's view on Irish can be set in a long-established literary tradition, as Anglo-Irish writing in English is well grounded on the island. J. C. Mangan's deployment of English to craft an Irish narrative has been so lasting in the Irish literary scene that it has influenced some major twentieth century Irish writers, most notably James Joyce, who described J.C. Mangan as "the type of his race."[42] Ironically enough, J.C. Mangan's achievement is somewhat overshadowed by the literary pre-eminence of James Joyce, so much so that some scholars refer to the former's technique as "proto-Joycean wordplay and fantasy."[43]

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[41] Boehmer, *Ibid*, 200.

[42] Wheatley, David. "'But I Must Not Accounted Be /One of That Mumming Company': Joyce, Mangan, and the Treacheries of Poetic Succession." *Dublin James Joyce Journal*, 6/7, 2013-2014, 2.

[43] Wheatley, *Ibid*, 5.

Let us return to that institution which "began in 1824 to remap and rename the Irish landscape, quickly expanding beyond its topographical agenda and entering into concerns of archaeological, historical, and linguistic matter"[44]—The Ordnance Survey, which included participants of such importance for the cultural programme as George Petrie or Samuel Ferguson. And, of course, James Clarence Mangan.

J.C. Mangan and the Irish Tongue

The Dublin poet's attitude towards the Irish language is somewhat ambiguous. Despite his resistance to aesthetic and political labels, J.C. Mangan was a "poet with nationalist sympathies"[45] if not a convinced nationalist. He seems, however, to have shown no regard for Gaelic; if his attitude is to be labelled, then indifference could be the word. This is striking since he had a cursory knowledge of several languages, which would make one think that he would have been interested in Irish. Additionally, he versified many a translation of an Irish original—what Ellen Shannon-Mangan (1996) terms his Irish poems. He was certainly acquainted with the Gaelic scholar Owen Connellan. They had, in fact, become close friends, and J.C. Mangan had helped him correct his English when writing *Annals of the Four Masters.*[46] Despite this, his interest in Irish seems to have been non-existent, proof of which is O'Curry's comment to Thomas Davis, "Mr Mangan has no knowledge of the Irish language, nor do I think he regrets that either … ."[47] O'Curry was O'Donovan's (J.C. Mangan's editor) brother-in-law and certainly no friend of the

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[44] Hall, Dialogues in the Margin. A Study of the Dublin University Magazine, 23.

[45] Hogan, Ciara. '"Lost Hero of the Past': Ruin, Wound, and the Failure of Idealism in the Poetry of James Clarence Mangan." *Études irlandaises* 35-1, 2010, 133.

[46] Shannon-Mangan, James Clarence Mangan: a Biography, 131.

[47] Shannon-Mangan, *Ibid,* 223.

Dublin poet, but he was his collaborator for many years and one of the sources J.C. Mangan used to write his English versions of Irish poems. In spite of his knowledge of different languages—or perhaps due to it—, J.C. Mangan seems to have been conscious of his limitations. He did like translation and devoted immense time to it, but his creative outcome was solely in English. And yet, he still had to confront the same question which W. B. Yeats would ask himself later on—how to express an Irish soul through an alien medium. And yet translation seems to have provided him with the answer for "his translation activity instead preferred displacement of the source text and the liberation of the translator's authorial voice."[48]

J. C. Mangan does not give a clear answer *within* his short stories; it is true that in many of his stories there is repentance and a return (or exhortation to) the abandoned path, as in "The Remorse of a Night." In this story—a translation of Jean Paul's "Die Neujahrsnacht eines Unglücklichen"—, Old Man, on his deathbed, reflects on his past years of vice and wrongdoing, and realizes that the only thing that awaits him in his future life is eternal damnation, artfully represented in the metaphor of the serpents around his bosom, "and with that woeful thought were torn the open anew the leprous wounds in his bosom which the serpents that clung around him would never suffer to be healed."[49] He sees his life mirrored in those friends of his who followed the path to virtue and reflects how much better it would have been for him if he had followed that same path. Through an act of repentance and contrition, Old Man finally manages to save himself and is given a second opportunity to follow the path to virtue and save his eternal soul. J. C. Mangan's story finishes with a call to "turn while yet thou mayest—retrace thy steps—make a

[48] O'Connor, *Ibid,* 132.

[49] Mangan, *The Collected Works of James Clarence Mangan. Prose: 1840-1882,* 59.

happier choice!"[50] Entreaties to repentance are common in Mangan's short stories and acquired a more significant weight as the years went by and he perfected his writing techniques. Suffice as a further example his 1838 story "The Man in the Cloak," a re-writing of Balzac's Melmoth réconcilié (1834), itself a kind of sequel to Melmoth the Wanderer (1820). In this story, Braunbrock, the main character, decides to become Melmoth the Wanderer to gain supernatural powers and eternity, but in so doing is condemned to roam the earth eternally. The story ends, however, with Braunbrock's reconciliation with the Church and his death in peace, repentance and contentment, "he made his confession and was reconciled with the Church … . His last moments were characterised by a penitence as sincere as that of Melmoth himself."[51] Guilt and damnation are always present but so is hope. Still, what this return is or what its implications are is never stated further from a general injunction to follow the right path or the way to virtue, and to assume it could refer to the recovery of Irish as a vehicular language would be too far-fetched an assertion, moreover considering his attitude towards the language.

The answer to this issue is actually found *in* the text. As most postcolonial writers after him, J. C. Mangan felt the inadequacy of both the English language and of the English literary tradition to express his displaced and fragmented mind. As with the rest of the colonial question, the Dublin poet does not address the topic directly, but he does so by displacing the focus to the Orient. In his fourth instalment of *Literae Orientales*, J.C. Mangan discusses his approach to the translation of Arabian, Persian and Turkish poetry, and asserts—after having thought deeply about it—that "Oriental poetry is not fairly readable in an English translation" and, in what can only be conceived as a very

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[50] Mangan, *Ibid*, 60.

[51] Mangan, *Ibid*, 263.

modern and postcolonial approach, expostulates that "it must be read in the original" for "Oriental Poetry apparelled in a western dress becomes essentially unrecognisable, forfeits its identity, ceases to be an intelligible object of apprehension to the understanding."[52] Baggett (2000) notices how J. C. Mangan is not only referring to the inadequacy of the English language to portray Oriental poetry faithfully but how he is also criticising the colonial gaze. A subtler reading of J. C. Mangan's statement poses the idea that Eastern cultures should not be "translated into, judged by, understood in terms of English culture specifically."[53] This leads us to think that his first intention would have been to recover the Irish language and to write in Irish to express the nation. However, as for many Irish writers, this presented a practical problem since the Dublin-born poet knew virtually no Irish, even though he collaborated with John O'Daly in translating Irish poetry into English. Shannon-Mangan (1996) artfully narrates an anecdote worth repeating here, "Mangan did not know any Irish, and . . . it was his custom to stretch his body halfway across the counter, while John would translate the Irish song to him and [he] would versify it, half-sitting and half-lying on the counter."[54]

J. C. Mangan's only option, then, was to use English. However, knowing it to be an imperfect tool for his aims, and since he could not express himself in Irish, he had to adapt English to his objectives, he had to create an English that sounded Irish, and, at the same time, a suitable genre to express himself. Thus, J. C. Mangan aligned himself with the array of Irish writers writing in English to build the nation, like his contemporary Edward Walsh or, later on, James Joyce. This problem supports Williams' assertion that

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[52] Mangan, *The Collected Works of James Clarence Mangan. Prose: 1840-1882,* 1.

[53] Baggett, *Celticism, Orientalism, and Irish Identity, 1829-1916: Ferguson, Mangan, and Yeats,* 185.

[54] Shannon-Mangan, *James Clarence Mangan: a Biography,* 274.

"not only is syncreticity a valuable tool but it is also an intrinsic and inescapable feature of postcolonial societies."[55]

Through his appreciations of Oriental literature and his incensed argument in favour of relying on the original rather than on the translation, J. C. Mangan is not only stating his opinion of how literature should be read, he is also defending the value of colonized people's cultures and, at the same time, de-Anglicizing colonized people's minds in general and that of his Irish readers in particular. The object of what J. C. Mangan terms as "old Orientalists" had been to make Oriental literature available to the West by analysing it through, and adapting it to, Western tastes, which resulted in "few or no impressions of Asia that were not imperfect and unsatisfactory."[56] The poet considered this an error. He explains it further in his first instalment of *Literae Orientales*,

> They tested the genius, habits, and prejudices of one continent by the genius, habits and prejudices of another; and because the two continents differed—because the moral character of Europe was reckoned austerer than that of Asia—because Asia was not Europe, the literature of Asia was pronounced unworthy of a comparison with the literature of Europe. The inference was mysterious, but not more than two-thirds a *non-sequitur* after all, and drawn with all imposing gravity besides; and so, many believed, and few questioned, and none contradicted. Writers and readers were alike misled—the writers by their own convictions—the readers by the plausibility of the writers.[57]

A subtler reading of this text yields J. C. Mangan's attacking not only the biased interpretation of Oriental texts colonizers did but the colonizing enterprise as a whole. In

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[55] Ashcroft, *The Empire Writes Back,* 30.

[56] Mangan, *The Collected Works of James Clarence Mangan: Prose 1832-1839,* 132.

[57] Mangan, *Ibid,* 133.

what seems an anticipation of Boehmer's (2005) assertion, J. C. Mangan exposes that colonizers' understanding of the Oriental Other was based on a highly questionable misreading of the latter as inferior because it was different. J. C. Mangan considers it a mistake to pass judgement over other cultures through the values of a different one. In fact, as Melissa Fegan (2013) asserts in "'Every Irishman is an Arab': James Clarence Mangan's Eastern 'Translations,'" J.C. Mangan "recognizes that translation is implicated in the colonial enterprise … .Translation is a form of plunder."[58] His judgement has a twofold effect: it questions the colonial gaze and, at the same time, it questions the colonizer's right to interpret other cultures from a superior standpoint. It is not hard to read Boehmer's (2005) assertion in the last lines of J.C. Mangan's extract, "it was possible to justify the Empire because it was self-evidently responsible, above blame, just—and it was just, it could be claimed, because it was British."[59] To question the validity, the right of judgement to translate Oriental texts was also to question the right of the Empire to claim their rule over other lands and cultures. As Lennon (2004) argues, "by pointing out the incommensurability of Oriental translations and their original West Asian texts, J. C. Mangan rhetorically undermines a fundamental goal of British and French Orientalism: to revive, supplant, and govern the Orient with European knowledge and capital."[60] Through his *Literae Orientales* and his short stories, then, J. C. Mangan reclaims the necessity to change the viewpoint, the need to see, analyse and interpret reality through the viewpoint of the Other, thus shifting the focus from the centre to the periphery.

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[58] Fegan, Melissa. "'Every Irishman is an Arab': James Clarence Mangan's Eastern 'Translations.'" *Translation and Literature,* 22 (2013), 203.

[59] Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature,* 41.

[60] Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: a Literary and Intellectual History,* 160.

J.C. Mangan's Appropriation of the English Language – "The Thirty Flasks"

Attempts to represent the Irish vernacular were common from the beginning of the nineteenth century, being Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800) a touchstone in this field. With its glossary and editorial intrusions, prepared for "the *ignorant* English reader" lest the narration "will perhaps be scarcely intelligible,"[61] Edgeworth's narrative constitutes a prime example of impersonation and mimicry.[62] Maria Edgeworth's representation of Irish vernacular does more than that. It is true that it may appear to be presenting the Irish, or at least the Catholic Irish, as illiterate through their dialect and manners. However, as she herself states in the preface to her masterpiece, it is a way of distancing Ireland from England, of showing it as different even if communication is carried in—supposedly—the same language. Edgeworth thus establishes a path which will be followed by subsequent Irish writers in their representations of Irish characters. J. C. Mangan's approach is, however, different.

The Dublin poet's stories are conspicuously alienated from Ireland and its context, or at least so it would seem on a superficial level. With the exception of "An Extraordinary Adventure in the Shades," none of his stories takes place in Ireland, characters and settings being—logically—not Irish. Only the character of the Man in the Cloak in the homonymous story is of Irish origin; he displays, however, no recognisable Irish traits either in language or behaviour. This, however, does not mean that J. C. Mangan did not display the necessity to re-invent the language of the colonizers, for, in fact, he is better ascribed to that category of postcolonial writers who take "idea of the "silencing" of the

[61] Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, 4.

[62] Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish: the Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture,* 21.

native by the imposition of imperial discourses quite literally-as a statement about the native's muteness more than the colonizer's deafness."[63] One of the techniques he uses to highlight this necessity is what Bill Ashcroft has termed as the accentuation of the phenomenon of distance, "[postcolonial texts] present us with writers and readers far more 'absent' from each other than they would be if located in the same culture; they present a situation which in some cases (because the genre of the written prose is so removed from some cultures) provides a totally original, negotiated and ambivalent site for communication."[64] How exactly J. C. Mangan brings this about in his fiction is what is most interesting.

A prime example of J.C. Mangan's technique can be seen in "The Thirty Flasks." The story narrates the misadventures of Basil Von Rosenwald, a gentleman who finds his privileged situation threatened due to his addiction to gambling. In his despair—and through the recommendations of his friend Flemming—, he resorts to the mysterious and magical solution proposed by a Nabob, who offers him a compact—money in exchange for his inches. Unwilling to believe in what he considers fooleries and superstition, Basil accepts and thus begins to lose his inches. Finally, the hoax is uncovered—Flemming is exposed as a con, and the Nabob as the terrible sorcerer Maugraby. The story is full of references to the East and perceptions and misperceptions of the Other. The focus of the present study is, however, language.

As can be easily deduced from the main character's surname, the story is set in a German-speaking place, although exactly where is not mentioned. It is assumed—or so one would think—that the language the characters speak is, therefore, German, although the narrative per se is written in English. This linguistic gap is bridged by fiction, which

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[63] Barber, "African-Language Literature and Postcolonial Criticism*,"* 5.

[64] Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation,* 62.

permits the reader to believe the characters express themselves in German while reading the story in English. As can be expected in a nineteenth-century text, the text is riddled with French expressions, a fact that also pays homage to Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin* (1831) as J.C. Magan used this novel as a source for his text. More surprisingly, perhaps, is the abundance of the German language. One could argue that J. C. Mangan's aim in doing so is to add some realism to the story; it being set somewhere in Germany, it would not be illogical to have some scattered German expressions to add vividness to descriptions and dialogue. There are two main objections to this argument, however. The first one has to do with intelligibility. As opposed to French, which was the lingua franca during the nineteenth century and the language learned by educated people, German did not enjoy such a high appreciation among the literate classes, even less among the poorly educated middle-class.[65] Therefore, and contrary to what happens with French expressions, it would have been expected that J.C. Mangan offered an explanation, either in the very same text (parenthetically) or via editorial intrusion (i.e. glossing). He chose, nonetheless, to leave these unexplained to his readers,

[65] Shannon-Mangan, *James Clarence Mangan: a Biography*, 14. Shannon-Mangan comments on how the Dublin poet acquired all his linguistic abilities, giving her readers, at the same time, an insight into Dublin's education system at the time, "[r]eputedly quite a linguist, Fr Graham introduced [Mangan] to Latin, French, Spanish and Italian, with all of which Mangan eventually became conversant, if not expert. German, however, the language he mastered most completely and which he most keenly enjoyed, was not part of the curriculum of the schools. As far as can be known, […] the poet was entirely self-taught."

> "Deuce knows!" Answered Heinrick. "Some whim of his own. But I forgot. He always closets the applicant before-hand and there is a talk between them *unter vier Augen*. I suppose he explains every thing [sic] then."[66]

The expression *unter vier Augen*, which can be loosely translated as "in private," is left untranslated. It is true that J. C. Mangan never introduces so many expressions as to render the text unintelligible, as more modern postcolonial writers would do.[67] However, his leaving those words untranslated serves the purpose which many a postcolonial text pursues, that is, to "seize the language, re-place it in a specific cultural location, and yet maintain the integrity of that Otherness, which historically has been employed to keep the post-colonial at the margins of power, of 'authenticity', and even of reality itself."[68] By leaving those expressions untranslated, the Dubliner shocks the English reader, who is forced to acknowledge the strangeness and the otherness of the text being read. This is a recurrent technique J.C. Mangan employs in several other stories and narratives, such as "My Bugle, and How I Blow it" (1841), where French is used to the same intent, "it is outside the sphere of your power, my Public! I am the MAN in the Cloak. *Mettez cela dans votre pipe, et fumez-le, mon public!*"[69] and yet again in "A Treatise on a Pair of Tongs" (1833), where the narrative is brought to an end citing German verses, "Das Jahrhundert / Ist meinem Ideal nicht reif—Ich lebe / Ein Bürger derer welche kommen

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[66] Mangan, *The Collected Works of James Clarence Mangan: Prose 1832-1839,* 182.

[67] In their challenging work *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) Ashcroft et al. remind us that the main strategies of appropriation in postcolonial writing are glossing, untranslated word, interlanguage, syntactic fusion and code-switching. The case of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is paradigmatic; he would leave whole paragraphs untranslated.

[68] Ashcroft, *The Empire Writes Back,* 77.

[69] Mangan, *Ibid,* 65.

warden."[70] Such linguistic deployments act as a constant reminder that even if both Irish and English now shared a common language, cultural differences remain, for there are aspects which persist in their untranslatability. This is, in fact, taken a step further since J. C. Mangan does not only leave words untranslated but whole idiomatic expressions. In the previous extract, the phrase *unter vier Augen* literally means "under four eyes." It would take a reasonably versed speaker to know the meaning of such an expression and not just the literal meaning, which could be gathered from a quick dictionary search. Thus, J. C. Mangan reminds us that languages "not only carry sets of associations related to particular words, such as 'tribe', 'fetish', 'black' and 'white', but also particular ways of thinking and perceiving,"[71] which cannot be easily transferred from one culture to another, even if they are, in principle, using the same language.

However, the text further complicates this aspect, for as the reader delves into the story, German acquires a greater importance. In fact, J. C. Mangan creates the illusion in the reader of witnessing a conversation in German,

> "I say, Mr. Grabb, before you go, tell me, did you see Schmidt last night?"
>
> "*Nein*, No," replied the little man.
>
> "The fellow owes me four hundred and odd florins, and I can't make him out high or low. It is very hard. Have you any idea where he is gone to?
>
> "*Ja.*"
>
> "You can tell me, then?"
>
> "*Ja*."
>
> "Well, where is he gone to?"
>
> "*Zum Teufel gegangen,* Gone to the devil," said Grabb.

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[70] Mangan, *Ibid,* 36.

[71] Innes, The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English, 98.

"How do you mean?"

"*Todt,* Dead."

"Dead?"

"*Ja*."

"Dead! You astonish me. I never heard a word of it. When did he die?"

"*Gestern*, Yesterday."

"*So* late?" said Basil. "Had he been ill?"

"*Nein*."

"*Er hat sich die Gurgel geschnitten,* He cut his throat," said Grabb, in a very soft tone.[72]

Two things are noticeable in this paragraph; first, the extended usage of German the Dublin poet displays, which—in this case—is provided along with a translation. Second, the fact that it is Mr. Grabb who is translated, not Basil. Before analysing these two factors in depth, one should consider the exact context of the scene. At this stage in the story, Basil has already tried his first dose of the Nabob's elixir, having subsequently visited Aurelia's villa, where he had a rather disagreeable meeting with her father over his possibilities to keep her happy. On the following day, and after a "tolerable night's sleep,"[73] Basil is visited by Mr. Grabb—one of his creditors—to settle his debt. Basil is, of course, exultant at being able to repay, and it is then that this conversation takes place. It goes without saying that the *tête-à-tête* is a warning for Basil, having a double effect: it awakens Basil's sense of oncoming danger in the fiction of the narrative, while at the

[72] Mangan, The Collected Works of James Clarence Mangan: Prose 1832-1839, 201-2.

[73] Mangan, *Ibid,* 200.

same time maintaining the tension for the reader, who does not know what the future might hold for Basil.

Bearing this context in mind, let us return to language. Although J. C. Mangan's use of German in this section is, in comparison, extensive, it is clear that he did not intend the text to be illegible for his English-speaking audience. Ismail S. Talib (2002) notices how some postcolonial texts "give almost equal weight to two or more languages, or more weight to the non-English language or languages, to the extent that the reader needs to be proficient in them in order to understand the work."[74] The reasons behind such an adoption are varied, as Talib (2002) himself comments, and range from the political to the more literary of infusing realism into a work of fiction,[75] as has been already commented. J.C. Mangan's idea is, therefore, to baffle the reader, to estrange the reader from their socio-cultural context by breaking the illusion of fiction which was alluded to earlier on. This acquires a greater significance when one bears in mind Ashcroft's assertion that "[o]ne speaker 'sees' the world in the same way as another because they share a language, that is, share a technique for putting certain rules into practice; the 'seeing' is embedded in the practice."[76] It is here that the second fact already noted comes into action.

Should one accept Ashcroft's assertion as true, then the question which would naturally follow is why Grabb is translated while Basil is left in English. J. C. Mangan's intention cannot have been just to impress the reader with his cursory knowledge of the German tongue, since to that effect the scattered usage of some expressions on the text would have sufficed. The Dubliner is precisely doing what Ashcroft (2001) asserts; by

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[74] Talib, The Language of Postcolonial Literatures: an Introduction, 144.

[75] Talib, *Ibid.,* 140.

[76] Ashcroft, The Empire Writes Back, 69.

translating Grabb and not Basil, the Dublin poet reminds his readers of the unbridgeable differences which exist within the same society. The rules cannot be the same because the perception of reality needs translating. In this way, the mixing of languages in a literary text becomes part of a series of "strategies which subtly express cultural conflicts through linguistic tensions."[77] Even though he is Basil's creditor, Grabb does not belong in the same sphere as him, and never will. Their worlds are too far apart, even if they coexist in the same physical place. This is further illustrated in Grabb's stark usage of language, as opposed to Basil's more poetic and verbose one, which can be appreciated in the above extract.

By breaking the illusion of fiction, the reader is forced to face a puzzling situation—there is no understanding, but a repressed linguistic conflict in which lower-class characters need to be translated or interpreted for the benefit of an elite class, even if—as has been argued—the action takes place in a German-speaking area. Thus viewed, the situation acts as a reminder of the Irish-speaking community in Ireland and their disadvantageous situation. It unveils the paradox of having to use a foreign language for the benefit of the ruling classes. As Simona Bertacco asserts, "as with languages, social differences are not always comprehensible or bridgeable; in other words, "untranslatables" do exist, and this aspect of cultures' untranslatability needs to be acknowledged."[78] The decline of Irish, already alluded to, finds its way into J. C. Mangan's prose, and not in a gratuitous way, for what is being portrayed is not a mere linguistic conflict but the whole social marginalization of a yet representative part of Irish society. "The Thirty Flasks" was published in 1838, by which time approximately 23.3

[77] Karrer, "Minority Literatures in North America: From Cultural Nationalism to Liminality," 25.

[78] Bertacco, "The Fact of Translation in Postcolonial Literatures," 26.

per cent of the total population of the isle could speak Irish, while just 4.9 per cent could speak only Irish. Further to this, and although Chairs of Irish had been established at third-level institutions, the language was discouraged in the education system until the 1870s. The state was also hostile to it, and "Irish speakers were sometimes ridiculed when giving evidence in court."[79] Even though J. C. Mangan was no Irish speaker, and there is no proof that he ever seriously attempted to learn the language, his prose does act as a denunciatory statement of the social differences which part of the Irish nation had to endure, for—in the end—Irish was a tool used for and by the nationalist cause to assert the different nature of Irish people.

Conclusion

James Clarence Mangan's choice of language is simultaneously paradigmatic and innovative when considered through a postcolonial lens. Like many writers from postcolonial societies, J.C. Mangan chose to write in the language of the colonizer, for practical but also for personal reasons, as has been seen. Such an abrogating and appropriating process is not uncommon for postcolonial writers as it can, in fact, better reflect the hybrid nature of their societies than the exclusive usage of their native tongue(s) could. This notwithstanding, the Dublin-born poet's choice is radically different—if W.B. Yeats would, later on, encourage and exhort Irish writers to write in an English specific to Ireland, a Hiberno-English which sounded English but with an Irish voice, J.C. Mangan goes a step further, almost creating an idiolect of his own.

J.C. Mangan's strategies to appropriate the English tongue, albeit common to other postcolonial writers, take a meaning of their own. The Dubliner makes usage of both untranslated passages and in-text explications (an element many postcolonial writers use)

[79] Murphy, Ireland: A Social, Cultural and Literary History, 1791-1891, 30.

but gives them another turn of the screw by introducing German in his discourse and clearly demarcating which characters are to be interpreted and which are to be left untranslated, reflecting social divides which are clearly reminiscent of JC. Mangan's contemporary Irish colonial context. This clear division, along with a displacement of the action to foreign lands and his choice of language (as the position of German was not that of French among the educated nineteenth-century élite), act as a constant remembrance, a perennial reminder of the need to know context to interpret a text. It breaks the unspoken pact between writer and reader—the suspension of belief—only to remind his intended audience—undoubtably English-speaking—that even within the same context, there are subtexts that require a meaningful reading, a surplus, an extra, additional interpretation if conscious meaning is to be derived. There is little doubt that, in so doing, J. C. Mangan is reflecting the social barrier which divided the English-speaking Anglo-Irish and the Gaelic-speaking Irish, to the disadvantage of the latter; a reflection that embodies the waning stance of Irish language in nineteenth-century Irish society and which portrays the troublesome relationship of the Irish language and national politics in Ireland.

All in all, read in the context of the incipient nineteenth-century Irish nationalism, J.C. Mangan's deployment of language as a postcolonial tool offers a new insight into the varied and manifold techniques postcolonial writers employ in their narratives to subvert the colonizer's tongue and cultural dominion.

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