Debunking Protestant Celticism: Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's Language Appropriation in 'The Quare Gander' and 'An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street'

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Colonial domination has been exercised by many means, exhibiting varied forms and expressions, one of the most prominent ones being language. Postcolonial countries and writers usually have to contend with the dilemma of which language to use, whether to employ their own native tongues, thus fostering national invigoration and a demise of colonial past, or whether the language of the coloniser is a valid tool for national, postcolonial expression. The Irish case is paradoxical: while Ireland possesses a language different to the tongue of the colonisers, by the time literacy was widespread, it had lost its vantage point among the majority of the population, especially the educated elites. In Ireland the question was how to best adapt the language to employ it as a decolonising tool. While many critics place such abrogation movement in the early twentieth century, in the context of the Irish Revival, this paper demonstrates that such language deployments had its origins in the nineteenth century, invigorated by Celticism and Protestant Cultural Nationalism. By examining two narratives by Dublin-born writer Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, the present study unveils how language was employed to break the well-established paradigms associated to Catholic classes and the Irish national identity.

Keywords: nineteenth century literature; Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu; language abrogation; Celticism; postcolonial Ireland; postcolonial literature; Anglo-Irish Ascendancy; Anglo-Irish literature;

Introduction

Language has been the primary tool to shape and deploy both colonial oppression and subsequent postcolonial reactions to the colonial process. Unsurprisingly, Ashcroft et al. 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] A discussion on postcolonial writing would then be incomplete

were it not to deal with language. Colonial and postcolonial discourses, the significance of history, the ambiguous connection between the self and the other are all ideas around which the concept of language revolves.[2] Walder explicates 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] This paper examines how this controverted postcolonial conundrum is carried out in the Irish case by examining how Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu deployed English as a subversive tool in two of his short narratives, 'The Quare Gander' and 'An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street' in the context of nineteenth century Ireland.

Language is a pressing issue discussed and analysed at length in postcolonial literatures—especially in those countries like Ireland, where the coloniser's tongue coexists with the native language. One question which recurrently arises is the adequacy of the language of the coloniser as a means of expression for postcolonial writers.[4] This is a hotly debated issue which takes both sides. On the one hand, many critics perceive, in using the coloniser's tongue, a continuation of the hierarchical order established by the coloniser and which disempowered the colonised other, therefore, reproducing colonial order (Wisker, 108). In this sense, Inness argues that '[l]anguages not only carry sets of association related to particular words … but also particular ways of thinking and perceiving' (98); based on the structuralist and poststructuralist assumption that language encloses the ideas which we can express, Innes' approach suggests that, therefore, ideas are restricted to the particular system of thought construed by the inherited language, thus limiting alien expressions. Boehmer expresses the conundrums succinctly when she poses the following 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?'[5]

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Boehmer's question seems to have produced two directly opposed answers on the side of both postcolonial writers and academics. A first reaction has taken the shape of an appeal to restore the original language, thus rejecting the coloniser's tongue and reinvigorating the native code of expression. Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, who rejected the use of English and turned to writing solely in Gikuyu, would most likely be the best representative of this approach in contemporary postcolonial writing. However, language choice is reflected—in more practical terms—in a choice of audience: inevitably, on choosing to address the world in their native tongue, postcolonial writers find the scope of potential readers diminished. There is, however, a clear advantage to such determination: the code thus employed is clearly intelligible for the immediate community the author is depicting. Such rejection of the coloniser's tongue carries a strong political connotation as not only are these writers rejecting the remnants of an oppressive, subduing culture but they are also privileging their native culture, '[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' (Innes, 99).

Conversely, there is a line of thought within postcolonial thinking whose tendency is to adopt and adapt the coloniser's language to their local context; this tendency, best known as hybridity, is defined as 'the creation of new transcultural rather than multicultural (crossing and fertilizing rather than fragmented) forms within the space produced by colonisation' (Innes, 189), or as 'the blending of [...] different cultural influences, an upfront an active syncretism' (Boehmer, 194). The underlying argument defended by these critics and writers would be that not only is the coloniser's language a valid means of expression, but it is indeed more suited to represent the hybrid nature of postcolonial societies. Suffice as an example the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, who put

forward two main arguments to employ English as a medium of expression for postcolonial nations. Chinua Achebe argued English is a lingua franca in a country where over two hundred languages are used in daily interactions; most notably still, its presence as a language in Africa has been sufficiently long and attested to regard it an African language (Boehmer, 199-200). Similar cases can be found in most postcolonial nations; more pertaining for the present study is the case of William Carleton (1794-1869), 'the greatest imaginative writer in English to emerge from the native Irish community before James Joyce'.[6] Several parallelisms can be drawn between the Kenyan and the Tyrone writers, their usage of English as their literary tool being, without a doubt, the most significant one. Albeit a native speak of Irish and a connoisseur of Irish myth and folklore, Carleton's literary language was English, a choice he was driven to make to please his intended audience (Moynahan, 52).

In terms of language, the Irish case constitutes a paradox, an in-between option different to the aforementioned ones. From a cultural point of view, and setting it apart from the coloniser's culture, Ireland possesses strong ethnographic manifestations, among which the Irish language features prominently, a language which is in all senses different to that of the British metropolis. However, although Irish was used in print during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, with 'a continuous and substantial production of Irish-language manuscripts […] as well as a minor explosion in Irish-language printing',[7] the language had lost its imprint on the country as a literary language for the educated élite by the time Irish Revivalism developed as a defining cultural element to the point that 'Irish speaking and illiteracy went together' (Ó Ciosáin 155) even if their direct link is not altogether clear. This, of course, does not mean that Irish was not used for writing. Its written production was, however, characterised by three

elements: 'its paucity, its domination by religious texts and its lateness' (Ó Ciosáin 162), which, in practice, meant that most printing of a literary nature was carried out in English.

Be it due to a lack of knowledge of the language or to other issues such as the pre-eminence of English in the printing business, the fact remains that writing in Irish was not a feasible option for most Irish intellectuals. This constituted a problem for the nationalist agenda, focused on highlighting ethnic differences with the empire. Two historical facts summarise the importance of the language issue. The first is Douglas Hyde's 1892 speech, 'The Necessity of De-Anglicising Ireland;' the second, the subsequent apparition of the Gaelic League, a cultural association integrated mostly by Catholic teachers and writers, and some outstanding Protestant figures, whose central aim was to reinvigorate the Irish language.[8] The solution to this conundrum was to come from another English-speaking revivalist, W. B. Yeats, who argued that the essence in any national literature was encoded in its spirit, language being a secondary tool; it was, therefore, possible to 'build up a national literature which [would] be none the less Irish in spirit for being English in language' (qted. in Innes, 99). W.B. Yeats' stance would be paralleled, years later, by 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' (qted in Walder, 52).

This study will, therefore, consider how the postcolonial issue of language choice is approached and determined by nineteenth-century Irish writer Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, demonstrating how the Dublin-born writer's stance on language actually predates W.B. Yeats' assertion. To do so, this paper will first examine the different approaches which have been traditionally considered in terms of language deployment in postcolonial countries, as different critics have provided varied and differing approaches to the

question; it will subsequently ponder the cultural context of nineteenth-century Ireland, with a special emphasis on the different ethnic and religious sensitivities, and the role of the incipient Irish nationalism. This will constitute the background against which J.S. Le Fanu's perceptions and approaches to the language conundrum will be gauged and which will be reflected in the final analysis of two of his short narratives, 'The Quare Gander' and 'An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street.' As the analysis will unveil, J.S. Le Fanu's deployment of language predates that of contemporary postcolonial writers' techniques in appropriating and abrogating English as a postcolonial tool.

Literature Review

Boehmer asserts that colonial discourse 'can be taken to refer to that collection of symbolic practices, included textual codes and conventions and implied meanings, which 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' (48). This 'bizarre and apparently untranslatable strangeness' which Boehmer mentions, stems from the necessity colonisers felt to adapt and understand a foreign medium. Nevertheless, the Irish case further problematizes this issue. Language is not only a powerful communication tool, but it can also be employed for domination. It is hardly surprising, then, that 'the issue of language is one of the most hotly debated topics among postcolonial writers, critics and readers' (Innes, 97).

Broadly speaking, the question which postcolonial writers try to resolve is which language should be employed in literary endeavours. For some, the solution to this problem is to be found in a return to native languages while others, such as the critic Homi Bhabha, or writers like Wilson Harris, have chosen what is known as 'cultural

syncreticity,' in which 'Received history is tampered with, rewritten, and realigned from the point of view of the victims of its destructive progress'.[9] This is a complex issue, in which different answers have been provided depending on the situation of the different postcolonial countries. In countries in which an indigenous language is readily available, like India or many African countries, writing exclusively in the native tongue has been a recurrent claim, given there is a feasible option to the colonisers' language. However, critics of this alternative have contended that by so doing, the syncretic nature of post-colonial societies is being denied (Ashcroft, 30).

This is still an ongoing debate for many postcolonial countries, a riddle which is mainly focused on the language issue, without forgetting that this also implies a debate on the suitability of Western literary genres to express their (post) colonial situation. The fact that this debate is carried out even within the same cultural and spatial spheres, with very often differing approaches, is an indicator of the extent of the discussion and its literary repercussions, and in this J. S. Le Fanu is no exception. Regardless of this dilemma, the problem for a vast majority of Irish writers was (and still is) that they were condemned to using the language of the coloniser, Irish simply not being a viable option. The constant decline of the language since, at least, the previous century, was only paralleled by the spread of literacy among the poorer classes. Despite its literary past, Irish was irreversibly becoming an oral, mainly rural, language. This, together with the introduction of the National Education System, accelerated the effective disappearance of Irish from an increasingly more urban society. Despite the English colonial system not contributing to it protection, it would be an understatement to assert that the imposition English as the official language was the sole cause of such decline. The ancient Irish tongue was perceived as an impediment to progress by many sectors in society, an artefact

from the past eliciting the curiosity of scholars but a hindrance to progress. As Curtis explains,

> 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.[10]

Hardly a better representative of this can be found than the fact that O'Connell, himself a native Irish speaker, strongly advocated for the implementation of English as the national tongue. Recent scholarship has proven how this social rejection of the language was well grounded before the Famine took place, and that this acted more as a catalyst, accelerating the process. All these factors together caused that by 1851 there were just 1.5 million Irish speakers left, of whom just 319,000 were monoglots.[11]

Ironically enough, it would be a Protestant element and not a Catholic one which would save the language from extinction. In their need to justify the incipient nation by looking back on its Gaelic past, practitioners of the incipient Protestant cultural nationalism founded what has been termed as Celticism. For the greatest part of the nineteenth century, the question of the Celtic origins of Ireland was central to intellectual debates. It was also a useful tool as it allowed the Patriots, 'a movement within the politically-enfranchised, English-descended, Protestant community, who came to see themselves as the Irish nation at odds with Britain' (Murphy 12) to mark a difference with the English, '[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'.[12] In turn, the Ascendancy, the Protestant ruling class who could trace their domination back to the Battle of the Boyne (1690) and the

subsequent land confiscation which would enrich them,[13] saw their opportunity to ascribe themselves to this differentiating factor and embraced Celtic nationalism as a survival mechanism (Murphy, 41). Paradoxically, Celticism was also used to reinforce British rule in Ireland in the same way Orientalism had been deployed in the East. Suffice as an example the popularity gained by the theories put forward by Matthew Arnold equalling Oriental and Celtic cultures, and thus levelling them to a child-like nature. In *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), Arnold explains how the Celtic race cannot aspire to self-rule as they have child-like qualities and would be in need of guidance. This proved to be a new point of friction in the always complex English-Irish relations; impelled by their Teutonic character, the English felt compelled to take responsibility of the Irish, shepherding them through the conundrums of history. Despite their blandness for Victorian standards, Arnold's views were still stealthy, after all, it is 'easier to want to rule a people whom one can think of as likeable and amenable that as unpleasant and resistant' (Murphy, 48).

In spite of all this insidiousness, Celticism proved to be a force for cultural cohesion, as it fostered the usage of the Irish tongue, 'Celticism [...] had turned firstly into a mode of delimiting Irish action before finally becoming a programme for building cultural cohesion' (Murphy, 41). Celticism was, however, a scholarly product, mainly indebted to James Macpherson's 1760 translations from the Gaelic and their subsequent discovery as forgery. It was this last fact which prompted a more methodical and in-depth scholarly study of Irish texts, delivering works like Joseph Cooper Walker's *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards* (1786). Returning to the language questions, the fact remains that most of these scholars had to rely on connoisseurs of the Irish tongue—usually of a Gaelic Catholic background—as the Anglo-Irish did not have a knowledge of Gaelic. The paradox remains that Celticism, based on the Irish language and Celtic traditions, was

mainly in the hands of the Anglo-Irish, whose lack of knowledge of Irish was more than evident, and was, therefore, made manifest mainly through English.

The nineteenth century saw the widespread emergence of Celtic societies such as the Gaelic Society of Dublin (1807), the Iberno-Celtic Society (1818) or the Ulster Gaelic Society (1830). Similarly, 1785 was the year the Royal Irish Academy was founded to form a 'body for scholars in a number of different areas, which set about building up a library of Irish manuscripts' (Murphy, 43-4). The fashion for collection and antiquarianism, so present in the writings of J.S. Le Fanu and itself part of a wider, European trend for the scholarly, found its replication in numerous collections of Irish manuscripts such as the RIA's, partly possible thanks to the liberality of the government, which contributed to the funding of such collections. Leerssen, in an article entitled 'Anglo-Irish Patriotism and its European Context,' contextualizes the attempt to use manuscripts and languages by cultural nationalists. Celticism was, therefore, part of the ongoing dialogue on the nature of Irish national identity throughout the country and an early example of postcolonial debates on the language question. The debate had, as always in Ireland, two differing views, which Leerssen defines as pagan primitivism and Christian medievalism at a scholarly level[14] and which were replicated in politics, respectively, in the division between nationalist and democratic Catholics, and unionist and aristocratic Protestants, who perceived Irish Celtic heritage as paying tribute to aristocratic loyalties, a fact which imbues J.S. Le Fanu's narratives.

As has already been noted, the study of Irish—pioneered by German linguists such as Rudolf Thurneysen in the latter part of the eighteen hundreds—was also a task which the incipient Protestant cultural nationalism undertook, even if this was realized in the abundance of translations from the old Irish manuscripts. Ferguson's own translations of

Irish poetry constitute an attempt at providing, in language, a political fusion which was difficult to attain otherwise,

> By rendering the text in an English at once civil and faithful, the political union of Britain and Ireland, or Anglo-Irish and Gael, can be re-enacted at the level of discourse. The English verbal form draws the uncouth Gaelic content into the universalising sphere of modernity, while being itself rooted and replenished by the Gaelic poetry's more robust energies.[15]

Although more critical of Ferguson's work, Peter Denman also comments on the achievement implied by '[w]riting against a background of tension between an almost lost Irish tradition and an imperious English one'.[16]

However, and despite this scholarly work, for the majority of the landed Protestant classes, Irish was as foreign a language as Russian, if not more, for it did not enjoy the social prestige that other European languages might have enjoyed at the time, being a tongue associated with peasants and the rural world at its best, or with the threat of a Gaelic revolt at its worst. William Carleton addressed this issue—even if tangentially—in *Father Butler and the Lough Dearg Pilgrim: Being Sketches of Irish Manners* (1829). In this story, the narrator is a Protestant landlord who—as Moynahan highlights—'is unusual among early nineteenth-century estate owners, though certainly not unique, in being able to understand spoken Irish' (Moynahan 50). Interest in Irish—Old Irish, especially—was, however, widespread during the nineteenth century, being an intrinsic part of the incipient Celticism, which—as a movement—cannot be solely associated with the nationalist cause, for it was also popular among the Protestant, pro-Union classes. It did contribute to raise the interest in the Irish tongue and to encourage its preservation through the publication of scholarly material and the apparition of Celtic societies of various kinds all over the country (Murphy 41-8).

There is, however, a further approach to language usage which needs to be considered—language appropriation, which is a recurring theme in many postcolonial literatures (Innes 97). As has already been noted, W.B Yeats defined the approach to be followed in the Irish case: using English as spoken by the Irish. This was, nonetheless, hardly an innovative step to take. It can, in fact, be traced back, at least, to the beginning of the nineteenth century, a century inaugurated by Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800). There were significant differences between Edgeworth's usage of Hiberno-English and Yeats' suggestion that the English language be used, however. When Anglo-Irish writers began to use Hiberno-English, it was mostly to represent a particular type of Irishman, especially 'those social groups who were illiterate and ill at ease with standard English',[17] that is, mostly the Catholic majority on the isle. Fears of a violent uprising which would threaten the Anglo-Irish hold on power had prompted some Anglo-Irish writers to present the Catholic population in a mocking light, if only to dispel such fear. Thus, the usage of the vernacular becomes 'sign of moral inferiority'.[18] Despite the durability of such humorous depictions in Anglo-Irish writing, not all authors sought to ridicule the Catholic population. The next section will explore how J.S. Le Fanu, while deploying similar humorous representations, adapted the vernacular to debunk such a perception of the Catholic Irish.

The Language question in J.S. Le Fanu's Work – 'The Quare Gander' and 'An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street'

As a member of the Protestant classes, J. S. Le Fanu is no different in this. There is no proof that he was acquainted with the language, although his sister Catherine taught English to the Gaelic-speaking tenants in the district,[19] and a few scattered Irish

expressions can be found in some of his stories. Although for different reasons, J. S. Le Fanu's attitude can be aligned to that of J.C. Mangan[20] and could only be classified as indifference. Nowhere is it proven that he was averse to the Irish language; the opposite, however, is equally true.

This does not mean that J. S. Le Fanu did not attach any importance to the issue of language nor that he did not concern himself with problematics raised by Celticism. As a member of the Protestant classes, his stance should be viewed in Maria Edgeworth's terms. Suffice as an example the figure of Terry in 'The Ghost and the Bone-Setter,' which owes much of its characterisation to that of Edgeworth's Thady in *Castle Rackrent* (1800). A plausible explanation for such characterization is the idea of comic relief as a way to dispel fears of Catholic retrieval and as a way to propitiate an understanding of the Catholic other (Moynahan 22). This can be taken a step further in terms of language.

It is language, in fact, which divides the bulk of J. S. Le Fanu's work into two, clearly demarcating his more serious gothic stories from his more humorous ones. This coincides, broadly speaking, with the Dubliner's attempt to portray Catholic peasants (pagan primitivism) and Protestant higher classes (scholarly medievalism) in a different light. As with many other features of J. S. Le Fanu's prose fiction, this fact tends to wear off as his career came to a close. In fact, his last collection of stories, *In a Glass Darkly,* does not contain any of the features which can be attributed to the Irish comic tradition as started by Edgeworth. This is explicable form a purely market point of view. J. S. Le Fanu stopped setting his stories in Ireland right at the time when the English market ceased to show a clear interest in them, and thus began to adapt his settings and plots to contemporary likes.[21] Thus, *Uncle Silas* is but a re-working of 'A Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess,' with 'the introduction of Protestant contexts and criminal villains' (McCormack 79). Nonetheless, many of his stories—especially, the earlier

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ones—are set in an Irish context and feature Irish characters. As already mentioned, J.S. Le Fanu's short fiction can, according to this pattern, be divided into two broad categories—his more serious Gothic tales and his more comic ones. Nevertheless, both share a common characteristic, which ties in well with the already mentioned approach carried out by J.C. Mangan (Jorge 2016). It is always peasant characters who find their language clearly identified with an Irish brogue. There is a clear link, then, between language (Hiberno-English) and class. This is hardly surprising. As Brian Earls shows in 'Bulls, Blunders and Bloothers: An Examination of the Irish Bull' (1988), the figure of the Irish bull as a comic element has been 'consistently associated with Irish people speaking in English and most prominently with the social groups included within the category "the lower Irish"' (1). A bull is a brief spoken utterance involving a contradiction between two or more of its components of which 'the speaker is unaware but which is perceived by the person who has recorded the anecdote and by his readers' (Earls 1). Such traits feature more prominently in the Dubliner's lighter Gothic stories, which sometimes give the impression of being somewhere between the folktale, the anecdote and the ghost story, never clearly aligning with any at all.

J.S. Le Fanu's 'The Quare Gander' serves as a perfect illustration; included in *The Purcell Papers*, and first published in October 1840 (McCormack 83), the story narrates the misadventures of Terence Mooney, 'an honest boy and well to do; an' he rinted the biggest farm on this side iv the Galties'.[22] Terence had several ganders but there was one to which he became so attached that he 'would not allow it to be plucked any more, an' kep it from that time out for love an' affection—just all as one like one iv his childer' (Le Fanu, *The Purcell Papers* 268). This attachment causes the people in the area to start gossiping about the origins of the gander, 'an' some of them said it was the divil, an' more iv them that it was a fairy' (Le Fanu, *The Purcell Papers* 268). This determines

Terence to call on Jer Garvan, the fairy doctor, who—after examining the gander—pronounces his verdict, assuring that it is none other than Terence's own father, Terence Mooney Sr. Not willing to believe him, Terence Jr. expresses his doubts, to which the fairy doctor replies that he will make it speak that night, ''An' if he don't spake to-night,' says he, 'or gother himself out iv the place,' says he, 'put him into the hamper airily, and sind him in the cart,' says he, 'straight to Tipperary, to be sould for ating […] an' my name isn't Jer Garvan,' says he, 'if he doesn't spake out before he's half-way'' (Le Fanu, *The Purcell Papers* 270-1). It so happens that the two men start talking and drinking poteen, after which Terence mistakenly falls asleep into the poultry hamper. The day after, two boys under the command of Jer take the hamper to be sold in Tipperary, and—as the fairy doctor had predicted—Terence starts to speak and to ask to be let out, only it is Terrence Jr. and not Sr. The scene, reminiscent of a comedy of errors, is worth quoting,

> 'There's no use in portending,' says the boy, 'the gandher's spakin', glory be to God,' says he.
>
> 'Let me out, you murdherers,' says Terence.
>
> 'In the name iv the blessed Vargin,' says Thady, 'an' iv all the holy saints, hould yer tongue, you unnatheral gandher,' says he.
>
> 'Who's that, that dar to call me nick-names?' says Terence inside, roaring wid the fair passion, 'let me out, you blasphamious infiddles,' says he, 'or by this crass I'll stretch ye,' says he.
>
> 'In the name iv all the blessed saints in heaven,' says Thady, 'who the divil are ye?'
>
> 'Who the divil would I be, but Terence Mooney,' says he. 'It's myself that's in it, you unmerciful bliggards,' says he, 'let me out, or by the holy, I'll get out in spite iv yes,' says he, 'an' by jaburs, I'll wallop yes in arnest,' says he.

'It's ould Terence, sure enough,' says Thady, 'isn't it cute the fairy doctor found him out,' says he. (Le Fanu, *The Purcell Papers* 273)

The boys, convinced that the gander is none other than Terence Sr., decide to take him to a priest, who—on hearing Terence speak—assures that he will 'read some rale sthrong holy bits out iv it [the Bible] … an' do you get a rope and put it round the hamper … an' it's no matther if I don't make the spirit come out iv it' (Le Fanu, *The Purcell Papers* 274). The two boys do, of course, what they are told to, and on hanging the hamper, both Terence and the gander come out, falling with a great splash on the river, to the priest's surprise who 'giv his horse one dig iv the spurs, an' before he knew where he was, in he went, horse an' all, a-top iv them, an' down to the bottom' (Le Fanu, *The Purcell Papers* 274). Once the mystery has been solved, they all decide to keep it a secret, to prevent people from laughing at them. The gander, of course, was kept alive till Terence died.

Suffice the extracts quoted to show how J. S. Le Fanu attempts to portray the speech of the Catholic Irish. Representations of Hiberno-English abound, ranging from dialectal pronunciations ('iv' for 'of,' 'id' for 'would,' 'giv' for 'gave,' the aspirated representation of both 't' and 'd,' as in 'gandher' and 'matther') to the corruption of words from standard English ('blasphamious,' 'bliggards'). This brief recount of the story presented above should be sufficient to show how the story moves between the folktale, the anecdotal and the Gothic story, with a strong inclination towards the first two. However, the story is not a mere pastoral representation of Irish countryside life. Far from it, the story encapsulates the Catholic Irish and it does so through the usage of language.

At this stage, it is worth remembering that the story was intended mainly for a Protestant middle and upper reader, and that it was first published in the *DUM*, whose ideological concerns—at least in an early stage—were 'the crucial role of the Established

Church in Ireland, the treachery and error of Catholicism, the folly of the liberal Whig government in Westminster, the need for religious education, and, in startling ways, the possibility of the repeal of the Union'.[23] J. S. Le Fanu shows the Catholic Irish as close to that child-like stage which the coloniser had deployed to justify the colonial quest (Boehmer 76). In this story, the Catholics are presented as superstitious and ignorant—hence the mispronunciation of certain 'formal' words—, tricked by 'fairy doctors' into believing a gander could be the soul of a deceased father. Such representations could be easily seen as instances of the stage Irishman so popular during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Earls 7). However, what could be taken to be a piece of comic abuse has, in fact, a much deeper reading, for superstition is so entwined that the whole community partakes of it. As has been seen, when the two boys set about carrying the father/gander in the hamper—which, in fact, contains Terence and the gander—and they hear the sound of a human voice, they instantly assume it to be that of the deceased Terence Mooney Sr. J.S. Le Fanu's criticism delves even deeper, for the Catholic Church is also affected by this superstition, and shown in a remarkably dark light. The priest the two boys take the gander to is completely taken in by superstition, even though such an act would be contrary to Catholic dogma. Proof of this is that he is so taken aback by the apparition of Terence Jr., that the last closing comic scene in the story which has been narrated above takes place. This argument is further reinforced by the priest's speech, which comes out as no better than any of the other characters in the story. Even the spiritual leaders of the community are shown as unavailing, superstitious and ignorant.

However, one should ponder the question of whether J. S. Le Fanu really is criticising the Catholic Irish as a group. From letters and personal papers left behind by the Dublin writer, it can be gathered that he was not totally opposed to the idea of Catholics gaining more access to certain spheres of public life. On a letter addressed to

his cousin, J. S. Le Fanu expressed his views that 'My sympathies are all in favour of a liberal Roman Catholic as Chancellor.' However, he was still a member of the, by then, waning Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, which led him to conclude his letter by assuring that such a measure 'will stir Irish society to its depths' (McCormack 217), as in fact happened. His sympathetic views on the liberal Roman Catholics, together with his idealization of and interest in earlier Jacobites with whom he identified—especially on an earlier stage—should lead one to reconsider the criticism vested in his stories in a different light. This is especially true if one considers that these principles would better ascribed to the traits of Celticism already mentioned. Such a stance on the social condition and aspirations of the Catholic Irish provides a stark contrast with that of other Anglo-Irish writers, especially Maria Edgeworth, who 'believed that the lower classes should not partake in governing'.[24] It is not illogical to think, then, that even if both writers used the Irish brogue to depict the Catholic Irish in a humorous manner, their ultimate objectives might have differed in purpose.

It is at this stage that one should remember that most of these stories were published in the *Dublin University Magazine*, whose views have already been exposed. Readers of this magazine still held themselves as the rulers of the country, a view which was—to a certain extent—true. A mixture of factors, then, might have been at play here. On the one hand, J.S. Le Fanu felt compelled to voice Protestant anxieties over Catholics and a possible Catholic takeover. It is thus that he might have put pen to paper to express things commonly held against them—their tendency to drunkenness, their superstitious customs, the erroneous beliefs. This would align with other nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish writers' representations of such instances of Irish brogue as Irish bulls, which were 'produced by speakers of Hiberno-English for an Anglo-Irish or English audience which made use of the standard language' (Earls 17). Such depictions were possible—and

successful—due to the different ethnic and social backgrounds of the Anglo-Irish and the Catholic Irish. However, it is now known—as possibly was for J.S. Le Fanu too—that these maladies attributed to the Irish Catholics were also shared by their Protestant counterparts, it being more a class symptom than a religious divide; such portrayals could be better interpreted as actions of comic relief than attacks on the subject portrayed (Moynahan 22). But J.S. Le Fanu's portrayal can also be reversed—by exposing the encapsulated perception the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy held of the Catholic Irish, the Dubliner is, *de facto*, turning tables for an encapsulated writing reveals much more of the reader's views than of the subject portrayed, so that 'the ideologues of Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland succumb to the very forms of superstition they excoriate'.[25] In other words, J.S. Le Fanu is stripping Protestant Ascendancy perceptions of the Catholic other as expressed in Protestant Celticism of their patronizing cover only to show their real diminishing intent. This, in fact, reinforces and complements J.S. Le Fanu's *other* writings of the Catholic Irish, in which they are shown as noble even if doomed, as can been seen when analysing characterisation in such stories as 'The Last Heir of Castle Connor' (Jorge 2016), a line of interpretation which better aligns with J.S. Le Fanu's contemporary interest in Catholic Celticism.

One does not have to leave the margins of the story in question to refute the perception of the Irish Catholic in such a negative light. While it is true that J.S. Le Fanu was trying to portray vernacular speech in his stories, and that this portrayal may not transmit the Irish Catholic in a positive light, one should not obviate the fact that all the stories contained in *The Purcell Papers* respond to a common structure and follow a similar logic. The usage of embedded narrators, in this case, provides a different reading. It should not be overlooked that it is Father Purcell, a Catholic priest, who introduces all the stories in the collection, giving them coherence through a common narrator. While

the usage of embedded narrations dilutes the story—questioning the idea of veracity and identity—, it also provides the reader with a different source of interpretation of the Catholic Irish. In this case, Purcell is riding through Tipperary as the sun is setting, which provokes in him a particular reflective mood. In such a state, he soliloquizes,

> 'Alas, my country! What a mournful beauty is thine. Dressed in loveliness and laughter, there is mortal decay at thy heart: sorrow, sin, and shame have mingled thy cup of misery. Strange rulers have bruised thee, and laughed thee to scorn, and they have made all thy sweetness bitter. Thy shames and sins are the austere fruits of thy miseries, and thy miseries have been poured out upon thee by foreign hands. Alas, my stricken country! Clothed with this most pity-moving smile, with this most unutterably mournful loveliness, thou sore-grieved, thou desperately-beloved! Is there for thee, my country, a resurrection?' (Le Fanu, *The Purcell Papers* 266)

This rhapsody, as Purcell himself calls it, contrasts powerfully with the remaining parts of the story, both in tone and in choice of language; in addition, the fact that J.S. Le Fanu chooses two priestly figures as the opening and closing frames cannot be accidental. This usage of elevated language has several justifications. 'The Quare Gander' is the penultimate story in the collection, and as such Purcell is taking his last leave of his readers, therefore, explaining his choice of a more mournful style. More subtly, however, this paragraph also summarizes J.S. Le Fanu's attitude towards his mother country, more in line with the idealization embedded in the Celticism movements, especially in its Catholic manifestations. Ultimately, however, Purcell is living proof that not all Irish Catholics are ignorant, superstitious and prone to drunkenness, since Purcell's language is consistently poetic all through the collection, thus questioning the widespread assumption of 'Irish people at the mercy of unbridled lust, superstition, and endemic

violence' (Gibbons 34), and subverting colonial misperceptions of the Irish as a nation in need of external governance.

But Purcell is no common priest. In fact, he belongs to the old school, being of Continental education—and of a Jacobite bent—, and, overall, a literary man. As Sage explicates, 'Purcell, a figure from the past, is given credibility as a witness to national tradition, against the negative examples of the modern priests […] who might well be part of what the *DUM*'s readership regarded as the divisive, politically nationalist, campaign of Daniel O'Connell for repeal'.[26] This contrasts powerfully with the superstitious, illiterate priest figure which makes up the closing lines in 'The Quare Gander.' The figure of Purcell, with his heightened language and rhetorical figures of speech, align the usage of vernacular with an idealized and noble Celt. The divide J.S. Le Fanu is establishing is one of class rather than of religion. Both Purcell and those characters connected with the old Catholic nobility are linked in the same way—they have both received Continental education, and can, consequently, show a good command of standard English to verse the Irish landscape and its Celtic traditions and inheritance.

The usage of the vernacular in J.S. Le Fanu, then, is linked to a certain feeling of comic relief, conjuring up the fears of a takeover by the Catholic masses as led by O'Connell, much in the same style of Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800), written to voice her anxieties 'about her family's relations with the native Irish and about the possibility of a peasant uprising' (Egenolf 849). However, as J.S. Le Fanu progressed in his writings, the usage of the vernacular—always associated to the lower Catholic Irish— lost its comic tint but retained its supernatural imprint. For the most part, as well, J.S. Le Fanu retained this class difference. This can be better appreciated in 'An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street,' first published in the *DUM* in 1853. The story is set in Dublin, on the street that gives its name to the title of the story. To be more

precise, the action takes place in a house which 'had seen years and changes enough to have contracted all that mysterious and saddened air, at once exciting and depressing, which belongs to most old mansions'.[27] The setting is, therefore, an ideal one for a ghost story, as the narrator has already assured his readers. He introduces the story but is also one of the main characters, together with his cousin Tom. Both being medicine students at Trinity College—and, consequently, of Protestant ascent—, they decide to occupy one of the houses in Aungier Street, 'a move which would accomplish the double end of settling us nearer to our lecture-rooms and to our amusements, and of relieving us from the weekly charge of rent for our lodgings' (Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Stories* 68). Clearly, the choice of profession was intended to heighten the feeling of the supernatural, given that they are both men of science, even if the narrator 'had never pretended to conceal from Tom my superstitious weakness' (Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Stories* 70). These were, however, soon to be proven true, or so the narrative leads us to think. Upon their arrival in the house, first Tom and then the narrator begin to feel and see the figure of a man, 'That awful countenance, which living o dying, I can never forget' (Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Stories* 78). However, J.S. Le Fanu displays, in this story, his use of the loophole technique—their 'seeing' of this terrifying figure is always partial, ambiguous, and subject to external causes (among them the influence of liquor); thus, on seeing the spirit for the first time, the narrator himself wonders 'If the apparition of the night before was an ocular delusion of my fancy sporting with the dark outlines of our cupboard, and if its horrid eyes were nothing but a pair of inverted teacups' (Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Stories* 75). Further to this, he admits to having 'adopted the practice recommended by the wisdom of my ancestors, and kept my spirits up by pouring spirits down' (Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Stories* 73), while on the third and last night the apparition manifests

itself, the narrator assures that 'My courage was ebbing. Punch, however, which makes beasts of so many, made a man of me again' (Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Stories* 76). J.S. Le Fanu's technique leaves a door open to a logical explanation. The narrator might have been influenced by the Gothic atmosphere of an old mansion and Tom's delusions. These would, then, have been encouraged and heightened by his indulgence in alcohol. Be it as it may, in the end, both Tom and the narrator decide to leave the house and to look for lodgings somewhere else. However, this happens after Tom has narrated his particular encounter with the spirit, which he does in the presence of the old maid who assists them, a 'handmaid, a mature girl of two-and-fifty' (Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Stories* 82). It is at the very end of the story that the narrative is thus handed down to a second narrator, an Irish maid, who explains the origins of the spirit.

This last part of the narration is different both in content and in the way it is expressed. There is an interlinking Catholic Irish-superstition which is expressed and made manifest through language, and which contrasts powerfully with the first part of the narrative. If in the first part of the narration, the ghostly apparition was put into question by the scientific mind of a Protestant, college-educated man, in the second half there is no real doubt expressed. The 'mature girl' expresses no dissent with the tradition of the hanging judge as passed down to her by her own mother, and she goes on to relate why the hanging judge had become an apparition,

> 'Oh, then, how would I know?' she answered. 'But it must be a wondherful long
> time ago, for the housekeeper was an ould woman, with a pipe in her mouth, and
> not a tooth left, an better nor eighty years ould when my mother was first married;
> and the said she was a rale buxom, fine-dressed woman when the ould Judge come
> to his end; an', indeed, my mother's not far from eighty years ould herself this

day; and what made it worse for the unnatural ould villain, God rest his soul, to frighten the little girl out the world the way he did, was what was mostly thought and believed by everyone. My mother says how the poor little crathure was his own child; for he was by all account an ould villain every way, an' the hangin'est judge that ever was known in Ireland's ground.' (Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Stories* 83)

Although here J.S. Le Fanu is not displaying such a deep representation of the vernacular, he does establish a profound difference between the lower-class Catholic Irish and the higher-class Protestants. The comic tint is gone but the link to superstition remains. This, however, can be given a very different interpretation. J.S. Le Fanu might well be trying to eliminate the barrier which demarcates Catholics as superstitious, thus subverting colonial discourse. Although in the end the narrator goes on to recollect all the happenings which took place in Judge Horrocks' house as if he was a mere collector of interesting stories—'And she certainly did relate a very strange story, which so piqued my curiosity, that I took occasion to visit the ancient lady, her mother, from whom I learned many very curious particulars' (Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Stories* 84)—, the fact remains that both he and his cousin Tom—both college-educated and Protestant—left the house due to their believing it to be haunted. The Catholic voice is merely explaining the possible origins of the haunting but, ultimately, it is the Protestant, scientific man who pens it, assuring his readers that he 'tell[s] you simply how it all happened' (Le Fanu *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Stories* 68), in other words, he takes it to be a narration of the truth. In this sense, J.S. Le Fanu is contradicting the mainstreams of colonial discourse for it is the discourse of superstition which ultimately dominates the narration, entrapping the coloniser/settler narrator, thus subverting 'the ways in which knowledge is governed and owned by Europeans to reinforce power, and

to exclude or dismiss the knowledge which natives might claim to have' (Innes 9). It is the Protestant mind which is ultimately dominated by superstition, a fact which was—at least in theory—a feature of the Catholic Irish, who were seen as 'a people mired in dirt, superstition and a subhuman lifestyle, [being] a source of pollution' (Gibbons 41). This discourse of contamination, in which the Irish race would degrade the Saxons, is here reversed as both the narrator, Tom, and the supposed apparition are all of Protestant—and, therefore, colonial—ascent. Their believing in it, as well as their decision to escape what can be seen as their collective past, is prior to the explanation given by the Irish maid, who is, in the fiction of the narrative, a mere transmitter.

Conclusions

Language configures a key, defining element in J.S. Le Fanu's short narratives. While the Dublin writer seems to maintain and draw on distinctions established by colonial narratives, presenting Catholic characters in a child-like manner, prompt to superstitions and gullible, such portrayal is deceptive. A deeper analysis unveils the different elements at play in J.S. Le Fanu's writings, especially when the context in which his stories were written is taken into account. Although a certain degree of comic relief can be observed, this should be understood as a criticism of J.S. Le Fanu's own class and their prejudices against the Catholic majority. Stripped from the glamour of Protestant Celticism and the patronizing views it lent itself to, J.S. Le Fanu's short stories reveal the Ascendancy's contempt for their Catholic counterparts, who were perceived as naïve, brutish and uneducated, ideas all associated to their speech and vernacular mannerisms.

However, via textual intervention, J.S. Le Fanu manages to reclaim and vindicate a Catholic past and stance, and does so via language. It is through the figure of Father

Purcell, a Catholic priest and the main narrator of the stories contained in *The Purcell Papers* that J.S. Le Fanu aligns himself with Catholic Celticism and a reinstatement of Irish identity. The figure of Father Purcell allows J.S. Le Fanu to criticise his own class from a safe distance while simultaneously showing a Catholic figure as educated, deep, profound and—most remarkably—capable of elevated, accurate and poetic diction. Father Purcell personifies J.S. Le Fanu's aspirations in terms of language.

This idea is further reinforced in the second story analysed, where the Dublin writer manages to level the two seemingly opposing views on Celticism: Catholic pagan primitivism and Protestant medieval scholarly interest. The narrative structure and the differing characterisations in the story, especially carried out via language deployment, allow for a questioning of the tenets of Protestant Celticism, which portrayed itself as educated and not prone to superstitions nor mystifications while showing Catholic Celticism as the exact opposite. However, J.S. Le Fanu's story manages to reverse these established roles—in the end, it is the Catholic maid who transmits the facts of the past and does so in her Hiberno-English vernacular. Simultaneously, it is the educated Ascendancy representatives who pen the story, thus tacitly acknowledging the credibility of the narrated facts.

J.S. Le Fanu, then, appropriates and reinterprets colonial conventions as expressed in Protestant Celticism to debase the colonial claims of Protestant racial superiority and Catholic inferiority, thus reinstating the national spirit. His usage of language to develop his criticism of his own social class and to vindicate the Catholic Irish predates that of later Irish and other postcolonial writers and constitutes an early example of language appropriation for national reconstruction.

Notes

[1] Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back* (New York: Rutledge, 1989), 7.

[2] Gina Wisker, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 107.

[3] Dennis Walder, *Post-Colonial Literatures in English* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1998), 42.

[4] C. L. Innes, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 97.

[5] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 199.

[6] Julian Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish: the Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 43.

[7] Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland, 1750-1850* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 155.

[8] James H. Murphy, *Ireland: A Social, Cultural and Literary History, 1791-1891* (Dublin: Four Courts Press ltd., 2003), 47.

[9] Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* (Oxon: Routledge, 2001), 34.

[10] Edmund Curtis, *A History of Ireland* (Norwich: Methuen, 1965), 362.

[11] Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998. War, Peace and Beyond* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 83.

[12] Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: a Literary and Intellectual History (*New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 9.

[13] Kurt Derek Bowen, *Protestants in a Catholic State: Ireland's Privileged Minority* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983), 8.

[14] Joep Th. Leerssen, "Irish Studies and Orientalism: Ireland and the Orient," in *Oriental Prospects: Western Literature and the Lure of the West*, ed. C. C. Barfoot and Theo D'haen (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), 161-73 (68-156).

[15] Terry Eagleton, *Scholars and Rebels in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 67.

[16] Peter Denman, *Samuel Ferguson: The Literary Achievement* (Maryland: Barnes and Noble, 1990), 179.

[17] Brian Earls, "Bulls, Blunders and Bloothers: An Examination of the Irish Bull," *Béaloideas* 56 (1988):1-92 (4).

[18] Claire Wills, "Language Politics, Narrative, Political Violence," in *Oxford Literary Review* 13 (1991): 20-60 (21).

[19] W.J. McCormack, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1991), 62.

[20] Richard Jorge, The Irish Gothic Short Story in the Nineteenth Century: J.C. Mangan, J.S. Le Fanu and Bram Stoker. 2016. University of Santiago de Compostela, PhD Dissertation.

[21] In fact, his deployment of English settings was motivated by an editorial decision which prompted him to write stories in "an English setting and of modern times." (McCormack 204)

[22] Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *The Purcell Papers* (Gloucester: Dodo Press, 2007), 267.

[23] Wayne E. Hall, Dialogues in the Margin. A Study of the Dublin University Magazine (Gerrard Cross: Colin Smythe, 2000), 53.

[24] Susan B. Egenolf, "Maria Edgeworth in Blackface: Castle Rackrent and the Irish Rebellion of 1798," in *ELH* 72:4 (2005): 845-869 (851).

[25] Luke Gibbons, Gaelic Gothic. Race, Colonization, and Irish Culture (Galway: Arlen House, 2004), 57.

[26] Victor Sage, *Le Fanu's Gothic: the Rhetoric of Darkness* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 12.

[27] Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *Madam Crowl's Ghost and Other Stories* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994), 69.