Chapter 5

Conclusion- Styles in Oxen of the Sun as Minority Discourse

In the ‘Oxen’, Joyce attempts to articulate the ontological status of a group – the colonized – that was not done earlier. “Nothing can describe well enough the extraordinary deficiency of the colonized” (17) Albert Memmi writes, pointing to the colonial subject’s under-representation; Joyce without question succeeds in figuring this “deficiency” by upending traditional notions of “text,” “identity,” and “language.” In the end, Joyce subverts the very medium in which he writes: he appropriates the tongue of the colonizer in order to re-establish himself in the aftermath of colonization.

Joyce was decidedly political. His politics have a trajectory that sometimes perplexed the reader for it was subtle and specific. For Joyce, being politically informed meant understanding the various discourses current in the time that his book was placed in and not in playing to the various binaries these discourses represented. His politics did not compromise on the aesthetic philosophy that he steadfastly believed in. In composing the ‘Oxen’ episode Joyce was well prepared for the onerous task he was executing. He had a scheme already in place; his notebook had all the sources he was going to use, identified in different coloured ink and he was sure how the original sources were going to be transformed. After the entire and elaborate planning Joyce decided to make this particular episode the most challenging one in the whole of Ulysses. In a letter to his editor, Harriet Weaver Shaw dated 25th February 1920, Joyce explains, “I am working now on the Oxen of
the Sun the most difficult episode in an Odyssey, I think, to interpret and to execute…” (L 30) Furthermore in a letter to B.W. Huebsch on 22 June 1920, Joyce confesses “my last chapter Oxen of the Sun cost me about 1000 hours’ work so that I need a rest.” (L 34) This was the magnitude of the whole enterprise.

It is evident as to why he needed 1000 man hours to execute the episode. This is the birthing episode and what is given birth to is a voice and a language that is minor by virtue of being Irish, but still manages to be heard because it is the English language that is being used. Joyce sows the seed of the language and style of *Finnegans Wake* in the ‘Oxen’ passage especially at the end of the episode, elaborates the style in the ‘Penelope’ passage, which is the last episode of *Ulysses* and perfects the style in *Finnegans Wake*. The language is created out of a need to liberate the Irish from colonial shackles and is born from the laughter of a hybrid group who resemble Fannon’s ‘mimic men’: the men who are invested with the power to menace the colonizer because they threaten to disclose the ambivalence of the discourse of colonialism which the use of stereotypes anxiously try to conceal. Hearing their language returning through the mouth of the colonized, the colonizers are faced with the worrying threat of resemblance between colonizers and colonized.

The styles used in the ‘Oxen’ episode become as Bhabha concedes a site of anti-colonial resistance in that it presents an unconquerable challenge to the entire structure of the discourse of colonialism. By speaking English, the colonized had not only succumbed to the power of the colonizer but also challenged the representation which attempts to fix and define them. It is precisely in this treatment of not merely focusing on the representations in the text but also by exploring the context within which the text is situated that makes this research work mark a departure from a
typical postcolonial reading to an attempt at a minority discourse reading as suggested by Benita Parry and Abdul JanMohammed.

Between 1880 and 1920, English cultural nationalism had a significant impact on many different spheres of English and Irish cultural life. Collini suggests that it is this period that first sees the appearance of the 'symbolic and emotionally charged selection of writing known as "English literature"'. This 'selection of writing' played a central role in the new politics of culture, becoming 'a crucial vehicle for establishing and negotiating a sense of national identity ... in increasingly official form' (347); from the 1880s onwards, it became a central symbolic expression of what Benedict Anderson calls the 'imagined community'(1991). Men and women of letters were increasingly concerned to define the English literary heritage and to construct a genealogy specifically of English literature. They also sought to disseminate the tradition they constructed, not the least in schools: the early publications of the English Association, for example, show how far it was concerned that children throughout the British Isles should be properly exposed to the 'national literature' (Gibson, Joyce’s 10).

English cultural nationalism in general and the 'Whig interpretation of literature' in particular were not merely intended for home consumption. They also had a global circulation. According to Chris Baldick, one of the principal motivating factors 'behind the movement for English studies' at the turn of the century was colonialism (72). From the India Act in 1853, there was a growing emphasis on 'officially encouraging the study of English literature for the good of the empire' (20). In Gauri Viswanathan's words, English not only came into its own in an age of colonialism, it also took on 'the imperial mission of educating and civilizing colonial
subjects'. In principle, both at home and abroad, the process was one of homogenization. Cultural historians argue that the nationalization of English culture was partly fuelled by an aspiration to erase the conflict or difference that stemmed from the ideas of Matthew Arnold. According to Collini, nationalization involved 'the softening of many of the political and religious divisions that had marked the first half of the [nineteenth] century' (347). Dodd suggests that the 'differences' most in question were those that had appeared to marginalize particular ethnic and social groups, like the Irish. Certainly, from an Irish point of view, the new English nationalism seemed to be both alien and profoundly suspect, for it projected a specious unity: where union was neither possible nor desirable (1).

The signs of English cultural nationalism were pervasively evident in turn-of-the-century Ireland: in school and university syllabuses, libraries and bookshops, newspapers and magazines, advertising, commercial and popular culture. In 1904, the year in which *Ulysses* is set, 'national efficiency' and various questions associated with it like the supposed 'physical deterioration' of the nation were live issues in both the serious and the popular English and Irish press. Joyce could hardly be unaware of the ideological formations in question. He encountered them repeatedly in the books he read as a reviewer in Dublin in the first years of the century. Alfred Ainger's book on Crabbe, which Joyce reviewed in 1903, was in the *English Men of Letters* series. At the back, it displayed the lists of the companion series *English Men of Action* and *Twelve English Statesmen*. More revealingly, at the back of James Anstie's *Colloquies of Common People*—which Joyce reviewed in the same year, along with Clive Phillips-Wolley's *Songs of an English Esau*—he would have found both titles advertised in Smith, Elder and Coo's new list. The dominant tone of the latter was set
by Conan Doyle's *The Great Boer War*, Sidney Lee's biography of Queen Victoria, and titles like *Nelson and his Captains* and *Wellington's Lieutenants*. Joyce repeatedly confronted the same ideological formation in his books in Trieste.

He had a range of books like the kind of series listed, including *Heinemann's Favourite Classics*, *Cassell's National Library*, and the *English Men of Letters*. He owned various books from the *Nelson Library of Notable Books*. It is also interesting to find key names in the cultural historians' discussions of the literary nationalism of the period in Joyce's library in Trieste like: Saintsbury, Raleigh, Skeat, Lee, Herford, Dover Wilson, John Morley, Stopford Brooke (Gibson, *Joyce's* 13).

The argument of this thesis is as follows: in the 'Oxen of the Sun' episode of *Ulysses*, Joyce works towards liberation from the colonial power and its culture through a style of English language evolved from the canonical writers but which finally assumes a shape that the colonized Irish can use without any inhibition. He also takes his revenge on the English colonizer by making the coloniser’s language not only talk back to them but also by perfecting it in *Finnegans Wake* to narrate an Irish story. There is a will to freedom and a will to justice, but also a recognition that the two do not necessarily coincide. Joyce's revenge gets much of its form from his concern with Irish culture as it was shaped and determined by English cultural nationalism 1880-1920 (and by certain Anglo-Irish variants of that nationalism).

Joyce makes this theme both general and historically specific through Stephen's antagonism towards a particular Englishman (Haines), a 'gay betrayer', and an Ulsterman. Stephen is concerned with both liberation and revenge. Antagonism traps Stephen in particular structures of thought and feeling: melancholy, sullen hatred, spiritual violence, despair of the soul, the intimate complicity born of polar
oppositions. Joyce therefore turns to Bloom instead. As a Jew whose family has not
been long in Ireland, Bloom is not caught in the same trap as Stephen. He is thus an
extremely effective weapon against colonial discursive and ideological formations.
Joyce locates him solidly in the Dublin Catholic community, a community whose
politics Bloom is broadly in sympathy with. He also makes Bloom radically different
from that community. Bloom's perspective on the colonizer's culture is therefore a
doubly alienated one. Joyce recognizes that Bloom's position as a Jew and the kind of
anti-Semitism he encounters is particular to colonial Irish culture, which bears the
scars of its own deep-rooted 'racial distinctions' (Dunraven 304).

For Joyce, Bloom is a useful instrument than Stephen. Having allocated Bloom
his collection of roles, however, Joyce leaves him to perform his own distinctive
functions, and sets other processes in motion. He does this chiefly through the styles
in the chapters of the novel, where particular historical, political, and aesthetic issues
are inseparable from one another. The styles are thus the major concern of this book.
Their historical and cultural specificity and the extent to which they are engagements
with particular English and Anglo-Irish discourses-with the discourses of English
cultural nationalism between 1880-1920--have gone more or less unnoted.
Stylistically, almost every chapter of *Ulysses* from the ninth onwards operates as a
resistance to, a corruption of or, a reworking of such discourses. While both the
social and the discursive material of *Ulysses* belong largely to the period around
1904, Joyce the author declares his distance from that period. Thus 'Scylla and
Charybdis', 'Nausicaa', and 'Oxen of the Sun' engage with literary and sub-literary
manifestations of English cultural nationalism (Victorian and Edwardian bardolatry,
the Victorian and Edwardian anthology, the discourses of 'national fitness', and the
so-called 'domestic ideology' as evident in women's magazines). Much of *Ulysses*
resists the historical, English insistence on 'standard English' and its impact on Ireland, particularly between 1880 and 1920.

Many other English discourses are important for *Ulysses*: the discourses of late nineteenth-century English and Anglo-Irish political economy in 'Oxen', or 'imperial science' in 'Ithaca'. Finally, in 'Penelope', Joyce puts Molly Bloom against an openly colonial and masculinist Victorian and Edwardian discourse which articulates imperial, British values in relation to what it takes to be the central, symbolic significance of Gibraltar.

A reading of ‘Oxen’ as Joyce's revenge on the colonizer will work only if the passage is made so subtle as to seem almost self-contradictory. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a growing movement for de-Anglicization in Ireland. The Sinn Fein, the Gaelic League, the Gaelic Athletic Association, Douglas Hyde, Maud Gonne, Arthur Griffith, Moran, and many others espoused it. Joyce partly shared the passions that drove the movement though he was not himself a de-Anglicizer. The history of Ireland had been 'lodged in the room of the infinite possibilities' it had 'ousted'. ‘History was 'not to be thought away’ (Gibson *Joyce’s* 16). Joyce was very well aware of how far English nationalism had left its mark on Irish expressions of opposition to it, including those of the de-Anglicizers.

The condition of *Ulysses* is not freedom, rather in the ‘Oxen’ episode it is an attempt at a particular kind of liberation from the shackles of a language that was restricting the Irish voice from being heard. *Ulysses* is not a postcolonial novel. It is rather concerned with an extraordinarily arduous struggle towards a freedom that its author knows is at best partial or equivocal. Joyce began *Ulysses* in 1915 and 'announced that it was complete' on 29 October 1921. 1921 is also the year of the
Anglo-Irish Treaty. Joyce announces that *Ulysses* is complete nearly four months after the IRA and the British Army declare truce, eighteen days after the opening of the Anglo-Irish conference and just over five weeks before the signing of the Treaty itself. On the realist level, perhaps the main theme of the ‘Oxen’ episode is an invader’s entry into a supposedly hallowed preserve of English literature through using the perfect English literature styles to birth an Irish style in the same language. Not surprisingly, the movement of the style is particularly marked in 'Penelope', which Joyce said was about detente, or 'the end of all resistance'(Gibson, *Joyce’s* 19). It is this which makes the ‘Oxen’ a minority narrative.

In 1935, John Eglinton published an account of Joyce in *Irish Literary Portraits*. It must have seemed to Joyce, wrote Eglinton, 'that he held English, his country's spiritual enemy, in the palm of his hand'. Alas, the English language 'found itself constrained by its new master to perform tasks to which it was unaccustomed in the service of pure literature .... Joyce rejoiced darkly in causing the language of Milton and Wordsworth to utter all but unimaginable filth and treason' (145-6). Eglinton argued that *Ulysses* was an act of 'treason' fuelled by an 'ironic detachment from the whole of the English tradition. It was Joyce's 'Celtic revenge' on the colonial power. Both Joyce and his art are not only self-evidently Irish and Catholic, but also 'insurrectionary'(145-6).

There was a part of Joyce that was sufficiently 'Anglophobic' to describe the English as a 'reptile people' and English literature as 'pompous and hypocritical' (*CW* 212). Joyce informed Claud Sykes that 'an Irish safety pin is more important than an English epic'(R. Ellmann, *The Consciousness* 423) and claimed that 'it is my revolt against the English conventions, literary and otherwise, that is the main source of my
talent. I don't write in English' (Power 107). Padraic and Mary Colum thought Joyce was fundamentally hostile to the 'English-speaking civilization'(Colum 44). But Joyce's antagonism towards England and English culture characteristically took far subtler, more arrogantly insouciant, and cunning forms.

Joyce is not merely ironically dismissive of the 'Anglo-Saxon spirit'. He even rewrites the history of English literature:

…during the centuries which followed the French conquest, [English literature] was at school, and its masters were Boccaccio, Dante, Tasso, and Messer Lodovico. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are a version of the *Decameron* or of the *Novellino*; Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a Puritan transcript of the *Divine Comedy*. Shakespeare, with his Titianesque palette, his flow of language, his epileptic passionateness, and his creative fury, is an Italianate Englishman… (*CW* 7)

In Joyce’s account of matters, with the Battle of the Boyne, the Glorious Revolution, and the final triumph of the Protestant spirit in England—a richly European literature which is derived from Catholic sources shrinks to mere Englishness. This, then, is Joyce's version of 'the great tradition': an etiolated literature that runs from Defoe to Kipling and whose character is inseparable from a will to domination, however admirable some of its individual representatives may be. The mixture of ironical homage to and radical negation of English power in his lecture on Defoe bears a resemblance to the same mixture of humour and sarcasm as seen in some of Kelly's bulls.

Joyce was using the Defoe lecture to quarrel with what Stefan Collini has called 'the Whig interpretation of English literature'(*Collini* 342-73). This line of
thought was increasingly dominant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It insisted on the continuity of English writing. Skeat wrote, for example, of the 'unbroken succession of authors from the reign of Alfred to that of Victoria' (359). The 'Whig interpretation' made grandiose claims for the 'enduring spirit' of English literature (359). By contrast, Joyce insists on historical discontinuity and violent rupture. In effect, he stresses the importance of a historically specific mode of thought. The emphasis on historical specificity is evident everywhere in his work. Accordingly, the England that features most largely in Joyce's work up to *Finnegans Wake* is the particular England that dates from his birth to the completion of *Ulysses*, 1882-1921.

“Where do things stand now, at a time when the surfeit of postcolonial theorizations has begun to elicit the sort of exasperation epitomized in the title of a 1998 book, *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*?” asks Wollaeger and goes on to explain that the first wave of postcolonial Joyce criticism coincided with a surge of interest in race and modernism in 1994 that soon spilled over into Joyce studies. Criticism also began to focus more intently on specifically Irish history, sometimes merely to rebuke the supposed excesses of theory but more fruitfully to illuminate Joyce's complex positioning between British imperialism and Irish nationalism. However, with the high theory of the 1980s migrating into postcolonial studies, Joyce criticism has also seen an increasing number of highly theorized postcolonial approaches, and these typically rely on a predominately analytic mode.

It makes sense therefore to consider Joyce's "broken English" within the framework of "minority discourse", in other words, as a discourse that turns the dominant language toward new and subversive ends (77).
“In a way we've been saying it for years-Joyce is a minor writer” says Reizbaum (177). The ‘Oxen of the Sun’ clearly proves what Homi Bhaba advocates:

Minority discourse …contests genealogies of origin that leads to claims of cultural supremacy and historical priority. Minority discourse acknowledges the status of national culture- and the people- as a contentious, performative space of the perplexity of the living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of the fullness of life (“DissemiNation” 307).

In the subversion of language, in the parody and the loud laughter it evokes, in representing the national culture and the people as a contentious force perplexed with life and the styles providing them with the performative space amidst the pedagogical representations of the fullness of life, the styles in the ‘Oxen of the Sun’ passage in *Ulysses* is indeed Minority discourse.