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OLR: In what ways and to what effect does the domination of the humanities by the educational institutions of the United States affect thinking in your field and your place or places of work?

Graham Allen
As everyone knows, Ireland has its own 'special relationship' with the United States. Since The Universities Act of 1997 the colleges of the NUI (National University of Ireland) have undergone an incredibly rapid process of modernisation, including sadly familiar features such as an exponentially expanding bureaucracy, a rhetoric and culture of Quality and Excellence, the establishment of performance-based criteria for funding and internal assessment, and the emergence of a pervasive logic I would figure in terms of the trope of transparency. A general concern to avoid apparently British models, such as the RAE, has perhaps left the academic community within the NUI somewhat blind to the eruption within its body of what I am calling transparency. This phenomenon is a pandemic, and so is not exclusively the product of the United States. However, the emphasis within your question on educational institutions and forces is a telling one.

The rise to dominance of U.S.-based educational models has been significantly registered within my own institution (NUI Cork). Without going into the specific politics of the institution in question, we might understand this quite radical change in terms of (1) a campaign and (2) institutional legislation. The immediately striking feature of these two components is that they have been instituted simultaneously. The terms of the campaign are captured in a NUI Cork publication entitled *Advancing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Through a Reflective Portfolio Process*. The language employed in this text has its origins and its legitimating force in the publications of U.S. institutions such as the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Learning and the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE). What is particularly striking about this language is the stress it gives to notions of a seismic (epochal) cultural change within the academy. Ernest L. Boyer's Carnegie Foundation report, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, is the frequently cited origin of this campaign, a campaign Boyer presents as an attempt to rectify an historically chartable over-emphasis on research criteria in the assessment and promotion procedures of contemporary U.S. institutions of higher education.

Boyer's basic argument is that the academy's obsession with research criteria is radically out of kilter with the post-war massification of university education in the U.S. The solution to this problem, Boyer argues, is to be found in a concerted campaign to reconsider the concept of 'scholarship' and, as part of this, to return teaching to its rightful place. He states in his Preface that 'It is time to ask how the faculty reward system can enhance' such a campaign (p.xii). In his opening chapter, 'Scholarship Over Time', Boyer presents a brief history of the higher education institutions within the United States and quotes a recent statement from Stanford University President Donald Kennedy: 'It is time . . . for us to reaffirm that education – that is, teaching in all its forms – is the primary task [of higher education]' (p.1). Just in case we had not noticed the call, Boyer reiterates it on the next page of his report:

> The time has come, we believe, to step back and reflect on the variety of functions academics are expected to perform. It's time to ask how priorities of the professoriate relate to the faculty reward system, as well as to the missions of America's higher learning institutions. (p.2)

Pat Hutchings, in his introduction the AAHE's *The Course Portfolio*, captures Boyer's rhetorical call for action when he describes *Scholarship Reconsidered* as 'that exquisitely timed book'.

We have, then, a call to action, a temporal (epochal) rhetoric ('It is time . . .') that is in many ways wholly understandable and laudable in its goals. One would certainly wish to support any call to reassess and reaffirm teaching (in all its forms). A problem occurs, however, when that call, that invitation or rally, is, at the very moment it is being uttered, also legislatively instituted. In NUI Cork, for example, the past few years have seen the establishment of weekly seminars which have sought to provide all staff with a forum to reflect upon and discuss their teaching in an open and encouraging manner. The prospect of creating a time for dialogue and debate on teaching should appear wholly positive and intellectually challenging. However, at the same moment that such an apparently dialogic and open call for discussion has been made, the college has also rewritten its promotion procedures, so that it is now impossible for younger academics to gain promotion without having successfully written and presented a portfolio of their actual teaching or what is frequently called their 'teaching philosophy'.

In my institution, then, the impact of U.S. educational institutions and, more importantly, U.S. educational discourse has been the creation of a significant paradox: a call to discussion and dialogue over teaching; a law demanding staff practise one method and negotiate (for assessment purposes) one educational discourse. What Derrida calls a 'fold' turns a performative language ('we should reflect on and offer up to the community our thinking on teaching') into a juridical language which can only present itself as a constative statement of law ('reflective teaching is performed through course and teaching portfolios', 'reflective teachers do construct and offer up for assessment course portfolios', and the like). A call to responsibility and dialogue becomes, at the very moment it is uttered, a demand concerning benchmarking, evaluation, assessment and promotion. The call for a dialogue on teaching is delimited, delegitimated, through its institutional (legislative) endorsement. It can be noted that such a fold, or what Derrida also calls a 'transparency', is evident also on the level of institutional and national contexts. Boyer's challenge to his readers to return to the idea of educational 'service', for example, is presented in terms of his account of the historical mission of what he calls 'American' universities. Describing the move from the early 'colonial colleges' to the great, second stage of development, which included the Land Grant College Act of 1862 and the increasing sense of 'service' and nation-building in the expanding university sector, Boyer cites the historian Frederick Rudolph: 'All were touched by the American faith in tomorrow, in the unquestionable capacity of Americans to achieve a better world' (Boyer, p.4). Clearly privileging the notion of 'service' which predominated in this great period of the later nineteenth-century, Boyer adds another quotation from the first President of Cornell University, Andrew D. White: 'Corruption would come to an end, pure American ideals would prosper until one day they governed the entire world' (pp.6-

7).

Portfolio discourse is part, then, of a globalising culture which problematises the very idea of (national) service it attempts to legislatively institute. It is also a discourse and culture which, because it puts its emphasis on evaluation, argues that teaching must be representable. Privileging a narrative and archivising (evidential) accounting of teaching over the scene of teaching itself, portfolio culture loses sight of the very thing it would prioritize. One could discuss the impact of portfolio culture in terms of the demoralisation and alienation it obviously produces. One could discuss also the split it produces within departments and faculties, some staff supporting and some criticising its language, its institutional enforcement. I would rather emphasize the challenge it offers us to rethink the history of the philosophy and literature of teaching, including the challenge of teaching's irreducible incalculability.

OLR: A question to move things on. Extending the scope of the first question beyond matters of teaching, do you think it raises any pertinent issues in relation to the research of your own field of Romantic studies in your place of work?

Graham Allen:
Your question about Romantic studies in Ireland is a difficult one for me to answer. On one level it is addressed to the wrong person, since I am not an Irish literary critic. On another level it is perhaps addressed to the right person, since not being an Irish literary critic I can perhaps see some things that those who are cannot. Romanticism is far more important nowadays in Irish literary criticism than it was say twenty years ago. This return to Romanticism in Ireland is due in part to the influence of U.S. criticism and its concern with historical approaches and the issue of national identity. One can think of the influence of critics such as Jerome J. McGann, Marjorie Levinson, Alan Richardson and Stuart Curran, to name only a few, and one can see that a Romantic criticism which places a significant emphasis on history and on national identity and questions of colonialism has helped to return Irish criticism to the Romantic period. Nowadays there is a vital, dynamic interest in Maria Edgeworth, Sydney Owenson, Thomas Moore, Charles Maturin, Mary Tighe, Samuel Ferguson, Thomas Osborne Davis, James Clarence Mangan and others, and an important consideration of Irish Romanticism's contribution to the emergence of Irish national identity. It is not possible, of course, simply to ascribe the new vitality in Romantic studies in Ireland to U.S. influences; however, it certainly has helped. A figure like Burke obviously looks different from a U.S. rather than a British perspective, and this angle of vision has been extremely productive in revivifying Irish Romanticism.

From the perspective of Ireland one can see quite significant fault-lines in some of the still dominant assumptions and prejudices of British Romantic studies. One blind-spot which is patently obvious from an Irish perspective is the manner in which British Protestantism's figuring of Catholicism is replicated in work emanating from British universities. The manner in which Blake, Wollstonecraft, Godwin and other 'radical' writers of the 1790s and beyond, employ Catholicism as a kind of straw-man is

something which has only really become visible to me since I began to live and work here, just over ten years ago. The manner in which this implicit and occasionally overt bias works against the principle of rights, or republican notions of national identity and agency, in works by the authors I've just cited is a subject which requires far more thought than it has hitherto been given.

But then, as I suggested, I am not necessarily in a position to speak about these issues. The critics who stand out in the current reassessment of 'Romantic Ireland' would give you far more detailed and informed analyses of the phenomenon: I am thinking here of critics and scholars such as Declan Kiberd, Luke Gibbons, David Lloyd and W. J. McCormack. My position is analogous to that of a foreign body within Irish Romantic studies. That is to say, I have moved away from a perhaps still dominant British perspective, but I am certainly not Irish in my perspective. That position is of course difficult at times; as difficult, no doubt, as the position of the many Irish scholars who have over the years ended up living and teaching in British universities. It is also, as I am sure it was for all those Irish scholars in Britain, a position of irony or para-doxa. For my part, for example, I remain enough of an English 'socialist' to still deeply distrust the very idea of nationalism, even whilst I live and work in a country where politics and intellectual study fundamentally, and perhaps necessarily, revolve around it. It is here that perhaps the U.S. influence on Irish Romantic studies comes up against its limit. I cannot really see how U.S.-based or U.S.-inspired Romantic studies can help us (and who are 'we'?) begin to explore in a more sophisticated and para-doxical fashion the limits of British and Irish national identity in the Romantic period. That is, however, something I believe we must do, even against the professionalised categories which tend to make it very difficult to exist (to teach and to publish) between Irish Romantic Studies and British Romantic Studies. One can think of many Romantic writers and figures, from Wollstonecraft to Thomas Moore, from the painter James Barry to Burke himself, who experienced, temporarily or on a more permanent basis, that foreign body existence to which, in my own case, I have already referred. Important as the study of the rise of national identity is to an understanding of Irish and British Romanticism, we must not forget that during the fallout of 1798 and the Napoleonic Wars, nationalism was uneasily tied to what we might call a new internationalism of human rights, along with an emergent Europeanism. I will cite two quotations from P. B. Shelley's visit to Ireland in 1811, both taken from a book by Paul O'Brien which exemplifies the new phase of 'foreign body' Romantic criticism and study I am alluding to here. The first quotation comes as Shelley is preparing to take his *An Address to the Irish People* to Dublin. Of that text Shelley writes: 'it is intended to familiarise to uneducated apprehension ideas of liberty, benevolence, peace and toleration. It is secretly intended also as a preliminary to other pamphlets to shake Catholicism at its basis.' The second is written by Shelley after having heard of the Mexican Revolution during his time in Dublin: 'I desire Catholic Emancipation . . . all steps however good and salutary, which may be taken . . . can only be subordinate and preparatory to the great and lasting one which shall bring about the peace, the harmony and the happiness of Ireland, England, Europe, and the World.' That serial constituency is as difficult (impossible even) to speak of and for now as it was in the Romantic period. It makes every voice which would speak and be heard, on different levels, a foreign body.

OLR: Could you expand on and illustrate your point about how a U. S. based- or U.S.-inspired version of Romantic studies may come up against its limit?

Graham Allen:
The question is obvious and yet very difficult to answer, partly because of the condensation involved in the notion of America and Americanisation or, to employ the term I've been using, professionalisation. I've already named some of the U. S.-based Romantic critics I really admire. There is absolutely no reason why such critics or indeed any U. S.-based scholar of Romanticism should necessarily fall foul of the 'limit' mentioned by me and reiterated in your question. What is a limit? It is a flaw or error, but it's also a blind-spot; it's an end, but it's also a border or liminal or trans-place. It is very difficult to keep these competing meanings apart, and yet they are competing meanings. We would have to say that it is not at all clear how U.S.-based Romantic studies could be charged by you or me with over-stepping its borders. That's precisely what it has to do if it is to contribute to the study of British or Irish or European Romanticism. The limit has to do, rather, with professionalisation and the manner in which it informs (shapes, mis-shapes) what can be done in academic writing and teaching. The issue is how a certain professionalised version of Romantic studies (which in some ways, but only some, can be nominated 'Americanising') places a limit on our writing and teaching, our thinking about Romantic literature, its histories, cultures, individual and national identities.

Every year I teach a seminar on Derrida's essay 'Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and Other Small Seismisms' to our MA students in *Modernities: Romanticism, Modernism, Post-Modernism.* It's a wonderful text (lecture) in which Derrida talks about theory 'in the States', 'the states of theory', and takes as his main examples the U.S. assimilation of deconstruction, but also the recently emergent, U.S.-based new historicism. I set the text for this seminar because it's a brilliant analysis of professionalisation and I want students at this stage to start seriously thinking about that phenomenon. Derrida looks at how each new professionally endorsed theoretically-inspired movement in criticism ingests elements of older or rival movements which it then figures as other and, in comparison to itself, outmoded; so that, for example, there is a good deal of new criticism and particularly poststructuralism in new historicism, a movement or school which figures itself as rectifying the unhistorical formalisms of both of those theoretical movements, or what Derrida styles 'jetties'. Derrida also talks about irony in that text. He is being polite to his American academic audience (and somewhat ironic as well) and so he says that academics are very aware of the ironies of these theoretically-inspired critical movements. He says that no one actually calls themselves a new historicist (they do not positively 'use' the label, the name), rather they merely (ironically) 'mention' such labels, such names. But of course, academics do 'use' these names all the time. It's actually a common occurrence that an academic literary critic will call him- or herself a new historicist or, more commonly now perhaps, a post-colonialist critic and berate post-structuralism or even deconstruction for being too formalist. 'I am a new historicist critic' or 'I am a postcolonialist critic' are statements one is going to find pretty frequently around the corridors of literature departments. It's actually very difficult to resist the

professionalised process of name-assuming and name-calling. And today, the current state of Romantic criticism and theory is one in which various (new) historicist criteria and practices, including a continued, less than theorized, critique of 'formalism' dominate. New historicism and postcolonialism are, of course, positive, highly valuable trends. And yet it is possible to say, in fact necessary to say, that the initial force of new historicist theory and practice, in Romantic and other period studies, is frequently lost sight of, so that what passes for new historicism or postcolonialist criticism nowadays is often informed by quite a traditional archival or objectivist notion of historical work.

Derrida's essay is linked, of course, to his other U.S.-based texts on the university, theory and teaching, in particularly one can think of 'The Principle of Reason'. Taking a cue from that latter text, it needs to be stated that the pressures of professionalism (including a non-ironic use of names) are not simply caused by the kinds of processes of normalisation (Derrida speaks about 'normalising monsters') in the former essay. They are also fostered by much greater forces which prop up the dominance of performative criteria in funding bodies, research assessment exercises, quality audits, promotions and appointment procedures, and so on. Professionalisation is, after all, how the status quo (of knowledge, of procedure, of practice) asserts itself whilst allowing for the appearance of innovation, exploration and pure, non-instrumental thinking (or what we still tend to call 'pure' research). So that when both internal (promotion and appointment boards) and external (the criteria of academic publishing houses, funding bodies, auditing bodies) forces converge to privilege an old historicist agenda of archival work, nationally-specific frames of reference, and objectivist historical understanding, it becomes very difficult for academics to resist professionalisation. There are a number of U.S.-based theorists who have attempted to analyse the parameters of such processes (Gregg Lambert and Samuel Weber, come to mind), but it's true enough to say that professionalisation (or what in certain senses we can call Americanisation) provides the most serious limit for new thought and new (really new) critical writing on Romanticism or any other field of literary study.

This is a huge subject, and I can only use a kind of short-hand here. I return, then, to the issue which prompted your question, the issue of national identity and the 'foreign body' nature of certain authors' relation to the idea of a national context and a national identity. I am taking the limits of the national as my prime example of the limits mentioned in your question. I want to respond by referring to two areas. The first has to do with what we are calling 'Romanticism' here and relates to issues concerning the very idea of the university. The second is a more general issue within the Irish university system.

The professionalised realm of academic literary criticism tends to see the national limit (the border, if you will) as *the limit*. On a very simple level, this is partly to do with our educational institutions and their traditions and historical formations. Scholars coming into the field of Romantic literature, for example, do not tend to emerge with a doctoral expertise in English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, German, Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese national literary traditions. The national tends to be the limit (border) of our educational limits (ends). Such a professionalised limit or set of limits then tends to set the agenda for those new scholars' understanding of the authors and the historical periods

they go on to teach and to write about. And as I've said, this is a problem. It's a problem when we read many Irish Romantic authors or British Romantic authors. But, as the quotations I used from P. B. Shelley suggest, it's a problem which faces us with the question of how to deal with the heterogenous and yet inter-related European contexts for what we call Romanticism. It's a problem which reaches even beyond Europe, in the sense that there is a universalising or globalising language in the politics and the literature of Romanticism. To discuss this issue at this level, however, is immediately to fall into the very problems one is attempting to describe, since Romanticism, as a word, has very different connotations within different professionalised groups or sets. For some it simply refers to the literature produced, mainly in Europe, between the 1790s to roughly the 1830s, a literature responding to the experience of revolution and the rise to dominance of the modern nation-state; for others it refers to a larger cultural phenomenon throughout the Western world, involving changes in our notions of the artist and the work of art (the change from mimetic to expressive theories and practices of art, etc); but for others again, Romanticism refers to a certain high-point *and* crisis within Enlightenment thought associated with philosophical names such as Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, on to Nietzsche. There is, then, a Romanticism which refers to the borders of European national literary traditions, to aesthetic criteria and to philosophical movements within the Enlightenment. At least three generalized borders for the term 'Romanticism', none of them unrelated, all of them somewhat (and in some senses hugely) different. To employ the word 'Romanticism' one finds oneself, from the very outset, inside and yet traversing various borders and limits of the name. A scholar of Romanticism can never simply be 'at home' with his or her subject, since the subject itself is plural and divided, contested, even contradictory. Professionalised literary studies, however, finds it very difficult to register such complexities, since they do not all line up neatly with the disciplinary, historical and national categories by and through which academic teachers and researchers must pursue their careers. It is very difficult to convince academic publishers that a phenomenon like 'Romanticism' ranges across these borders; it is equally difficult (institutionally) to construct courses and curricula which do justice to such heterogenous features.

Despite its globalising force, professionalisation (which includes the need for our teaching and our research to meet internal and external criteria of assessment, standardisation, accountability and evaluation) frequently privileges the national border, even the local border. Universities, after all, are contradictory bodies. They exist because of the Enlightenment ideals of universal knowledge and the human right to that knowledge and yet they are also involved in a specific national and local exchange in which autonomy (the right to pursue knowledge for its own sake) is gained on the promise of overt and covert benefit to these specific constituencies. That tension, between universal and local ends, is of course the basis for a specific Romantic (philosophical) creation, in Kant and others, of the very idea of the modern university. What professionalisation can do, however, is limit our ability, as academics, to criticize the university system when it mishandles that difficult balancing act.

My second point concerns such a situation in the Irish national university system. Since 1997 and the National Universities Act there has been a sustained government-led

campaign to improve both the quantity and the quality of postgraduates working in the university sector. This campaign is across the disciplinary and faculty board and has been fuelled by the establishment of a competitive government-financed system of funding the best doctoral projects. All the evidence in that ten year period is that we are producing increasingly professional postgraduate students, who increasingly complete their PhDs on time, are much clearer from the very beginning about the precise nature of their research aims and criteria, produce publications during their doctoral studies, are confident teachers and are, generally, far more prepared for a modern, professionalised academic world than their supervisors were at the equivalent stage. This is surely a very laudable development and just as clearly makes sense to government officials (who, after all, are not always that eager to spend government money on the university sector) because of a perceived link between improved educational standards and improved economic national productivity. This link between the production of postgraduates and national economic prosperity has in the last few years been reinforced by the Irish Government's stated desire to build what, in a European context, it calls a 'Knowledge Economy'. Make improvements to the former (knowledge), so such logic runs, and you will inevitably see improvements in the latter (the economy). In the new Five-Year Plan recently announced to the university sector the Irish government has now decided to take this improvement one stage further and to commit itself to achieving a 70%-30% ratio between undergraduate and postgraduate students respectively. The aim is to double the number of postgraduate students in Irish universities by 2012. This might seem completely unobjectionable. However, there are no plans to expand the staffing and resources of the university sector in Ireland, in fact wide-scale restructuring is currently being implemented in order to 'down-size' many programmes and departments, with a certain decrease in staffing (certainly in the Humanities and Social Sciences) almost an inevitable result. Despite the creation of new universities in Ireland over the past ten years, there are still very few institutions of higher education in Ireland. Where are these new, professionalised academics, growing ever larger in number, going to be teaching and researching in the future? One cannot help imagining that they will inevitably have to cross national borders (into the British system primarily, but also into the U.S. and the European systems, and then beyond) to gain the salaried positions for which their qualifications equip (if not entitle) them. That doctoral students, trained to be academics, seek, after they graduate, to become academics rather than movers and shakers in the business world is currently a rather obvious and glaring 'secret', something everybody knows but no one can effectively say.

The post-modern, transparent (professionalised, bureaucratically-centred) university produces ironies which, although they may be described by theorists such as myself, remain unspeakable, off-the-map, at a local and national managerial level. Try telling your managerial bosses or government officials that their transparent commitment to quality and excellence is supporting the academic quality and excellence of the educational systems of other nation states rather than their own and you will quickly see what I mean by some subjects and some ironies being 'off the map'. While the university system in Ireland is increasingly urged to commit itself to service to the community and to the state, it is being put in a position where what it produces (its students, particularly its postgraduate students) can have little hope of finding a professional and civic 'home'

within the borders of the nation. Ironies spiral out from such a situation and all I can do here, given time, is to refer to what I have already stated about the tendency within a subject like English Literature to privilege the national border as a limit. Should we be encouraging these new, massified groups of postgraduate students in Ireland to study more international subject areas? Or should we be retaining our traditional emphasis on Irish Romanticism, Irish Modernism, Ireland and the Renaissance, in the hope that the educational systems of other neighbouring countries will assimilate experts in these areas in ever greater numbers? Does my own teaching (of English Romanticism) become more or less relevant in such a situation? Confronted with students who passionately want to make a difference to the future of their own country, should I go against government policy and directives and try to dissuade them from taking up postgraduate positions (knowing, as I do, that they stand little or no chance of gaining employment in an Irish university)? Or should I develop a long monologue, to be delivered to each of my department's new postgraduate students, on how the role of universities is to produce 'citizens of Europe', 'citizens of the world'? What are my responsibilities, in such a contradictory and yet largely impenetrable (i.e. managerial, 'top-down') professionalised and bureaucratic environment, to my students, my subject, my colleagues and, indeed, ultimately, myself? These are the kind of questions in which professionalisation comes up against its most pressing limit.

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