

Charting Culture in the *Dublin University Magazine*

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The long-term storage and special collections rooms of libraries all over Ireland contain a treasure-trove of periodicals and newspapers relating to the country and its relationship with Europe. Often consulted by historians and literary critics for judging evidence and gleaning illustrative material about the past, they are rarely considered as anything other than depositories of truth. Scholars of the Victorian era in particular are confronted with data overwhelming in its sheer mass and intimidating in its confident, authoritative tone. For example, it is impossible to imagine a text on the history of Ireland during the 1840s without the evidence of supporting documents from the *Times* or drawings of Famine victims from the *Illustrated London News*. In the absence of contemporary photographs, these drawings often form the locus around which ideas about the Famine converge; it is only recently, however, that their shortcomings as evidence have been made plain. Drawn in a style calculated to produce emotion (and sell newspapers), and often executed by artists who had never set foot in Ireland, they offer more clues about current economic and political attitudes, not to mention Victorian notions of genre painting and 'realism', than about conditions in Ireland during the Famine.

This feature deserves to be highlighted because the disregard for form, for perspective, and for the exigencies of economic and genre conventions frequently occurs in the scholarly habit of using periodicals as a mine from which it is assumed that accurate, relatively unbiased information about a particular historical period or community can be gained. It should be remembered that periodicals are expressions of popular culture; as such, they depend for their continued existence and appearance on factors often hidden from view. This essay looks at the *Dublin University Magazine*¹ as a periodical, a multitext entity, and suggests some of the ways that its form influences the creation of meaning – both within the periodical itself, and also between the periodical and its consumers.

In numerous studies of Irish culture and literature in the nineteenth century, the *DUM* is combed for information and opinion about an assumed ideological region formed by Ireland's Protestant, conservative, urban middle class. The *DUM* has become synonymous with conservatism, with unionism, with

¹ Hereafter '*DUM*'.

an ethnographic attitude towards Ireland's Catholic population; moreover, it is presumed that the policies and tone of the magazine remain constant throughout its forty-four year history. It seems irrelevant to later scholars that the magazine went through many guises in its long run, that it was produced by no fewer than eleven editors, and was in its lifetime owned by ten individuals or – and this is important in economic terms – publishers. The point is that it was and still is seen as a static entity, as a single text whose index is consulted more often than its pages and whose special status as a periodical is ignored. Lyn Pykett, in 'Reading the Periodical Press' reminds us that looking at a periodical for information about a particular historical period or ideological region demands a detailed examination of the structures that govern the production of the periodical itself, and by extension all mass-produced commodities of a capitalist system. To ignore the circumstances of production is to assert the absolute reflective quality of the material. The periodical, as Pykett notes, 'is not a mirror held up to culture or society; it is yet another interpretation of that society', another form of social discourse, not 'direct social statement'.²

The *DUM* was begun as an undergraduate exercise by a small group of Trinity College students in 1833. It was consciously modelled on the English *Fraser's* and *Blackwood's* magazines, but as a new forum that would provide a previously unavailable outlet for Irish literary talent.³ Its avowed political stance was anti-reform, pro-Protestant, and strongly nationalist within the empire, though the editorial comment in the opening numbers for 1833 makes clear the precedence of literature over politics in subject matter, and the subtitle of the magazine was always 'A Literary and Political Journal'. A retrospective article about the first editor outlines the magazine's twofold purpose:

one being to further the cause of Protestantism throughout the empire, by affording it a new organ in connection with literature, and giving it a voice in hitherto silent Ireland; and the other to prove by experiment the possibility of a literary periodical *living* in this country.⁴

The decision to ally the magazine with Trinity College (there was no official sanction for this) through its title, advertising for university textbooks, and articles about university affairs and gossip, seems to have been an economic one. It may have been felt that without the borrowed prestige – that is, the stability and power of Trinity and the discourse of power the University represented – the magazine would fail. For the same reason, Samuel Lover's first contribution of a serial novel to the magazine was signed – a practice not common until

² Lyn Pykett, 'Reading the Periodical Press: Text and Context' in L. Brake, A. Jones and L. Madden (eds), *Investigating Victorian Journalism* (London, 1990), p. 15. ³ See Graham Houghton (ed.), *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*, vol. iv (Toronto, 1987), p. 195; hereafter 'Wellesley'. ⁴ *DUM*, September 1840, p. 267.

the 1860s. Lover's established reputation was therefore borrowed in order to lend an air of legitimacy and ability to the enterprise.

By 1836 the magazine was strong enough to criticize Trinity College in its pages and dissociate itself from the influence of the University. Isaac Butt, its editor from 1834 to 1838, writes in the issue for December 1835: '[We have] more popular, and far more important objects ... to send forth to the world [than] a chronicle of scientific intelligence, or a register of academic proceedings. We desire that there should be nothing in our pages to distinguish us as a University Magazine'.⁵ He added: 'With respect to the editorial management of our periodical, the principle upon which we have acted may be summed up in one word, and that word is INDEPENDENCE, Independence in politics – in criticism – in everything.'⁶ Despite this declaration, the larger necessities of economics and market forces are felt even in the first issue. Since, unlike single texts, the periodical exists only so long as buyers can be persuaded to take it, its format, advertising, editorial policy, and the fluctuations in circulation will be good indicators of – and dictators of – general readership and popularity. The list of Irish writers who had material (mostly anonymous) published in the magazine reads like a who's who of the nineteenth century: Isaac Butt, one of the undergraduate founders; Samuel Ferguson; Samuel Lover; Caesar Otway; William Carleton; James Clarence Mangan; J.S. Le Fanu; and Charles Lever, who was editor during the 1840s and under whom the circulation of the magazine reached four thousand copies per month.⁷ Just as Lover's name was used to sell the first number, Carleton's contributions were too important a draw to force him to submit to the anonymity rule, and his work was often identified through internal references to his novels. His presence also points up one of the stated policies of the editors: to prove the saleability of Irish writers at home, without the help or stamp of approval of English publishers.⁸

Again following the model of *Fraser's*, the *DUM* produced a series of rather long biographical sketches of both living and dead 'illustrious Irishmen', accompanied by full-page etchings of each subject. By 1850 some seventy-two sketches had been produced and the names included both nationalist and unionist notables: Isaac Butt, William Carleton, J.W. Croker, Thomas Davis, Mrs Hall, Daniel Maclise, Thomas Moore, Charles Napier, Daniel O'Connell, Caesar Otway, George Petrie, Lord Plunket, and of course Jonathan Swift. Many of these were writers for the magazine, self-aggrandizement being part of the advertising

5 *Wellesley*, p. 195. In May 1858 another article, sharply critical of salaries of senior fellows at Trinity College and the absence of public auditing of university funds controlled by senior fellows, prompted the University to forbid Dublin booksellers to stock the magazine (*DUM*, May 1858, pp 616–18). 6 *DUM*, December 1835, p. 709. 7 See *Wellesley* and Alvar Ellegård, *The Readership of the Periodical Press in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Göteborg, 1957), p. 32. Compare its competitors: *Blackwood's* at 7,500 per month in 1868, or *Fraser's* at 6,000 per month in 1870. 8 See *Wellesley*, 197.

process. The series ran until 1854 and was begun again in the 1870s, this time with photographs of those honoured.

From the 1830s to the 1860s, in common with similar English magazines, the number of items included in each issue declined as the length of each increased, and the proportion of political to general interest items similarly decreased, until under the editorship of J.S. Le Fanu in the 1860s there was very little political comment. Sensation serials predominated (a trend also followed in English periodicals) and LeFanu's Irish gothic novels lend a tone to the magazine that Alvin Sullivan in *British Literary Magazines* calls something

between a Celtic twilight and the Newgate Calendar, with an interest in faraway places mixed in. In 1862, for example, there appeared not only chapters from *The House by the Churchyard* [LeFanu's novel] and profiles of murderers, but articles on Carlyle, Goethe, spiritualism, a walking tour of Nagasaki, haunted houses, medieval mysticism, Leinster folklore, the Irish wake, and the Irish wedding.⁹

Though the magazine continued to be popular, its circulation fell to about two thousand per issue by 1870, and by 1877 it had ceased to be a viable concern.

The question of form in periodicals is an important consideration. One of the most profound differences between a single text and a multitext like the periodical is the issue of time and change over time. The *DUM* continued to use the same title for forty-four years, and yet each volume, each issue was different, and, under different editors often varied in policy, emphasis and tone. It is essential then that the periodical be studied along a time continuum as well as a space continuum.¹⁰ To isolate an issue of the *DUM* from 1842, and decide that it is both an accurate reflection of its society/community and of its own history, is obviously erroneous. What we can say is that each issue is rooted in a historical moment – again an indication of the periodicity of the form, and that its claims to truth and importance are always contingent on that moment. This variegation emphasizes the almost infinite capacity of the periodical to remake itself¹¹ – to respond to readers' comments, to market forces, to fashion. Indeed its survival as a commodity depends on a quick response to these forces.

⁹ See Alvin Sullivan, *British Literary Magazines* (London, 1983), p. 121. The magazine's continued commitment to noticing books on Irish history and culture should be mentioned, as well as its policy of reviewing Irish authored publications in general. ¹⁰ See Margaret Beetham, 'Towards a Theory of the Periodical as a Publishing Genre' in Brake, Jones and Madden (eds), pp 19-32; see also Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, 'Linear Stories and Circular Visions: The Decline of the Victorian Serial' in N. Katherine Hayles (ed.), *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science* (Chicago, 1991) pp 167-94. ¹¹ See Beetham, p. 9

For instance, the first volume of the magazine (January 1833 to January 1834) uses what had become a national symbol for Ireland as a prominent part of the woodcut on its cover: the Irish round tower, along with the harp and the tomb. The symbols were intended to suggest the magazine's 'emphasis on Irish history, poetry, and biography'.¹² Joep Leerssen, in *Remembrance and Imagination*,¹³ is the latest in a long line of scholars of Ireland's cultural history to devote space to the nineteenth-century debate surrounding the origin and use of the round towers in Ireland. Were they pre-Christian objects devoted to phallic worship and therefore obscene, or were they ecclesiastical edifices and therefore worthy to be invested with nationalistic significance? Until the question was settled, using the round tower as a symbol of antiquity and permanence (not to mention its resemblance to a phallus) was suspect. It seems clear that Charles Stanford, editor of the *DUM* at this time,¹⁴ decided early on to remove the shadow of controversy – or possibly misplaced allegiance – from the magazine. Its ambiguous status might, after all, affect sales. This development is interesting for two reasons, first because the idea of the round tower, as Leerssen points out, was taken up by other periodicals, most notably the *Nation*, as a symbol on which the idea of unification might be based, and, second, because the choice of a central focus for the new cover of the magazine was a woodcut portrait of Queen Elizabeth I, patron of Trinity College and colonizer of Ireland (Figure 1). The alteration made the magazine look much more like *Blackwood's*, which was perhaps the intent. The change did not pass entirely unnoticed in the pages of the magazine, though the unofficial reason for the alteration is still obscure. The January 1834 issue begins with an article entitled, 'Queen Elizabeth and the University', a fictional reconstruction of the events surrounding the Queen's decision to sponsor Trinity College. It includes accounts of conversations and a description of a triumphant Bishop Ussher leaving England, 'the bearer of a letter written in the Queen's own hand, communicating the joyful intelligence of that act of condescension and goodness, which was to work so many important effects, and amongst others, centuries after, to give an appropriate embellishment to the title page of our magazine'.¹⁵ So we can theorize that the *DUM* reincarnated itself in response to market forces, but also proclaimed an overt partisanship that had not

¹² See *Wellesley*, p. 195, and Michael Sadleir, 'Dublin University Magazine: Its History, Contents and Bibliography' in *The Bibliographical Society of Ireland*, vol. v, no. 4 (Dublin, 1938), p. 82. ¹³ Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork, 1996), p. 108. ¹⁴ The Reverend Charles Stuart Stanford was the first editor of the *DUM*, from January 1833 to July 1834. He is given special notice in the September 1840 issue in 'Our Portrait Gallery' as the illustrious translator of Plato's Dialogues. By 1840 he was rector of Glasnevin, and had recently been appointed Secretary and Chaplain to the Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb at Claremont. His formal association with the magazine seems to have ended with his editorship. ¹⁵ *DUM*, January 1834, p. 9.



1 Cover of the *Dublin University Magazine*.

been quite so evident at its inauguration. While the decision to use an image of English colonialism as an advertising lure to a particular body of readers is a determining one, it is important to note as well the simple fact of the alteration and one of the plausible reasons for it in the first place.

Magazines sell things, both ideological and material commodities. In the case of the *DUM*, what was being sold is evident from the few pages of advertisement that survive in unbound issues from the 1850s. Wares include, naturally enough, the stock of Dublin publisher James M'Glashan, who issued the *DUM* from 1846 to 1855,¹⁶ and the books and journals he imported from England. There is also an astonishing number of consumer goods such as raincoats, lawn mowers, hair oil, and patent medicines to alleviate everything from scrofula to syphilis – all of them sourced in England and in most cases obtainable only from there. The implication of this is obviously that the magazine had developed a

¹⁶ M'Glashan was also editor from 1838 to 1842, and for the June issue of 1845. See *Wellesley*, p. 210.

fact, if the magazine mirrors anything, it mirrors this uncomfortable position. There are, however, constants: there is always, throughout the life of the *DUM*, an assumption of basic allegiance to empire, and a similar assumption (perhaps less obvious) of intellectual superiority, if not material prosperity, over the average Catholic Irishman; but this position in itself involves a further instability as the nineteenth century progresses – an assumption of difference and power that is harder and harder to maintain.

The *DUM*, then, tries to create an ideological region while simultaneously demonstrating, through its form, the impossibility of maintaining stability in that region. While the greater proportion of the subject matter over the years proclaims a relatively static response to the condition of being Anglo-Irish, by Le Fanu's time in the 1860s, that position too is questioned through the increased number of gothic stories and general articles on the occult and the supernatural whose inherent anti-Catholicism, questioning of science, and blurring of the boundary between self and other opens a new chapter in the continuing story of Irish Protestant paranoia.¹⁹ The circumstances and aims of the *DUM* were not singular when compared to similar publications elsewhere; however, its mixture of conservatism and 'popular writing', its radical heterogeneity of genres, the lack of a single authorial voice, endlessly deferred closure and constant closure, its physical fragility, and the likelihood of its component parts being extracted and made the bases for other works²⁰ – all contribute to a general ideological uneasiness in the Anglo-Irish community/region. This is at least as important to study as the contents of seemingly myriad articles about Catholic atrocities on Protestant clergy and the perils of 'Popery' in general.

¹⁹ See Richard Hayes, 'The Night Side of Nature' in Brian Cosgrove (ed.), *Literature and the Supernatural: Essays for the Maynooth Bicentenary* (Dublin, 1995), p. 60. I am indebted to Mr Hayes for drawing his article to my attention. See also W.J. McCormack, 'Irish Gothic and After, 1820-1945' in Seamus Deane (ed.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. ii (Derry, 1991), p. 831 and passim. ²⁰ See Beetham, p. 9. The library of the National University of Ireland, Galway, has an almost complete run of the *DUM* in volume form; but only four single issues, all from 1850, remain in the original paper-covered form with advertisements and notices intact. These are the only single issues I have been able to locate in Ireland.