Sanda Berce

Laudatio

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Esteemed Rector,
Esteemed President of the University Senate,
Dear colleagues and students,
Cead mile Fáilte, Professor Kiberd,
Welcome Professor Kiberd,

In December 1916 the novel of a self-exiled writer was published in Trieste. The writer had suddenly decided, at the age of 22 (in 1904) to emigrate to the old continent which had once been the home of his ancestors. During this self-imposed exile, he came to live in Trieste, Paris and Zurich. From there, from the modern world proclaimed by radical movements and changes that led up to the Great War, a world harshly tested by volatile experiences trigerred by uncontrollable events, a world of loneliness and uncertainty, James Joyce, the Irishman living in the Europe of the peoples (the "entrenched and marshalled races"), seemed to be uniquely qualified to understand the anxiety-ridden spirit of the fin de siècle. As a result, between 1904 and 1916, feverishly, but standing at an unforgiving distance from his own composite creation, he wrote and rewrote a novel that has since become an emblem of not only Irish, but of European modernism, as well. In what

follows, we intend to examine two fragments of the novel which can teach us what Joyce meant to both the Irish and the European culture and literature; subsequently, we will explain the connection between these ideas and today's event, which we will be reading from the perspective of the two fragments. The first one, to be found at the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, consists of a dialogue between two friends: "—Look here, Cranly, he said. You have asked me what I would do and what I would not do. I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning."

This quote is significant not because the character Stephen is talking to his friend Cranly, but because it privileges the *unsaid*, the censored, exile and silence as conditions of spiritual survival, manifestly associated to a firm refusal of illusionment. This is done *in the name of facts* and of a reality Joyce is observing with refreshing humour, in an ironic key noted by many critics familiar with his biography. It is the paradox of a lifetime, because Joyce unremorsefully left Ireland at 22 to be able to love it, and suffered to be able to achieve an imaginary return to his loves—country, home/language and church. The "non serviam" that was going to define his whole life and work originated in an obsession for betrayal illustrated by the Irish political and literary history and its abundance of similar events: politicians, artists, intellectuals and literati betrayed by the people they had served and who would then find another leader, driven by the same hypocritical and opportunistic impulse. Joyce left Dublin because he did not want to "pay with his life for the debt of another." He himself commited a betrayal, because leaving is a form of treason; he nevertheless left to ceasessly return to the city of his youth on every page he wrote. He decided to write in the language of the "father," but in the name of a love for his "mother"—his maternal language, thus becoming an artist of the Irish spirit. He chose both literal exile in a world which could not understand him because he was too Irish, and the much more painful and unbearable inner exile in a world which could not accept him because he was imagining forms through which Ireland's modernization was effected by catching up with "continental time." Transceding the spirit of dissent that provided the foundation of his early art—a spirit inaugurated and consolidated by the avant-garde of the first half of the twentieth century—the connection to continental time Joyce envisaged had to do with the novelist's will to tell the truth about people and the world, about the beauty of the everyday and about common life. We are speaking of the will and capacity of Joyce as a writer to understand and let the world know about Ireland's history, about the potential of heroism and that of nationalism as forces that are simultaneously dy-

namic and destructive; of his willingness to identify himself with the community where he was born, but also the force to distance himself from "traditionalisms" apt to generate antimodern feelings and attitudes, to imagine the value of a historical perspective and to clearly gauge the path his country had to walk on the way to modernization, setting out from an intelligent valorization of tradition. Joyce's whole work represents such an objective, pragmatic use of tradition, in its spirit, in its imagery, in the way in which it communicates through the Word and beyond the Word, by exploring the nature of Irishness which Joyce interprets from an astonishingly new standpoint—that of permanent change in the relation he had with the idea of Irishness, but also in the the relation between Irishness and the world.

We have resorted to this rather long prelude, to the quotations and their interpretive comments to introduce the audience to the content, ideation, and, to a certain extent, the form in which the Irish theme is taken up, for interested parties or informed scholars alike, by Professor Kiberd's studies, books and work. This approach combines the tradition of thorough philological study with postcolonial methods, with history and literary history, literary theory and the sociology of reading, philosophy and the history of mentalities. It is an approach made up by an alloy of perspectives outlining a new and essentially incisive vision, founded on correlations, comparisons, similitudes, correspondences among the data examined by the literary historian, seconded by the analytical insights of the experienced reader. This is how Declan Kiberd appears to us, the readers, in a book that astonishes through its content and novelty: *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of a Modern Nation* (1996). In retrospect, reading this book today confirms the visionarism of its ideas. Just as in the last century Ireland produced a kind of writing that was experimental par excellence, thus creating a living and dynamic literature that participated in the renewal of contemporary history, the authors Professor Kiberd writes about triggered the emergence of a new Ireland. *Inventing Ireland* investigates the personalities and literary texts which refashioned the country after centuries of colonialism; it therefore affirms its belonging to the set of new literary histories of modern Ireland initiated during the mid-1990s and culminating in the first complete history of Irish literature, published in March 2006.

The book contains three tenets that have been verified by time. The first one states that Ireland's entry into modernity was determined by the preference for the experimental literature illustrated by writers who rejected insularity and isolation from the larger cultural environment, and adhered to major European trends, fully embracing the cosmopolitanism of the great cities where they lived while continuing to be Irish. This points to the literary descent and the connections of Irish writers with the European, world and British culture. Secondly,

Professor Kiberd disagrees with the assumption that it was their Europeanism, rather than their Irishness, that turned Yeats, Wilde or Shaw into modern authors. This is also to be found as a chapter of the important Field Day Anthology—another fundamental national project to which Professor Kiberd contributed at the beginning of the 1990s. The third tenet concerns the vital significance of the Protestant values of Anglo-Irish culture, with a special emphasis on the impact of Protestant Anglo-Irish women writers. Twenty years ago, Professor Declan Kiberd viewed the investigation of the nature of Irish identity, of Irishness, as "the ongoing process of coping with the realities of an ever-changing world." In *Inventing Ireland*, coping with the real—"the rough reality which tends to break romanticism to the core . . . the type of disillusioned romanticism and a certain form of erroneous understanding of a utopian ideal" described by Joyce in one of his letters—becomes a historical-critical perspective, interested in both the context and the innovating value of the literary text. It was an approach continued and developed in many other studies, which has turned Professor Kiberd into a trigger of change in the science of literature.

In an interview conducted after the publication of *Ulysses and Us* (2010), he states: "I'm not interested only in the Irish language, I'm also interested in comparing different European Modernisms with those of Latin America and so on . . . The resistance to globalization among young people often defines itself in terms of cultural value . . . I'm very aware, for instance, of how the revival of the Irish language as a movement has changed since my youth, when it was more a nationalist option, part of being patriotic. Now, it's actually counter-cultural in the minds of younger people who speak Irish, and would see themselves as anti-globalisers, rather than Irish nationalists; and the Irish language is a creative weapon in that particular struggle." Through the method of comparative analysis (and implicity other comparativist methods), somehow in tune with the programme of the Field Day Group founded in 1980 by Brian Friel and Stephen Rea, Professor Kiberd "invents Ireland" and creates an imaginary cultural space similar to the "fifth province" (apart from Ireland's four historical provinces) from where he can bring about a different, new discourse of unity. This is the gist of the extraordinary *Inventing Ireland*, published in 1996 and concerned with the significance of the multivoiced ensemble made up by diverse writers and supporters of the Irish Revival: some writing in Irish, others Anglo-Irish, some Catholic, some Protestant.

The second fragment *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* we have selected has very often been discussed by critics of Irish literature: the conversation concerning the word "tundish" between Stephen and and an English priest. Musing upon this word, Stephen is disconcerted to realise that the language he speaks belonged to another before being his: "The language in which we are speaking

is his before it is mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language."

Rooted in uncertainty and a mistrust in the capacity of language to tell the truth, the move towards language as an object of investigation, staged artistically through narrative and fictional discourse, is one of the most exciting themes of Irish modernism. Both *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (published in the year of the Easter Rising, 1916), and *Ulysses* (published in the year of the proclamation of the Republic of Ireland, 1922) discard the idea that a novel can rely solely on one native idiom and imaginatively anticipate the effects of artistic globalization adumbrated by the cosmopolitanism and internationalism of modernism as an aesthetic trend. The gist of this issue can be traced back to the historical-political and social-cultural context of the age and to the so-called "detachment"/"distance" taken from the (maternal) language. Joyce could not speak Irish; he tried to learn it, he lived his life in its shadow and the shadow of the dream the Irish language embodied for the individual and collective imaginary.

Irish had been diminished by lack of usage and had been banned by an act of Queen Elizabeth I in the 16th century. Detachment from the maternal language had to do with Joyce's rejection of traditionalism (though not of tradition) in both the life of the community and in his art. Through this rejection he antagonised his fellow writers, supporters of the Irish Revival. Actually, however, Joyce was secretely and deeply connected to Irish as a symbol, rather than a communicative act, since in spirit it was the languge within which he had been born, but within which he had not been able to grow up. He chose to come close to Irish through different means—by repeating its sounds, syllables, words, or by imaginatively exploiting its rhythm and musicality. The episode cited by Harold Bloom in *The Western Canon* (1994) concerning the literary descent of some of Joyce's characters invokes this mysterious and imaginary relation of the writer to his native language.

In *Ulysses*'s Stephen, based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Joyce embodies parody's cunning through the Logos; he uses English to construct the irony and self-irony that define the Irish way of negotiating with the world; he acknowledges both his Irish roots, and his Irish intellectual education expressed in what he called "the voice of a new humanism." The language Joyce felt he should be using and fighting for is obviously experienced as a source of estrangement ("His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay.") In fact,

the main contribution brought by the Irish language to Irish literary modernism has little to do with its linguistic features. The influence of the Irish language on Irish modernist writing has to do with a paradoxical ideology of the unsaid/the censored/the silenced accompanying the Irish Revival and endorsed by the language movement (adopting the Irish language). It is the idea that English—spoken, learned and thus accepted by most of the population as the native language within which they lived, dreamt and had been reared—was nevertheless foreign, deliberately and consciously acquired; this was seconded by the idea that somewhere offstage there was such a thing as an authentic native language. This may explain why the Irish writers of the early 20th century excelled at gauging, experimenting with and renewing the use of language and narrative discourses. A major role in this process was played by the dissonance born out frustration and generated with the use of English, which was equated with the impossibility to stay loyal to Irish ("The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. . . . I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit.")

There are two perspectives at play here: one for which the frustration of languge derives from it being a language—a signifying system which inflicts arbitrary limitations on the said; and one for which this languge acts by exclusion, because it is acquired speech, and consequently the ambiguity of what is expresses becomes suspect to an Irish writer who also happens to have been born a Catholic, like Joyce. It is therefore no accident that the first book published by Professor Kiberd, the outcome of of his doctoral research, *Synge and the Irish Language* (1979/1993) approaches the very theme of language, from the standpoint we have just described. The book is a clearheaded and courageous analysis, characterized by novelty in the context of its publication. John Millington Synge, an Anglo-Irish playwright (and thus a speaker of English, rather than Irish, which he learned for its own sake), became the victim of a paradox he had created himself: the readers who appreciated his plays could not speak Irish, and Irish speakers criticized and shunned his work. Working as a literary secretary of the Abbey Theatre during Yeats' directorship, Synge embarks on a career project by learning Irish in such a way as to become a creator of language, rather than deciding to actually write in Irish.

In fact, he carries on a tradition that had emerged as early as the 17th century, when Anglo-Irish was used to render local colour, comical effects, and stylistic games. Ironically, the English Synge created draws heavily on Irish, while its syntax is typically Irish. Professor Kiberd's object consists in analysing these essential aspects of the understading of century- or decade-long linguistic transfers that had ocurred after the banning of Irish, and of Synge's characters' source language, harking far back to the old history of the countryside and of the Irish rural communities, in the various provinces. The assumptions and approaches of

the 1979 book are verified by such recent works as *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Modernism* (2014), or Andrezj Gasiorek's *A History of Modernist Literature* (2015), which take up the arguments and demonstration Professor Kiberd produced almost 40 years ago. This may be explained by the visionarism of the author of *Synge and the Irish Language* and by the reliance on the adventure of language(s) in past and present Ireland. The distinction between "language" and "their language" is extremely significant: the former points at an impersonal association with language, the second to a relation of ambiguity which connotes, but does not precisely determines, who "they" are: the readers, the English, grammarians, the exiles (be they Irish, English or others living in the great metropolises). What is certain is that language is experienced as a source of discomfort and estrangement. ("The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine.") It is obvious that a writer who finds himself in a state of conflict with a language—manifested through exuberant irony, or through the industrious search for comic effects in the use of language, through imitation or reconstruction and dovetailing various syntactic systems—can either wage war against the language, or he can use it for clear political purposes, open to a host of political readings.

In this respect, Professor Kiberd's contribution, in all the three works we have mentioned, is remarkable. On the one hand, he finds that a writer does not wage war on a language just for the sake of staging various textual forms by means of style or narrative techniques. He wages war on a language for different reasons. The war against written or spoken language can be fought in a comic mode (as in Synge's plays), or in a serious-dramatic tone, or in a wordly-aboulic one (as with Joyce). In all these cases, the texts are political because their purpose is dismantling and recoding words, meanings and idiolects, and drawing attention to the materialized histories imagined, distorted, organized and temporally arranged by language. The Irish literature of the past and of the present is profoundly political, but this dimension does not surpass aesthetic value, but emerges stealthily and simultaneously with the latter. It is also political in Jacques Rancière's sense: "not as an exercise of power, but as a mode of action trigerred by a certain reason and practiced by a certain kind of subject."

The most frequent question (encompassing both the writing process itself, and its context cultural media ask contemporary authors refers to the choices they need to make when writing), in order to select slices of reality and turn them into a personalized edifice. In an interview conducted in February 2016, asked when and how he writes (that is, his choice of theme and the writing process itself)—Professor Kiberd provided an astonishingly simple answer: "I am a teacher, ultimately. I don't really think of myself as a writer." Speaking about one of his most recent books, *Ulysses and Us* (2010), he goes on: "That

book, like the other one, is a kind of overflow of the enjoyment I had with students for ages in classrooms in UCD." Therefore, Declan Kiberd's main mission seems to be being a good teacher, since everything he has written has started out from and returned to the student-reader. Having reached the peak of an academic career, widely recognized for the contribution he brought to the science of literature (history, criticism and literary theory), Professor Kiberd feels at ease with the two languages of Ireland: Irish and English. The pleasure of reading is seconded by the play of meanings and the transversal approach rooted in the change of the linguistic register. Language as the play of meanings and the consciously "amphibian" experience with and within the two idioms are felt not only as a challenge, but also a source of knowledge and light cast upon the authenticity of the Irish or Anglo-Irish cultural space. Certainly, like any other literature professor, Declan Kiberd deciphers textual meanings and identifies reading conventions; however, he does so in the case of two distinct literatures, written in two distinct languages and engrained in different cultural experiences: "I've always been amphibious," he confessed in the same interview. "I work both in Irish and in English, so this is a great attraction for me, to have students working on the cusp between both languages, and to be also working on the cusp with such disciplines as history, sociology, and political science."

A philologist by training, Professor Declan Kiberd studied English and Irish literature at Trinity College, Dublin. In 1976, he was awarded a Ph.D. from Oxford University, for a thesis supervised by Richard Ellman, the biographer of Joyce, Oscar Wilde and W. B. Yeats. He began his academic career by teaching English literature at the University of Kent, Canterbury, and Irish literature at Trinity College, Dublin. Since 1979, he has continued his academic career started as a lecturer, then a professor of English and Anglo-Irish drama and literature at University College, Dublin. Until 2011 he held the professorship in English and Irish literature, drama and film at this university, and he has served in several academic and administrative capacities at the College of Arts and Humanities, School of English, Drama and Film. He was the director of the W. B. Yeats Summer School (1985–1987), and the director of the Centre for Irish Studies at UCD. He has devoted much of his time to the community by accepting some important public offices: Director of Public Libraries and Arts Government Commission, the director for cultural programmes at RTÉ, a member of the Irish Manuscripts Commission and Cultural Relations Committee. He has published extensively as a reviewer and editorialist for the *The Irish Times*, *The Times Literary Suplement*, *The London Review of Books*, *The New York Times*, *The Irish Press.* He has held vital and significant positions in the management of cultural and literary societies militating for the blurring (or even erasure) of the cultural borders between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (The

Field Day Group, Director of the G. B. Shaw Society of Dublin, one of the new managers of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin). At the same time, since 1982, he has been invited as a visiting lecturer in more than 30 countries. In 2003, he was elected a member of the Royal Irish Academy.

Since 2011, he has been a professor of Irish literature and language at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA, and at its Institute for Irish Studies. He has taught both in the USA and in Dublin. For services rendered to the Irish culture, literature and languages he became the recipient of numerous prizes, such as the Prize of the President of the Republic or Ireland for the scientific and academic work conducted between 1988 and 1989. His books won prizes in both Europe and America: the Michael Durkan Prize of the American Committee for Irish Studies for the best book of cultural criticism, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of a Modern Nation*; the Oscar Wilde Prize for Literary Achievement, 1996; the *Irish Times Literature* Prize for a nonfiction book, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000; Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2001). In 2011, John Naughton included him on *The Observer*'s list of 300 personalities of Anglo-Irish culture ("the top public figures of our cultural discourse").

As a specialist in the Irish language, culture and civilization, Professor Kiberd had a substantial contribution to the development of the M.A. programme in Irish Studies, founded in 1999-2000 by the Department of English Language and Literature of the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University.

Occasions like the present one occur seldom in the life of a person serving the Alma Mater Napocensis. Life seems to have been generous and patient with me, as it allowed me the experience and rare honour of speaking from a seat formerly occupied by the great magisters of the university. Before this distinguished forum of knowledge and wisdom, I am to deliver the Laudatio address in honour of Professor Declan Kiberd, the Keough-Naughton Professor at the University of Notre Dame, USA and Dublin, the Republic or Ireland. My task is very difficult, because of the remarkable personality and work I must introduce to you: a complex nature which has produced a complex body of work, a man whose entire life was divided among teaching, research, and academic administration, but who has never forgotten to spend some of his precious time by contributing substantially to the development of Irish culture. It is why I have opted for such a presentation—on the assumption that it is important, for all of us and for Professor Kiberd, to emphasise the exceptional moments, the essential directions defining the trajectory of his research activities, teaching and presence within the community.

This is also why I have chosen to speak about an Irish novel—one of the emblematic pieces of modern fiction—and about James Joyce, who was mod-

ern because he was Irish, an example of imagination, creativity and innovating spirit. Speaking to his contemporaries in *Ulysses and Us* (2010) Declan Kiberd used the term the "art of everyday living" to describe what Joyce does in the novel: the art of everyday living is the art of passing on life experience from one generation to the next—from the old self-satisfied Dubliner Bloom to the inexperienced, agitated and anxious youth, Stephen.

Ulysses and Us represents the quintessence of Professor Kiberd's contribution to the effort of reconsidering the authentic and the authenticity of Irish writing, by identifying popular genres in Joyce's fiction in the modes of staging the everyday in Irish literature, which has now found its own place within the diversity of European culture, in a rapidly globalizing world. In relation to this, Declan Kiberd examines the assumption that an author has to have an international or global consciousness, and finds that it is precisely the Irish space and context that provide the value of a writer's work. Exactly twenty years ago, discussing the issue of modernity, Professor Kiberd put forth the visionary and prescient idea he still supports today (as testified by his work): it is cultural geography that gives value and significance to the word: "being Irish means being modern." It seems this idea has been confirmed by the passing of time.

Go raibh maith agat, Professor Kiberd. Thank you, professor.
Go n-éiri an bóthar leat!

May the road rise up to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back
May the sun shine warm upon your face;
The rains fall soft upon your fields
And until we meet again
May God hold you in the palm of his hand!