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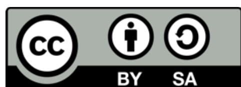

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Neo-Victorian Romanticism and Decadence: The Reconceptualization of Realism from John Henry Newman to James Stephens

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This article explores the late nineteenth-century resurgence of Romantic aesthetics as a neo-Victorian phenomenon.[1] To do so, it tackles realism as the dominant formal and conceptual register of the Victorian age, investigating the reconceptualization of social realism put forth by decadent artists such as Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater and by Irish modernist writer James Stephens (1880-1950).[2] Such a reconceptualization is assessed as a reworking of theoretical principles set forth during the Victorian Age by John Henry Newman. An overview of such tenets, based mainly on Romantic premises such as idealism and immaterialism, is provided to bring into focus the reception of Newman's 'aesthetic idealism' during decadence and High Modernism. In this respect, the use of Stephens for our purpose is grounded on a set of diverse reasons, all resting on his historical placement in the continuum of the very long nineteenth century.

Stephens wrote novels, short stories, poems, plays, and radio shows, as well as essays and articles which he contributed to newspapers and journals such as *The Irish Review* (which he founded and edited), *Sinn Féin*, and *The Times*. He shared his birthday with James Joyce, who declared that, should he die prematurely and never finish *Finnegans Wake*, the whole project had to be handed over to Stephens.[3] Born in 1882, and thus very likely to have absorbed both Victorian and decadent aesthetics, Stephens's cultural background was that of an Irish-born Protestant and active member of the Irish Revival.[4] Such biographical details characterize his discourse as a deliberate challenge to the English Imperial semiosphere and to its practices of meaning-making, including literary realism.[5] Although often deemed a modernist, Stephens's work reveals a decisive influence on decadent aesthetes and their sceptical attitude towards the type of realism codified by the great Victorian novelists.

This attitude is expressed quite vocally by Wilde in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), in which he designs a geometrical opposition between realism and Romanticism, pivoting on a metamorphosis of the nineteenth century into Caliban:

> The nineteenth-century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass.
>
> The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass.[6]

This Wildean proportion establishes realism and Romanticism as two conceptual registers that coexist, albeit on opposite ends, in the nineteenth century. Wilde also indicates that ugliness and deformity are intrinsic to the nineteenth century: whether it knows its own features or not, the spirit of the age dislikes the artistic practices that return a clear image of itself. Realism, in Wilde's words, becomes a device for self-revelation, like the reflective surface of a glass. The reproduction of the visible qualities of the world through verbal, pictorial, or photographic media ultimately lets the century see his own image, providing a visual and accurate rendition of his monstrous appearance. Romanticism, on the other hand, is despised by this historical and cultural Caliban because it does not possess the ability to make Caliban self-conscious of, and thus angry with, his own ugliness. Instead, it enrages the monster because its set of aesthetic values will not reflect Caliban's internal and inaccurate image of itself, which identifies, by extension, with the theoretical principles of the Darwinist and Benthamite philosophies. Immaterialism, the call for communion with nature and the supernatural, the exploration of the inner self, and tackling the unseen as triggers for artistic practice all fail to align with the century's newer materialistic ideologies. In other words, the nineteenth century disregards Romantic aesthetics because it fails to conform to the century's idea, or inner vision, of itself.

Interestingly, both realism and Romanticism are set out by Wilde at the opposite ends of a dichotomy which has at its centre the act of seeing, self-reflection, and the notion of the image ('seeing his own image' vs '*not* seeing his own image'). Such a dichotomy signals, on the one hand,

how Romanticism as a conceptual register never ceased to exist throughout Victorianism and, on the other, a mutual irreconcilability between Romantic and realistic forms of expression. Yet, Wilde's considerations also acknowledge that Victorian art and philosophy were oscillating, at varying degrees, along the continuum existing between these two aesthetic tendencies. Indeed, Wilde's far-sightedness is confirmed in the literary criticism of the 1910s, where it is stated that a 'great movement […] which began in Romanticism, is ending in Realism'.[7] Hence, anything neo-Victorian, whether decadent or modernist, should replicate this dichotomic episteme between Romantic idealism and the modes and ways of literary realism in Victorian novels. Moreover, while the source for the realistic end of Wilde's equation can be traced back to nineteenth-century novelists, the Romantic one might seem more elusive, and this is where James Stephens comes into play.

Our object of enquiry is 'An Essay in Cubes', which Stephens published in *The English Review* in April 1914.[8] It is a dense theoretical essay where Stephens exposes his views on prose writing and literary criticism – views which seem to owe quite a lot to Wilde's *The Critic as Artist*, especially in Stephens's elaboration of Wilde's concept of 'second-rate littérateurs':[9]

> We are overrun by a set of people who, when poet or painter passes away, arrive at the house along with the undertaker, and forget that their one duty is to behave as mutes. But we won't talk about them. They are the mere body-snatchers of literature. The dust is given to one, and the ashes to another, and the soul is out of their reach.[10]

By characterizing contemporary writers as 'body-snatchers', quick to collect the material remains of great writers but unable to reach their inner essence (their 'soul'), Wilde once again plays on the duality of material and immaterial as the opposing philosophical tenets driving artistic enterprise. Aptly illustrating the artistic faults of the present in the mindless disposal of the great artists' mortal remains on behalf of this 'set of people', Wilde is, in fact, implying the crucial importance of connecting to the inner invisible qualities of a work of art, rather than concentrating on a forgetful reproduction of its exterior attributes. Stephens, on his part, begins 'An Essay in Cubes' by cutting through the clutter, providing a variation on Wilde's theme that wants to give clear instances of

some 'detestable' writers or, in Wilde's words, 'cheap editions of great men'.[11] Stephens thus taps into Wilde's celebration of the 'soul' of literature by morphing it into the 'heart', declaring 'our novelists' to be 'peculiarly heartless people' who, 'masked by the current fashion in ethic and religion', are responsible, like Caliban, for an 'unconscious' and 'horrid self-revelation':

> It is a matter for astonishment at how mediocre is the intellect which the best of these writers will display. The masters of fiction have seldom risen above the level of an after-dinner speaker who has ascertained his own glibness and the silliness of people who have dined, and who knows that it is seldom necessary to give of his best, even if he had it. The thought of these men does not often rise above banality.[12]

Stephen then continues by indicating Henry Fielding as the epitome of such an after-dinner speaker, by elaborating a technological analogy between these types of writers and phonographs, and by asserting that their 'duty', instead, should entail the mastery of a keyword for decadent aesthetics such as 'vision'. Stephens writes:

> Just as many artists are no more than animated photograph-machines which project rigorously the inessential of something seen but not visualized, so many writers have been phonographs, and they have authoritatively the most banal ideal of their day floating in a solution of the then-current scientific small-talk. […] [T]heir duty is to see the external world not with their eyes but with their minds, and to pass it through that crucible before they reproject it (interesting cinematic metaphor); but if they are unable to digest their vision, we are entitled to inquire whether they remain in an intelligent profession.[13]

Stephens's insistence on 'seeing the external world not with their eyes but with their minds' as an inescapable duty of the artist and of man had been laid out quite conspicuously by Walter Pater in *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). Through the motive of religious conversion in this historical novel Pater dramatizes the development of Marius from a materialistic pagan worshipper to an idealistic follower of Christianity, embracing the 'reasonable Ideal' of God. Throughout the novel, Marius comes to his realisation through a progressive detachment from a blind trust in visible materiality. This detachment will eventually lead him to embrace a thorough questioning of the visible. Such a progression is dramatized in the culminating chapter, titled 'The Will as Vision':

> Through one reflection upon another, he passed from such instinctive divinations, to the thoughts which give them logical consistency, formulating at last, as the necessary exponent of our own and the world's life, that reasonable Ideal to which the Old Testament gives the name of Creator, which for the philosophers of Greece is the Eternal Reason,

> and in the New Testament the Father of Men – even as one builds up from act and word and expression of the friend actually visible at one's side, an ideal of the spirit within him.[14]

Marius' realization is a 'build up from act and word and expression […] actually visible' to an understanding of 'The purely material world [as] the unreal thing',[15] thus formalizing a type of idealism that, while undoubtedly tinged with Romantic premises, can be said to be resting on a Platonic philosophical set-up, eventually made explicit by Pater with the publication of his lectures on *Plato and Platonism* (1893).[16] What is often overlooked in criticism is Pater's exquisitely Victorian source for his appreciation of Plato, an Eminent Victorian who sought to harmonize Platonic Idealism, Romanticism, and the teachings of the Fathers of the Church: St. John Henry Newman. A monumental thinker to whom both Wilde and Pater looked with reverence, Newman elaborated a theory of art resting on the very premises that Pater dramatized in *Marius,* and which were also taken up by Wilde and decadence.[17]

A necessary premise to lay out a synthesis of Newman's thought on art is that his theological understanding and his literary conceptions are deeply ingrained into each other. He deemed literature indivisible from theology, while his own theology is highly influenced by some literary premises.[18] Generally speaking, it is safe to affirm that Newman's overall thought was built on a reprise of Patristic theology on the one hand and on Romanticism on the other. In particular, Newman's studies for *Arians of the Third Century* (1833) had him come in contact with Clement and Origenes, an intellectual encounter which allowed him to incorporate Plato's and Plotinus' hypostatic theology into his own. At the same time, his appreciation of the Romantics' capacity to express 'awe, mystery, tenderness, reverence, devotedness, and other feelings'[19] posit him on anti-rationalistic, anti-utilitarian stances which are often sustained by Berkeleyan, immaterialist views, as he would call them in *Apologia*, 'my mistrust of the reality of material phenomena'.[20] Naturally, this 'mistrust' entails a recourse to individual perception as a reliable measure to assess the real, a principle which Newman expanded on in his theology of Conscience[21] and which ultimately rests on the paradigm of subjectivity which moulds Romantic aesthetics. In other words, Newman's

thorough knowledge of platonic philosophy via the Church Fathers, along with his immaterialist views, all concur in assessing his philosophical, theological, and literary set-up as 'idealistic'. However, for its structural reliance on Patristic gnoseology, Newman's premises rest on an etymological kind of idealism, one where the Idea, in its true platonic sense, harks back to the Greek root of the word, *-ἰδ-*, which forms the aorist tense of the verb *ὁράω*, and therefore refers to an aspectual, subjective way of seeing, untied from material, seeable referents. Hence, Newman's idealism rests on the notion of the Idea as vision and on the ultimate Idea, that of God, as showing itself to the believer as an 'image', which, being 'no warrant for the existence of the objects which those images represent',[22] ultimately entails a full engagement of the subject's perception. Thus, I propose to define Newman's idealism as 'aesthetic'.

It must be noted that Marius' change of conscience occurs after a vision, a spiritual experience transmitting to him complex meanings that he seeks to unravel, which ultimately lead him to convert to Christianity.[23] This type of experience is at the core of Newman's aesthetic idealism, being in truth a re-enactment of the mystical experience, by which the vision of an 'image', often accompanied by sensory perceptions, triggers a rational comprehension of God's existence – in Newman's terms, 'real assent', which he connects to a 'change in the character of that apprehension' that happens 'so often […] in what is called religious conversion'.[24] Newman's conception of poetry and literature finds an almost exact correspondence in his broader theological understanding as based on real assent. In his Dublin lecture on the subject, he defined Literature as the *mise en forme* into the language of the aesthetic perception of an ideal, unseen reality – a definition which perfectly resonates with real assent as an act of rational apprehension of the truth: 'why should not skill in diction be simply subservient and instrumental to the great prototypal ideas which are the contemplation of a Plato or a Virgil?'.[25] Literary activity is thus the result of a contemplative act harking back to what Wordsworth called 'turning the mind upon herself' while looking for 'universal things'.[26]

It is therefore in mysticism, in the ability to inhabit both the visible and the invisible, that Newman finds a suitable place for poetry as a religious experience:

> Poetry then is our mysticism; and so far as any two characters of mind tend to penetrate below the surface of things, and to draw men away from the material to the invisible world, so far they may certainly be said to answer the same end; and that too a religious one.[27]

The mystical is thus the conceptual foundation for Newman's Catholic literary and theological thought, for he saw Romanticism as the re-enactment or, instead, as the development of that mystical sensitivity even though, he says, 'it may appear to some far-fetched, of course, to draw any comparison between the mysticism of the ancients, and the poetry or romance of the moderns, as to the religious tendencies of each'.[28] Newman's frequent praises of Romantic authors often trespass their literary merits to evaluate Wordsworth, Scott, and Coleridge in their own philosophical and theological weight. Of Coleridge, in particular, Newman said during the spring of 1835: 'I for the first time read parts of Coleridge's works; and I am surprised how much I thought mine, is to be found there'.[29] What Newman calls 'Shelleyism, Coleridgism' had the merit of proposing 'a richer and warmer philosophy' thriving upon the ashes of 'old Benthamism shrivelling up […] edging forward and forward, no one knowing how, to a more Catholic theology'.[30] It should not come as a surprise, then, that in *A Letter to Jelf,* Newman went so far as to establish a clear parallel between Romantic literature and Catholicity:

> In truth there is at this moment a great progress of the religious mind of our Church to something deeper and truer than satisfied the last century. […] The poets and philosophers of the age have borne witness to it for many years. Those great names in our literature, Sir Walter Scott, Mr. Wordsworth, Mr. Coleridge, though in different ways and with essential differences one from another, […] still all bear witness to it. […] The age is moving towards something, and […] this something, is the Church of Rome. She alone […] has given free scope to the feelings of awe, mystery, tenderness, reverence, devotedness, and other feelings which may be especially called Catholic.[31]

The Romantics' catholicity rests precisely on their visionary immaterialism and on their sacramental conception of the real – two tenets which Newman himself had explored in 'Poetry' in 1829. In the essay, poetry is defined as a 'gift', hence as a charismatic bestowal, from an ideal entity that lingers beyond the 'written composition' – in Wordsworth's verse, 'the vision and the

faculty divine'.[32] The written composition, for Newman, is therefore the projection, or rather, the active formalisation of an aesthetic experience of the ideal, which men can access through the imagination. 'Figure' and 'language' are thus necessary but 'poor means' to express their imaginative contact with the ideal:[33]

> Poetry, according to Aristotle, is a representation of the ideal. Biography and history represent individual characters and actual facts; poetry, on the contrary, generalizing from the phenomenon of nature and life, supplies us with pictures drawn, not after an existing pattern but after a creation of the mind. […] Hence, while it recreates the imagination by the superhuman loveliness of its views, it provides a solace for the mind broken by the disappointments and sufferings of actual life; and becomes, moreover, the utterance of the inward emotions of a right moral feeling, seeking a purity and a truth which this world will not give. It follows that the poetical mind is one full of the eternal forms of beauty and perfection; these are its material of thought, its instrument and medium of observation, – these colour each object to which it directs its view. It is called imaginative or creative, from the originality and independence of its modes of thinking, compared with the commonplace and matter-of-fact conceptions of ordinary minds, which are fettered down to the particular and individual. […] Figure is its necessary medium of communication with man; for in the feebleness of ordinary words to express its ideas, and in the absence of terms of abstract perfection, the adoption of metaphorical language is the only poor means allowed it for imparting to others its intense feelings. There is an ambiguity in the word 'poetry', which is taken to signify both the gift itself, and the written composition which is the result of it.[34]

On his part, Stephens fully embraces this Paterian/Newmanian subjectivity principle in art by dismissing 'objective art – realism as it is usually known'[35] and harshly criticizing 'novelists […] who have seldom been artists'[36] on the basis of their proneness to scientific objectivity, giving instances that go from Hardy, whose *Jude the Obscure* is defined as a 'miserable book',[37] to George Meredith, and George Moore. Of Moore, in particular, Stephens says that he 'ought to have been the greatest writer of his contemporaries […] but he had the misfortune of having been born too soon'.[38] Stephens lucidly singles out the causes for Moore's hit-and-miss as a writer in having come 'into a world entirely dominated by Charles Darwin and the theories of his time: a world absolutely reeking of the most matter-of-fact intellectualities', which prevented him, and Hardy and Meredith, from developing 'the free minds of artists'.[39] Instead, Stephens advocates once again for a Paterian motive, inviting writers to engage with 'the only subject' worthy of their attention, namely 'showing the growth of a soul to some maturity'.[40] He then continues by criticizing any pretence of

objectivity in art, again wanting to shift the subject matter of the writer from a 'physical' conception of life to a tension towards 'heaven', which, in Stephens's understanding, coincides with the act of looking 'inwards'. Moreover, he openly advocates for scientists to return to the 'sacred books of the world' as 'the record of human progress', hence attempting to reintroduce a religious paradigm in his present epistemological realm, a move that is surprisingly reminiscent of Newman's own intellectual strife during his own time:

> Their whole conception of life is physical, and when they try to look upwards, which is inwards, they cannot see heaven because of the red haze in their brains; [...] The term objective, as applied to art, has only a temporary significance, if it has any. [...] I am more inclined to believe that there is no such thing as objective writing in fiction, but in science there has been much, and it has paralyzed science for centuries. [...] We will have no belief in scientists until we are assured that they are deeply read in poetry and are as deeply interested in the sacred books of the world; then we will know that they are really pursuing their *metier*, for poetry and the sacred literature are the record of human progress.[41]

Stephens's arguments, as exposed so far, with their insistence on mistrusting visible materiality in favour of the inner vision as a trigger for art, follow a distinct Wildean and Paterian, thus decadent, track. Yet, Stephens is also arguably drawing on a blatantly Victorian cultural paradigm, namely the dichotomy between Science and Art. In particular, he dwells heavily on the mechanization or, rather, 'technicalization' of writing, painted out in the initial analogy between writers and reproducer machines. Stephen's reliance on this widely Victorian epistemological binarism, while replicating and reaffirming decadent aesthetics, is also indirectly reproducing motives put forth by Newman when he denounces the inherent dangers of massification and technical reproducibility in his 1850s Dublin lectures:

> Our writers write so well that there is little to choose between them. What they lack is that individuality, that earnestness, most personal yet most unconscious of self which is the greatest charm of an author. The very form of the compositions of the day suggest to us their many deficiencies. They are anonymous. So was it not in the literature of those nations which we consider the special standard of classical writing [...]. The Epic was sung by the voice of the living, present poet. The drama, in its very idea, is poetry in persons [...]. Pindar is all through his odes a speaker. Plato, Xenophon, and Cicero, throw their philosophical dissertations in the form of a dialogue. Orators and preachers are by their very profession known persons, and the personal is laid down by the Philosopher of antiquity as the source of their greatest persuasiveness.[42]

Newman's influence on Stephens reads quite pervasively; in particular, when Stephens mentions 'matter of fact intellectualities' and the novelists' conception of life as 'physical', one can hear Newman's voice echoing through, especially in his consideration of Bentham as 'a stern realist' who 'limits his realism to things which he can see, hear, taste, touch and handle'.[43] Moreover, both authors concur on the intrinsic self-reflexivity of the work of art and on style as the blueprint for the artist's mind. Where Newman talks of 'the personal' as the 'source of their greatest persuasiveness',[44] Stephens tells us that 'As our aspiration, so our inspiration. There is never an exception to this rule. We reproduce ourselves.'[45]

In this sense, even though Newman's influence on a writer like Stephens might be indirect, it is safe to affirm that Stephens's rejection of realism can be defined as neo-Victorian for his reliance on Newman as the enabler of a Romantic persistence through the Victorian Age and beyond – a persistence which is still speaking to our present not just in literature, but in pop culture and fashion, and that needs to be more thoroughly interrogated.[46] In dismissing the identification of the seeable with the real, Stephens is not just dismissing social realism and its pretences of scientific objectivity as viable forms of representation. He is also re-enacting Newman's understanding of realism, which was ingrained in the sacramental, or mystical principle according to which all that is seeable, touchable, or hearable is a type and a manifestation of unseen 'realities greater than itself'.[47] Such immaterialism, like an underground current, made its way through the Victorian Age, springing back to the surface with Wilde and Pater all the way to modernism. Unsurprisingly then, in conclusion to his essay, Stephens comes full circle and, while discussing emotion as a synonym for wisdom, proposes William Blake, 'in whom emotion and intellect almost balance each other'[48] as the epitome of the artist.

Having traced so many conceptual assonances connecting Stephens's idea of art with Wilde's and Pater's, and having found in Newman an authoritative source for the rebound of Romantic principles during the late nineteenth century and beyond, the status of decadence and modernism as cultural moments of 'rupture' with their immediate past should be further

questioned. If anything, these findings prove that decadence and modernism carry the kernel of an exquisitely neo-Victorian resurgence of themes and motifs that run through the century in the words and thoughts of Newman. Such themes and motifs rely on Romantic paradigms, such as a general mistrust of the sensible in favour of an exploration of the aesthetic experiences, the immaterialism of poetic vision, a conscious use of emotion in writing to form a personal style, and reclaiming the sacred, religious dimension as foundational aspects of art and life.

Conclusion

Rather than clear-cut argumentations, a tentative conclusion to these findings entails a considerable number of questions, the most urgent of which is the rediscovery of Romantic aesthetics as the prime foundation for modernism. This is an argument that Frank Kermode has already made present, and which is gaining momentum in recent studies.[49] Embracing the perspective that modernism's yearning towards 'the New'[50] was, simply put, an almost nostalgic rediscovery of a Romantic ethos via the mediation of Newman, Wilde, and Pater would possibly prompt scholars to review the periodization of the very long nineteenth-century to include much more of the twentieth. Moreover, it would require looking at Romanticism as the original matrix for change and revolution in literary modes, tropes, and language, which kept disseminating and re-emerging constantly through time until this day. As Newman astutely knew, such a change was founded on a thorough experimentation with language as a means to express the self and on a general conception of the real as something existing beyond the scope of the visible. Romantic immaterialism might thus be at the basis of the paradigmatic strive for religiosity that attempted to counter-balance Victorian materialism, a strive that decadent authors quickly took up to differentiate themselves from their contemporary mainstream. It would be disingenuous to believe that this yearning for transcendence ended once modernist authors came to be, as proven by Stephens's writings. Instead, it is safe to affirm that this constant search for an adequate representation of this 'invisible visibility' is a conceptual pillar of art from time immemorial, which

shaped itself according to given historical conditions, and that it constitutes, at the present day, a hermeneutic question still 'somewhat neglected by literary scholarship', that is, 'the problem of the relation between an author's religious convictions and his artistic technique'[51] – a question that definitely needs to be confronted again.

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[1] In order to set up a comprehensive methodology for this article, and to avoid the lures of rigid periodization, the adjective 'neo-Victorian' is here used in accordance with the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition. In 1916, 'neo-Victorian' was used as a noun meaning a person or thing whose 'values, attitudes, or behaviour hark back to' the Victorian Age. Interestingly, about twenty years later, it had become an adjective signalling 'resembling, reviving, or reminiscent of' the Victorian Age. See 'neo-Victorian, n. and adj.', *OED Online*, http://www.oed.com [accessed 9 August 2023]. My intention is to provide the reader with other evidence for the temporal ubiquity of cultural and artistic phenomena, so as to further question the notion of historical periods as 'vertical pile[s] of neatly stacked boxes'. Art and culture are therefore considered as complex modes of meaning-making that, manifesting in the historical continuum, keep iterating kernels of shared universal sense by refashioning it in forms and modes suitable to the period they appear in. In other words, and to borrow Felski's perspective, the aim of this article is to observe 'the transtemporal movement' of 'particular texts'. See Rita Felski, 'Context Stinks!', *New Literary History*, 42.4 (2011), pp. 577; 574.

[2] An in-depth discussion of realism in its theoretical or semiological formulations is beyond the scope of this article. Hence, realism as a literary phenomenon is going to be observed in its *formal* transformation from a generally ekphrastic modality of representation during the Victorian Age [cf. J. R. Ehnenn, 'Haptic Ekphrasis', *Victorian Studies*, 64.1 (2021), pp. 88-114], overall driven by pedagogical and scientific approaches [see Jerome Meckier, *Hidden Rivalries in Victorian Fiction: Dickens, Realism, and Revaluation* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987), pp. 5 *et passim*], to the modernist 'realist ambition' [see Salado, Régis, 'Stream of Consciousness et Monologue Interieur. Contribution a l'histoire de deux notions critiques "modernes"', *Modernité/Modernism*, *Textuel*, 53 (2006), p. 114] of shaping the non-visible for the page – in Rene Gladman's words, putting 'the complex shape of our interiority […] into the straight line of the sentence' [see Rene Gladman, as quoted in Timothy Bewes, *Free Indirect. The Novel in a Postfictional Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, New York, 2022), p. 7]. Therefore, realism will be here understood according to Watt's comprehensive definition of it as a discursive practice aimed at rendering an 'authentic report of human experience' [Ian Watts, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), p. 32)].

[3] Joyce wrote to Miss Weaver on 20 May 1927: 'As regards that book itself and its future completion I have asked Miss Beach to get into closer relations with James Stephens. I started reading one of his last books yesterday Deirdre. I thought he wrote The Return of the Hero, which I liked. His Charwoman's Daughter is now out in French. He is a poet and Dublin born. Of course he would never take a fraction of the time or pains I take but so much the better for him and me and possibly for the book itself. If he consented to maintain three or four points which I consider essential and I showed him the threads he could finish the design'. Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 591-92.

[4] See Patricia McFate, *The Writings of James Stephens: Variations on a Theme of Love* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), p. 10 *et passim*.

[5] Revival writers in Ireland shunned from realistic depictions of Irish everyday life to re-forge their national alterity by means of a rediscovery of myth and legend. As an indirect form of critique towards Englishness, such a tendency shares the same sets of intentions of Aestheticism, and Wilde's own remodulation of social realism. See Alison Harvey, 'Irish Aestheticism in Fin-de-Siècle Women's Writing: Art, Realism, and the Nation', *Modernism/Modernity*, 21.3 (2014), p. 806: 'Revival writers including W. B. Yeats, Augusta Gregory, and J. M. Synge fused aestheticist modes – symbolism, myth, legend, allegory, and dream, among others, with nationalist politics as part of a project of forging and fostering a sovereign Irish identity and nation-to-be. […] [R]evivalist authors emphasize Celtic and Gaelic myth and legend over contemporary Irish life, an emphasis that aligns their works formally with central aspects of British aestheticism while also differentiating them nationally from British imperialist depictions of

Ireland and Irishness. Like Wilde, revivalists critique Englishness, though their works focus on Ireland, not England; they counter British colonialism by proffering "authentic" Irish forms and figures in place of colonial representations of Irishness'.
[6] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: Barnes & Nobles, 2003), p. 1.
[7] William Francis Barry, *Heralds of Revolt. Studies in Modern Literature and Dogma* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), p. 192. This perspective seems to be considered by recent critics such as Meckier, p. 5: 'Indeed, the major varieties of competing Victorian realisms – George Eliot's and Dickens's – each had both a scientific and a poetic component. Pro-Darwin, George Eliot and Mrs. Gaskell were also strongly imbued with Wordsworth. Dickens and Collins had grave reservations about the positive implications George Eliot drew from the biological sciences; they preferred a perspective colored by Coleridge'.
[8] James Stephens, 'An Essay in Cubes', in *Uncollected Prose of James Stephens*, edited by Patricia McFate, vol. 2 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), pp. 115-24.
[9] Ibid., p. 123: 'The great novelist will forever be less than the great critic. The novelist is the food-carrier to genius; the genius is the critic, and the critic, when he is truly competent, is the great poet.'
[10] Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: Blitz Editions, 1990), p. 949.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Stephens, pp. 115-16.
[13] Ibid., p. 118.
[14] Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean. His Sensations and Ideas* (London: Macmillan, 1885), p. 235.
[15] Ibid., p. 236.
[16] Ibid., p. 250: 'In truth, it was the Platonic Idealism, as he conceived it, which for him literally animated, and gave him so lively an interest in, this world of the purely outward aspects of men and things. Were not all visible objects – the whole material world indeed, according to the consistent testimony of philosophy in many forms – "full of souls"?'
[17] Although a small number of excellent studies on Newman's influence on Pater and decadence do exist, none of them considers Pater's Platonism as an intellectual heritage he drew from Newman. Among those studies, it is worth citing David J. DeLaura, *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England: Newman, Arnold, and Pater* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), and Jude V. Nixon, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and His Contemporaries: Liddon, Newman, Darwin, and Pater* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994).
[18] See John Henry Newman, 'Bearing of Theology on other Branches of Knowledge', in *The Idea of a University Defined and Illustrated* (London: Longmans, 1907), pp. 67-8: 'from time immemorial [theology] meets us at every turn in our literature, it is the secret assumption, too axiomatic to be distinctly professed, of all our writers'.
[19] John Henry Newman, *A Letter Addressed to the Rev. R. W. Jelf, D. D., Canon of Christ Church, in Explanation of no. 90 in the Series Called The Tracts for the Times* (London: Rivington, 1841), p. 386.
[20] John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua. Being A History of His Religious Opinions* [1865] (London: Longmans, 1908), p. 108.
[21] As formalized in his *opus magnum*, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870).
[22] John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Longmans, 1907), p. 80.
[23] See Pater, pp. 227 *et passim*.
[24] Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, p. 80.
[25] John Henry Newman, 'Literature', in *The Idea of a University*, p. 283.
[26] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 3, ll. 110-18 (London: Edward Moxon, 1850), p. 60: 'I looked for universal things; perused / The common countenance of earth and sky: / Earth, nowhere unembellished by some trace / Of that first Paradise whence man was driven; / And sky, whose beauty and bounty are expressed / By the proud name she bears – the name of Heaven. / I called on both to teach me what they might; / Or turning the mind in upon herself / Pored, watched, expected, listened, spread my thoughts / And spread them with a wider creeping'.
[27] John Henry Newman, *Essays, Critical and Historical*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1907), vol. 1, p. 291.
[28] Ibid.
[29] *Letters and Correspondence of John Henry Newman During His Life in the English Church: With a Brief Autobiography*, edited by Anne Mozley, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1890), vol. 1, p. 35.
[30] Newman, *Essays*, vol. 1, p. 304.
[31] Newman, *Letter to Jelf*, p. 386.
[32] William Wordsworth, 'The Wanderer', in *The Excursion* (London: Edward Moxon, 1853], p. 6: 'O, MANY are the poets that are sown / By nature; men endowed with highest gifts, / The vision and the faculty divine; / Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse'.
[33] 'What are words but artificial signs for ideas?' asks the protagonist of Newman's 1848 conversion novel, *Loss and Gain* (London: Longmans, 1907), p. 245.
[34] John Henry Newman, 'Poetry. With Reference to Aristotle's *Poetics*', in *Essays*, vol. 1, pp. 10-11.
[35] Stephens, p. 120.
[36] Ibid., p. 119.
[37] Ibid., p. 121.
[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., p. 118.
[41] Ibid, pp. 118-19.
[42] John Henry Newman, 'English Catholic Literature', in *The Idea*, p. 329.
[43] John Henry Newman, 'The Tamworth Reading Room', in *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects* (London: Longmans, 1907), p. 269.
[44] Newman, 'English Catholic Literature', p. 329.
[45] Stephens, p. 118.
[46] In post-modern and contemporary culture, Romanticism seems to have regained a paradigmatic status, especially when it comes to ecocriticism – see Kate Rigby, *Reclaiming Romanticism. Towards an Ecopoetic of Decolonization* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022) – and epistemology, as in *Constellations of a Contemporary Romanticism*, ed. by Jacques Khalip and Forest Pyle (New York: Fordham University Press). Pop culture seems to have anticipated such a resurgence ever since the New-Romantic movements in music and fashion, prompting Robert Pattinson to associate Romanticism with rock music in *The Triumph of Vulgarity: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). What is all the more interesting is that a Romantic paradigm harking back to its Biblical and Neo-Platonic premises is currently being retraced in African-American culture, in Gospel and Work Songs, as in the case of Pastor T. L. Barrett's work – see John Kimsey, '"Go Out and Bring Me Lazarus": *O Brother*, Allegory, and a Work Song's Circuitous Journey', *Popular Music and Society*, 45, 5 (2022), pp. 531-52 – so much so that it became politically tinged and reappropriated by the Black Community, as in Paul Youngquist, 'Black Romanticism: A Manifesto', *Studies in Romanticism*, 56, 1 (2017), pp. 3-14.
[47] Newman, *Apologia*, p. 28.
[48] Stephens, p. 122.
[49] See Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 193: 'the twin concepts of the isolated artist and the supernatural Image to which he gains access continue to be influential, and indeed stand behind these modern developments'. Also see Audrey Wasser, *The Work of Difference: Modernism, Romanticism, and the Production of Literary Form* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016). Wasser suggests the epistemic kinship between the Romantic and the Modernist aesthetic of the fragment as they both stem from 'the context of a philosophical crisis in the concept of system' (p. 19).
[50] Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, SC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. ix.
[51] Joseph Ellis Baker, *The Novel and the Oxford Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1932), p. 60.