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The Parnellite Connection: Daniel John Hishon and the Joyces

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The admiration that James Joyce felt for the Irish nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell is undisputed and reflected most starkly in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. John Stanislaus Joyce was often maudlin when relating stories of his time in the Parnellite movement, and during Joyce's years in Dublin old political friends of his father reinforced his affection for the Parnellite myth of Ireland's lost messiah. In later life, John Joyce seemed to survive at times almost entirely on the patronage of his political associates.

But who were these Parnellites who played such a central role in the life of the Joyce family? In general, the primary connections are identified as Tim Harrington, M.P. (the erstwhile Lord Mayor of Dublin); William Field, M.P. (the Blackrock butcher); and John Kelly (the Fenian who appears in *A Portrait* transmogrified into "Mr. Casey"). Kelly, who befriended John Joyce, was a family intimate, but the importance of Harrington and Field has almost certainly been overstated. In fact, the key Joycean Parnellite connection, misread to some extent in two recent biographical treatments, was the little-known Daniel John Hishon, an influential figure within the bureaucracy of the National League and a close aide to Harrington.¹ Hishon has been wrongheadedly portrayed as a significant Jewish influence on James Joyce by Peter Costello, who has assumed the uncommon surname to be of Jewish origin, leading him to the further surmise that, through Hishon, the aspiring writer met some of the "more radical-minded members of the Dublin Jewish community" (*Years* 135-37). In fact, the Hishon name, although admittedly a rather rare one, is entirely of Irish derivation, being an Anglicization of Ó hOisín, a name associated with the west of the country.² More to the point, Hishon was a Roman Catholic in belief and ancestry.³

According to Costello and John Wyse Jackson, James Joyce's father and Hishon seem to have been acquaintances from the time of the Parnell split of 1890-1891 (*Joyce* 162). Costello and Jackson, in their biography of John Joyce, identify Hishon as a close friend and drinking partner of their subject although they mistakenly confuse him with his second son, John (Jack) Hishon (*Joyce* 188). Jack was blamed in later years by Joyce senior for the death of his daughter Mabel while the family was residing at the Hishon hotel at 11 Denmark Street. Costello and Jackson note that Mabel (known as "Baby" in the

Joyce family) died from typhoid fever that her father alleged was contracted at the hotel (*Joyce* 321). The Hishons, however, were keenly aware of the loss felt by the Joyces. Between 1884 and 1893, four of Daniel and Nora Hishon's children, aged between seven months and four years, had died.⁴ In 1910 and 1911, the Joyces lived intermittently at the Hishons' hotel, but a more important element in the relationship was the link that Daniel Hishon provided to the patronage of the home-rule movement in which he was a significant apparatchik. Without Hishon, it is unlikely that John Joyce would have received any favors from Harrington or from the Dublin Corporation. The importance of Daniel Hishon, a forgotten figure in many ways, can only be understood if we know his biography.

Daniel John Hishon (1851-1919) was born near Shanagolden in County Limerick to William E. Hishon and Frances Langford. His father was a fervent nationalist, and Daniel Hishon himself joined the separatist Irish Republican Brotherhood at an early age. He apparently participated in the Fenian outbreak of 1867, but it was in 1880 that he first came to public attention as a local leader of the Irish Land League.⁵ In 1881, Hishon was elected on the Land League ticket as a Poor Law Guardian in the Glin Union, and during the "land war" of 1879-1882 he was among the most prominent leaders of the League in the Limerick region. This brought him into regular contact with activists in neighboring counties. Kelly and Harrington, both then Tralee-based Land League organizers, came to know Hishon at this time, and on occasion they spoke from the same platforms at agrarian demonstrations. In late May 1881, for example, both Kelly and Hishon spoke to a crowd of 18,000 at a Land League rally in Abbeyfeale.⁶ The linkage is neatly exemplified by a letter from Kelly to Hishon read out at a Shanagolden demonstration in June 1881 in which he apologized to his friend for his inability to attend because of the recent arrest of Harrington.⁷ Kelly similarly suffered arrest for his Land League activities while the police carried out arms searches at Hishon's farm at Cloonyclohassy on two occasions.⁸ A nephew of Daniel Hishon, James Hishon Moran, was also interned by the government at this time.

Thus, Daniel Hishon, Kelly, and Harrington were political allies and friends before any of them moved to Dublin. Hishon's migration to Dublin in 1882 occurred as a consequence of his involvement in both the Land League and the burgeoning rural laborers movement. Despite being a tenant farmer from a prosperous background (his father originally held more than six hundred acres), he joined with P. F. Johnson, W. C. Upton, and others in founding the Munster Labour League in May 1881.⁹ Hishon was subsequently extremely active on behalf of the laboring class, and he was one of the key figures behind

the formation of the Irish Labour and Industrial Union (ILIU) in August 1882.¹⁰ This necessitated a move to Dublin, a decision facilitated by his eviction for the nonpayment of what he considered to be an iniquitous rent for his Shanagolden farm.

In October 1882, the National League was founded—partly to replace the banned Land League—and Hishon became a member of the national organizing committee. The ILIU formally merged with the new organization in late December. More importantly, he was appointed as assistant secretary and chief aide to his old friend Harrington who became the secretary.¹¹ Between them, Harrington and Hishon effectively ran the League, and they remained close allies over the following three decades. Both took Parnell's side after the split of 1890.¹² Hishon rather sanguinely viewed the split as an opportunity to “weed out from the home rule ranks weak-kneed creatures whose interest in it was never more than skin-deep.”¹³ T. M. Healy, one of the more virulent anti-Parnellite M.P.s, accused Hishon almost four decades later of having poisoned the atmosphere by telegraphing Parnell, warning him of Healy's enmity and thus destroying any possibility of a negotiated settlement.¹⁴

Daniel Hishon also worked as an insurance agent, and he and his wife, Nora Bridgeman (circa 1851-1902), established the Eblana Private Hotel at 11 Denmark Street in the early 1890s.¹⁵ Both Kelly and John Joyce lived with the Hishons at various times, and it is clear that Daniel Hishon was at the center of a Parnellite nexus that included both of these individuals. Unlike John Joyce, he managed to maintain some financial and personal stability in his life. Indeed, he remarried in 1910 at which time he seems to have handed over the hotel to his son Jack.¹⁶ Hishon was also closely involved with the running of the nationalist electoral machine in the Dublin wards, and this gave him access to levers of power within the nationalist-dominated corporation.

John Joyce seems to have had only fitful contact with Harrington, while he was intimately associated with Hishon. It would seem, according to Costello and Jackson, that Joyce senior was inclined to view Hishon as Harrington's *fidus Achates* (Joyce 277). There may have been some truth to this depiction, but when it came to dispensing patronage it appears that Hishon exercised his influence in favor of his old friend. In these circumstances, and bearing in mind Hishon's position within the apparatus of the home-rule movement, it is plausible to argue that Daniel Hishon was John Joyce's patron, rather than Harrington, and his most important Parnellite connection.

NOTES

¹ The studies referred to are Peter Costello, *James Joyce: The Years of Growth, 1882-1915* (London: Kyle Cathie, 1992), and Costello and John Wyse Jackson, *John Stanislaus Joyce: The Voluminous Life and Genius of James Joyce's Father* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997). Further references to the Costello work will be cited parenthetically in the text as *Years* and to the Costello and Jackson work as *Joyce*.

² See Edward MacLysaght, *The Surnames of Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997), pp. 156, 158.

³ See the National Archives of Ireland (NAI) census household return for 11 Denmark Street, Dublin.

⁴ See in the General Register Office of Ireland, Death Certificate of Nora Hishon, 21 April 1884, Dublin North; Death Certificate of Teresa Hishon, 14 June 1884, Dublin North; Death Certificate of Norah Hishon, 28 August 1889, Dublin North; and Death Certificate of Agnes Mary Hishon, 14 August 1893, Dublin North.

⁵ This is according to the *Munster News*, 8 June 1881.

⁶ See the *Munster News*, 21 May 1881.

⁷ See the *Munster News*, 8 June 1881.

⁸ In fact, John Kelly, who was a Land League town councilor in Tralee, was arrested along with Harrington and four other Tralee activists on 5 January 1881, according to the *Cork Examiner*, 6 January 1881.

⁹ See in the National Library of Ireland, Griffith's Valuations (circa 1850), County of Limerick, Barony of Shanid, Parish of Kilmoylan, Townlands of Cloonyclohassy, Craggard, Ballynash (Bishop), and Ballylin, and the *Munster News*, 21 May 1881.

¹⁰ See *The Irishman*, 26 August 1882; *United Ireland*, 26 August, 2 September 1882; and the *Freeman's Journal*, 7 October 1882.

¹¹ See the *Freeman's Journal*, 18, 20 October 1882, and *The Nation*, 23 December 1882.

¹² Frank Callanan, *The Parnell Split, 1890-91* (Cork: Cork Univ. Press, 1992), p. 13.

¹³ In the National Library of Ireland, see Daniel J. Hishon to Tim Harrington, 22 November 1890, Harrington Papers, Manuscript 8.576 (23).

¹⁴ T. M. Healy, *Leaders and Letters of My Day* (London: T. Butterworth, 1928), 1:324-25, 332.

¹⁵ See *Thom's Directory* (Dublin: Thom's Directory, 1891).

¹⁶ See the National Archives of Ireland 1911 census household return for 11 Denmark Street, Dublin. The hotel seems to have closed by 1913, and Jack Hishon, who had married in 1910, may have emigrated.