

ROBERT JEPHSON: ANGLO-IRELAND, A SPANISH LAZARILLO OF VALENCIA AND THE FARCICAL RECOURSE TO FOOD IN *TWO STRINGS TO YOUR BOW* (1791)¹

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ABSTRACT: Robert Jephson's farce *Two Strings to Your Bow* (1791) is an Anglo-Irish exemplar of the use of stock characterisation, i.e., the representation of the comic and humorous wit inherent to the native Catholic Irish mainly according to the English and Anglo-Irish audiences of the time. Behind this particular use of characterisation many Protestant Anglo-Irish authors made reference to the religious, social and economic discourses present in Ireland at the time, which represents a translation from literary uses to the plights at the social level. Through the recourse to Spanish archetypes –in Jephson's case Lazarillo of Valencia – together with a new-historicist use of the “anecdote” of food we examine how Robert Jephson provides an analysis of the circulation and negotiation of social energy at large in Ireland and the Anglo-Ireland of the ascendancy at the end of the eighteenth century.

Key words: Robert Jephson, Lazarillo, picaresque, stock-characterisation, Anglo-Ireland, new historicism, circulation of textuality, Anglo-Irish theatre, farce, religious discourse.

RESUMEN: La farsa *Two Strings to Your Bow* (1791) de Robert Jephson representa un claro ejemplo de la utilización de la llamada caracterización tipo; término que se aplica a la representación del ingenio cómico inherente a los nativos irlandeses católicos según los públicos inglés y angloirlandés de la época. Mediante este distintivo uso de la caracterización por parte de un gran número de autores angloirlandeses protestantes, se hacía referencia a los discursos religioso, social y económico; lo que suponía una traslación del uso de lo literario para explicar la sociedad irlandesa en su conjunto, tanto católica como protestante, del momento. El uso del arquetipo español del pícaro –Lazarillo de Valencia en el caso de Jephson – junto con el uso de la “anécdota” neohistoricista de la comida nos facilitan el análisis de cómo Robert Jephson examina la circulación y la negociación de la energía social en su conjunto en Irlanda y la Anglo-Irlanda de la primacía protestante (ascendancy) de finales del siglo dieciocho.

Palabras clave: Robert Jephson, Lazarillo, picaresca, caracterización tipo, Anglo-Irlanda, nuevo historicismo, circulación de textualidad, teatro angloirlandés, farsa, discurso religioso.

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In the Anglo-Irish³ literary discourse of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a constant reference to the representation of the native Catholic Irish picturesque personality and character was the Irish stock character. By this broad term we mean, the representation of the comic and humorous wit inherent to the native Irish mainly according to the English and Anglo-Irish audiences of the time. This English and Anglo-Irish creation of “adverse social stereotypes of supposedly inferior national or racial groups”, which was only studied if the process of such a creation could be termed as “a subtle and sinister weapon of colonial exploitation”, has traditionally attracted “condemnation rather than cool scrutiny” (Hayton 1988: 5). In this article an analysis of the Anglo-Irish Robert Jephson’s farce *Two Strings to Your Bow* (1791) will be provided. His representation of the native Catholic Irish picaresque through the adoption of a picaresque Spanish figure in his Lazarillo of Valencia together with the recourse to the new-historicist anecdote of food stand for an ultimate exploration of the in-betweenness and the hybridity of the social, economic, religious and literary discourses of Catholic Ireland and of the Anglo-Ireland⁴ of the ascendancy at the end of the eighteenth century.

It has been argued that the native Catholic Irish, even in ancient Gaelic times, were prone to wit and imagination. No other fiercer nomenclature coined and used firstly by the Anglo-Irish at large and then extended to the stage could have proved so useful in the process of religious and economic scorn. On the one hand, the comic and humorous native Irish were the mirror of the poor, mostly Catholic, population of the isle. On the other hand, the Anglo-Irish, keen on finding a place for themselves in the English mindscape, proudly boasted of refined English manners, polished at Oxford and Cambridge, which kept up any English standard, in so doing, the members of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy did not want to attach themselves to the native cultural processes of the Irish. Accordingly, they developed a colonising attitude which wanted to do away with everything that was Catholic Irish in order to establish the laws and rules of their class and the metropolis. For this purpose, the creation of the Irish stock character proved valid.

This representation of the Irish stock character was presently translated from the social to the literary level. Christopher Murray, in his reference to the stage Irishman of the late eighteenth century, highlights a few points of interest, stating that the portrayal of Irish countrymen as amusing and harmless was a question of mutual agreement between the audiences, mainly English, and the expatriate Catholic Irish and Anglo-Irish playwrights, who needed London as a platform to achieve popularity and celebrity. Murray distinguishes two main types of Irish stock characters on the stage:

³ The term Anglo-Irish is used to describe writing in English stemming from Ireland which is distinguishable from the Gaelic tradition. The term has been widely applied to register the distinctiveness of the Protestant Anglo-Irish ascendancy since the seventeenth century in contrast to the native Catholic population.

⁴ By the coinage Anglo-Ireland we address the cultural, social, economic and political traits inherent to the British settlers in Ireland and their descendants. The Anglo-Irish ascendancy became the dominant class in Ireland and their small outpost of the Pale, an area around Dublin, was the centre of their power which was directly linked to Britain and from which they exerted their power over Ireland as a whole.

One, the uneducated servant whose mistakes, verbal and logical alike, provide the basis of popularity, is found for the first time in Sir Robert Howard's *The Committee* (1662), where he is given the name Teague. In *The Twin Rivals* (1702) Farquhar, who had acted in Howard's play at Smock Alley, also names his stage Irishman Teague, which was to become the habitual name of the Irish footman ... He is presented with a broad accent, spelt phonetically, and a tendency to contradict himself foolishly, using what became known as Irish bulls ... The comic Irishman was simply a stereotype who offered a variation on the Shakespearian fool ... The second version of the stage Irishman was more socially elevated. He was a landowner, a man of means, with military experience. (Murray 1991: 504)

Although the force of these stereotyped –“stock”– versions of the native Catholic Irish was to remain well into the twentieth century, this use of stereotypes is generally believed to have been a trend initiated by the first British colonial settling influx on the isle. For Seamus Deane, “the idea of an Irish national character took shape in response to the earlier and aggressive English (or British) definition” (Deane 1987: 91). In this light, the production of the first stock-Irishman on the stage in the early seventeenth century owed debt to the first English and Scottish planters and their attendant view of the neighbouring isle. The native Catholic Irish were stigmatised for they were considered traitors and savages. Later productions gave an amusing view of these native Irish so as to please the London audience at large. Thus, English and Anglo-Irish authors over-exaggerated traits that were commonly attributed to the native Catholic Irish, and which best differentiated them from the English. Annelise Truninger's seminal study on the creation and development of the stock Irishman for the stage advances the belief that the stock Irishman was widely adapted into the drama or the novel with slight modification from English colonial prejudice due to the fact that “stock characters are based on facile generalizations, and only partly on observation;” for Truninger, accordingly, Irish stock characters tend to “petrify into types” (Truninger 1976: 7).

Briefly, we have the eternal types of the officers in foreign armies, the household servants (footmen or valets) and sharpers. The defining features of the stock-Irishman on the stage and fiction were his extensive use of the Hiberno-English, mainly depicted in quasi-phonetic transcription, his belligerency, his boastfulness, his hard-drinking and most certainly his verbosity and illogical utterance known as “the Irish bull”. But, these traits of the stock character were transformed and changed depending on the socio-cultural atmosphere of the times. Indeed, this stereotype of the native Catholic Irish varied together with the accompanying development of the dominant Protestant Anglo-Irish ascendancy. This fact would be deeply undesired by those Anglo-Irish living in the British metropolis and those who saw a likely patriotic separate status of Ireland from Britain. David Hayton contends that this development of “typical” traits of personality “paved the way for this extension of the stereotype to the Protestant Ascendancy.” A development which was “abetted by an emergent sense of nationality within the Anglo-Irish Protestant community” (Hayton 1988: 24).

The traditional stage-Irishman even surpasses the English with comical wit and skill. Farquhar's character of Roebuck in *Love and a Bottle* (1698) and Thomas Sheridan's *The Brave Irishman* (1743) are good instances of this. This characterisation, undergoing a process of hybridisation, turned awry for the common Catholic Irishman at the end of the eighteenth century with the advent of the French Revolution and the Volunteer movements. As a result,

the newly adapted version of the stock-Irishman bore once again a closer resemblance to former colonial attitudes. If he was ridiculed, it followed a trend initiated by many Anglo-Irish authors who felt the need to enter the London stage, now that Dublin would lose its Parliament in 1800 and, hence, its political force and social life. Besides, the extensive use of stock characterisation in comedy evinces a substantial difference between Irish and English writers which makes it possible to make a sub-division and call it a tradition of Anglo-Irish stock characterisation in itself.

In effect, the reference to the Anglo-Irish historical discourse is therefore an obliged matter of interest. The popular Anglo-Irish writer John Corry (c. 1770-fl.1825) gives a close account of the Irish in England, which helps us to understand why stock characters were embedded in the reality of what was expected from a native Catholic Irishman at the time. John Corry, born in County Louth, became a prolific writer both of national and local histories as well as of a number of novels. He also specialised in the lives of contemporaries and near-contemporaries, such as William Cowper and George Washington (Share 1992: 53). His *Satirical View of London* ran into many editions after its first publication in 1801, coinciding with the enactment of the Act of Union. Besides, he wrote an interesting play about the late war between France and Spain, *The Adventures of Felix and Rosarito* (1782), which presents many of the flaws and traits attributed to the native Catholic Irish via stock characterisation. Corry's *Satirical View of London*, a "tourist guide" of the age and of the metropolis, describes all levels of society in London and among them the Catholic Irish community. In Corry's account we find an explicit reference to distinct types of Irishmen, reproducing, thus, many of the literary and social traits of the native Irish in an illuminating exemplar of stock characterisation:

No people of any nation now resident in London present such a curious diversity of character as the Irish.

We shall first classify and delineate those Irishmen most remarkable for their foibles, and conclude with the most estimable.

Among the other qualifications of young Irishmen who migrate to this city their eloquence is the most remarkable. From their constitutional vivacity they are generally possessed of such a superabundance of animal spirits, that their loquacity is astonishing. In almost every tavern or coffee-house you may meet with one or more of these orators, whose wit and fluency are exerted for the amusement of the company. Whatever the topic –philosophy, politics, or the news of the day– the Irish orator speaks with impressive energy; and this communicative disposition is, doubtless, sometimes pleasing and sometimes tiresome to his auditory.

Our most sensible poet observes, that:

Words are like leaves, and where they most abound

Much fruit of sense beneath, is rarely found.

This simile is sometimes applicable to the Irish orator; put the true cause of his volubility, is the sprightliness of his imagination. This is also reason why lively Irishmen so often commit blunders, as they generally speak without much reflection or arrangement of ideas. Were we to account physically for this *flux of sounds*, it might be asserted that it is necessary both for the health of the individual and the peace of society, that a volatile Irishman should be privileged to talk as much as he thinks proper –whether sense, nonsense, or as is too often the case, an intermixture of both (Corry 1801: 27-9).

Corry's description stands for a necessary reflection on the "circulation" of texts, i.e., a negotiation and exchange of textuality at large which sheds light on the interaction of texts, literary and non-literary, canonical and minor, with a view to establishing the validity of historical, political, religious, literary and economic issues in the study of stock characterisation of the native Catholic Irish. Literary texts by Irish, and Anglo-Irish writers went hand in hand with this type of literature. Corry, most probably in need of giving off his Irish provenance in order to better accommodate himself within the London literary circle, privileged a fierce attack to what Ireland represented and offered a condensed view of the common Irish people. This "negotiating" interaction between reality and literary reality provides an evaluation of the processes of "exchange" carried out in the discourse of Anglo-Irish literature. Not surprisingly, many attempts to create or rather design a canonical scheme for the Irish literature in English of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries –at times referred to as Anglo-Irish only– are still finding it difficult to draw a line within the vast group of Irish-born writers who even made no single reference to Ireland in their writings.

In the case of the representation of Spain and Spanish characters in Anglo-Irish literature at the end of the eighteenth century the use of these Iberian referents acted as a vehicle for the Anglo-Irish authors to describe and portray the native Catholic Irish, rather the Protestant Anglo-Irish reality. The embedding of the Anglo-Irish literary discourse under a foreign, in this case Spanish, literary discourse validated many of the trends which were in action in the contemporary social context. The use of Irish stock characterisation under foreign tinges had a deeper meaning as it showed a process of globalisation which was deeply incrustated within a colonial mindscape, and this is the case with Robert Jephson. This use consists, therefore, in a centripetal movement in which *the other* was brought into the Anglo-Irish world and transformed for the audience, especially for a London audience.

Robert Jephson (1736-1803) had recourse to the world of stock characterisation in many of his plays. In *Two Strings to Your Bow* (1791), a short farce for the stage, he mocks the figure of the servant and meddler in a Spanish atmosphere reflecting social and political precepts in Anglo-Irish society. Jephson's farce was first produced in Ireland exclusively until its premiere in England in 1791. His version for the Irish stage entitled *The Hotel; or, the Servant with Two Masters* was first shown at Smock Alley, Dublin on the 8th May 1783 (Clark 1965: 55) and was later premiered in England at Covent Garden Theatre the 16th of February, 1791 (Rafroidi 1980: 189). The farce was based, as its former version, on Thomas Vaughan's *The Hotel; or, the Double Valet*, which Vaughan borrowed in turn from Carlo Goldini's *Il Servitore di Due Padrone* (1776-7) (Hogan 1968: 88). Although both versions were already known to the English audience, the critics of the time regarded Jephson's farce as an import from Ireland which achieved moderate success (*London Chronicle* 1791: 168).

Robert Jephson was a well-known character within the close-knit circle of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy. He entered the army and became captain of an infantry regiment on the Irish establishment. He then settled in England and became acquainted with important figures such as, Johnson, Burke, Goldsmith and Charles Townshend, from whom he obtained the post of "master of the horse" to Viscount Townshend, when he was appointed lord-lieutenant of Ireland, settling after that back in Dublin. A fierce defender of Lord Townshend, this latter made an arrangement for Jephson to obtain a seat in the parliament of Ireland in 1778 (Lee 1892: 334-335). A great deal is known about Jephson's social life in Dublin, as he was

“much caressed and sought after by several of the first societies of Dublin, as he possessed much wit and pleasantry, and when not overcome by the spleen, was extremely amusing and entertaining” (Hardy 1812: 363).

The farce *Two Strings to Your Bow* shows Jephson’s mastery in describing archetypes and stereotypes in characterisation. Many topics of interest are briefly sketched in the play through his use of Spanish stock characterisation. The plot of the farce is simple and rapid in execution. Don Pedro has already arranged his daughter Leonora’s marriage of convenience, on knowing that Felix, who was firstly going to marry Leonora, has died at Salamanca. Borachio had met Felix before because he had kept a tavern at Salamanca, and now he is responsible for Don Pedro’s daughter’s wedding dinner preparations. Borachio –appropriate humour-name used by Jephson– is quick in answer and resolute in profit, he knows a wedding will make his ends meet. Suddenly a maid enters announcing that there is a servant who has a message for Don Pedro. He is Lazarillo –a well-known Spanish archetype for stock characterisation– who jokes about the maid. He is truly a picaresque figure: verbosity, the image of a knave and fool, and his love for women are his first introductory traits in the farce. Lazarillo of Valencia is the servant of the noble Don Felix de Silva of Salamanca. But he is presently told his master is dead and is taken aback as he wonders who the man of the so called name downstairs is. Don Pedro really believes that he must be going mad: “I would recommend to you, friend, to lose a little blood, and have your head shaved –you are mad” (Jephson 1791: 9). The alleged Felix de Silva comes up and everybody is astonished; Borachio, however, is not taken in at all because he knows she is Donna Clara, Felix’s sister. Borachio talks to her aside about her intentions and they decide to plot something together in order to achieve their final goal to get Don Pedro’s money. As we see, Jephson’s farce lacks the strength of character portrayal and seeks to please the market with straightforward types. In this vein, the inclusion of Spanish stereotypes, mostly through stock characterisation, reinforces Jephson’s aim. For Peter Kavanagh, the farce in Ireland followed rules of its own, was led by Irish dramatists and lacked aesthetic quality:

Farce in the period 1750-1800 had become a definite form of dramatic art, obeying definite rules of its own. Once more it was Irishmen who led the way. O’Keeffe, Murphy and Bickerstoffs expressed in their farces a wild comic abandon that drew laughter from the most gloomy. The majority of the farces were written in the Jonsonian “humours” style, but others were of the intrigue type, with occasional glimpses of the manners note. Only a few were sentimental. (Kavanagh 1946: 305)

Borachio continues with the wedding preparations but he is not fair in that either. The image of a trickster and swindler are rapidly presented. He will be getting one hundred “pistols” for keeping Donna Clara’s secret and go on with the fraud. He is not, however, a trustworthy character. His intentions and mindscape are portrayed through food and how he tricks his customers –and society at large– with a view to obtaining economic gain:

BORACHIO Then there can be no fault found with my charges or my entertainment, though I serve up crows for partridges, and a delicate ram-cat for a fricassee of rabbits. (Jephson 1791: 15)

Donna Clara informs Borachio of how her brother died. There was a quarrel at a “*vento*” and he died in a fight, Clara’s lover Octavio was there too, he fled and that is why she is there now. Borachio tells her he will keep the secret through the simile of exchange of food and win quality standards:

BORACHIO ... , I would no more tell your secret than I would tell my guests my own secret, how I turn Alicant into Burgundy, and sour cyder into champagne of the first growth of France. (Jephson 1791: 16)

The idea of masking truth so as to obtain a quick and ready profit seeps through all levels of the social order; in fact, Donna Clara’s disguise and the artificiality of a wedding dinner are but distortions of reality. Honesty and truthfulness are wanting in the social discourse whilst men who betray their own selves advance and survive in society. Indeed, we can agree with Kavanagh’s statement above that these Anglo-Irish dramatists, among them Jephson, lacked aesthetic and philosophical qualities; but, we should concede that through facile stock characterisation, these dramatists catered for a quick mercantile stage in which they portrayed not only straightforward issues; but, also an evaluation of the different social, political and religious discourses in Ireland.

Lazarillo, albeit the stereotype of the rogue and trickster, is, nevertheless, a sympathetic figure, as he never yields, striving to survive in the social order. Octavio, Donna Clara’s lover, enters accompanied by a drunken porter who carries a Portmanteau. As the porter is not paid, he says he will go to the “Corregidor”. Lazarillo seizes the opportunity for he is hungry and tells Octavio he has no master now. He is told to go and see whether there are any letters for him, Don Octavio of Salamanca, at the post-house:

LAZARILLO Well done, Lazarillo; between two stools they say a certain part of a man comes to the ground; but ‘tis hard, indeed, if I don’t take care of myself between two masters. (Jephson 1791: 19)

Lazarillo’s sententiousness is what characterises the native Catholic Irish stock character of the time. He exemplifies the user of wit and resolution to continue living. His farcical retort hides Jephson’s explanation of the in-between social, political and economic plight Ireland was undergoing at the time when the Union between Ireland and Great Britain was about to take place leaving questions of belonging unanswered (parliament, culture and social life).

The plot disentangles itself in a curious manner. Octavio, on knowing that Felix is still alive, realises he is not a suspect any longer, and there is no point in his staying there. He is resolute to go back to Salamanca. But Borachio explains the roads are not safe because there are banditti. In the meantime Lazarillo’s entanglements come up to the surface embedded in a halo of witty resolution. First, he swaps the letters and Octavio takes the letter addressed to Donna Clara, he is puzzled. Lazarillo answers it belongs to a servant of his called Lopez. Octavio reads the letter written by a certain Manuel who knows what Clara is really up to. Octavio wants to see this Lopez. Second, Lazarillo tries to reseal the letter again but swallows the breadcrumbs as he is starving hungry, but Clara on seeing the letter believes Lazarillo wants to trick her. Don Pedro comes back with money for Clara but La-

zarillo does not know who it is for so he proposes Lazarillo to give the money to the first master he meets: Octavio. Lazarillo thinks he is not mistaken for once and is really proud:

LAZARILLO If a man takes care in great matters, small things will take care of themselves –or if they should go wrong, if the gusts of ill-look should make his vessel drive a little, honesty is a sheet-anchor, and always brings him up to his birth again. (Jephson 1791: 28)

Lazarillo finds a middle way if a possible problem arises and he has to face up with it. The other characters in the play use Lazarillo. It is their use of him for their own interest what is questioned in the play, and not Lazarillo's behaviour and attitude towards life. Lazarillo's atmosphere mirrors the fiercely persistent colonial use of racial stereotypes to which Hayton alluded above, and which is a regular trait in the stock characterisation of the native Catholic Irish. This use represents a sinister weapon of colonial differentiation between England and Ireland; but, more importantly between the Anglo-Irish ascendancy and the debased Catholic Irish majority, which is implemented through the use of the farce.

Lazarillo is really wise, and when he is in the real world he can survive. He owns the witty and vivid knowledge of real life and university culture does not interest him. Borachio gives some food to Lazarillo, who even knows of "Olla Podrida" (Jephson 1791: 37). Lazarillo is not pleased with mixing:

LAZARILLO It will never do. Mind, I don't find fault with the things, the things are good enough, very good, but half the merit of a service consists in the manner in which you put it on the table. Pig and ham at the same side! Why you might as well put a Hebrew Jew into the same stall at church with the Grand Inquisitor... (Jephson 1791: 37)

With Lazarillo's thoughts Jephson asserts his views on the Irish religious conflict between the Catholic majority and the Protestant minority. The Jew and the Inquisitor are members of different religious creeds. They cannot find reconciliation, in the same way as Lazarillo cannot picture his meals concocted with strange mixtures. Lazarillo, and therefore Jephson, does not invoke forgiveness or mutual understanding. Rather, Lazarillo leaves things as they are for nothing can really bring them together.

In this light, Robert Jephson's *Two Strings to Your Bow* translates the Spanish religious debate and difference into the field of food, or to use new-historicist terminology, the anecdote of food. The new-historicist "anecdote" is a move "outside of canonical works", an "effect of surprise" which pulls away or swamps "the explication of the work of art" (Gallagher & Greenblatt 2000: 36).

Jephson's most conspicuous reference to religious difference in Spain is established through Lazarillo's setting of a table for dinner. Indeed, Jephson's reference to food and table-setting constitutes a characteristic expressive form in the text, an anecdote, which helps us to unravel similar transactions within the cultural, historical and religious discourses (Penedo & Pontón 1998: 15). The dialogue between the owner of the tavern, Borachio, and Lazarillo displays a variety of food, which is rejected and accepted by Lazarillo on the grounds of their suitability for one of his master's dinner. Apart from referring to an "English

plum-pudding”, and to a set of foods which belong to England, rather than Spain –except for the allusion to the “Olla Podrida”– Lazarillo does not reject these dishes because of what they really stand for but because of their order at the table. Robert Jephson prefers to have these dishes –as any religion– separated. To what extent should Jephson’s attempt be translatable to the religious discourse in Ireland?:

LAZARILLO Now for the side dishes.

BORACHIO At one side stew’d venison, at the other an English plum-pudding.

LAZARILLO An English plum-pudding! That’s a dish I am a stranger to. Now, Signor Borachio, to your second course.

BORACHIO Roast lamb at top, partridge at the bottom, jelly and omelette on one side, pig and ham at the other, and Olla Podrida in the middle.

LAZARILLO All wrong, all wrong, -What should be at the top you put at the bottom, and two dishes of pork at the same side. It won’t do – It will never do, I tell you.

BORACHIO How would you have it? I can order it no better.

LAZARILLO It will never do. Mind, I don’t find fault with the things, the things are good enough, very good, but half the merit of a service consists in the manner in which you put it on the table. Pig and ham at the same side! Why you might as well put a Hebrew Jew into the same stall at church with the Grand Inquisitor. Mind me, do but mind me, see now, suppose this floor was the table. (Goes upon one knee, and tears the paper left him by his master.) Here’s the top, and there’s the bottom –put your partridge here (places a piece of the paper), your lamb there (another piece of the paper), there’s top and bottom. Your jelly in the middle (another piece of the paper.), Olla Podrida and pig at this side together (two pieces of the paper) There’s a table laid out for you as it should be –(Looking at it with great satisfaction). (Jephson 1791: 37-8)

Recalling a historical event which we alluded to above, Robert Jephson had met Lord Townshend, lord lieutenant of Ireland between 1767 and 1772, in London and this meeting was significant as it “led to Jephson’s being appointed Master of the Horse to Lord Townshend’s administration of the King’s affairs in Ireland”(Peterson 1930: 13). On his return to Dublin in 1767, “to take up his duties with his benefactor, Lord Townshend,” he started to prove his usefulness to Townshend’s administration “by the display of a distinct gift of satire” (15), in which religious issues were also present. One of Robert Jephson’s controversies consisted in his opposition to George Faulkner, who had published the first editions of Swift’s works and Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (Welch 1996: 183). Faulkner’s paper, the *Dublin Journal*, was “apparently more or less hostile to the Administration [Townshend’s],” and “the Penal Code, directed against the Catholics, and adhered to by the Townshend Administration, doubtless accounts for Faulkner’s temperate hostility” (Peterson 1930: 16). Back in 1758 Faulkner had become “involved with Charles O’Conor the Elder and John Curry in the campaign for Catholic Relief, and was thought by some to have become a Catholic” (Welch 1996: 183).

Robert Jephson’s attacks against George Faulkner continued and in 1774 Jephson published a speech against a bill which encouraged Catholics to become Protestant. As Charles A. Read states in his *Cabinet of Irish Literature* (1876-8) “in the debate on a bill to repeal or relax some of the cruel laws against Roman Catholics he [Robert Jephson]

‘took a prominent part, and made a long and eloquent speech in their favour [of the Penal Laws], quitting on that occasion his usual satirical turn which had obtained him the name of ‘Mortal Momus!’”(Read 1876: 69).

In a pamphlet by Robert Jephson in 1768, he had advocated the augmentation of the English Army in Ireland for the welfare of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy. In the pamphlet Jephson warns against the interests of the Catholic population in Ireland. The need of a bigger army is based on religious and property terms –basis of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy’s power in Ireland; but, Jephson’s proposal also implies the revenge which awaits the Anglo-Irish ascendancy if Catholic relief were extended to the Catholic population:

Let us not despise their rude Education and uncultivated talents, they have Science enough to be useful to our Enemies, and dangerous to us. Ireland they still consider as their natural Inheritance, and the claim of original Possession is transmitted amongst them from Generation to Generation. To revisit the Land of their Fore-fathers, and to enjoy again the Property they have forfeited, is the favourite Topic of their Discourses, and the Object ever present to their Hopes ... Bold and ready for Battle upon any Pretence, and in every Quarrel, they are animated with no common Ardor when this Enterprize is started. Innovators and Robbers are the Characters we are described under: and, as such, should the fatal Opportunity happen, we must expect to be treated. (Jephson 1768: 13-14)

Robert Jephson’s move in this pamphlet accounts for his belief in the necessity of separation and differentiation between the two religious creeds in Ireland, Protestant and Catholic, and in the opposition to further relief for the Catholic population in Ireland. Indeed, Jephson’s food anecdote in *Two Strings to Your Bow* corroborates his defence of religious separation in Ireland through the representation of Spanish stock characterisation, evaluated within the colonialist discourse of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, especially that of the Pale (the Dublin area). The workings of Anglo-Irish political power contain the religious preoccupation in Ireland at the time; an Ireland which embodies the conflict of a Catholic majority versus a Protestant minority.

But Jephson’s ideas about religious separation in Ireland proved somehow ambivalent and confusing. While Jephson was filling Lord Massey’s vacant seat of old Leighlin and Fern’s (*Biographia Dramatica* 1812: 399), Jephson delivered a notable speech on behalf of the Roman Catholics.⁵ In a letter he wrote to David Garrick, a life-long friend contemporary of Jephson’s whom he had met through Johnson’s circle in London, he explained the progress of his speech and addresses the problem of the Penal Laws which “impoverishes” both realities –Catholic and Protestant– in Ireland:

Dublin Castle, April 7th, 1774.

Dear Sir:

I enclose you a speech which, very contrary to my inclinations, has made its way to the press, and I think it is probable the credit I got by it on the delivery may be forfeited by the serious perusal; however, if it has any merit it will not escape you, and you will

⁵ However, we have also found that almost a decade before he had warned Protestants against Catholics, who would turn against the Protestant in Ireland if they were given the chance: “should the fatal Opportunity happen” (Jephson 1768: 14).

be a friend to the endeavor, as I know you are an enemy to every species of oppression. If Mrs. Garrick continues as good a Catholic as usual, I flatter myself she will be pleased with an attempt to rescue thousands of the same persuasion from the absurd severity of laws which equally impoverish them and their oppressors. I beg my best compliments and am, dear Sir,

Ever your affectionate and obliged Servant,

Robert Jephson

(*The Private Correspondence of David Garrick*. 1831-1832: 276)

In this respect, Jephson's letter evinces what Seamus Deane has stated above on stereotypes—the main defining features of the native Catholic Irish stock characters at large—being “mutually generative of each other”. Deane addresses the concept of identity through the overuse of stereotypes, which were interiorised to a great extent at the time and were used as tools for theatrical success:

Although the stereotyping initiative, so to speak, is taken by the community that exercises power, it has to create a stereotype of itself as much as it does of others. Indeed, this is one of the ways by which otherness is defined. The definition of otherness, the degree to which others can be persuasively shown to be discordant with the putative norm, provides a rationale for conquest. The Irish reluctance to yield to the caricature of themselves as barbarous or uncivilized exposed the nullity of the English rationale although it also aggravated the ferocity of the process of subjugation. (Eagleton, Jameson & Said 1990: 12)

Jephson abandoned the world of politics, dedicating himself to his literary pursuits exclusively. With the picaresque figure of Lazarillo Jephson depicted a clear exponent of his ideals of a rogue and witty character, but this fact did not imply that his soul and mind were detached from the outside world. In the final scene confusion reigns and Octavio sees Clara beating Lazarillo and wants an answer for her behaviour towards his newly employed porter. But, presently, she reveals her identity to Octavio. Accordingly, Octavio wants to keep Lazarillo in his private service. Lazarillo boasts about his past masters; they do possess a treasure in their keeping him. Lazarillo steps forward in Jephson's best exemplar of farcical social in-betweenness in Anglo-Ireland:

LAZARILLO To serve two masters long I strove in vain,
Hard words or blows were all my toils could gain;
But their displeasure now no more can move,
If you (to the Audience), my kinder masters, but approve. (Jephson 1791: 48)

Robert Jephson's farce and its progressive adaptations since 1783 up to 1791 were enmeshed in the political scene of his time. Jephson's political career was principally upheld by the lord lieutenant, George Townshend, whose main contribution to the political arena of Anglo-Ireland was the overthrow of the undertaker system. The figure of the undertaker was that of a local power broker, who managed a certain amount of business of government in parliament. Their use was essential to deliver majorities in parliament and received a share in the patronage at government's disposal. “Such local managers were necessary

because lords lieutenants were English politicians who served for relatively short periods and resided in Ireland only during parliamentary sessions” (Connolly 1999: 564). Joep Leerssen contends that this “political tradition”, which lasted more than a century, gave way to an advance of Anglo-Irish patriotism:

Around this time –the mid-1770s– the Patriots were beginning to gain ground in their parliamentary politics. Under Henry Flood they had been able to carve out their first toehold in the monolithic system of vote-buying and undertakers, of the periodic trade-off between the British-appointed lord lieutenant who had honours and pensions to bestow, and parliamentarians who had votes to give or withhold. The position of the “undertakers”, the go-betweens in this business of lieutenant Townshend during the 1760s; Townshend established the more direct control of the British executive over the Irish House of Commons, and a tighter “management” of its votes. The non-mercenary behaviour of Patriot parliamentarians like Sir Lucius O’Brien, Luke Gardiner, Henry Flood and Hely Hutchinson was gaining increasing public applause; in 1768, the government could be forced to grant an important concession, the Octennial Bill, stipulating that elections (and, hence, a public reckoning –at least theoretically– of an M.P.’s behaviour) were to be held every eight years. Lord lieutenant Townshend resigned in 1772, and in 1775 Henry Grattan entered the House of Commons. (Leerssen 1986: 350)

Jephson agreed with the political advance of Anglo-Irish patriotism and disliked corruption at a parliament epitomised by the figure of these go-betweens, undertakers or “Lazarillos”. Jephson’s adherence to a stricter political centre in Dublin deeply favoured Anglo-Irish patriotism at the turn of the eighteenth century. Jephson had already acted supporting Anglo-Irish patriotism with the inclusion of his *The Carmelite* (1784) in the first-night bill of an “Irish National Theatre” opened by Robert Owenson, who “leased the Fishamble Street Theatre to mount a “National Theatre” with the support of the patriot aristocracy.” Many Volunteer songs and anthems were sung there “with harp accompanied by his daughter Sydney [the future Lady Morgan], who deemed it ‘very Irish’” (Welch 1996: 463). To this last fact much controversy has arisen as Fitz-Simon and Rafroidi do not consider Jephson the author of such play. The former contends that:

Lady Morgan’s memory, unfortunately, cannot be relied upon. Theatre historians up to the present have taken her word for it, and have perpetuated her error in stating that the first production was Robert Jephson’s play *The Carmelite*. Jephson did not write a play of that title, but the English dramatist Cumberland did; and the third production was a revival by another English dramatist, Otway, his famous *Venice Preserved*, as the newspapers of the time show. Perhaps it was Owenson’s intention to produce Irish work only. (Fitz-Simon 1983: 78)

However, whereas *The Oxford Companion* and Patrick Rafroidi’s first volume of his comprehensive *Irish Literature in English. The Romantic Period (1789-1850)* account for this fact, Rafroidi’s second bibliographical volume does not include *The Carmelite* under the heading of Robert Jephson. Besides, Christopher Morash in his seminal study on the history of Irish theatre corroborates this fact. For Morash, in Lady Morgan’s statement “there is a telling mixture of fantasy and truth” (Morash 2002: 67). Lady Morgan was trying to supply

facts for her account of her father's merit in the establishment of the theatre which obtained "the name of 'National' ... at a time when the glorious body of Irish Volunteers became the Prætorian bands of the land, not to impose, but to break her chains" (Morgan 1862: 23-4).

For Peter Kavanagh, in the case of "minor" canonical dramatists in Ireland between 1750 and 1800 he evinces a preference for the subgenre of the farce as "the drama had long since been deserted by the writers of real merit as a vehicle for thought" (Kavanagh 1946: 297). Kavanagh is depriving the stage of its aesthetic and philosophical qualities in an attempt to highlight the purely market and economic objectives of "minor" drama at the time. For him, "the stage fell from its high position to being merely a place for cheap entertainment" (298). But, whereas Kavanagh's analysis embodies a correct critique of audience reception at the time as well as an exploration of the main features of the farce in Ireland, his approach lacks a wider and comprehensive examination of other factors in the use of the farce by Anglo-Irish writers. Indeed, we have seen that Robert Jephson has recourse to the facile stock characterisation of the native Catholic Irish, in our case through the use of Spanish characters. This use of stock characterisation enables Jephson to explore the discourses of Catholic Ireland and the Protestant Anglo-Ireland of the ascendancy. Jephson's farce is an exemplar of how a "negotiating" interaction between the social, political and religious realities in the various discourses in Ireland provided an evaluation of processes of "exchange" at literary and social levels in Ireland. But, above all, Jephson's enterprise evinces a hybridity –an in-betweenness– that was present in both Catholic and Protestant discourses in Ireland at the time. Thus, although he defends the repeal of the unfair Penal Laws against Catholics, he supports Anglo-Irish patriotism and distinctiveness in Ireland. In this vein, Robert Jephson's farce depicts a "minor" circulation of "social energy" through the stock characterisation of the native Catholic Irish within a Spanish background in Anglo-Irish literature at the end of the eighteenth century, especially in theatre in the subgenre of the farce. Kavanagh believes that "Jephson's influence was negligible and Walpole's assertion that Jephson was so great, so sublime, that twenty tragic authors might be set up with his rejected lines alone, is ridiculous" (373). Through this new historicist analysis of stock characterisation of the native Catholic Irishman we prove Kavanagh to be partially wrong. Robert Jephson's farce *Two Strings to Your Bow* and his representation of the Irish picaresque and picturesque personality with his Lazarillo of Valencia did cater for a quick mercantile theatre in Dublin and London at the time, which accounts for the alteration of the 1784 version of this farce and the later London production of 1791. Jephson's enterprise attempted something else, i.e., to transcend the use of the farce as a mere vehicle for cheap mass enjoyment. His farce is not negligible as it encompasses not only all the features of the farce: stock characterisation and the stage mercantilism of the day; but, it also advances a vivisection of the social, religious, political and economic discourses that informed both Catholic Ireland and the Anglo-Ireland of the ascendancy. Through the recourse to a minor farcical anecdote of food Robert Jephson expresses the in-betweenness, the hybridity and the enmeshment of the social, economic, religious and literary discourses of Ireland at large at the end of the eighteenth century. Unlike Kavanagh, we believe forgotten authors like Jephson –largely desecrated from the canon of Irish literature– should deserve a more comprehensive approach in order to better understand the literature written in English at the end of the eighteenth century in Ireland.

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