Filled though it is with verifiable “street furniture,” “After the Race” is moored above infernal fires. Consider this familiar Irish folktale:

“Jemmy Doyle in the Fairy Palace”
My father was once coming down Scollagh Gap on a dark night, and all at once he saw, right before him, the lights coming from ever so many windows of a castle, and heard the shouts and laughing of people within. The door was wide open, and in he walked; and there on the spot where he had often drunk a tumbler of bad beer, he found himself in a big hall, and saw the king and queen of the fairies sitting at the head of a long table, and hundreds of people, all grandly dressed, eating and drinking. The clothes they had on them were of an old fashion, and there was nothing to be seen but rich silk dresses, and pearls, and diamonds on the gentlemen and ladies, and rich hangings on the walls, and lamps blazing.

The queen, as soon as she saw my father, cried out, “Welcome, Mr. Doyle; make room there for Mr. Doyle, and let him have the best at the table. Hand Mr. Doyle a tumbler of punch, that will be strong and sweet. Sit down, Mr. Doyle, and make yourself welcome.” So he sat down, and took the tumbler, and just as he was going to taste it, his eye fell on the man next him, and he was an old neighbour that was dead twenty years. Says the old neighbour, “For your life, don’t touch bit nor sup.” The smell was very nice, but he was frightened by what the dead neighbour said, and he began to notice how ghastly some of the fine people looked when they thought he was not minding them.
So his health was drunk, and he was pressed by the queen to fall to, but had the sense to take the neighbour’s advice, and he only spilled the drink down between his coat and waistcoat.

At last the queen called for a song, and one of the guests sang a very indecent one in Irish. He often repeated a verse of it for us, but we didn’t know the sense. At last he got sleepy, and recollected nothing more only the rubbing of his legs against the bushes in the knoc (field of gorse) above our place in Cromogue; and we found him asleep next morning in the haggard, with a scent of punch from his mouth. He told us that we would get his knee-buckles on the path at the upper end of the knoc, and there, sure enough, they were found. Heaven be his bed!

This story is a fine example of motif F211 in Stith Thompson’s Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: “Fairyland under a hollow knoll (mound, hill, sídh),” of which there are many variants in Celtic literature and modern Irish and British folk and fairy lore. It is a counterpart to motif F212, “Fairyland under water,” which, again, makes many appearances in the written and oral culture. The Celtic Otherworld is imagined as either faoi thalamh [under ground] or faoi thoinn [under sea], and accessible by entering a cave or bruidhean, or by fairy horse or boat (MacKillop, s.v. “Otherworld”).

The structural, verbal, and dramatic similarities between this fairy tale and the third scene (and some elements in the second) of “After the Race” argue that the relationship between the folk figure and the literary character is more than coincidence. The fairy tale involves the enthralling of the naive traveler Jemmy Doyle, during the course of a night journey through unfamiliar territory, by the lights of an opulent and exotic abode. By the station gate stands the ticket-collector who evidently recognizes Jimmy (who would have taken this train to his Trinity College classes). His familiar greeting, “Fine night, sir!” (D 47.13), would therefore be unremarkable were it not precisely situated between the two counterpart exclamations, Rivière’s “It’s Farley!” and Villona’s “It is beautiful!” (D 47.4, 23). One effect of the contrast between the formally expressed exclamations of this Québécois and Hungarian and the old man’s metaplasmic Hibernicism is the intimation of the ethnic bond between Jimmy and this servile spokesman for the native oral tradition.
The ticket-collector is at once a sentry at the gate to the underworld and a harbinger of its mysteries. Sure enough, Jimmy soon finds himself an uncomfortable guest among an assembly of strangers and vaguely familiar figures over whom the Queens of Hearts and Diamonds preside. They are engaged in a night-long scene of feasting, dance, song, and drunken revelry. His initial fascination at the company who toast their guest yields to his impression that he is being deliberately embarrassed and deceived. He escapes these apprehensions into a sleep from which he is eventually released by the rising sun.

Besides these formal similarities between the literary and folk stories, the narrative fabric of “After the Race” is flecked with images familiar to the Irish storyteller. It moves from the pedestrian world of streets and labor to a fascinating and frightening sphere where wealth dissolves into wisps of paper. Then, twice as quickly, it moves back again into the gray quotidian daylight. This out-of-life experience whirrs the son of a “merchant prince” at a dizzying pace past dull clumps of rooted onlookers, as he attempts to construe his strange company’s language and song half-heard and half-understood in strained snatches. First he rides the “swift blue animal” (D 45.12) with the “snorting motor” (D 45.17), in this context a sly and humorous reference to the fairy púca. Then the party of nightwalkers chance upon a short fat man who has made the “pots of money” (D 45.6) desired by the Doyles, Farley, a figurative leipreachán or leprechaun, known to Munster speakers of Irish as an fairceallach talmhaí [the short man—the farley—of the Underworld] (D 46.33). A familiar of the company, he leads them to his floating palace where, under a reign of kings and queens, diamonds flash, hearts are bared, and magic portions are proffered. He engages in the exciting otherworldly competition of these companions—whether “good company” (D 48.3) or “devils of fellows” (D 48.14). The membership of Jimmy’s entourage implies the typical diversity found in oral accounts of the trooping fairies. In an orgy of music, drink, food, dance, and gambling, they swirl around him until Jimmy finds himself swept off his feet by the increasing pace, against which his litany of cries of “stop!” are unavailing. Only inevitable dawn, which spells the end of all fairy revels, grants him suacease.

The prospect of the “pots of money” (D 45.6) promised by the “charming” Ségouin (D 44.1) conjures up the corollary image of the leprechaun’s pot of gold, exciting but predictably eluding the night traveler; and suggests, in turn, the vanity of the Doyles’ quest for easy riches at the end
of the red, white, and blue rainbow. Is this amalgam of clever citations an ironic send-up of sentimental folksiness? Or are we to take it more seriously, as sharing with its fairy counterpart metaphysical and moral cautions about the limitations of the natural order? Is it an elaborate joke or a caution on the need to behave with respect for forces in the universe beyond ordinary observation or offering immediate practical advantage? If the first, it confirms the condescension Joyce displays in executing his official duty as a reviewer of Lady Gregory’s *Poets and Dreamers* and as the author of “The Day of the Rabblement” and “The Holy Office.” The “senility of the imagination” he discerned in her fairy tales might still serve the needs of a beginner whose long-term ambition was “to become indeed the poet of my race” (*Letters* II: 248).

Joyce’s words are an unreliable guide to what might be his actual practice. He had a singular capacity to discern the serious core in a trivial jingle while at the same time is possessed of the intelligence to deflate the sententious in a witty paranomasia. Part of this “jocoseriousness” he inherited from his rhetorically gifted father and part from his Jesuit training. High literacy and orality were not, for him, so much opposites as complementary expressive modes. In the rich anecdotes of John Stanislaus Joyce he recognized an urban and bourgeois version of the rural *seanachái* [storyteller]: a man possessed of a remarkable memory, a natural, though uncultivated, genius. His witty sociability was the source of much of Joyce’s narrative gifts, as he acknowledged. His father’s stories represented an often fatuous though deeply felt nationalism: nurturing a long-held sense of political resentment, the “suppressed rage” of Irish Catholics since the Tudors. At the same time, although a skeptic about the exaggerated claims of the Church in the spiritual realm, he was no materialist: he kept silent on the “deep questions,” while maintaining an array of superstitions embarrassing to any rationalist. We must keep an open mind on how these forces are likely to reveal themselves even in his apparently least satisfactory and objective fictions.

The interest in Irish fairy lore, as in its European counterparts, is imbued with the spirit of nationalism. It is one of the marks by which the distinctive and local is celebrated. It purportedly provides access to the pre-Christian substratum in regional culture, commemorating the sense of the numinous surviving among the unlettered. While social realists would account for its imaginative force as arising from counsels of caution enjoined upon the young—to avoid this or that place, or this or that...
deviant person—romantics view fairy lore as articulations of imaginative traditions forced into retreat by urbanization and industrialism, and conventional popular Christianity looked on them as figurations of the vanquished faiths—or “superstitions”—of Celtic Ireland. To the leaders of the Irish Literary Revival, fairy lore served these three premises in various ways; but politically, it served to offer the image of a common imaginative ground before Christian evangelization (which triaged the denizens of the Otherworld into the saints in Heaven, the damned in Hell, and the suffering souls in Purgatory), the depredations of colonialism and the sectarian divisions fomented by the Reformation. Fairy lore offered a popular, oral, and democratic counterpart to aspects of the national imaginative tradition rediscovered in the medieval Irish literary sagas roused from their centuries of linguistic sleep.

**Bruidhean Tale**

The stories of the two Jimmy Doyles seem to have cousins in the immediate oral tradition as well as a remote common ancestor. The case for an intermediate source closer to home and to the literary and cultural moment at which Joyce is writing can, however, be advanced: in the *bruidhean* tale of Irish Celtic literature. This tale-type was a standard part of the narrative repertoire of the medieval Irish poet, and would thus be within the competence of a man who would accept the public compliment “that I was going to be the great writer of the future of my country” (*Letters II*: 248, September 5, 1909).10

One of the *bruidhean* tales most widely collected in the oral tradition is *Bruidhean Chaorthainn* [The Fairy Palace of the Quicken or Rowan Tree]. A translation can be found in a book with which Joyce was familiar, P. W. Joyce’s *Old Celtic Romances* (1879: 123–53).11 Patrick Pearse, whose Irish classes Joyce attended for a period (JIII 61), edited a sixteenth-century version of the tale (1908). Irish topographical history lists five or six *bruidheine* in early Ireland. Among them is Da Derga’s by the River Dodder in Dublin, the focus of the eighth or ninth-century narrative *Togáil Bruidne Da Derga* [The Destruction of Da Derga’s Hostel]. As John Kelleher demonstrated, this non-Fenian *bruidhean* tale is a structural model for “The Dead.”

The *bruidhean* tale is one kind of Fenian narrative in which Finn and his men are invited to a feast in the Otherworld, an occasion that turns