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Aongus Ó hAonghusa
Director
The National Library
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

27 March 2006

Re: Library's recent purchase of James Joyce MSS dating from 1923.

Dear Mr Ó hAonghusa,

I find some aspects of the purchase referred to above disturbing, and I would be grateful for a response from your good self to the questions that follow.

As you perhaps recall, I wrote to you in 2004 with a complaint about my treatment by your predecessor on the matter of an earlier purchase (the Léon MSS). Despite that complaint I remain a good friend of the Library (it is after all *our* national library and is not the personal property of its officers past or present). I do not want you to dismiss this letter out of hand as coming from a disgruntled correspondent.

I became aware of the offer for sale of the above MSS in 2003. On the 2 February 2004 at the launch of the 2004 celebrations I informed the Library's Joyce Scholar Dr Luca Crispi of the offer and suggested that the National Library look into their purchase. Dr Crispi told me that this was the first he (or the Library) had heard of the MSS but that he would look into it.

The MSS were being sold through a Monsieur Vrain, a French bookseller. They comprised:

- 1) the 6 sheets recently exhibited by the Library (dated 1923)
- 2) a *Finnegans Wake* notebook (dated c. Dec 1923)
- 3) a revised TS of *Finnegans Wake* II.3 (dated 1937)

The purchaser was seeking €400,000 for the 6 pages. Monsieur Vrain (with whom I was in correspondence) did not specify a price for the notebook or TS, but I should imagine a half million or less would have secured these items.

For your information I should tell you that the six sheets that you purchased are fragments of *Finn's Hotel*, a short work that Joyce was working on in-between major works (as was characteristic of his oeuvre) that he subsequently abandoned but later incorporated into *Finnegans Wake*. The notebook is almost certainly one of the notebooks (specifically, VI.X.2) that in my book *The Textual Diaries of James Joyce* (Lilliput, 1995) I predicted should exist. The TS is possibly the one mentioned in Slocum and Cahoon (item E.7.c), presumably seen by John Slocum during his search for Joyce MSS after the War but otherwise unseen by any Joyceans.

My first question is, on being informed of the offer, did the National Library follow it up straight away? Did the Library engage in negotiations with Monsieur Vrain? If not, why not? And why in the end pay almost three times the asking price?

A *Guardian* journalist, a Mr Peter Carty, wanted to write a story on the discovery of these MSS and asked for my help in doing so. In June 2004 I again raised the subject with Luca Crispi and asked what was going on. Dr Crispi advised me very strongly, in the interest (as he said) of the National Library and of Joyce scholarship, to try to keep Mr Carty from writing the story until such time as the Library had secured the purchase of the MSS. He pointed out – correctly – that the loss of these MSS to a private collector would be very detrimental to Joyce scholarship. He said that the securing of the MSS by the Library should take only a few months more. He promised to let me know at once when Mr Carty could safely go ahead with his article. I agreed to do as Dr Crispi asked and Mr Carty held off writing his story.

Unfortunately, Dr Crispi did not get back to me on the matter so that the first I heard about the purchase was from the article in the *Irish Times* by Terence Killeen. I am sure that my credibility with Mr Carty is now entirely shot.

My second question is, was Dr Crispi acting on behalf of the National Library when he asked me in June 2004 to help to keep confidential the ongoing purchase of the MSS by the National Library?

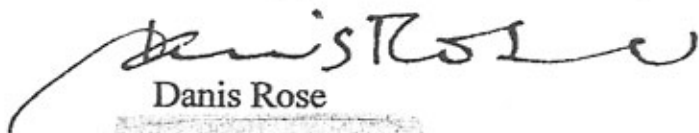
My third question should be fairly obvious. From my point of view – and the point of view of Joyce scholarship – it is the most important question. Insofar as the Library has paid €1.17 million for the MSS, easily sufficient to purchase all of them (and with change to boot), where is the *Finnegans Wake* notebook and the *Finnegans Wake* TS? If Mr Carty had gone ahead and published his article, would these items now be in the National Library?

What I find most disturbing about this whole affair is the news that the MSS (or some of them) were purchased in the first place not by the National Library but by Mrs Laura Weldon, who had been appointed head of the 2004 celebrations by your predecessor, Mr Brendan O'Donoghue. As I understand it, Dr Crispi was also appointed (as your Joyce expert) by Mr O'Donoghue. Was this appointment made on the recommendation of Mrs Weldon? And has Dr Crispi's "worst fear", that two very important Joyce manuscripts have been lost to scholarship, now become a fact?

Finally, I should like to ask you why I was not approached formally by the Library to advise on these Joyce manuscripts (I am after all this country's principal expert on the Joyce manuscripts), as indeed I was on the purchase of the John Quinn "Circe" manuscript?

I won't mention the 2002 purchase of MSS except to ask, have I been put on a black list, on account of the fact that I complained of my treatment by Mr Brendan O'Donoghue?

Sincerely,


Danis Rose

