

## James Joyce: Portrait and Still Life\*

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My TITLE PLAYS on Joyce's first novel, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916), with its hero, Stephen Dedalus, named after the Greek artist Daedalus, who created the Labyrinth. The Greek craftsman made wings for himself and his son, Icarus, held together with wax. Icarus did not heed his father's warnings and flew too close to the sun; the wax melted and the son drowned in the sea. He was a good symbol for the creator Joyce, who invented a new type of literature that was shot down again and again as he tried to get it published. But Dedalus also is a character in Ulysses, and this is the identity Joyce intended to be his own.

Joyce in all his work is conscious of death. We think of "The Dead," the final story in *Dubliners*, in which priests sleep in coffins to keep them mindful of their end. Stephen in *Ulysses* "sees corpses rising from their graves like vampires to deprive the living of joy." But Joyce could be equally resistant to its fascination, as Leopold Bloom, after brooding on his dead son and father, says in Glasnevin Cemetery, "They are not going to get me this innings. Warm beds: warm full-blooded life." Death permeates life for Joyce: bride-bed, childbed, and the bed of death, a necessary cycle, but this realization can make every day an adventure and bring gratitude and love for life out of still life.

A portrait can be a still life, something unmoving. While that can be a corpse, it may also be something living—and after so many years there is still life in all of the writing by

<sup>\*</sup>Based on a talk given on Bloomsday, 2015, at the University of California, San Diego.

James Augustine Aloysius Joyce (1882–1944), born at 41 Brighton Square, Rathgar, Dublin. In the *Portrait* we learn he was "educated" by the "holy fathers" and regularly beaten. Both his overloaded religious name and education almost guaranteed he would be an atheist. When after his death a Catholic priest offered a religious burial, Joyce's wife Nora said she couldn't do that to him.

Joyce died in Zurich, having wandered Europe much as Bloom (both Jew and Irishman) wandered Dublin. The parallels between Joyce and his Bloom lie partly in the thirteenth-century legend of the wandering Jew who insulted Jesus on the cross and was cursed to walk the earth until Christ should return. Joyce, for his part, was never devout and could also be insulting about religion—especially Irish Catholicism—as well as people. As a result, most of his works were banned for many years. Wandering, then, for him was a blessing (as he soon tired of most places and most people), not a curse. *Ulysses*, loosely based on Homer's *Odyssey*, was aptly a tale of wandering throughout Dublin, but also in the underworld (episode 6, Hades).

Joyce continually resurrects the dead in his use of the Greek classics. Here I am reminded of what Bryan Friel in *Translations* has the schoolmaster, Hugh, say to Lieutenant Yolland, who is working on a map and renaming places from Irish into English (for the people who occupied Ireland for about 800 years): "Wordsworth?...no. I'm afraid we're not familiar with your literature, Lieutenant. We feel closer to the warm Mediterranean. We tend to overlook your island." Yes, the Irish prefer Greece and Greek Literature.

The Irish have come to wear their religion lightly. In an interview with an Australian newspaper, an Irish taxi driver, asked how he felt about the same-sex marriage referendum just passed, answered with a straight face, "Oh I approve of it. After all I've been having same sex with the wife after thirty years." Another variation on still life?

A funeral—for another example of this sort of levity—can be "funferal," as in the song *Finnegan's Wake*, when it describes a hooley or donnybrook (Irish words for brawl) which ends up reviving the dead Finnegan. Thus the correct name of Joyce's book is *Finnegans Wake*, without an apostrophe: Joyce claimed it was "omitted because it meant both the death of Finnegan and the resurgence of all Finnegans," i.e., wake for the dead, and the dead awake. It could also refer to Fionn mac Cumhaill (popularly called Finn McCool), the Irish hero who lent his name to the Fenian Brotherhood that defended Irish independence. It is said he will return to defend Ireland at its hour of greatest need, so "Finn again."<sup>1</sup> "Fin," the beginning of Finnegan, also plays on "end," (in French) and "Eagan" "again."<sup>2</sup> This kind of high spritidedness is fitting, since Joyce was a master of the double entendre (admittedly to the dismay of some and delight of others).

Here's an excerpt from that merry song:

Whack fol the dah now dance to yer partner around the flure yer trotters shake Wasn't it the truth I told you? Lots of fun at Finnegan's Wake

Mickey Maloney ducked his head when a bucket of whiskey flew at him It missed, and falling on the bed, the liquor scattered over Tim Bedad he revives, see how he rises, Timothy rising from the bed

Saying "Whittle your whiskey around like blazes, t'underin' Jaysus, dye think I'm dead?"

Still life, resurrection, and yes, there's also still life—some would claim Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* was stillborn, given the reviews of its opaque stream of consciousness.

*Ulysses* described one day, *Finnegans Wake*, a night, as we trace the adventures of the Earwicker family. The sons try to replace the father. The book's narrative resembles a dream sequence and the opening line links into the closing line—which, naturally, is never finished.<sup>3</sup> The cycle is likewise unending in the humorous karma of these people. Anna Livia Plurabelle (both Finnegan's wife and Joyce's variation

of the Liffey) flows into the sea, fresh water to tears of salt, a cycle of death and life, endlessly repeated.4

SEAMUS HEANEY (1939–2013) is another genius who offers a comparison with and contrast to Joyce. He is Ireland's recently deceased latest Nobel Prize winner, who was born in Castledawson, on a farm in County Derry, and died in Dublin. His journey is nearly the opposite of Joyce's. He reproduces objects, even corpses, to the point where they take on another life. Heaney's first book was called *Death of a Naturalist*, and a collection of his poems (1966–1996) suggestively is called *Opened Ground*. In *North* he describes funeral rites in a civil war that is anything but civil:

Now as news comes in of each neighbourly murder we pine for ceremony, customary rhythms.

Heaney also wrote a collection of poems called *Station Island* in which he makes a rigorous religious pilgrimage.

One could hardly imagine anything less appealing to Joyce, mainly because he would be deprived of food and drink, besides having to express total devotion. And Joyce himself had an irrepressible sense of humor that not only shows in his writing. Part of it shows in his acute sense of satire. When a student asked him what a line in Shakespeare (not one of his favorite authors), meant, namely "And brass eternal slave to mortal rage" (Sonnet 64), Joyce answered, "I don't know what it means, but I suppose Shakespeare was thinking of German bands."

This biting humor is another difference between him and Heaney. Heaney rarely has Joyce's exuberant wit. His pacifism made his translations of Greek plays a bit bloodless compared to the originals. He is well known for his version of *Philoctetes*, *The Cure at Troy*, which is a prayer for peace, rather than the celebration of a Greek hero conquering Troy. These words at the end of the play show his mentality and are endlessly repeated by political leaders in a gesture of hope towards peace:

History says, *Don't hope On this side of the grave*. But then, once in a lifetime The longed-for tidal wave Of justice can rise up And hope and history rhyme.

Heaney bemoaned the fact that the Irish nurse their wounds and flash them around like badges. He concludes that play:

> It was a fortunate wind That blew me here. I leave Half-ready to believe That a crippled trust might walk

And the half-true rhyme is love.

Joyce concludes his *Ulysses* (1922) with a celebration of life, in Molly Bloom's "yes I said yes I will Yes." Note, it is the final Yes that Joyce capitalized. Besides Molly's assenting to marriage and sex, it is also an affirmation of Joyce's own artistic achievement. The artist of *The Portrait* has truly matured.

Joyce was often a pauper, conning people into making him loans to keep him up to his normal daily saturation of alcohol. He shared this with his father, who was not above blackmail, and all for the sake of drink. If it weren't for his older brother Stanislaus, Joyce and his family would have starved. In later years Joyce had more money, but could never resist spending it in what some would call indulgent ways and not simply on himself: once, rather than food, he purchased a necklace for his wife.

If he developed a grudge he usually nourished it for a lifetime, and made that person an object of his venomous satire. One such victim was Oliver St. John Gogarty (*Ulysses*' Buck Mulligan) because of the intimacy and enmity they developed living in close quarters for a while (in the Martello Tower in Sandymount). Joyce appreciated people who helped him, like Alfred Hunter. Hunter was said to be a Jew and had a faithless wife, and somewhat shaped Joyce's Bloom, though Joyce too can be found in Bloom (and Nora in Molly).

As we have seen, Joyce also liked to wander, like Bloom, nourishing his love/hate relationship with Ireland, and at times his marriage to Nora. His first formal date with her (when she was a chamber maid) was June 16<sup>th</sup>, and that's the date for *Ulysses*, and so for Bloomsday. With her he traveled in Europe (mainly Paris, Trieste and Zurich) teaching, and even was a banker for a while. They had two children, Georgio and Lucia. Their daughter was diagnosed as schizophrenic by Jung himself, who, after reading *Ulysses*, said the father suffered from the same disease. Joyce's wandering, like his preference for Ibsen over Shakespeare, made him a European. So, not even Irish names for the children.

Generally, Joyce was critical of everyone and everything. Richard Ellmann in his biography, claimed the highest praise Joyce gave anyone was of Ibsen: "I have found nothing of the charlatan in him." Joyce was a debunker, and ardently committed to his freedom to say anything in what he wrote. He rejected conventional style, or whatever would set limits on him. By contrast, Heaney was committed to domesticity, an inner sense of religion, and was adept at winning people over—one Irishman said of his winning the Nobel Prize, "In Heaney's case, it's the No Balls prize."

Joyce was rather scathing when he spoke of his compatriots:

Dubliners, strictly speaking, are my fellow countrymen, but I don't care to speak of our "dear dirty Dublin" as they do. Dubliners are the most hopeless, useless and inconsistent race of charlatans I have ever come across, on the island or the continent. . . . The Dubliner passes his time gabbing and making the rounds in bars or taverns or cathouses, without ever getting "fed up" with the double doses of whiskey and Home Rule, and at night when he can hold no more and is swollen up with poison like a toad, he staggers from the side door and, guided by an instinctive desire for stability,

along the straight line of the houses, he goes slithering his backside against all walls and corners. He goes "arsing along" as we say in English. There's the Dubliner for you.

And in spite of everything. Ireland remains the brain of the United Kingdom. The English, judiciously practical and ponderous, furnish the over-stuffed stomach of humanity with a perfect gadget—the water closet. The Irish, condemned to express themselves in a language not their own, have stamped on it the mark of their own genius and compete for glory with the civilized nations. This is then called English literature . . .<sup>5</sup>

Joyce rejected Dublin and Ireland, and Ireland rejected him by banning most everything he wrote for years, and even refused to repatriate his remains from Zurich after Nora asked Ireland to do so. Now he and she are buried side by side in Zurich, beside their son Giorgio. Still life in exile? Well, the Greeks did the same to Nikos Kazantzakis, one of their greatest writers. Only later did both countries realize their mistake and reclaim, at least in spirit, their atheists.

At the same time, so many have noticed the spiritual in Joyce's writing. I call Joyce an Irish atheist, a strange mixture with all that implies. After all, the Jesuits said, "Give us a child until he's seven, and we'll give you the man." I can say from first-hand experience, no matter how one rebels, a Catholic education is inescapable and haunts you forever, if just as an antidote to organized religion.

I CONSULTED SEAMUS DEANE about this talk. He is known for his novel *Reading in the Dark*, which includes a humorous chapter on his and Heaney's misguided education by the Holy Fathers. He also has written several collections of poetry, as well as criticism, besides editing the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writings*, in five volumes, reclaiming much of so-called English literature for the Irish.<sup>6</sup>

So here are some of Deane's thoughts about Bloomsday:

Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* is a novel in which walking and talking are the main activities. In *Ulysses* we have walking and talking indeed but also singing and drinking, sex and politics, andalthough it is rarely mentioned-crowds, the urban throng. The Dublin of this novel is very different too from that of the short story collection Dubliners, in which the light is very different; in the stories we have twilight, candlelight, gaslight, silhouettes, shadows, profiles; but never the full, bright panorama of Ulysses. Despite its difficulties, many people love Ulysses the way they love great movies. It is epic and funny, historical and anti-historical, a bourgeois story in an era when the dominance of the bourgeoisie was coming to an end. By now, in Dublin, with the annual celebration of Bloomsday on the fictive date of the novel, we may feel that Joyce-the steely exile from Ireland-has been thoroughly exploited by the Irish tourist industry. Is this another example of how the dangerous, thrilling experimental nature of early modernism has been so thoroughly absorbed and commercialized that it—and any of the succeeding postmodernisms—has almost entirely lost its shock value and has become hopelessly commodified?

Yes and no. *Ulysses* is a Tourist Board's dream. It makes lots of money for the nation, it makes various tours around Dublin, that take in the many places mentioned in the novel, profitable enterprises that continue all through the year and that are conducted by people whose knowledge of Joyce is scanty. It is perhaps too easy to sneer at all this. For a question to be asked is—Why does this novel lend itself to such vulgarization (if that is what it is)? Just as we also have to ask the equal and opposite question, why has Joyce (more than Proust or Kafka) become the object of an academic industry, heavily populated by quarrelsome experts, very few of whom have any interest or expertise beyond Joyce's work? So, on the one hand, vulgar tourism; on the other hand, specialization that is so intense it becomes a caricature of itself.

I would suggest that these positions derive from the novel's central preoccupations and techniques. In the first three episodes—the so-called Telemachiad—in which Stephen Dedalus is the dominant figure—the question keeps recurring: Is history, Irish history, world history, the very idea of history, something that had to happen the way it did? Is it in fact destiny? Or is it random, a series of accidents that seem to have a pattern.

Stephen can't abide the fact that he, the special one, may be an accident, that his consciousness and the world it creates and/or perceives do not constitute a dramatic encounter which is a microcosm of world history and is the stuff of legend and epic; hence the Greek superstructure of the novel which, in a sometimes nonchalant way, indicates that everything within the narrative is part of a meaningful whole. But then there are the famous techniques-stream-ofconsciousness narrative among them, also intercutting and fragmentation-that indicate chaotic inconsequence. The whole work balances on this queasy question. Even after episode 12, with stylistic parodies of literary styles of earlier periods or of contemporary best-sellers (Gerty McDowell sequence in episode 13), we are conscious of Joyce's virtuosity-part of his point-but also conscious of the fact that the idea of an evolving style of prose writing, or the idea of evolution itself, or the idea of the child growing in Mrs. Purefoy's womb, are all versions of pattern and of teleological development, but the fact that they are comically related undercuts their seriousness and throws us back to the kind of disorderly consciousness of the man in the street, Leopold Bloom, whose information is that of a newspaper reader and whose Irish-Jewish-Catholic family history rehearses part of the western tradition and at the same time makes fun of its claims to priority and to the "traditional" approaches that make stories out of mass collections of unrelated data.

It is this that gives Bloomsday its appeal. In one sense it is nonsense. In another, it is a derivative of a great orderly system. It is a typical product of and for the mass consumer audience of today, for which tourism is the perfect image—revisiting an organized past that claims to make sense of everything and makes ordinary places into sacred sites; it is also a sheerly commercial way of making money. To make the idea of culture (challenged as such by Joyce) into an economic opportunity is both a joke and also part of the meaning of *Ulysses* and of modernism; everything becomes consumable and is consumed, most especially that cultural activity that once was regarded as the enemy and opposite of commercial and economic activity.

The famous phrase that opens episode three, "Proteus"—the phrase is produced in Stephen's consciousness—"Ineluctable modality of the visible"—referring to the dominance of the eye in our perception of the world, can be altered to "ineluctable modality of the risible"—the inescapable power of the comic epic to establish and destroy, in one movement, the idea of a story, a history, of the unpatternable world.

The experience of reading the novel-especially the episodes Stephen dominates-for most people is a sense of a total confusion in which there lurks, could we but see it-that's what we need all those specialists for-a comprehensive order, one we should preserve, against all commentators; for that dual sense, that contradiction, and the comic dimension that grows out of it-sexual fidelity and betraval, son Icarus and father Dedalus, Mother Nature and Molly Bloom, an aria by Mozart and the glistening of sexual appeal in an Irish pub, the official Lord Lieutenant's procession and the sojourns of Dubliners across the city-these are all coincidences and accidents and patterns. If we hold them together in our minds and enjoy their dovetailing and their inconsequence simultaneously, then we can go on one of the Bloomsday tours and feel gratified that we don't know where culture ends and commercialism begins-assuming that these two things are entities in their own right and are separable by a boundary that naturally divides them.

A VARIATION NOW on tragic still life. Seamus Deane and I wept on seeing the film *Michel Collins*, and the tragic loss of so many young people who died for Ireland's freedom. On another occasion, when Seamus Heaney saw the footage I'd collected in Ireland about the way the peace marchers were mowed down by the British, the two of us wept. I used this footage to preface performances of my translation of *Antigone* in Ireland and elsewhere. Seamus Heaney dedicated his *Burial at Thebes* to me, knowing I also translated *Antigone*, and how I was involved with Antigone's defense of human rights. Ireland's tragedies are still not over.

Both Deane and Heaney have been my guests many times, and I've been theirs in Ireland. They were close friends with whom I've shared many social occasions, which generally include singing and story-telling. Deane and Heaney (now singing with the angels) have singing voices to be reckoned with, as did Joyce—indeed, a gifted tenor and in 1904 he won the *Feis Ceoil*. Singing is essential for committed pub attendance in Ireland (though with Heaney it was more often for church). All of them also shone at parties.

Tragedies, yes, but laughter too abounds in Joyce's writ-

ings, including sing fests. For that is what we sing about, talk about, celebrate now on Bloomsday: that Stephen Dedalus's vampires will not deprive the living of our joy.<sup>7</sup>

Finally Joyce's reputation as a writer has assured him a place in history, and Bloomsday is a true celebration of life and the humor in life all over Ireland and the world.<sup>8</sup> The proof is it's become a best seller in China. *Ulysses* promptly sold out 85,000 copies when it first appeared in China in 1995. If that doesn't show it still has life, I would like to know what would.<sup>9</sup> YES!

## NOTES

I. I owe this link of Finn with the Irish hero and Joyce's Finnegans Wake to the distinguished Professor Henry Powell, who spoke on Bloomsday after I gave the keynote address, for which I wrote this article (June 16, 1915, UCSD, Pat Ledden Memorial Lecture Series).

2. See R. Ellmann, James Joyce (New York 1982), 543 and 597.

3. First line: "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs." Last line: "A way a lone a last a loved a long the".

About the "Yes" that concludes *Ulysses* ( or what Joyce says about it) remember it's the end of a day. *Finnegans Wake* is at night, so the ending is dawn, but both signify acquiescence: "In *Ulysses*, to depict the babbling of a woman going to sleep, I had sought to end with the least forceful word I could possibly find. I had found the word "yes," which is barely pronounced, which denotes acquiescence, self-abandon, relaxation, the end of all resistance. In *Work in Progress (Finnegans Wake*), I've tried to do better if I could. This time I have found the word which is the most slippery, the least accented, the weakest word in English, a word which is not even a word, which is scarcely sounded between the teeth, a breath, a nothing, the article *the*" (Ellmann, note 2, quoted in a footnote, 712).

4. In the Wake, Egyptian mythology (Isis, Osiris), and Irish mythology, figure prominently with death conspicuous, and sometimes rebirth. All still life, and *still life*.

5. Ellmann (note 2), 217. In his *Collected Letters*, Joyce says: "For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the Universal" (Ellmann, note 2, 505).

6. The two founders of Field Day were Brian Friel and Stephen Rea, who lent their names; and they asked Seamus Deane, Seamus Heaney, Thomas Paulin, and David Hammond to be on their board of directors, and then others joined them, like Thomas Kilroy; and many wrote for them, including Edward Said and Terry Eagleton. They wanted to reclaim all Irish literature and make Field Day in addition to the Irish four, a fifth province that transcended political factions. Seamus Deane was a close friend and admirer of Seamus Heaney.

7. Heaney is a master poet, but Joyce is a master of wordplay, flow of consciousness, and prose poetry. He historicized his corpses and gave them all immortal life. Declan Kiberd, another friend of Heaney's, Deane's, and mine, said: "Before Joyce, no writer of fiction had so foregrounded the process of thinking," adding "the cult of James Joyce [is] known jocularly as The Feast of Saint Jam Juice in Dublin," in an article called "Ulysses, Modernism's most sociable masterpiece" (*The Guardian*, 16 June 2009).

8. Joyce's writing had a mixed reception: sometimes simply outright hatred and dismissal, or even jealousy (e.g., Gertrude Stein: Joyce was her rival in Paris), and most often, ignorance. Accordingly, the publication of Joyce's works was often delayed. Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein were particularly vocal in their negativity, which led Joyce to say, "I hate educated women" (Ellmann, note 2, 529).

9. The translation of the first third of *Finnegan's Wake* is out, and the rest will be. Dai Congrong, the translator, a professor at Shanghai's Fudan University, was surprised at its becoming a bestseller in China after hitting the shelves last month. The Chinese also appreciated Joyce's *Ulysses*, and *Portrait of the Artist* as a Young Man. http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/feb/05/finnegans-wake-china-james-joyce-hit

Because not all celebrations work out to enhance life, in 2012, The Central Bank of Ireland issued a 10-pound commemorative coin in honor of Joyce, but bearing on it a misquotation of a famous line of *Ulysses*. So fittingly, Joyce despised bankers, after a stint as one in Rome. The erroneous lines on the front on the coin are taken from the beginning of chapter three of *Ulysses*, where Stephen Dedalus walks alone along Sandymount Strand reflecting. Joyce wrote: "Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, though through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read." However, on the Central Bank coin the surplus word "that" is inserted into the second sentence. http://www.rte.ie/news/2013/0410-/380758-central-bank-coin.

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