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DANIEL R. SCHWARZ



READING JOYCE'S *ULYSSES*

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First published 1987

Published by
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Anchor Brendon Ltd, Tiptree, Essex

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Schwarz, Daniel R.

Reading Joyce's Ulysses.

1. Joyce, James 1882-1941. Ulysses

I. Title

823'.912 PR6019.09U6

ISBN 0-333-408699-1

Acknowledgements

Since this book results from my experience not only as a reader, but as a teacher of *Ulysses*, my greatest debt is to my students at Cornell where I have been teaching *Ulysses* regularly for the past eighteen years.

My Cornell colleagues, especially Phillip Marcus, have been generous and helpful in dialogues about *Ulysses*, but I want also to acknowledge the ubiquitous influence on my work of M. H. Abrams, and the friendship and collegiality of Tom Hill and Michael Colacurcio.

As my student and my graduate assistant in two summer session courses on *Ulysses*, Beth Newman has provided stimulating and challenging conversation on *Ulysses*. I have also learned from the work of my graduate student William Thickstun. For more than twenty years, since I was his student at Edinburgh in 1961–2, I have had the benefit of Ian Gregor's advice and friendship. I am grateful to the participants in my 1985 National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar for high-school teachers for helping clarify some points in my argument. I appreciate the splendid and loyal secretarial support of Phillis Molock, the proofreading assistance of Diane McPherson and Mary Ann Naples, and the encouragement of my wife and sons.

I would like to thank Random House and The Bodley Head for permission to quote from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and for the Society of Authors for permission to reprint Joyce's schema as it appeared in C. H. Peake's *James Joyce: the Citizen and Artist* (Stanford University Press, 1977).

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Introduction: “O, Rocks. . . . Tell Us in Plain Words”

This study is for readers of *Ulysses*. It attempts to comment on the major issues confronting a reader as he tries to make sense of the novel. In the title of my Introduction, I playfully use Molly’s response to Bloom’s explanation of metempsychosis (“O, rocks! . . . Tell us in plain words”) to indicate that *Ulysses* is a readable novel – rather than an elaborate puzzle or a Rosetta Stone or a hieroglyph. For *Ulysses*, while presenting unique challenges, depends upon readers who have a good deal of reading experience in more traditional narratives.

Ulysses is first and foremost a novel about three individuals – Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom, and Molly Bloom – who live in turn-of-the-century Dublin. But it should also be read as a social, political, and historical novel. *Ulysses* is Joyce’s inquiry into the question of what values are viable in the twentieth century urban world where, according to Joyce’s view, God does not exist and traditional notions of heroism are obsolete. Among other things, *Ulysses* is an effort to redefine the concept of the hero. Joyce uses the marginal Jew Bloom to redefine heroism in secular humanistic terms. As he examines recent Irish history and culture, Joyce proposes Bloom as an alternative to the xenophobia and fantasies of the Celtic Renaissance as well as a successor to Parnell.

There is a danger that the study of *Ulysses* has become like ground that has been farmed for so long that it now only supports exotic crops like persimmons. While we have a vast array of critical apparatus, we have neglected the questions of how and what the novel means. In terms of the vast critical landscape of *Ulysses*, I shall attempt to provide a bridge between those who stress *Ulysses* as a novel that reveals the psyche and

motives of characters and those who stress *Ulysses* as an elaborate rhetorical experiment. While taking account of essential arguments of prior critics and acknowledging their contribution in the appropriate places, I shall try to focus on the novel rather than on the tradition of commentary produced by the thriving cottage industry of Joyce scholarship. While discussing *Ulysses* in terms of the relationships among the three basic units of formal criticism – author, text, and audience, I shall use contextual information when necessary.

Joyce transforms the nominalistic events of one day in the lives of his three characters – events based often on details of his own life – into significant events. We shall explore how Joyce creates the metaphorical and allusive relationships on which meaning depends, and we shall examine how Joyce gives significance to events in the lives of the major figures on one single day, 16 June 1904. We shall not only examine how Joyce makes use of his major sources – *The Odyssey*, the Old and New Testaments, and Shakespeare, but how he uses in important ways *The Iliad*, as well as the works of Wilde, Yeats, Dante, Milton, Tennyson, Swift, and Blake.

Ulysses teaches us how to read itself. Put another way, we should think of our experience of reading it as the reader's odyssey. We shall stress what the novel does to us as we read it and how the ventriloquy of its various styles establishes an unusually complex relationship between text and reader. Unlike some recent critics who believe that Joyce's interest in style deflects the reader from his characters, I believe that the focus in every chapter returns to the subjects of Stephen, Bloom, Molly, and the Dublin world they inhabit. To be sure, in the chapters from "Sirens" through "Oxen of the Sun", we are aware of a tension in Joyce's imagination between interest in style and interest in character, but in the climax of every chapter his focus returns to his major figures and their significance. As odyssean readers turning the pages of the novel and progressing through the one crystallizing day in the lives of the major figures, we must overcome the difficulties of style and the opacity of content – just as the modern Ulysses must resist temptations which threaten to deflect him from his journey home.

In my view the principle interest of Joyce's stylistic experimentations should be how they shape a reading of the novel. For the odyssean reader is invited to see that Bloom and Stephen

survive and transcend what Karen Lawrence in her *The Odyssey of Style in "Ulysses"* calls "the wealth of detail and . . . the protean transformations of style".¹ I think Lawrence's title privileges style over character, in part because it sees style as something that is embodied in the text separate and distinct from the effects it creates. By contrast, I find style inseparable from what it *does* to the events and characters it describes and what it *does* to the reader as he negotiates his journey through the novel to his final destination, the novel's end. Since Joyce's focus – notwithstanding frequent rhetorical flourishes and word-play for its own sake – always returns to the characters and their meaning, we should assume that the effects of his language upon the reader were never far from his mind.

As odyssean readers, we must wend our way through a variety of experiences, but these experiences can best be understood in terms of the novel's two major and contradictory formal principles: its insistence on integration and its refusal to allow every word to signify in terms of coherent thematic or structural patterns. The first formal principle urges the reader to see *Ulysses* as a completely organic and integrated novel in which one can conceive in every part some aspect of the grace and harmony of the whole. In his book *Godel, Escher, Bach*, Douglas Hofstadter describes the graph of a mathematical function $INT(x)$, every section of which is a replica of the whole; since every individual part of each section is also a replica of the whole, the graph consists of an infinite number of copies of itself.² $INT(x)$ becomes an apt expression for reading *Ulysses*, because it expresses the Viconian idea that history repeats itself and that the whole can be perceived within the component of one aspect of a culture. Another model for organic unity is the genetic code which determines the macrostructure of an organism, but which is contained in every separate part of the organism.

But opposed to the totalizing perspective is the second formal principle which insists that, as Geoffrey H. Hartman puts it, "literary language displays a polysemy, or an excess of the signifier over the signified".³ Resisting the odyssean reader's efforts to understand *Ulysses* in terms of organic unity are a plethora of catalogues, barely relevant details, marginalia, false clues, linguistic games, and playful attempts to undermine the reader's quest for unity. On the one hand, *Ulysses* insists that its readers interpret every detail in terms of larger patterns, and

thus urges the book's own argument that even the most particular details of the individual lives of Bloom and Stephen are important because Bloom and Stephen iterate major historical and mythical figures in western civilization. But, on the other hand, by focusing on the quirky and idiosyncratic aspects in human behaviour, *Ulysses* immerses the reader in the nominalistic world of the lives of a few characters during one day.

Does not Joyce's insistence on exploring the eccentricities of language for its own sake – its local wit, word games, ventriloquism, and typography – urge the reader to pause and enjoy (without imposing interpretive patterns or judgments upon) the peculiarities and oddities of human behaviour? For *Ulysses* is full of moments which immerse the reader in the local pleasures of the text and resist interpretation. At times, the novel's interest in moments of life and linguistic pyrotechnics for their own sake temporarily deflects the reader from allegories of reading that propose organic unity. For the sake of intellectual housekeeping, it would be neater either to give the two modes of reading – the one that insists on moving from immersion to interpretive reflection, the other that stresses immersion in the text for its own sake – equal importance or to claim that the latter deconstructs the former. But it is more accurate to say that at most points the novel invites the first mode of reading *Ulysses*, the traditional humanistic mode of reading that stresses unity of form and content, rather than the latter, deconstructionist mode of reading which questions meaning, coherence, and significance. Yet the dialectic between the two modes of reading – a dialectic which enacts more vividly than any other literary work I know the contending claims of the two dominant ideologies of reading on today's critical mindscape – is crucial to the experience of reading *Ulysses*.

My study of *Ulysses* is based on some fundamental assumptions about reading novels. Let me briefly summarize them. I assume that the author has created an imagined world, an ontology separate and distinct from the real one, and that the created world of a good novel is organized according to orderly principles and is apprehensible by orderly principles, although the reader's concepts of order may be different from those of the author. The structure of a novel is an evolving process in which the reader participates with the author. After all, the author embodies in his work a structure of effects that arouses expecta-

tions and subsequently fulfils, modifies, transforms, postpones, or deflates them. Since each novel generates its own aesthetic, we need to inquire into how a particular novel signifies. We must define the voice of the novel by continually asking who is speaking to what implied audience and with what intended effects.

Finally, the language of a novel presents a concatenation of events or episodes that comprise a narrative; this narrative – notwithstanding the kind of stylistic eccentricities and deliberate efforts to subvert the expectations of traditional narrative that we find in a novel like *Ulysses* – makes a coherent statement about the way life is lived in the imagined world within the text. Moreover, our interest in imagined worlds depends upon their relation to real ones; although that relation may be oblique, we do look for kinds of representation in our fictions, and we do understand events in fiction in terms of signification beyond as well as within the imagined world of the novel.

Thus it is not only appropriate but necessary to inquire into the relationship between the presence embodied in the form of the novel and the real author. Reading is a mode of perception, and reading about characters within an imagined world appeals to us because such reading is an extension of how we perceive and understand the events in our lives. Of course, we must understand that characters in fiction are functions of the formal properties of a novel's imagined world. But, despite some recent attacks on the "metaphysics of presence", we should not be apologetic for or embarrassed by thinking of characters in literature as if they were humans within the "hypothesis" of their imagined worlds, or as reflections, distortions, or parodies of their creators.

The aforementioned concerns define a rather more humanistic canon of modern British literature than the one defined by the New Critical emphasis on "Exit Author" or the tendency of recent theories to view the author as a kind of historical accident whose vision and style are dialectically shaped by the *Zeitgeist* in which he wrote. Readers of my prior work, including *The Humanistic Heritage*, my recent study of Anglo-American novel theory, will recognize a kinship between my approach to *Ulysses* and the substantive claims I have been making for the pluralistic Anglo-American tradition of reading novels. For lack of a better term, I have called this tradition humanistic formalism. I conceive this

tradition as progressive, evolving, and open to entering into a fruitful dialogue with structuralism, deconstruction, and semiotics about how and why novels signify, *Reading Joyce's "Ulysses"* is, among other things, an effort to demonstrate that this tradition of reading – because of its resourcefulness, flexibility, energy, and potential for assimilating other modes of inquiry – provides the best means of coming to terms with complex literary works.

* * *

Quotations refer to *Ulysses: A Critical and Synoptic Edition*, edited by Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (London and New York: Garland, 1984). Within the text I refer to this monumental work of scholarship as the Gabler edition. While I have my misgivings about some of its corrections, and am aware that some of its findings have been called into question and will be challenged by subsequent textual scholarship, this edition must be regarded as authoritative. In addition to the episode and line number in the Gabler edition, I have included page references to the 1961 Random House edition. Where there is a change in the Gabler edition from the Random House edition, I have underlined the episode and line number. The appendix provides Joyce's schema for *Ulysses*.⁴

NOTES

1. Karen Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in 'Ulysses'* (Princeton University Press) p. 6.
2. Douglas Hofstadter, *Godel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).
3. Geoffrey H. Hartman, "The Culture of Criticism", *PMLA*, 99:3 (May 1984) p. 386.
4. My scheme follows C. H. Peake's in *James Joyce: the Citizen and the Artist* (Stanford University Press, 1977) pp. 120–1. Peake combines Stuart Gilbert's scheme in his *James Joyce's 'Ulysses': a Study* (1930; rev. New York: Random House, 1952) p. 41, with the "Correspondences" column which Hugh Kenner published in his *Dublin's Joyce* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1955) pp. 226–7.

1 Joyce as “Lord and Giver” of Language: Form and Metaphor in *Ulysses*

I begin from the premise that literary criticism must first pose the necessary questions about a work and that each work generates its own line of inquiry. The major questions to ask when teaching or writing about *Ulysses* are what does it signify and how does it signify? Can we reconcile its symbolic implications and its vast historical and literary scope with its nominalistic texture of experience – experience that often has its origin in the life of Joyce? How can a novel that takes its significance from the author’s biography be discussed? Does it have aesthetic autonomy? Can we discover something about its form that tells us what kind of novel we are reading and helps us define its approach to representation? Is the naturalistic novel of the experience of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus on one ordinary if possibly important day at odds both with the novel’s pretensions as the modern epic and its insistence that the experiences of Stephen and Bloom reiterate those of major figures of the past? How does Joyce’s obsession with the scheme of the novel – with each chapter’s organs, colours, techniques, symbols, and correspondences to mythic and historical figures – reinforce, but also at times undermine both the metaphorical implications and the basic story and characterization? Can we locate within the language principles of signification that might elude our focus on plot, character, and even narrative form? As we answer these questions, we shall see that *Ulysses* teaches us how to read itself, or, put another way, that it creates its own readers.

Reading *Ulysses* depends on understanding Joyce’s concept of metaphor and how it defines the fundamental relationship between words and reality. The significant form of *Ulysses* depends

upon the kinds of metaphorical substitutions Joyce makes when he lets Bloom and Stephen signify and be signified by historical figures. Reading the novel establishes how Stephen and Bloom become metaphors or signifiers for one another as well as, in their potential fusion, a metaphor for the creative presence who narrates the novel. It is not too much to say that much of the originality and power of *Ulysses* depends upon its examination of the possibilities of metaphor.

I THE GENRE OF *ULYSSES*

Ralph Rader has written, "[*Ulysses*] is to be understood as deriving its significance from, and a continuation of, [Joyce's] own experience which requires the reader to understand the relation between Joyce and Stephen and Bloom as quite definite and unambiguous".¹ Rader continues, "The separation of the book from life is the direct manifestation of its connection with it, since the goal of fictional recreation requires, as autobiography does not, that the artist break the explicit premise of connection and with it the emotional bond to his represented experience. He is to recreate his life as if he were not part of it. But this apartness, or detachment, was nevertheless meant to be understood as a fully implicit relation."² We are indebted to Rader for focusing on the unique formal relationship between author and novel, and for proposing an aesthetic which includes the principle that a book's significance may depend in part on knowing something of what happened to the author between the time of the action and the time the book was written. Recognizing the validity of such a principle is obviously crucial to a book in which the relationship between author and major character is often autobiographical: "Joyce's shifts of style from episode to episode are intended as a continuous manifestation of the presence which everywhere translates the random real to the order of art."³

However, we must ask whether we can read *Ulysses* as if Joyce's "fictional recreation" enabled him to "break the explicit premise of connection and with it the emotional bond to his represented experience". Or is the explicit relationship between *Ulysses* and Joyce's life — particularly as presented in Richard

Ellmann's canonical biography – inevitably part of our reading experience? I shall argue that we must see the fictional presence as a character within the imagined world whose full significance depends on a dynamic and varying relationship with the creator. Just as the explanatory Talmud has become part of the Torah for observant Jews, and just as for believing Christians biblical interpretation is as much a part of God's message as the New Testament, the biographical and critical apparatus has become part of the process of reading *Ulysses*. By distributing his schemata for the novel, and by helping Budgen write his early biography and Gilbert write his critical study, Joyce deliberately and willfully shaped the interpretation of *Ulysses*. It is as if God had given both the Holy Word and the subsequent exegeses.

Perhaps we should first turn to Joyce's own discussion of genre in *Portrait*:

[A]rt necessarily divides itself into three forms progressing from one to the next. These forms are: the lyrical form, the form wherein the artist presents his image in immediate relation to himself; the epical form, the form wherein he presents his image in mediate relation to himself and to others; the dramatic form, the form wherein he presents his image in immediate relation to others. . . . The lyrical form is in fact the simplest verbal vesture of an instant of emotion. . . . He who utters it is more conscious of the instant of emotion than of himself as feeling emotion. The simplest epical form is seen emerging out of lyrical literature when the artist prolongs and broods upon himself as the centre of an epical event and this form progresses till the centre of emotional gravity is equidistant from the artist himself and from others. The narrative is no longer purely personal. The personality of the artist passes into the narrative itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea. . . . The dramatic form is reached when the vitality which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible esthetic life. The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak. The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination. (P. 214–5)⁴

In applying Joyce's aesthetic to his own works, we should think of literary works not as purely lyrical, epical, or dramatic, but as mixed modes that contain aspects of more than one genre. A *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* begins in the lyrical mode, but, to the degree to which it is ironic, approaches the epical mode. If we understand the relationship in *Ulysses* between the three genres as a dynamic process – as a trialogue among them – we can better understand the novel's form and meaning. Thus in *Ulysses* Joyce progresses from the lyrical to the epical and finally to the dramatic. The first three chapters oscillate between the lyrical perspective of Stephen and the epical perspective of Joyce's omniscient but not entirely distanced narrator, a narrator who is never far from Stephen's consciousness and who does not enter into the consciousness of any other characters. By using the lyrical mode, Joyce establishes the continuity with *Portrait* of both Stephen and of the narrative presence, and calls attention to the process of fictionally re-examining and recreating his own life. By allowing the lyrical mode to dominate over the epical mode with which *Portrait* had concluded, he shows that Stephen has taken a step backward in his artistic development, for the mature artist needs the objectivity Stephen lacks.

Gradually, as we shall see, Joyce distances himself from Stephen and establishes him as a potential character in an epic – the character of the young artist trying to find himself amidst personal and historical confusion so that he might develop into the writer of a novel like *Ulysses*. Presenting Bloom is the means by which the Joyce-presence places his characters – not only Bloom, but Stephen, too – at a distance from himself. Joyce conceived Bloom as a character that would enable him to achieve the epical mode ("prolong[ing] and brood[ing] upon himself as the centre of an epical event").

Joyce's desire to objectify part of himself in a character that seems to be the diametric opposite of Stephen, the artist based on his younger self, was probably influenced by Wilde's theory of masques; Wilde believed that we must assume a masque in order to liberate ourselves from our customary conventional daytime selves. Yet for the very reason that Bloom is still enough of the mature Joyce who is living in Europe and writing *Ulysses*, Joyce had to struggle to achieve the objectivity and distance that are the prerequisites of the dramatic mode. Perhaps we can say that beginning with "Circe" and climaxing with "Penelope," the

artistic personality becomes – to use Joyce's terms from the passage from *Portrait* I quoted above – "impersonalized" and "reprojected from [Joyce's] human imagination". Indeed, it is Molly, based on the physicality and ingenuousness of Nora, that allows him to achieve the necessary objectivity and impersonality to use comfortably the dramatic mode. Molly Bloom displaces the narrative presence or, to say the same thing, the ventriloquy of the voice is so complete that we almost – but not quite – forget that the narrative presence contains all the varied voices, including some, such as the snarling ally of the Citizen in "Cyclops" and the speaker of sentimental pulp in "Nausicaa", that he assumes only to discredit.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the dramatic mode is the protean speaker whose virtuosity enables him to assume various and conflicting voices. For the unique styles of each chapter can be equated with the voices of characters in drama. This ventriloquy calls attention to the presence of an objective artist impersonalizing himself and looking at the personae of the plot as well as at the various tellers from a detached, ironical perspective. Does not the recurrence of Stephen Dedalus, the major figure of *Portrait*, make particularly striking the contrast between the diverse voices of *Ulysses* and the third person omniscient narrator of *Portrait*, who renders Stephen's perspective almost exclusively?

The reader understands that the possibility of discovering an appropriate fictional form for the modern epic novel is itself one subject of *Ulysses*, a subject that self-consciously hovers over the entire novel. Since, for Joyce, inclusiveness is itself an essential prerequisite and a value for the modern epic, he wished to include within *Ulysses* not only the epic mode, but also the lyrical and dramatic. (It is worth noting that Joyce's own definitions of form focus on narrative distance, insist on the relation of work to author, and assume the imitation of an a priori world.) Central to his inquiry into the putative form for the modern epic were what voice to assume, what style to employ, and what kind of characters could possibly imply the universality he required.

Since, at the end of *Portrait*, Stephen, as Ellmann nicely puts it, "could no longer communicate with anyone in Ireland but himself", Joyce could not rely on Stephen's consciousness.⁵ In *Ulysses*, Joyce decided to make the creation of the *mature* artist the subject. But how? Why not dramatize how the warmth and generosity of an obscure middle-class Jew – a man as marginal

as the egotistical but self-doubting young artist who has not fulfilled his potential – open doors and windows of experience to the latter? Why not demonstrate that on one particular crucial day Stephen began the journey from an immature artist to the mature epic artist who was now writing *Ulysses*. Why not show that Shakespeare, the artist that Joyce regarded as his major precursor in the English language, also used his own life as his subject?

Indeed, Joyce's creative imagination works, as we shall see, the way that in the ninth episode Stephen defines Shakespeare's. For the purpose of defining the form of the novel, the ninth section is as much what Joyce called the "clou of the book" as the last episode.⁶ Stephen praises Shakespeare for qualities that are essential to the artistic conception of *Ulysses* and the narrative presence he creates to tell it. Despite the hyperbole, despite Stephen's doubt about his own argument, this chapter educates his reader to read his novel in terms of the aesthetic principles with which he interprets Shakespeare; these principles argue that for the creative genius the personal past is as important as the historical past because such a figure can universalize his own idiosyncratic and nominalistic experience. From his 1922 vantage point, Joyce has Stephen predict the relationship between his 1904 self and his retrospective fictionalized self: "In the intense instant of imagination, when the mind, Shelley says, is a fading coal, that which I was is that which I am and that which in possibility I may come to be. So in the future, the sister of the past, I may see myself as I sit here now but by reflection from that which then I shall be" (U.194; IX.381–5). By defining the relationship between the creative imagination of Shakespeare and the biographical Shakespeare whose actual experience is the crucial source for the activity of the imagination, this passage educates the reader to understand the relationship between Stephen and Joyce.

We should not think that the fictionalized presence is simply a more mature version of Stephen. Rather, the retrospective "future" self is Joyce fictionalized, within the imagined world of the novel, as a mature omniscient presence whose experience is more inclusive and whose knowledge of life is more profound than we have any reason to believe that Stephen's could ever become. For the creative imagination of this presence not only embodies