



James Joyce's  
*Ulysses*

David Fuller

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## *Note on the Text*

There can be no definitive text of *Ulysses*. The main substantive texts are the first edition of 1922, the Random House edition of 1961 (which replaced, with corrections, the first American edition of 1934), and the corrected text of 1984, 1986 (see Bibliography). The corrected text, though still widely regarded as standard, has been attacked on various grounds: amongst others, that it adopts readings from sources not in a direct line of descent to Joyce's final text of 1922; that it at times prefers readings derived from evidence of Joyce's first thoughts, despite a strong case for later versions; that it corrects, not from Joyce's manuscripts, but from facsimiles which do not reproduce the originals adequately for its purposes; that it normalises errors and inconsistencies which are clearly Joyce's; and that it does not retain typographical features of 1922 which Joyce apparently approved. The edition has therefore generated considerable scholarly controversy. This can be followed up in C. George Sandulescu and Clive Hart (eds), *Assessing the 1984 'Ulysses'*, Princess Grace Irish Library, 1, Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 1986; polemically, in John Kidd, 'The Scandal of *Ulysses*', *New York Review of Books*, XXXV, 11 (30 June 1988), 32-9; in detail in John Kidd, 'An Inquiry into *Ulysses: The Corrected Text*', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 82, 4 (1988), 411-584. The substantive texts can be checked for principal variants against Philip Gaskell and Clive Hart, '*Ulysses*: A review of three texts', Princess Grace Irish Library, 4, Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 1989.

### *Note on the Text*

In the following study, quotations are from 1986. References are to 1986 and 1961 respectively. Short quotations are not referenced where their approximate location is sufficiently obvious from the surrounding discussion. Where it seemed necessary a line reference is given to the lineated version of 1986 (the 'Student's Edition'), thus 448,3353/549 means 1986, page 448, episode line 3353; 1961, page 549.

### CITATIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used for titles of works by Joyce.

CW	<i>Critical Writings</i>
D	<i>Dubliners</i>
E	<i>Exiles</i>
FW	<i>Finnegans Wake</i>
P	<i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>
SH	<i>Stephen Hero</i>
SL	<i>Selected Letters</i>
U	<i>Ulysses</i>

JJ        This refers to the biography of Joyce by Richard Ellman

The bibliography should be consulted for full details.

# *Acknowledgements*

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## Preface

Joyce's lectures and essays, his letters and his conversations as recorded by Arthur Power and the many friends and associates interviewed by Richard Ellmann, like the books on *Ulysses* by Stuart Gilbert and Frank Budgen which he sponsored, all show that he endorsed some central traditional interests of criticism: interests in character, in theme, and in the construction of a fully imagined social world. It is indicative of Joyce's predispositions that Tolstoy was among his favourite novelists. Joyce's radically experimental attitudes to form, language and the presentation of consciousness have also generated, and become the subject of experimental critiques with roots in anthropology, linguistics and psychoanalysis, some underlying bases of which are described below (pp. 24–8). This study works with both the critical methods Joyce endorsed and those his work has played a major part in generating. Opposed to the Catholic appropriation of Joyce which does not acknowledge that his lifelong dialogue with the Church was an antagonistic one, and to the post-structuralist appropriation of his work as concerned exclusively with language, this study stresses the political dimension of Joyce's fiction – his socialism, his attitude to Irish nationalism, his prescient treatment of racism and anti-Semitism, and the relation of these issues to the mode of *Ulysses*, comedy, which Joyce saw as ethical and political, a force against fanaticism. I have also discussed Joyce's radical experimentation with form and language, and his challenges to notions of the individual subject and to stereotypes of male

## Preface

sexual identity. Many of these issues are dealt with whilst following the episodic structure within which the novel gives rise to them, partly because more synoptic criticism does not always lead back readily into the novel, and partly because it can lose touch with some basic pleasures of reading Joyce: the radiant clarity of his precise observations of world and mind, and his immense inventiveness with words.

*Ulysses* stands alone. Like any individual work, however, it can in some ways be seen more clearly by comparison within its author's whole *oeuvre*. I have referred, therefore, as necessary to *Dubliners* and later work to extend the account of Joyce's portrayal of Ireland and Catholicism, to *Exiles* and its treatment of sexuality, to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Stephen Hero* from which the character of Stephen Dedalus is in part taken, and to *Finnegans Wake*, where the character and myth of HCE extends aspects of Odysseus-Bloom, and in which Joyce's pressure on the limits of English, and his love of the music of language, are so evident.

My own interests in critical theory and practice lie in acknowledging and working with the inevitably personal nature of criticism, and in encouraging an interplay of practice and theory, such that each can question, and as necessary disrupt, the other. In discussing literature, personal response is vital because a text achieves significant life in the mind of a reader. What we understand a text to mean, because that text is addressing in each of us a particular complex of thought and feeling, is bound to be involved with the experience we bring to it. Why this should be so is clear if we consider how interpretation works. As we read, we notice aspects of a text which connect with our own experience alongside others highlighted by kinds of stress – of position, repetition, intensity of articulation, and so on – given by the author. We also, in ways suggested by Henry James's metaphor of the figure in the carpet, establish relationships between all the highlighted elements. Personal perspectives are inevitably and properly active both in responding to particulars and in the pattern-making from which overall meanings emerge. If criticism



## *Preface*

is to represent all that happens in the reading process, it must incorporate the values and experiences with which a text interacts. To do this is to encourage reading which calls on all the faculties that must be brought into activity – intellect, feeling, imagination – in any proper knowledge of art. If we accept that the personal is not purely individual – either that it bears more or less fully the traces of our own cultural situation, or that there is a core of common experience which a personal view that goes deep enough will tap – this view of criticism will not mean generating purely private meanings. But there must also be completion by a pressure to go beyond the personal – recognising that one never entirely can. One reason for acknowledging the personal nature of interpretation and evaluation is to make criticism more real. Another, quite different in direction, is to acquire some control over unconscious subjective distortion. One point of writing criticism is to engage with the frames of reference of one's own culture, and to re-engage older texts with the forms of intellect and sensibility generated by new conditions. But one point of reading imaginative literature at all is to get outside our own cultural presuppositions and experience surrogately alternative views of the world. Criticism locks us into our own cultural situation if it does not attempt – acknowledging all the difficulties of this – to see 'the object as in itself it really is'. Criticism may help investigate and deepen our own intellectual, emotional and imaginative set. It should not simply confirm it. Art is not to be enlisted as propaganda for one's own view of the world. Overtly personal criticism can avoid being narrowly subjective by taking into account all those elements in interpretation which can act as controls on the solipsistic. We should always be able to believe that the author's best self could recognise a reading as legitimate, that a reading has taken account of the meanings a text could have for its first audience, and the changing meanings a text has had for later readers who bring to it different presuppositions. Personal response is always central. However deeply investigated, it is never all. In the attempt to make a text fully and truly a part of ourselves we must, if we are to extend that self, move outside it. We can never completely do so.

## *Preface*

Interpretation avowedly involved with non-literary experience inevitably calls on ethical, political or religious perspectives. This does not imply a separation of literary and non-literary values: readers naturally derive their values in part from the records of human imaginative experience. It does mean acknowledging that any reading is interacting with a set of values, values which it may change. And it means saying where a reading stands in relation to those values. There should be a similar interplay between individual readings and general theories of reading. Theories of reading are properly derived from all one has read, with practice and theory negotiating a constant interaction. The conscious application of theory can be part of an attempt to understand one's own conditioning and to evolve a principled critique of it with the aim of making one's own alternatives to the world as one finds it consistent and coherent, not just intellectually but in one's whole mode of acting and being. Theory can help to free people from the effect of destructive ideologies. But it can also be yet another destructive net or trap. The form of this currently most evident in academic criticism is the barren intellectualism which enjoys the prestige of an imposing language and the safety of a pretended objectivity while pursuing a career the dynamics of which create a need for new fashions. There are also less conditional problems: of subscribing to a hierarchy in which abstract intellectual consciousness is seen as superior to other forms of knowledge; of accepting in the humanities criteria of knowledge governed by those of the economically more powerful natural sciences; of getting control by means of a narrow but powerful form of intellectual operation over art that should properly be intellectually and emotionally disruptive; of operating a closed circuit of rigid method in which answers are entirely predicted by questions. Roland Barthes has a fine phrase, applicable here, on 'the sclerosis of systems'. One characteristic of imaginative literature is its particularity, which should always resist the generalising tendency of system. If a theory does not allow this resistance to break down its schemes it becomes merely self-confirming, seeing only what it sets out to find. The

## *Preface*

myth critic finds a pattern very like a seasonal cycle. The deconstructive critic finds criticism participating in a text's endless play of meanings. And so on. Properly, the individual text must be allowed to 'read' the theories applied to it: that is, to resist and reshape them. This can only happen if we allow a text, in the first instance, to generate the terms in which it is read. The basis for this is not the chimera of unconditioned intuition: we can never make sense of anything without a framework within which to do so. But neither is it true, as evangelists of theory are wont to claim, that only theoretically self-conscious criticism is not in the grip of some given theory. Learned frameworks of critical response are always subject to the powerful check of the actual experience of a text struggling to be true to itself in articulation. There are more ways out of mental prisons than the hardly guaranteed exit, all too appealing to intellectuals, of yet more self-consciousness. The proper basis for a desirably resistant, disruptive engagement with general theories of reading is that of having struggled to make the fullest possible sense of many different kinds of writing in many different kinds of ways.<sup>1</sup>

# Contents

<i>Note on the Text</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi

## *I Contexts*

Historical and Cultural Context	3
Irish History: Joyce's Politics	3
Cultural Contexts	11
Critical Reception: Theoretical Perspectives	19

## *II Ulysses: A Reading of the Text*

1. Themes and Techniques	31
2. 'Extravagant Excursions into Forbidden Territory': Bloom, Stephen and the Joycean Triangle	88
3. Comedy	94

<i>Appendix: The Schemata</i>	101
<i>Notes</i>	105
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	114
<i>Index</i>	121



# *Historical and Cultural Context*

## IRISH HISTORY: JOYCE'S POLITICS

*Ulysses* was written, as its final page says, in Trieste, Zürich, and Paris between 1914 and 1921 – that is, it was begun in the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the beginning of the Great War, continued through the war in neutral Switzerland, and finished in the centre of post-war avant-garde. When Joyce began the novel he had published only essays and reviews and the slim volume of poems, *Chamber Music* (1907). *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* began serial publication in *The Egoist* in February 1914, and after many struggles the collection of stories, *Dubliners* (completed in 1907), finally appeared in June the same year. Joyce embarked on one of the greatest experiments in modern literature while still a virtually unknown writer, though the publication of *A Portrait* in book form (1916), and of sections of *Ulysses* itself in *The Little Review* from 1918, were to bring him celebrity as the work progressed. In Ireland the period during which Joyce worked on *Ulysses* is the time of the 1916 Easter Rising against British rule, effective secession after the general election of 1918, the Anglo-Irish war of 1919-21, the creation of the new state of Northern Ireland in 1921, and, in January 1922, the setting up of the Irish Free State. Joyce never returned to Ireland after a brief visit of 1912 connected with the possible publication of *Dubliners*. He expressed little interest in events in Ireland from the Easter Rising to the setting up of the Free State. On the Great War he

took a neutralist attitude: 'Dooleysprudence' (CW, 246–8) (1916) criticises the moral propaganda of both sides. The principal historical context of *Ulysses* is not the period of its composition but the period of its setting, 1904.

In relation to *Ulysses* this context is best understood as far as possible from Joyce's own writings: fiction, essays and letters. The central figure is Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–91), and the main issue Irish independence of Britain. Parnell and the Home Rule movements had roots, going back at least to the eighteenth century, in events to which Joyce often refers, or of which he presumes a knowledge. Only occasionally in *Ulysses* does Joyce refer back substantially beyond the eighteenth century to a crucial origin of Anglo–Irish conflict, the Norman invasion of Ireland in the twelfth century at the invitation of Dermot MacMurrough, King of Leinster. This beginning of the English conquest of Ireland, supposedly legitimised by a papal bull, *Laudabiliter*, issued by the only English pope, Nicholas Breakspear, Pope Adrian IV, contained in Joyce's view the main elements of the subsequent history: English tyranny and Irish betrayal, by Ireland itself and by the Catholic Church. It is a view which Joyce set out in plain terms in his fullest statement on Anglo–Irish history, 'Ireland, Land of Saints and Sages' (1907) (CW, 153–74). In *Ulysses* (and even in *Finnegans Wake* where earlier Irish history is much more fully invoked) Joyce largely ignores Tudor, Stuart and Cromwellian policy towards Ireland, the phase of history leading up to William of Orange's victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. The historical background of *Ulysses* after Henry II means principally the 1798 republican risings, the Act of Union of 1800, and the various parliamentary, popular and insurrectionary movements of the nineteenth century. The risings of 1798 (there were a number, more or less co-ordinated throughout the country) grew out of the Society of United Irishmen founded in 1791 by Wolfe Tone (1763–98) and others. The aim of the risings, which were preceded by brutal British army and Irish Orange lodge (Protestant) repression of the Society, was to found a secular republic on the model of (and helped by) the new republic

of revolutionary France. They were put down quickly and with great ferocity. The fear in ruling-class circles which this evidence of widespread disaffection generated led to the Act of Union – ‘the transaction of buying and selling the Dublin parliament’, as Joyce called it (CW, 223). By this Act the Dublin parliament dissolved itself and transferred its powers to the British parliament. The other aftermath of ’98 was the rising of 1803 led by Robert Emmet (1778–1803). This was easily crushed, and Emmet was executed, but his speech from the dock became part of Irish historical mythology. (Joyce, not one to endorse models of Romantic failure in history or in myth, thought Emmet’s rising foolish (CW, 189); in *Ulysses* Bloom farts through his recollection of the famous speech (238–9/291), and Emmet’s death may, as Richard Ellmann suggests (CW, 189), be the basis for the grotesque Cyclops parody of the execution of a nationalist hero (U, 251–5/306–10).

The Act of Union led to over a century of agitation for the restoration of Home Rule, the first important figure in which is Daniel O’Connell, ‘The Liberator’ (1775–1847). O’Connell’s main aim, apart from repeal of the Union, was Catholic emancipation, meaning equal political and civil rights for Catholics. Barred from parliament until emancipation in 1829, O’Connell developed various methods of extra-parliamentary agitation, particularly bringing pressure to bear on government by shows of popular support at huge public meetings. O’Connell’s policy was non-violent, where possible was constitutional, and allied nationalism with the Catholic Church. Though he achieved Catholic emancipation his efforts for repeal of the Union failed, and political activity was in any case driven into new channels by the terrible famines in Ireland caused by potato blight from 1845 to 1848. In the early 1840s a new movement, Young Ireland, began under O’Connell, but its ideals had more in common than O’Connell’s had with the revolutionary generation of ’98. Its members were not at one with O’Connell in his association with the Catholic Church or his opposition to the use of force. Provoked by the extreme situation of the famines, they split from O’Connell’s Repeal



Association under the leadership of Smith O'Brien (1803–64). Nothing effective was done against the famines. O'Connell died in 1847. Neither party recovered from the split. The famines caused the deaths and emigration (mostly to America) of over a million people between 1845 and 1848 alone, as well as continued massive emigration during the following two decades. Overall the population of Ireland declined from eight million in the census of 1841 to four and a half million in that of 1901, giving some justification to the arguments of the violent nationalist of *Ulysses* (Cyclops). Though the immediate cause of the famines, the potato blight, was an act of God or of Nature, the ultimate causes were political: British failure to deal with long-recognised problems of the Irish economy, problems which were arguably – and this was how Joyce himself saw them (CW, 167, 199) – actively created by British policy.

The English politician to attempt most in Ireland in the nineteenth century was the Liberal Prime Minister, William Ewart Gladstone (1809–98). Gladstone began his first ministry in 1868 in the immediate aftermath of another revolutionary attempt to overthrow British government of Ireland: the revolt organised in 1867 by the Fenian movement led by James Stephens (1824–1901). Gladstone's first step (1869) was to disestablish the (Protestant) Church of Ireland, which meant that Irish Catholics were no longer forced to support it with tithes. Land reform then became a principal issue. It was promoted by the Land League founded in 1879 by Michael Davitt (1846–1906) to protect tenant farmers against exorbitant rents and eviction. The movement worked hand-in-hand with a renewed struggle for Home Rule in which the principal figure was Parnell. Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill of 1886 foundered on the opposition of the Ulster Protestants, to whom it signified 'Rome Rule'. There followed an attempt to discredit Parnell by a forger, Richard Piggott (Joyce made great play with the Piggott forgeries in *Finnegans Wake*), which was itself based on a piece of political violence several times referred to in *Ulysses*: the murder in 1882 of the Chief Secretary and the Undersecretary for Ireland in Phoenix Park, Dublin, by a group calling itself the Invincibles.