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JOYCE EFFECTS On Language, Theory, and History

Joyce Effects is a series of connected essays by one of today's leading commentators on James Joyce. Joyce's books, Derek Attridge argues, go off like fireworks, and one of this book's aims is to enhance the reader's enjoyment of these special effects. He also examines another sort of effect: the way Joyce's writing challenges and transforms our understanding of language, theory, and history. Attridge's exploration of these transforming effects represents fifteen years of close engagement with Joyce, and reflects the changing course of Joyce criticism during this period. Each of Joyce's four major books is addressed in depth, while several shorter chapters take up particular theoretical topics such as character, chance and coincidence, historical writing and narrative, as they are staged and scrutinized in Joyce's writing. Through lively and accessible discussion, this book advances a mode of reading open to both the pleasures and the surprises of the literary work.

Derek Attridge is Leverhulme Research Professor at the University of York and Distinguished Visiting Professor at Rutgers University. Among his books are, as author, *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce*, and, as co-editor, *Post-Structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French*, *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, and *Semicolonial Joyce*.

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For Laura and Eva
avant la lettre

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Morris Beja and Shari Benstock (Ohio State University Press, 1989;
reprinted with the permission of the Ohio State University Press).

References and abbreviations

The following abbreviations, editions, and methods of reference have been used:

- D* James Joyce, *Dubliners*, ed. Robert Scholes and A. Walton Litz (New York: Viking, 1969). References to page number.
- FW* James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939). References in the form page number.line number (e.g., *FW* 318.24). (Only the first line number of the passage given.) All editions have the same pagination.
- Letters* James Joyce, *Letters*, ed. Stuart Gilbert and Richard Ellmann, 3 vols. (New York: Viking, 1957–66). References to volume and page number.
- P* James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Walter Hettche. New York: Garland/Viking, 1993. References in the form section number.line number (e.g. *P* IV.796). (Only the first line number of the passage given.)
- SH* James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*. Ed. Theodore Spencer, revised John J. Slocum and Herbert Cahoon. London: Jonathan Cape, 1956. References to page numbers in this edition.
- U* James Joyce, *Ulysses: The Corrected Text*. Ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior. London: Bodley Head and Penguin, 1986. References in the form episode number.line number (e.g., *U* 13.950).
- Critical Heritage* Robert H. Deming, ed., *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage*. 2 vols. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970. References to volume and page number.

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JJ

Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*. Revised edition. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Preface

A lambskip for the marines! Paronama! The
 entire horizon cloth! All effects in their joints caused
 ways. Raindrum, windmachine, snowbox.

(*FW* 502.36)

Joyce's four major books, *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*, all go off like inventive and spectacular fireworks, and one response is to sit back and enjoy them – enjoy their intricate construction, their subtle phrasings, their play with conventions and expectations, their engagement with the twists and turns of history, their often hilarious exposure of prejudice and pomposity. Joyce effects are dazzling, funny, sometimes disconcerting, occasionally astringent or even lethal. Like the special effects of the pantomime tradition, or those of which Hollywood is currently so enamoured, Joyce effects, while they amaze or entrance the audience, openly invite admiration for the skill of the artificer. Whatever argument I pursue in the different parts of this book, I try always to reflect my own pleasure in these effects and to do them some kind of critical justice. Although I have been able to touch on only a few textual moments in Joyce's writing, examined in the light of wider concerns, my hope is that the reader's enjoyment of his *œuvre* as a whole will be enhanced and some of the characteristic effects of each of the four works given renewed power to awe and entertain.

The Joyce effects that form the main focus of my attention, however, are of a different kind. These are the effects *produced* by his work, when it is read with the attention and commitment it demands – effects upon the way we think about a number of significant topics, and upon our involvement in other cultural (and more than cultural) activities. Readers of all sorts have testified to the transformative power of Joyce's writing; perhaps more than any other twentieth-century author he has

changed the way we conceive of literature and a variety of other institutions and practices, including language, history and historiography, sex and sexuality, and modes of interpretation. *Joyce Effects* examines a number of these incitements to reconsider our attitudes and concepts, not as a matter of past cultural history but as continuing challenges to thought. I make no claim that this book demonstrates what Joyce's writing is *really* about; my aim is simply to bring alive for the reader certain issues that it raises (or better, that it powerfully and pleurably dramatizes) as the twentieth century gives way to the twenty-first. For the most important effects of literature are not mechanical consequences of the text; they are the products of readings that are simultaneously faithful responses and fresh inventions, rediscovering the literary work in its original time and place while making it anew for the reader's time and place.

Critical essays, like works of literature, belong to their moment of production at the same time as they lay claim to a future effectiveness. The chapters of this book present a history of changing responses to Joyce (both personal responses and those of a wider body of readers and critics) over the period 1984 to 1999; at the same time they elaborate a continuing intellectual project which I believe to be still valid. Indeed, in some ways it seems to me more urgent now than when I wrote the earliest of these pieces. That project – which started with the four chapters on Joyce in my *Peculiar Language* (published in 1988) – involves an attempt to do justice to the literary not as some timeless and absolute realm, but as a concrete cultural space produced by, but not reducible to, the social, economic, and political forces at work at any given moment. Literary works have effects precisely because they do not float free from the material and intellectual conditions of their time – and 'their time' should be understood both as the time of writing and the time of reading – but perform a kind of staging of those conditions, whether in a spirit of interrogation or celebration or (as often with Joyce) both. They do so not from a political, moral, or religious platform raised above the terrain they survey (though they can function in all of these non-literary ways as well) but out of their own semi-submerged situation, half in and half out of the determining circumstances of the time.

My various endeavours to register the effects of reading Joyce over the past fifteen years have all been motivated by this interest in the peculiar capacity of literature to engage with crucial intellectual, ethical, and political issues without attempting to resolve them, and by a fascination with the specific ways in which Joyce, through an extraordi-

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nary linguistic and generic inventiveness, was able to make the most of this potential. From one point of view, this book is a reading of some central features of Joyce's works that aims to bring out the contribution they make to an understanding of the literary, such as its complicated relation to referentiality and to historiography, its linking of the linguistic and the erotic, and its capacity to both tempt and frustrate the hermeneutic drive. From another point of view, it is a discussion of some central features of the literary using Joyce's writing as a kind of testing ground, chosen for this purpose because those features are both heightened and troubled in it. From either point of view, of course, it is possible to ask: why this particular set of choices? Construed as primarily a book on Joyce, it prompts the question, 'Why concentrate on these particular literary issues and not others that are also operative in important ways in his writing?' Construed as a book on the nature of the literary, it prompts the question, 'Why choose Joyce as an exemplar and not other writers who also address and work through these issues?'

The obvious answer is that I believe the issues I have chosen to be particularly important ones in the current state of our understanding of literature and the literary, and that I believe Joyce to be a particularly important figure in the twentieth century's investigation of, and exploitation of, these issues. Joyce's version of modernism, that is to say, by producing heightened attention to *both* language in its multiplicity of forms and functions *and* the concrete world of sensation, emotion, drive, and desire, situates the literary precisely in the conjunction or crossover of the cultural and the material – hence his curiously double notoriety, as exceptionally difficult in his handling of language and exceptionally direct in his handling of the body and the world it encounters. At the same time, it would be absurd to claim that there are not many other significant issues that his work addresses or that there are not many other writers who address the issues I have chosen to concentrate on. There is, however, a further answer to the question of choice, which relates to a third way of viewing the book: as the representation of a particular fifteen-year history, both mine as a reader of and commentator on Joyce and that of literary criticism, especially Joyce criticism, more generally. There is, that is to say, an element of historical contingency about the scope and targets of these essays, begun as they were in response to a variety of invitations and opportunities and first published in a variety of places, but it is a historical contingency which I hope is itself illuminating for anyone interested in the situation of the literary critic, and the place of the literary, in the late twentieth century.

In order to bring out this aspect of the book, the introductory chapter provides an autobiographical framework for the pieces that follow (in the context of the changing climate of Joyce criticism), as well as pursuing some of the theoretical implications of the critical trajectory depicted in this chronological account. After the introduction, the main spine of the book consists of four long essays – chapters 3, 5, 8, and 11 – that take up in turn *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*. Each of these chapters focuses on a particular topic (or set of related topics) that lies at the heart of the work in question. My claim in each case is that the work effects a reevaluation of many of the habits of thought that underpin conventional assumptions about the particular subject addressed in the chapter. *Dubliners* is known for its tight embrace of the real; my essay, starting from one paragraph in ‘Clay’, asks what Joyce’s method in the collection suggests about the process whereby a literary work – or language more generally – *refers* to what we think of as the real world. The topic explored in the chapter on *A Portrait* is the relation between language and sex, two of the most powerful forces in the novel, an exploration that leads to a consideration of the wider issue of the peculiar potency of literary language in its relation to bodily experience. The essay on *Ulysses* concentrates on the final episode of the book, Molly Bloom’s nocturnal monologue, examining Joyce’s challenge to our thinking about the representation of gender in language and by language. Finally, I broach the issue that *Finnegans Wake* raises for every one of its readers – interpretation – by taking a hard look, historically and theoretically, at the notion that the book represents a single long dream. These essays all attempt to start afresh in approaching these works and these subjects (a project which can have only limited success, of course, since we are able to rid ourselves of only so much of our inherited web of prejudices and mental habits), and treat the dominant critical assumptions about Joyce’s books as products of historical processes that bear careful examination. Thus, for example, I question the well-entrenched notions that *Dubliners* is an exercise in careful realism, that Molly’s style is the embodiment of a feminine fluidity, that *Finnegans Wake* is so strange because it portrays a dream. My purpose is not to dismiss these critical commonplaces, or the large body of fine exegetical work they have made possible, but to create space for alternative approaches that may bring with them new ways of enjoying, and experiencing the vivid and lasting effects of, Joyce’s writing. The book ends with a chapter that I believe is in the spirit of that writing: a self-questioning which is at the same time a questioning of the

state of Joyce criticism as the new millennium begins.

Interspersed among these longer chapters are shorter pieces, tracing a number of other Joyce effects, in both senses of the word. Each was written for a specific occasion, usually a talk that formed part of a panel about some particular aspect of Joyce's work, and marks a moment in the fifteen-year history which the book represents. In a couple of cases, where this seemed particularly relevant, I have indicated precisely the nature of that original occasion. The subjects that these pieces address (or rather that they show Joyce ingeniously addressing) include character, chance and coincidence, history and historical writing, and – through the *Wake's* evident challenge to these notions – narrative and linguistic transparency. I have resisted the temptation to expand these pieces to the length of the other chapters, believing that their brevity is part of their suggestiveness, and that the reader will have no difficulty in locating further relevant examples or in imagining how a fuller discussion could be developed.

Language is a constant concern throughout the book, as it surely must be in a full response to a writer like Joyce, but not in isolation from those processes that give rise to it and upon which it impinges: the physical body, the literary institution, the movements of history, and the network of power relations that entails, among other things, political authority, gender, education, and class. Joyce understood as well as anybody that language is not one thing with one origin or one function; the challenge to his readers is, in every sense, to live up to that comprehensive awareness.

In the course of fifteen years of writing on an author, and the numerous conferences, visits, collaborative projects, communications via e-mail and snail mail, and other opportunities for interchange that writing on an author like Joyce encourages, the number of debts one accumulates are such that to acknowledge all of them (or even all of which one is conscious) would produce something like one of the monstrous lists in *Finnegans Wake*, and detract from the very genuine gratitude motivating the gesture. I shall therefore run the opposite risk and avoid names, hoping that no one feels unappreciated in consequence, and simply express my thanks to all those whose conversation and writing have spurred and enriched my thinking on Joyce. I also thank those who invited me to give the talks out of which most of these chapters arose, all those who listened, all those who asked questions or made comments. My thanks, too, to those who asked me to contribute to collections and

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