

JAMES JOYCE

*Ulysses*

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1 Landmark: the ruined monument

When Wyndham Lewis attacked *Ulysses* in 1927, his appeared to be the most unlikely accusation: an excessive simplicity of mind. Forced underground by censors during its serial publication, smuggled out of France on pages folded into letters and parcels, freighted with those expectations of secret wisdom that attend a forbidden book, this was a cryptoclassic already before it was read, a subversive colossus; it could hardly fall to Lewis's charge that it had no ideas at all. Yet a critical description of *Ulysses* might well bear out Lewis's critique. Here is the story of the average sensual man, Leopold Bloom, whose middling fortunes in middle age remain ostensibly unchanged in the novel, which runs the short course of a single day. Canvasser for newspaper advertisements, he crosses paths with Stephen Dedalus, a 22-year-old who has already outlived his promise as Dublin's scholastic prodigy, whose career as artist remains wholly unrealized. Mr. Bloom rescues Stephen at the end of a day of debauchery, yet the quality and significance of their exchange is at best indeterminate. The older man returns in the end to the bed of his wife, Molly, whose (mostly) mute exchange with him does little to redeem the fact that she has entertained another man there during the day. If narrative generates and sustains the potential for meaning in a novel, if the plot is indeed the load-bearing element in the structure of significance, then it seems that Joyce has used a pennyworth of tale to hang a hundredweight of – well, of details, minutely recorded circumstances, but not those eventualities and changes that define the salient themes and values of a major work.

Does this judgment alter once Joyce's story reveals the logic and momentum of a shadow plot? The events of *Ulysses* run in parallel to

the adventures in Homer's *Odyssey*, and the correspondences range from circumstantial details to the motives and aims of the protagonists. Leopold Bloom's wanderings through Dublin not only resemble the adventures of Odysseus (Ulysses) but also recall the destination and promise of that homeward voyage: the Greek hero's desired reunion with son and wife. The death of Bloom's son eleven years earlier supplies a rationale for his temporary adoption of Stephen, whose disaffection from his own father opens him to the paternalistic offices of Bloom; the husband's longstanding estrangement from Molly, initiated eleven years earlier by the death of their infant, looks for relief, now, through the appearance of the substitute son. The *Odyssey* supplies *Ulysses* with a depth of human content as well as a structural rhythm, but the narrative imagination of the epic provides an energy in which Joyce's characters participate not at all consistently, for the most part not even consciously. That Joyce inscribes the crisis (and resolution) of his novel in the magic language of myth, in a kind of invisible ink, may conform to the general tendency of literary modernism to avoid direct statement. Yet many readers (especially *postmodern* ones) will resist the premise that human experience reveals its meaning through external and typical patterns, and will require the father-son-wife relationship to be apprehended in ways internal and unique to the characters.

The oblique signification of the Odyssean theme in *Ulysses* defines at once its central, ramifying problem and the very problematic terms used to describe the status it enjoys in the history of the novel. A conventional account of the genesis of the novel tells of its emergence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from a fusion of myth (fables, romances, moral allegories) and fact (diaries, journals, "news"). The two sides of the fact-myth equation seem to be exaggerated to equally extensive degrees in *Ulysses*. On one hand it is an encyclopedia of contemporary news, its myriad and timely detail attested by the need of Joyce scholars to consult those chronicles of current events, the several Dublin newspapers of and around 16 June 1904, to identify events and characters in the novel. On the other hand Joyce pushes the romance substructure of the novel into a radical form, recovering its deepest roots in the original epic quest of the *Odyssey*. To ask that these two dimensions meet in perfect cohesion, so that each fact acquires an epic correlation,

is to prescribe an impossible ideal, one which nonetheless describes a main direction of imaginative energy in the genre. That the random matter-of-novel-fact might cleave to the paradigms of ancient archetypes is no obscure object of desire; to this limit of credible need the novel ever verges, if only asymptotally. Yet the manifest experience in reading *Ulysses* is that Joyce manipulates and confounds this conventional expectation. He indulges and multiplies random detail increasingly over the course of the book, straining the sustaining frame of the myth up to and through the breaking point. The ultimate (absolute, final) novel, *Ulysses* enlarges each major feature of its genre to dimensions hitherto unknown, but in doing so voids the possibility of their reconciliation. It fractures the very compact that provides for its conspicuous eminence.

This paradoxical achievement points toward the complexities of Joyce's own moment in literary and cultural history, a situation which, once apprehended, may suggest how his incentives, far from perverse, sustain a rich and varied production in his novel. "We must dislocate the language into meaning": Mallarmé's adage applies to the generic as well as verbal experiments of the modernists. They might revive and extend a dying tradition by putting a reverse spin on its forms; by writing against the grain of generic expectation. *The Waste Land*, last of all pastoral elegies, occurs in a city; *The Cantos*, supposedly the summation of lyric tradition, teems with the anti-matter of chronicle, homily, and demotic talk. This disintegration of generic purity coincides with a reintegration that includes new material, fresh possibilities.

A similar double rhythm compels the main lines of movement in *Ulysses*. Its first six chapters establish the current state of the art, reinforcing conventional expectations by applying methods already well established in a contemporary practice as varied as Henry James's, D. H. Lawrence's, Virginia Woolf's. An apparently detached narrator enjoys linguistic sympathy with Stephen and Bloom, so that the narrative fabric catches up these protagonists as characters-in-voice, weaving the stuff of their inner monologues into the background tapestry of scene and event. No sooner is this careful synthesis perfected, however, than it unravels, in the seventh chapter, which uses its setting in a newspaper office to mimic the language and format of popular journalism. The inclusion of this

extra-literary manner anticipates the range of styles exercised in the second half of the novel, where Joyce indulges a wild farrago of mannerisms: melodrama, satire, romance (harlequin), scholastic catechism, musical fugue, etc. Not all of these voices are incompatible with the novel as genre, but in their variety and particularity they challenge and dissolve the tenability of a single generic method. In this way Joyce unmakes and remakes the conventional sensibility of the novel, expanding its area of imaginative awareness with these unexpected, fresh perspectives.

While these initiatives align Joyce with the timely enterprises of the modernists, his strategies also respond to a problem endemic to the form of the novel. It is more or less at the mid-point (after the tenth chapter) that he shifts into the high gear of stylistic exercise. In a conventional novel (speaking schematically), the half-way mark locates the moment at which the complications of situation and desire begin to move toward resolution. "Incidents and people that occurred at first for their own sake," E. M. Forster observes in his 1927 treatise *Aspects of the Novel*, "now have to contribute to the denouement." It is at this juncture, Forster complains, that "most novels do fail," for the variability of real characters must give way to the mechanical necessity of cause-and-effect sequence, of a narrative "logic" that "takes over the command from flesh and blood." Here Forster identifies a prime liability in the traditional plot-driven novel, a susceptibility that locates at once a negative incentive for Joyce's stylistic art and a rationale for its positive achievement. Sustaining and expanding his imitations and parodies through the second half of the novel, Joyce avoids the free fall of the narrative denouement; he erases any trace of headlong movement. Each chapter dilates into stylistic performance, shifting its source of energy from the linear continuum of plot or sequential events to language itself.

Forster faults *Ulysses* for its surplus of extra-narrative matter, however, and in that objection he measures the really novel quality of Joyce's experimental challenge to the traditional forms of the genre, which retains some residual commitment to represent the textures of social life. To Forster, Joyce's verbal constructs appear merely as architectures of sound turning in a void. Joyce indulges his deliquescent mastery over language, or so the usual objection ran, in evident defiance of the novel's social ground, where story

mimics history; where plot acquires its historical thickness. Marxist critics in particular have worried over Joyce's avoidance of the clearly defined story line, which marks the intersection, these critics maintain, between the author's imagination and the social reality that constitutes it. In his highly self-conscious medium of language, however, Joyce can be heard restaging the actions on which the stories of fiction conventionally turn. Interaction between people gives way to an exchange of styles; the reciprocating acts of characters reappear as a variorum of verbal mannerisms. This medley comprises the "heteroglossia" that Mikhail Bakhtin heard as the varied verbal stuff of a novel, where the socially and historically conditioned styles of an epoch are organized in a structured system, one which gives tongues to the whole socio-ideological economy of an age. While most novels require an effort to *overhear* a subtly graded modulation of idioms – their dissonance is often not even consciously intended – it is a mark of the generally colossal character of *Ulysses* that it presents its variable styles as oversize characters-in-voice. Gigantism is not a synonym for greatness, nor is the vocal record of a differentiated class structure the sole condition of importance. Yet the orchestration of styles in *Ulysses*, and the linguistic philosophy that attends this art, are the most conspicuous and suggestive facets of its achievement (these practices and attitudes in language provide the subject of chapter 3). One proximate source for this performance lay in Joyce's own earliest experience, for his ear was tuned in a vocal culture as complex and rich as the Irish society of his formative years.

## 2 Ireland and Europe: from the 1890s to the 1920s

W. B. Yeats has written:

The modern literature of Ireland, and indeed all that stir of thought that prepared for the Anglo-Irish war, began when Parnell fell from power in 1891. A disillusioned and embittered Ireland turned from parliamentary politics; an event was conceived, and the race began, as I think, to be troubled by that event's long gestation.

Yeats is surely correct in assigning to the absence of Charles Stewart Parnell an effect as momentous as his presence. An aristocratic



landholder seeking reforms in the tenant laws, an English activist for Irish Home Rule, Parnell displayed a capacity for paradox that signaled his genuine ability to cross cultural barriers and broker useful alliances. To suggest that the hope stirred by his leadership in practical politics could divert itself after his death into the production of pure poetry, which served in turn to generate nothing less than the Irish Rising of Easter 1916, however, seems both to privilege the artists' distance from history and credit them with too direct a political force and effect. It is a literary conceit, at once wishful and exclusionary, for its longstanding acceptance has served to minimize the importance of actual social conditions in literary writers' involvement in "that event's long gestation." It has also tended to reduce the historical content and political depth of Joyce's own imagination. The novelist's departure from Ireland in 1904 – exactly mid-way between Parnell's death and the 1916 Rising, in the depths of that political quietism that left Yeats's artists dreaming upon the bones of a new body politic – once encouraged commentators to write Joyce out of Irish social history; to deprive his work of its formative and enriching contexts. Yeats's romantic reconstruction needs to be examined, challenged and modified, in order to return Joyce's work to its historical ground, its first circumstances.

It is to the artists of the Celtic Revival that Yeats consigns the imaginative nurturing of Irish independence. Flourishing between 1880 and 1915, the Revivalists sought to recover the use of the Irish language, introducing it into the educational curriculum; they retrieved Irish folklore and songs for study, and established a national theater in Dublin to stage plays of strictly Irish provenance. They premised their efforts on the belief that political consequences would flow from the activity of culture-(re)building. Gaelic antiquity would provide the material source of ethnic identity, the stuff of national self-consciousness. The very terms of this claim – the political agency of literature is oblique – make it difficult to prove or refute. Yet the ongoing work of historical scholarship has shown that membership in the movement hardly constituted a cadre of proto-revolutionaries: suburban, upper middle class, often *Anglo*-Irish, many belonged to the very social order – indeed, the governmental caste – that a revolution would overthrow. Might some of these genteel partisans be pursuing politics by other means – using urgent but vague claims

of political relevance to validate a romantic antiquarianism, a nostalgic taste for holidays in a past they never knew? The inspired inconsequence of much Revivalist politics can be heard in its characteristic literature, in the very textures of Douglas Hyde's poetry, which infuses the English language with a Gaelic syntax and so establishes *strangeness* as the standard and condition of beauty. It is the art of *l'étranger*, the Norman English writer, who turns the country he is occupying and dominating into the alien land – an imperial exoticism.

Joyce's initial resistance to this movement went to the issue of its (self-proclaimed) insularity, a parochialism that choked his already declared sense of membership in a pan-European literary community. That the political energies of the revivalists were leading them *away* from the society they claimed to be serving, however, was an irony to which he was fully sensible. The contrast between the Celtic delicacies of Hyde's Connaught and the Irish destitution of Joyce's Dublin was the proven truth of his own experience.

The fate of Joyce's family in the 1880s and 1890s gave him a social exposure at once exceptional and totally representative. The declining fortunes of his father led him from modest privilege through well-mannered poverty into near squalor; in little more than a decade he had crossed the social map of Dublin. The lack of industry in the city accounted for the virtual absence of a secure working class and shaped the violently sharp divide between the two poles of his social experience – the affluent suburbs and the often astonishing destitution of its center. Here a surplus population of "general labourers," depending on casual or occasional work, filled the crumbling splendor of Georgian townhouses. Only one-quarter of the nearly 5400 tenement dwellings at the turn of the century was regarded (by the tolerant standards of the day) as structurally sound and fit for habitation; one-half was ever sliding into unfitness; and the remaining quarter had moved beyond the possibility of reclamation. Infant mortality and tuberculosis raised the death rate to 25 per 1000. Over this subworld the characters of a shabby gentility survived shakily. Shopkeepers, clerks, publicans, and their assistants seemed not to belong to a middle class in the English or European sense, rather to exist in a kind of space-between, affecting the manners of superiority, facing the possibility of collapse. Into

this space John Joyce sank his family, forever harkening back to the patrician grandeur of the near past, constantly raising the specter of absolute ruin in the future. It was, as it were, the psychic crossroads of the Dublin caste system.

Joyce's experience there structures his vision of the city and casts many of the characters the reader meets in *Ulysses*. The conventional working class – gardeners, plumbers, carpenters – has virtually no representatives here. Joyce's people belong almost exclusively to the lower middle class, often affecting a sense of superiority that is only a reflection of their own insecurity. Poised between upper-class aspirations and the possibility of descent through the no-safety-net floor of 1904 society, Joyce's characters inhabit a gap, a site of high anxiety in historical Dublin but, as recast on the pages of *Ulysses*, a stage for high verbal drama. This space-between locates a rich nexus, a kind of vortex point into and through which the various class dialects of the city come rushing. Joyce orchestrates this mixture – “dialogia” is Bakhtin's term for the practice – into his narrative with a skill as complex as the attitudes of a man who has suffered existence there. Being out of (any single) place, the Joyce family gave James a position from which the contemporary ideological constructions of society were opened for interrogation. He could see the dominant political conventions of the time from the vantage of a relative alien, and so reimagine a world he knew all too well to the lineaments of some alternative order, some alternate models of possibility. Two forces – mighty but for the most part irreconcilable – had grown up in opposition to the situation left in Ireland by English colonialism: Irish nationalism, international socialism.

Nationalism and socialism had long stood in conflict on the Continent, but Irish history made their alignment especially difficult. The absence of a broadly based labor movement left the socialists fearing that a new Irish state would change only the flag, not the structure or values, of the existing society. Conversely, the trans-European culture of socialism threatened the ethnic and political identity the Irish nationalists were seeking to retrieve. The Irish Free State that emerged from the rebellion of 1916 and the ensuing conflicts would indeed sustain much of the class-structure and economic culture of the older social order. But attempts to mediate the impasse between nationalism and socialism were not inconsequential: this debate

focused much of the energy in the intellectual culture of Irish politics. Of the writers involved in the debate one of the most interesting is the socialist James Connolly, an intelligence whose development between 1890 and 1916 (he was killed in the Rising) provides both a history-in-miniature of Irish social feeling and a parallel (ultimately a contrast) for the growth of Joyce's own political sensibility.

In "Socialism and Irish Nationalism" (1897), Connolly negotiates a strained settlement between his two claimants. "Even with his false reasoning," Connolly concedes, "the Irish nationalist . . . is an agent for social regeneration," but only insofar as the patriot forces Ireland to separate from "the interests of a feudal [English] aristocracy." Nationalism, in other words, is merely an expedient for the goals of socialism, a catalyst to be consumed in the very process of class-revolt that it helps to stimulate. It is a tinder no less dangerous than it is volatile. "The arguments of the chauvinist nationalist," he worries, address those zones of atavism and barbarism, the alliances of tribe and race, that ever threaten a "national recreancy." At times, however, Connolly attaches his language of egalitarian values to a romantic and nostalgic nationalism, imputing to the "social structure of ancient Erin" a "form of that common property" that is collectivist. To locate a socialist millennium in Celtic antiquity is of course anachronistic, but, in reaching so far back, Connolly's gesture reveals all too clearly an absence in the social and economic past of Ireland, indeed a missing phase in the connective tissue of a socialist's progressive history. Connolly lacks any evidence of a working-class movement in the actual history of Ireland, which, in one dominant model of socialist politics, is the enabling condition of class-revolt and the ultimate egalitarian state.

This absence defines an awareness central to Joyce's own youthful socialism, which grew from his early experience and crested in 1906–7, in Rome, where his short-lived employment as a bank clerk coincided with a meeting of the international socialist congress. Among the rival factions at the congress he prefers the trades-unionists or Syndicalists, who subscribe to an anarchism Joyce justifies in view of the problems particular to Irish social history. His wording forces to a focus the predicaments underlying Connolly's own argument and rhetoric. "The Irish proletariat is yet to be created" (*Letters* II, 187), Joyce knows, and this absence seems to

warrant an anarchist program of change. A month earlier he has deliberated “the overthrow of the entire present social organisation” to force “the automatic emergence of the proletariat in trades-unions and guilds and the like” (*Letters II*, 174). These socialist goals also lead him, like Connolly, into an opportunistic tolerance of Irish nationalism, which would at least break the English-forged chains of a feudal peasantry (*Letters II*, 187). Yet he also suggests that an English presence would help to erase those most regrettable conditions in Ireland – serfs scratching at the land to which they are tied. For English investment would alleviate the shortage of industrial capital (*Letters II*, 187), a deficit that accounts for the absence of an urban working class, whose forceful organization is essential to (one model of) socialist evolution. Apparently paradoxical, in fact pragmatic, indeed ultra-socialist, Joyce’s openness to the English also invokes the pan-national faith of socialism. It allows him to endorse the hope, expressed at the conference, that the new century will witness the end of international war (*Letters II*, 174).

Seven years later came the crisis of socialist internationalism: the Great War of 1914–18. On its verge Europe stood as a rickety collage of nation-states, adhering in systems of alliance that four centuries of diplomacy had evolved, bartered, and compromised. Four days in August brought the system to acute distress, plunging England and most of the Continent into total war. The swiftness with which social democratic parties capitulated to national war efforts – the Socialist Party in Germany followed its initial opposition to conflict by eagerly voting war credits to its government – may have dismayed socialist intellectuals like Lenin. But these developments forced fresh awarenesses on other Marxist ideologues; Henrik de Man, for example, saw that the claims of race and country operated far more powerfully than those of social class or millenarian cause. These circumstances and recognitions provide context and rationale for the Irish Rising and the development of Connolly’s own revolutionary politics, which changed utterly between 1914 and 1916. Nearly global evidence convinced him that a nationalist and ethnic vocabulary, not words like *proletariat* or *aristocracy*, could define oppositions, force issues, tap political energy. “The time for *Ireland’s* battle is now,” he proclaims in January 1916, “the place for *Ireland’s* battle is here.” A month later the rhetoric is rising

inevitably toward Easter: “no agency less potent than the red tide of war on *Irish* soil will ever be able to enable the *Irish* race to recover its self-respect” (emphases added).

Those militant blandishments of nation and race exert a powerful appeal. Does Joyce dramatize his own susceptibilities in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, when his counterpart envisions the Europe to which he is fleeing? Here Stephen Daedalus “raised his eyes towards the slowdrifting clouds, dappled and seaborne . . . The Europe they had come from lay out there beyond the Irish Sea, Europe of strange tongues and valleyed and woodbegirt and citadelled and of entrenched and marshalled races” (*P*, 167). The prospect is no less timely than antique, for its constellation of fortress nations presents a vision of contemporary Europe in a nostalgic medievalism. But it exerts a devious appeal, identified and framed as such. The archaic diction and alluring music suggest that this romance of nationalism, like some of Stephen’s other enthusiasms, is being displayed rather than professed by Joyce. This is the same “spell of arms and races” whose “tale of distant nations” (*P*, 252) also beguiles Stephen and leads him in this grand finale to the novel to appeal to himself to “forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race” (*P*, 253), in a piece of rhetorical afflatus that shows the young Icarus all too clearly flying all too high. Probably written before the outbreak of war, the words recover the urgency of a warning uttered as an oblique hortative, in the negative subjunctive of the imagination. Subsequent history confirmed the warning in a way that prompted greater directness. By 1919, when Joyce is writing the twelfth episode of *Ulysses*, nationalism finds its caricature-invoice in the Irish “Citizen,” identified as the Cyclops in the Odyssean parallel and stigmatized as the giant of monocular sight.

To be anti-nationalist, however, is not to be apolitical, and Joyce’s rebuke should not be assimilated too easily to the longstanding view that his imagination is somehow untouched by political issues. His attention centers on a social covenant peculiar to the history of Leopold Bloom. Born in 1866 to a Hungarian father and Irish mother, Bloom enters life as a kind of dual national. In the same year, Hungary initiated its rebirth as a nation, but with two allegiances: following the Austro-Prussian war (which began on 15–16 June 1866), it declared its independence from Austria, but it also

accepted the Austrian emperor as a constitutional monarch. The Hungarian plan was put forward as a practical model for Ireland's relation to England by Arthur Griffith, in 1904, in *The Resurrection of Hungary*, and the contemporary oral culture of *Ulysses* takes cognizance of that. Bloom is rumored to be a member of Griffith's secret counsels. The casual comedy of Dublin political gossip has led commentators to diminish the credibility of this option, but wrongly, and it may recover some of its original appeal in view of the circumstances contemporary with Joyce's writing. To the fever of single-vision nationalism currently raging across Europe (Joyce began the dedicated writing of *Ulysses* in March 1914) the Hungarian plan offers an antidote, encouraging a more pluralist outlook – a capacity and tolerance for doubleness. Already in 1907 Joyce expressed a similar aptitude in his readiness to accept English capital into a proto-socialist Ireland. But it is in the material of the novelist's art that these principles discover their relevance – or not; "technique," Ezra Pound insisted, "is the test of a man's sincerity." The very weave of disparate idioms that marks the dialogic achievement of *Ulysses* brings with it an endorsement of the values on which the Hungarian plan is based.

To posit this connection between aesthetic practice and political value is to bring Joyce into dangerous company. Modernists like Pound and Wyndham Lewis tended to articulate social beliefs in the language of art, often using literary authorship to endorse ideas of political authority. The claim of the romantic poet Shelley – "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" – exerts an appeal to which Joyce is not immune. His response to it evolves in a way that can be traced and compared summarily with the attitudes of other members of his generation.

The social potency of the literary imagination is a force that Joyce ratifies in his first attempt at his autobiographical novel, his 1904 essay "A Portrait of the Artist." Here the power he ascribes to the artist's Word – to incarnate the millennial State and race – breathes through the mythopoeic, ritualistic diction of his own prose:

To those multitudes not as yet in the wombs of humanity but surely engenderable there, he would give the word. Man and woman, out of

you comes the nation that is to come, the lightning of your masses in travail; the competitive order is employed against itself, the aristocracies are supplanted; and amid the general paralysis of an insane society, the confederate will issues in action. (P, 265–6)

Ten years later Pound privileged his artists in “The New Sculpture,” in lines that move to a finale strikingly reminiscent of Joyce’s second sentence above – both in the shaping of its phrasal cadences and in (some of) the terms of political reference:

We turn back, we artists, to the powers of the air, to the djinns who were our allies aforetime, to the spirits of our ancestors. It is by them that we have ruled and shall rule, and by their connivance that we shall mount again into our hierarchy. The aristocracy of entail and of title has decayed, the aristocracy of commerce is decaying, the aristocracy of the arts is ready again for its service.

In substance, both writers see the demise of traditional aristocracies, the self-consumption of the competitive or commercial class, and in that ruin the formation by artists of a new political order. But Pound could not have known Joyce’s essay, which was rejected for publication (the two passages may stem from a common original in Nietzsche). The echoes nonetheless enclose an absolute difference in political philosophy. Pound’s glorification of a hieratic priesthood, his esteem for ancient echelons of title and class, locate an authoritarian demeanor alien to Joyce. To that “aristocracy of the arts” Joyce would oppose “the confederate will.” The state of Joyce’s art differs radically from Pound’s (or Lewis’s), but their enterprises go to the single root of their joint historical condition. They are members of a generation compelled to reclaim the importance of literature in social as well as artistic terms.

### 3 Novel voices

When Joyce writes to Carlo Linati in September 1920, at a particularly high pitch of creative activity on *Ulysses*, he invokes a sense of tradition as the measure and value of his novel. Might these claims also disclose the more timely motives and aims of a modernist?



The character of Ulysses always fascinated me – even when a boy. Imagine, fifteen years ago I started writing it as a short story for *Dubliners*! For seven years I have been working at this book – blast it! It is also a sort of encyclopaedia. My intention is to transpose the myth *sub specie temporis nostri*. Each adventure (that is, every hour, every organ, every art being interconnected and interrelated in the structural scheme of the whole) should not only condition but even create its own technique.

(*Letters I*, 146–7)

The greatness of *Ulysses* appears to lie in its mastery of tradition, first of all in its refurbishing of a classical tale, ultimately in its perfection of novel form: its assimilation of encyclopedic detail to the underlying myth raises to a new order of magnitude those forces of fact and fable that fused (reputedly) at the origin of the genre. Yet exaggeration on this scale identifies a strongly anti-traditional energy in modernism. This is the temper of gigantistic parody – as the lines of classical portraiture swell suddenly for Wyndham Lewis, *circa* 1909, into proportions at once abstract, grotesque, wholly new. Mockery strikes close to the center of modernist greatness. Its colossi – *Ulysses*, Lewis's *Childermass* or *Apes of God*, Pound's *Cantos*, *The Waste Land* in its initial lyric sprawl (*He Do the Police in Different Voices*) – can be seen to rise not so much on a surplus of *original* energy as through hyper-awareness of the conventionalized nature of artistic expression, those rules which the artist simultaneously inflates and derides. Here is the ambivalent privilege of writing at a late stage of cultural history; the forms of tradition, firmly established, offer an opportunity for a negative apotheosis, a comedy that is at once destructive and creative.

Aesthetic self-consciousness like this is not exclusively modernist, of course. Its growth locates perhaps the main line of development in the history of the novel, and it points up a major relocation of value over the course of two centuries. The earliest novel criticism tended to stress the moral implications of technique; Samuel Johnson accepts the emerging genre, but only as a means of ethical instruction, relegating its craft to a fashioning of moral exempla that will furnish “the most perfect idea of virtue . . . that humanity can reach.” These tenets endure well into the Victorian period, informing the practice of writers as various as Charles Dickens and George Eliot. By mid-century, however, a counter-current in the tradition is

already rising: the aesthetic or art novel. In 1859, in *British Novelists and Their Styles*, David Masson confers the mantle of civil and literary authority, traditionally reserved for the poet-seer, on the novelist. While this sanction renews the moral mission of the novel, it also carries the demand that the verbal textures of fiction exact as much creative skill and critical attention as the language of poetry. Around this time Gustave Flaubert and Henry James are developing the principles and practice of the modern novel, less concerned with its moral function than its structure as an aesthetic creation. By the twentieth century the novels of early modernism – Marcel Proust’s and Ford Madox Ford’s before Joyce’s – openly seek to lift from art the burden of demonstrating a moral truth, thus creating the conditions for free technical experimentation.

Linear, continuous, “progressive” (by one measure of value), this standard history of the novel may scant the complexity of the tradition as a *total* legacy. *Ulysses* may be the last of all art novels, as the letter to Linati so forcefully indicates, but the same epistle points toward the moral gravity in Joyce’s imagination, toward a thickening mixture of aesthetics and ethics in his achievement. The story of Ulysses that he knew “as a boy” is Charles Lamb’s *Adventures of Ulysses* (1808), a text set for his intermediate examination in 1894 and a *locus classicus* of the moralizing convention in nineteenth-century literary culture. In this redaction Lamb reconceives the tale as a moral allegory, presenting Ulysses as a hero whose inner virtues are being tested and shaped in the crucible of experience. And so the relegation of Bloom’s epic action to the interior sphere not only conforms to the “internalization of the quest motif” that characterizes most post-romantic literature; it discovers at least the promise of a moral quest, a possibility Bloom seems to fulfill in the “equanimity” (17.2177) he attains in the face of Molly’s infidelity. The very oblique angle to which Joyce tilts his moral discourse, however, entails a high degree of artifice, one which signals the dependence of his moral concerns on the values and practices of the art novel.

The double measure of moral fineness and aesthetic finesse is indeed a formative conceit in Joyce’s works. In the 1906 letters to his prospective Dublin publisher Grant Richards, he characterizes the sequence of stories in *Dubliners* as a “moral history of my country” (*Letters* I, 62; emphasis added), but one that is told neither through

direct statement nor in the indirect discourse of moral allegory. The moment of moral awareness comes instead when “the Irish people [have] one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass” (*Letters I*, 64). That a writer might secure his moral authority as a credible reflector, by a clear mirroring of contemporary circumstances, recalls a dominant attitude in late nineteenth-century realism. Joyce’s emphasis on the *polish* of his looking-glass, however, suggests that his moral intensity is mainly a matter of artistic finish. Aesthetics are ethics, Wittgenstein would later claim; the practice of good writing offers a type and model of formal goodness (a conceit to which Oscar Wilde had given provocative testimony). It is not the lessons expressed in *Dubliners*, rather the razor-sharp quality of Joyce’s verbal presentation, that will stand his audience at moral attention. The quality that determines *good* writing will develop and vary widely over Joyce’s career – the exacting probities of his early naturalism will not last even through the rest of *Dubliners* (in 1906 several more stories remain to be written) – but the early statement to Richards locates Joyce’s abiding faith in the moral responsibility of art, to art.

The ascendant values of Joyce’s age will clearly lead to the production of a novel of art, and he displays the current state of the art in the overture to *Ulysses*. The first three episodes show the reader an exercise in a method familiar from, say, George Meredith’s novel *The Egoist*: a lack of emphasis on plot, the development of separate but finely etched scenes, the use of interior monologue to center the presentation in the elusively intense consciousness of the protagonist – the “artist-type” Stephen Dedalus. The next three chapters shift into the domestic rites and duties of the Blooms, complementing their materialism with richly detailed naturalism and showing throughout the banality and compensatory fantasies of the *petit-bourgeois* couple; here Joyce conforms to the atmospheric conventions of recent French realistic narrative, Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* most recognizably. This process of appropriating and using up the offerings of contemporary convention serves at once to signal the timely mastery of Joyce’s novel of art and, in a way characteristic of its true distinction, to bring this radical enterprise back to the very roots of its genre, to episode 7, to scenes of Dublin’s daily newspaper – that

repository of contemporary fact that supplies the novel with its nominal content, the news.

More than a generic in-joke drives this process, for Joyce advances the consciousness of episode 7 – and his novel – into the medium of the daily press. Its windy stink – those engines of hot verbal air acquire the Homeric likeness of “Aeolus,” god of the stiff breeze – blows through the inflated language of this chapter. Its layout also mimics a headline- and leader-format to frame a variety of short topical narratives. A collage of highly stylized presentations, “Aeolus” mirrors in small the shifting mannerisms of *Ulysses* – the exercise of style *qua* style first becomes noticeable in this chapter – and points to a formative model for this practice in the newspaper itself. Joyce’s claim that “each adventure . . . should not only condition but even create its own technique” recalls the discrete sectioning of contents and styles to sports pages, editorials, etc. And so the stylistic odyssey of the novel cycles back – no more oddly than seems appropriate to its fiction of the one *day* – into the conventions of the daily, of the quotidian, of *journalism*. On this circuit the consciousness of *Ulysses* continually travels, generating uncanny combinations of the extra-vulgar and the ultra-literary, the popular and the precious, the raw and the cooked.

The achievement came to Joyce with a difficulty that matches its importance. The tension between the Parnassian and public claims on his art is preserved in the difference between the two protagonists in *Ulysses*: Stephen Dedalus, an aesthete who has subscribed to the ascetics of medieval scholastic poetics, and Leopold Bloom, an advertising canvasser who purveys the language of conspicuous consumerism. However desirable, their *rapprochement* should not obscure its own strenuousness, for it points up a generative tension in Joyce’s development, in the evolution of his verbal art in particular, beginning in *Dubliners*.

In “Araby,” the protagonist-speaker situates his language in relation to the oral culture of Dublin, which he typifies in images of the marketplace or bazaar. Here is the medley of demotic voices, the background sounds of history and variegated social class, from which the novelist (in Bakhtin’s construction) draws his verbal stuff. Joyce’s character passes through these environs with a manifest

complexity of attitude – taking evident delight in describing so finely the voices he must censor out of his own curial speech:

On Saturday evenings when my aunt went marketing I had to go to carry some of the parcels. We walked through the flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies of shop-boys who stood on guard by the barrels of pigs' cheeks, the nasal chanting of street-singers, who sang a *come-all-you* about O'Donovan Rossa, or a ballad about the troubles in our native land. These noises converged in a single sensation of life for me: I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes. Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand. (D, 31)

The mixed feelings of fascination and revulsion may go to the divided state of Joyce's family, poised between poverty and gentility, the vulgar (*vulgus*, "the crowd") and the exquisite, and he elaborates this ambivalence in the more discursive textures of *Stephen Hero*, the novel he drafted (as the first version of *Portrait*) between 1904 and 1906. Here Stephen Daedalus is said to "read Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary* by the hour" (SH, 26), and his philological passions turn him away from contemporary usage, that hurly-burly of clashing class accents, into the vertical richness of words, the buried treasures of secret etymologies. Words "have a certain value in the literary tradition," he concludes, "and a certain value in the market-place – a debased value" (SH, 27). Yet Stephen's authority is forced, and self-contradictory, for he is deeply interested in words overheard "haphazard in the shops, on advertisements, in the mouths of the plodding public" (SH, 30). The naturalistic comprehensiveness of the novel extends to its character-in-voice, and the usually idiomatic narrative presents the varied speech of the city as its subsistence language, the ground on which the developing artist evolves his verbal consciousness.

Stephen's contradictory attitudes to the language of the marketplace appear to be put on display by Joyce; to be contrived as one expression of the tensions he develops more explicitly and extensively in *Dubliners*. To its well-known chronological scheme – stories of childhood ("The Sisters," "An Encounter," "Araby") lead to accounts of adolescence ("The Boarding House," "After the Race,"

“Eveline”), in turn to records of maturity (“Clay,” “Counterparts,” “A Painful Case”) and public life (“Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” “A Mother,” “Grace”)—should be added another kind of developmental unity. This process consists, not of differences in the evident registers of youth and age (nothing could be more “maturely” relayed than the precisely observed surfaces of “The Sisters”), but in degrees of privacy; in the gradual wearing away of the individual’s privileged usage and the increasing sway of an idiom recognizably, indeed conspicuously public: maturation of person is collectivization of voice. Apparently inevitable as a socio-biological fate, this process is also a fiction, a piece of artifice, one which Joyce constructs and exploits for expressive purposes.

A story Joyce wrote comparatively late in the process of composing *Dubliners*, “Two Gallants,” responds to the aspirations for privileged privacy in “Araby.” Placed in the adolescence phase of the sequence, “Two Gallants” complicates the tonal values of the earlier story: its protagonist explicitly fails the youth’s desire for a purified speech, bringing this ambition to common ground in the language as spoke: “He spoke roughly in order to belie his air of gentility for his entry had been followed by a pause of talk” (D, 57). Thus “Two Gallants” talks back to the protagonist in “Araby,” heckling the boy’s attempt to resist the urging tongues of the marketplace, sweeping the curial music of his knightly romance into this fierce mesh—a weave of idioms alternately refined and raffish: “He felt better after having eaten than he had felt before, less weary of his life, less vanquished in spirit. He might yet be able to settle down in some snug corner and live happily if he could only come across some good simple-minded girl with a little of the ready” (D, 58).

The legitimacy of this art is at one with its bitter originality—it grew from the residual trauma of Joyce’s own social experience. A dislocation of class identity helped to open the vocal register of his prose, but a feeling of lost dominance surely complicates the product. The regret that must attend such a loss accounts for a mixed motivation in this art, a sort of resisting reciprocity with the voices of parole. This generative tension extends into the project Joyce undertook immediately upon finishing the last story of *Dubliners*: the rewriting of *Stephen Hero* as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In the new title Joyce was to lay preponderant emphasis on the last phrase,

thus aligning Stephen with the youthful protagonists of the early stories in *Dubliners*, of "Araby" most suggestively. Equal stress should be placed on "Portrait": Stephen's proclivities as private romantic subject are framed, both displayed and distanced, within a narrative that exceeds him feelingly; that allows the varied circumstances of Irish culture and history to impinge upon his adamant declarations of artistic independence. Thus the mission he announces at the end of the novel represents a fusion of the personal and the collective: "to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (P, 253). Great hubris breathes here, of course; Stephen's rhetorical personality remains committed to the myth of the superior individual, the high aerial artist Daedalus. The trajectory of that faith aims him from the last page of the novel toward a career on the Continent—from which he will have returned, by the first page of *Ulysses*, as evidence (if not at first the willing witness) of the failure of such ambition. That circular plot bridges the fictions of the two novels, and if *Ulysses* goes on to dramatize the demise of Stephen as romantic subject, it extends the techniques of the earlier work, varying the practices used to depict the character's private life.

Chief among these is *musical technique*, the use of key phrases in refrain and incremental repetition. It is an invention fostered by the necessities of *Portrait*. Novel of education as well as art novel, it must allow the consciousness of its protagonist to develop in ways equally free and determined, combining an apparent naturalness of speech with a sense of artifice appropriate to the young artist's evolving temper. Musical technique meets these contrary needs. Uttered at the appropriate moments, the phrases acquire the immediacy and urgency of dramatic life; repeated like musical themes, the signal words comprise an aesthetic structure, which also deepens each utterance with a history of feeling, the emotions accumulated through the whole pattern (a strategy developed out of Joyce's early passion for Wagnerian opera, where leitmotifs repeat to similar effect). When Stephen enters Nighttown at the end of Chapter II, for example, a prostitute's lips "pressed upon his brain as upon his lips as though they were the vehicle of a vague speech; and between them he felt an unknown and timid pressure, darker than the swoon of sin, softer than sound or odour" (P, 101); the phrases and cadences that convey the delectation of falling reappear, like the memory of a

pleasure suitably avenged, in Stephen's ascetic phase, in a penitential phantasm, where demons "moved in slow circles, circling closer and closer to enclose, to enclose, soft language issuing from their lips, their long swishing tails besmeared with stale shite" (*P*, 138).

Musical technique, as the term suggests, is an art of time. It signals a preoccupation with process, with temporality and sequence. The portrayal of "life by time" strikes E. M. Forster as the vision special to the novel (as opposed to the depiction of "life by values" in classical literature). Attention to the timely generates an art of the timeful, an emphasis on sequential plots (the "what happens next?" effect is assisted by the serialization of novels in progress). Temporal consciousness is already an acute awareness in Joyce's early fiction, one which unifies those otherwise disparate products: the developmental sequence of *Dubliners* and the five-phase architecture of *Portrait* tell the one story of "life by time."

If this vision of "life by time" is intrinsic to the novel as genre, *Ulysses* expands it in ways consistent with its landmark status. There are of course those local chronotopes, the meticulously clocked adventures of its eighteen chapters. Yet Joyce extends the temporal sensibility to far wider horizons. What Oswald Spengler calls the "ultra-historical sense" of modernity turns its understanding of "now" upon a consciousness of "then" – a two-plane reality that Joyce reproduces by manipulating a parallel between present adventures and classical prototypes. Doubling Dublin through antiquity, he refashions the present as a site already crossed by time, already historical; its local details – like the coin Bloom has marked in hope of recovering it one day – already appear like the traces of ancient civilization. Not that the imagination of the novel moves through the emotional twilight of antiquarianism, the gloaming of learned nostalgia. The Homeric scheme is intensely problematical, and the gaps in the parallel may reveal more than the points of contact about the nature of the enterprise, to which we may now turn.