

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Local colour. Work in all you know. Make them accomplices.

U 9:158

1.1 'the cursed Jesuit strain'

Just moments into the day of *Ulysses*, after Stephen reveals he's offended at Buck's insult against his dead mother, Buck counters: 'You wouldn't kneel down to pray for your mother on her deathbed when she asked you. Why? Because you have the cursed jesuit strain in you, only it's injected the wrong way' (*U* 1:207–9). It hits Stephen where it hurts: the intellectually perverse, morally confounded remnants of his Catholic childhood. The logic is plain: if Stephen no longer believes, what, in the face of his mother's pain, stopped him from kneeling?

To Buck, Stephen takes religion, himself, and everything else too seriously. He has his own answer to these questions of religion and death: 'To me it's all a mockery and beastly' (*U* 1:210). Every time he appears, Buck is a paragon of blithe detachment, refusing to take anything seriously, using wit to sail past commitments and refuse consequences. His audiences find joy in Buck's mockery, which makes Stephen's 'moody brooding', his morbid earnestness, all the more unbearable. And yet, *Ulysses* makes clear, Buck's backslapping sociality leaves behind a beastliness of its own. When Buck is in the room, there's no place for honesty, for authenticity, for language that means much more than a joke. It's a battle over belief, and over language, that Stephen and *Ulysses* try to work out – can there be a seriousness that doesn't take itself too seriously? Can language accomplish this task – finding a way between beastliness and moody brooding, between cynicism and credulousness, towards something new?

James Joyce and the Jesuits proposes that Joyce's work addresses itself to particular crises of belief and representation generated by Ignatius of

Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order of priests, and uses these crises for its own purposes. Most scholarship on Joyce and the Jesuits makes strong claims of influence, and rightly so, as Joyce's Jesuit education forced him to encounter Loyola's peculiar theological and linguistic challenges on retreat, in chapel, in the classroom, and at home, hour after hour, for years. But this book takes a different approach, one that is neither biographical nor strictly intertextual. It instead claims that Joyce, who availed himself of endless philosophical, theological, and historical discourses, exploited Loyola's own methods and obsessions to open up the same crises for his own readers, using Loyola's dialectic to power his own art. There is thus no need for claims of causal 'influence', no effort to turn moments like Stephen's refusal into signs of any kind of 'enduring Catholicism'. Instead, I argue that both writers force their readers to confront these parallel crises of belief and language as intensely as possible, forcing us into carefully constructed situations of ambivalence, frustration, and loss. If there is any solution to these crises, it lies on the other side of intense practice, a practice of praying and reading that leads to what we'll call the 'Loyolan Position', a psychic and affective framework requiring a stance of 'sincere irony' – a position which, in the end, might not be possible at all.

1.2 'O, a jesuit for your life, for diplomacy!'

Perhaps one of the most disorienting, even painful moments in all of Joyce's work is the story of Father Dolan's beating of Stephen – not at the end of chapter 1 of *Portrait*, when Stephen endures the priest's zealous brutality and afterwards bravely approaches Father Conmee for justice, but years later, when the story returns to Stephen in the voice of his own father:

We were chatting, you know, and one word borrowed another [W]e were chatting away quite friendly and he asked me did our friend here wear glasses still and then he told me the whole story.

. . . Mr Dedalus imitated the mincing nasal tone of the provincial.

– Father Dolan and I, when I told them all at dinner about it, Father Dolan and I had a great laugh over it. *You better mind yourself, Father Dolan, said I, or young Dedalus will send you up for twice nine.* (60)

Simon Dedalus's sudden appearance here in the family kitchen, and in Stephen's solitary reverie, takes over the scene, and without context it's hard to know how to respond. We might look to Stephen for guidance as to how to react, but he's yet again silent, perhaps in an adolescent sulk, almost absent from the scene; like the boy at the start of 'The Sisters',

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Stephen hovers over his food (he ‘mumbled his bread’ [60]) as the adults above him thoughtlessly chew over what had been, moments before, his own intensely private memory. He says nothing, and the narration gives us nothing of his thoughts. Again Simon repeats the story in the booming voice of Conmee, ending the scene with that strange transcription of his laughter, its tonal shift from full-stop to exclamation marks: ‘*I told them all at dinner about it and Father Dolan and I and all of us we had a hearty laugh together over it. Ha! Ha! Ha!*’ (61).

At the level of realistic narrative, Stephen’s silence is simple to understand. Whether it’s rage, humiliation, sheepishness, or something else, his refusal to engage with his father here is consistent with what we know of Stephen in his brooding, lonesome adolescence. It makes sense within the broader realistic project of *Portrait*, too, with its brief but densely powerful moments of psychological development – here, perhaps, one of those moments when one’s childhood idealism turns childish, where former convictions turn charming, even risible, and it’s hard to know how to react other than with bewilderment.

But there’s also something aggressive going on here, a direct provocation that at once demands and refuses a response. Simon’s imitation of Conmee – with a ‘mincing nasal tone’ – turns Conmee into something of a sissy, converting their jovial encounter on the street corner into, perhaps, yet another instance of secret mocking laughter (over yet another dinner). His bursting into the kitchen echoes the way Father Dolan himself burst into Stephen’s classroom that day of the beating, and Simon calls Stephen an ‘impudent thief, from *pudere*, ‘to be ashamed’, repeating Dolan’s very charge. He even begins by ‘screw[ing] his glass into his eye’ to stare sarcastically down at Stephen – the same glass that began the book itself, with another of his father’s stories: ‘His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass’ (5). Simon and his stories have an uncanny, explosive power in making Stephen’s world.

This is more than a realistic record of a poignant adolescent moment. Instead, in this scene, with the authority of fathers echoed, amplified, and perverted, the question is forced: What is Stephen, and what are we, to make of this story?

On the one hand, is this good-natured teasing, the kind of backslapping camaraderie Simon tells of his own father who once found him smoking cigars (77) – in which case, Stephen needs to let go of his memory of childish bravery, of ‘manliness’ and earnest conviction, and grow up? One can imagine Stephen himself telling this story as an adult, running himself down for laughs at the pub. We might see here roots of his disenchantment

to come: as he thinks later, ‘Lately some of [the priests’] judgements had sounded a little childish in his ears and had made him feel a regret and pity as though he were slowly passing out of an accustomed world and were hearing its language for the last time’ (131).

Or, on the other hand, is this scene a travesty of a small but authentic instance of virtue, the invasion of privacy of a young man who took these men seriously and suddenly can no longer? If such values are childish fantasies, equivalent perhaps to the young Stephen’s devotion to the Count of Monte Cristo, does that laughter extend to the priest, to religion, and to God himself? When Simon reports that Conmee called Stephen a ‘manly little chap’ (60), the twist is in that very phrase: ‘manliness’ is something for children; real men laugh at it. Simon’s aggression, like Buck’s, inclines towards cynicism, and even the exchange on the street corner is subtly brutal: their banter is, among other things, a trade of Stephen’s memory for scholarship money. We might read this desperate compromising, this ironizing of former convictions, as part of the cynicism that undoes Stephen, his family, and the world of Dublin social relations itself.

Or not. We might be taking it all too seriously. But if that’s our reaction, the text has anticipated it already: it’s precisely what Simon would say if Stephen were to protest, if he were to do anything but fall in line with his father’s aggressive joke. Such a reaction – distancing oneself from the problem – solves nothing. It only repeats the problem itself.

Joyce builds this structure throughout his work – in nearly every scene and every sentence. Time and again the reader is forced into just this kind of crisis, where neither option satisfies, and yet to answer ‘both’ or ‘neither’ never quite works. Joyce’s texts make the stakes too high for middle grounds or refusals: here, he puts Father Dolan at that table of laughing fathers, and ‘laughing along’ means laughing away Dolan’s perverse abuse and the men who render themselves complicit by that very laughter.

We’ve interrogated this scene in part because it’s one of the clearest instances of this predicament in all of Joyce, one of the most ordinary moments of such impossible choices in his work. The frustration in this case doesn’t happen at complex levels of language, of representation, or of belief. Instead, Joyce here takes the ordinary bewilderment of adolescence and, through a subtle formal move, turns it into a crisis of hermeneutics – of how to make meaning where ‘meaning’ as such isn’t quite possible, right where it is urgently needed.

What renders this predicament is the narration’s form. The content of this scene could be something out of, say, *The Mill on the Floss*, where a narrator such as Eliot’s would have given the moment some background – at the very

least some reaction on Maggie Tulliver's part, if not some insight into the thoughts and motivations of her voluble father, or even some general explication of the scene itself and how to fold it into the wider narrative. Such a narrator here might make the conflict clear: Simon is a boor, perhaps, and Stephen is self-important. But we get nothing of the sort, and instead the whole room disappears into that strange way of recording laughter – 'Ha! Ha! Ha!' – and that line of blank space that follows.

James Joyce and the Jesuits argues that reading Joyce is an experience of constantly being forced into such blank spaces of hermeneutic bewilderment, where such choices are constructed as to make 'middle' or 'mixed' readings exercises in avoidance. As always, there is something social and ethical at stake; in this kitchen scene, it's something to do with masculinity, secrecy, self-importance, cynicism, knowledge, and abuse that cannot be dispelled merely by seeing 'both sides' of the story or by pushing it away by laughing along or by treating these baffling texts as puzzles, experiments, or games. The texts keep forcing us to the problem, demanding a response.

The structure of this impossible choice, we will argue, aligns with the structure generated by the *Spiritual Exercises* of Loyola. The Jesuits who taught Joyce would have themselves undergone and administered to others this regimen of blank spaces, of complex affective resonances, of moments that are at once true and not true, of a peculiar structure of belief and disbelief – one which disallows any kind of 'middle' or 'mixed' approach. It is a kind of 'diplomacy', as Simon puts it when describing the Jesuits, with shades of the 'jesuitical', the equivocal, in which 'plain truth' and meaningful understanding return to us in uncanny ways, sometimes dark, usually depressing, and often tremendously funny. This intellectual, theological, affective, and spiritual structure is intended, through a lifetime of practice, to instil a certain frame of mind, a detached disinterestedness in moving about the world. As we'll elaborate later, this frame of mind is something like a Kleinian mental 'position' – what we're calling the 'Loyolan Position'. Such a well-disposed mind is expert in *indifference*, to use the Jesuit term for this detachment from earthly things, including certainty about the world itself. It's also expert in *discernment*, the ability to sense, not with logic but with one's spirit, meaning and significance where they aren't apparent and may not 'exist' at all. These abilities and the Loyolan Position as a whole come from a lifetime of practising the strategies of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. And they are strategies Joyce complicates across his work, amplifying the experience of *ambivalence* in reading his texts and, as practitioners of Joyce come to learn, in reading any narrative text at all.

1.3 The Question of Influence

Joyce, of course, received an almost exclusively Jesuit education, and he repeatedly professed its significance. In an interview with W. R. Rodgers, Frank Budgen recalls a conversation in which Joyce told him, ‘You allude to me as a Catholic. Now you ought to allude to me, for the sake of precision and to get the correct contour on me, you ought to allude to me as a Jesuit’ (Rodgers 12). Kevin Sullivan goes on to explicate this influence:

For if many of Joyce’s intellectual virtues were the product of his Jesuit training, so it must be said were many of his vices – his pedantry, his perpetual seeking after first principles, his implicit sense of superiority that will not explain and cannot apologize, the sense that he leaves with even his most patient reader of being party to a secret which he will not share. (10)

Whether such an idiosyncratic reading is fully convincing, it at least has the virtue of being critical. By and large, criticism on Joyce and religion operates as a project of reclamation, seeking to prove (often with that cosy, unnerving tone of Garrett Deasy) that, despite his protests, Joyce was deep down, after all, really a Catholic. Joyce’s rebellion against the Catholic Church ‘was a kind of victory for the Jesuits’, argues J. Mitchell Morse, ‘since compulsive disobedience is a form of intellectual dependence. A person in mature freedom can obey or disobey as circumstances may warrant; he has no neurotic need to refuse all restraint, to defy all authority’ (1018). Sullivan argues that *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are both organized like the Catholic mass, ‘in which the priest, performing the specific sacrifice for which he was ordained, celebrates the communion of God and Man’ (140). Roy Gottfried argues that Joyce saw himself as a martyr, driven out of the church, and a ‘misbeliever’:

because he is not a believer in Catholic pieties, not an unbeliever in the rich complexity of religious thought and symbol, nor a disbeliever in Catholicism in order to hold to another and alternate religious system, but a misbeliever, someone who does not think as others do about Catholicism, but who clearly thinks about it nonetheless Misbelief requires, of course, the structure of belief. (2)

Diego Angeli, in his 1917 review of *Portrait* (*‘Un Romanzo di Gesuiti’*, translated into English by Joyce for publication in *The Egoist*), rightly notes the Jesuit content of the novel, and he gives Joyce some distance from the Catholic Church: ‘a catholic, he has had the courage to cast his religion from him and to proclaim himself an atheist’. But Angeli also seems to propose a certain exclusive, Catholic understanding of Joyce, an exclusivity

claimed by many critics raised as Catholics. Those contemporary critics who have not understood *Portrait*, Angeli argues, can't see beyond their Protestantism:

Possibly . . . their own protestant upbringing renders the moral development of the central character incomprehensible to them One must have passed many years of one's life in a seminary of the society of Jesus, one must have passed through the same experiences and undergone the same crises to understand the profound analysis, the keenness of observation shown in the character of Stephen Dedalus. No writer, so far as I know, has penetrated deeper in the examination of the influence, sensual rather than spiritual, of the society's exercises. (30)

Harry Levin later writes, in a 1946 article for the *Atlantic*,

The *Portrait* derives its pattern from the successive stages of a Jesuit education. Joyce was a prize student, albeit an embarrassing protégé, of zealous and thoroughgoing teachers. It was almost inevitable that they should suggest, and that he should very seriously consider, the possibility of entering the priesthood. That he felt the intellectual attraction of theology, as well as the emotional appeal of ritual, is evident in everything he wrote. Both are submerged in the cold terror of Stephen's central dilemma between carnal sin and priestly absolution His imaginative constructions are therefore grounded on the rock of his buried religious experience. (7–8)

And Gottfried writes that, with regard to religious ideas, Joyce was 'never able to break their powerful hold on his mind' (9).

It's as if there is something about the *Exercises* itself that is beyond thought, as if a serious encounter with them will inevitably have an interminable effect. 'The concepts of the Spiritual Exercises', the Jesuit Robert Drinan has written, 'have a way of getting into your soul in such a manner that you may not be able to articulate them, but they are there – real, pervasive, and determinative' (qtd. in Letson and Higgins 73). And the Jesuit psychoanalyst W. W. Meissner writes,

The reshaping of identity that the pilgrim [Loyola] sought in the cave of Manresa was distilled into the practices of the *Spiritual Exercises*. He proposed to his followers and to those whom he directed in the *Exercises* the same end – a restructuring of the self, of one's sense of self, one's identity, in terms of total commitment to God's will and to unstinting enlisting in His service. The entire corpus of the *Exercises* is organized and directed to this end. It proposes nothing less than a restructuring of one's life, one's ideals and values, one's goals and hopes. (qtd. in Letson and Higgins 77)

But here lies the problem of ‘influence’, at least as it relates to our argument. Direct and typical claims of influence can draw on the rich and ready discourses of Catholicism (particularly in its Irish form), discourses that are themselves deeply textual, lend themselves to boundless analysis, and have two millennia’s worth of scholarship and argumentation behind them. Once any claim is made about the status of Joyce’s own belief, those discursive relationships can easily take us on a journey far from the texts themselves and what they force us to do. For our purposes, it seems sufficient to note the parallels between Joyce’s and Loyola’s texts, to outline the complex problematics and the deep, demanding responses each writer makes. To claim much more – to claim anything about Joyce’s ‘mind’, for instance, or to claim that, while Joyce was able to take the widest range of sources and manipulate them for his own ends, somehow he was especially and helplessly ‘influenced’ by this source – risks obscuring the complexity and specificity of whatever dynamics might exist between these two sets of texts.

Brian Phillips, for instance, writes:

Joyce got from the Jesuits both the airy Platonic idealism that his aestheticism demanded and the grounded Aristotelian realism that his insecurity craved . . . [It] soothed his frantic, ego-panicking intellect and kept him staked in the world. Catholic ritual, which he was never able to renounce, united the two. (193)

The knot here is that ‘got’ at the start of that first sentence: not only, for our work, is it unverifiable, but it’s too blunt a tool to understand the operations of the particular Catholicism Joyce knew and the particular theological practices he rehearsed daily as an adolescent. The ‘got’ must have a mechanics to it, a specificity, and that is what this book investigates.

James Joyce and the Jesuits takes Geert Lernout’s heated analogy to be correct: that reclaiming Joyce as ‘really’ a Catholic is akin to the Mormons’ baptism of the dead (10). In *Help My Unbelief*, Lernout surveys recent criticism that sees Catholicism as liberating, a ‘force of deconstruction’, or as an option of post-humanist transcendence (19). He writes: ‘[W]hat do we really gain by calling Joyce a catholic writer, apart from scoring points in contemporary Irish cultural debates?’ (207). He goes on to ask, ‘And what can it possibly mean to say that someone has a mind with a catholic structure, and what would such a catholic structure look like?’ (211). The reductive cosiness of concepts like ‘the catholic mind’ is precisely what Joyce spent a lifetime working to dispel.

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Joyce himself can be said to acknowledge such arguments. As Mary Colum notes in her memoir *Life and the Dream*, ‘When I told James Joyce of Maritain’s statement about Baudelaire, he was very satirical and made considerable fun of anyone having a Catholic structure for his mind’ (381).

Joyce even puts such an argument into the mouth of Cranly in *Portrait*: ‘It is a curious thing . . . how your mind is supersaturated with the religion in which you say you disbelieve. Did you believe it when you were at school?’ Acknowledging he did, Stephen then answers, ‘I was not myself as I am now, as I had to become’ (202). Emer Nolan seems to have a more useful approach when she writes that Joyce

can certainly be read as a Catholic. The theology of the church – concerning the Trinity, the Incarnation, Original Sin, and so on – is so deeply absorbed into his self-representation and into his fictional recreations of his own family of origin that the question of belief itself finally becomes something of an irrelevance. (372)

Of course the Catholicism is there. But unless we know something of its dimensions, of where it might begin and end, it remains too broad a brush for interpretation. What we can make of these facts and these texts, besides roping them back into a pre-existent, orthodox religious system, is what *James Joyce and the Jesuits* will explore.

. . .

On the other hand, to read the Jesuits negatively, as a force to be overcome (by Joyce or by the critic herself) is just as obfuscating and risks re-enacting the problem it means to solve. I take a deliberately neutral stance with regard to Loyola’s value as such and to the status of Joyce’s own Catholicism. This book does not argue (as critics such as Barthes do) that Loyola’s text is ‘unbearable’ in its oppressiveness and its totalizing demands. Instead, it asks, ‘What happens when we read this relationship *indifferently*?’ It is, as we’ll see, a methodology drawn from the very demands Joyce and Loyola make of their readers – to take the text on its face for as long as possible, to engage with it on its own terms and, to put it simply, see what happens.

In that case, what we find is not, as most of these earlier studies have described, the relation of Jesuit theological practice and the *content* of the Joycean text, but its *form*. This is not to say that the Joycean text is structured like a Loyolan exercise; the *Exercises* are not another of Joyce’s many schemata that critics often seek in an effort to order the text.¹ Critics

¹ T. S. Eliot stands towards the beginning of this effort to order and control the Joycean text, an effort this book will later argue is a kind of paranoid move. For Eliot, the Homeric parallels offer ‘a way of

such as Thomas F. van Laan see Jesuit influence in such a way, as a means of creating order and structure:

By making use of the Ignatian system . . . Joyce has erected a structure equivalent to the meaning which it shapes. Similarly, the technical fusion of religious pattern with aesthetic discipline that went into the novel's ordering of random experience parallels Stephen's own fusion of Aquinas and Aristotle in his theory of art. (13)

The methodology van Laan describes here is akin to those often used to examine Joyce's aesthetics and his epiphanies – finding 'equivalent structures' to 'order random experience'. It's a method David Seed calls 'source-spotting', which 'attempt[s] to set up approximately parallel correspondences between Stephen's theories and the "original"' (22).

Instead, with Loyola, Joyce does something more complex than reproducing or parodying Jesuit theology in the form of a schema. Instead, he turns these crises induced by Jesuit theology in general and the *Spiritual Exercises* in particular into a centrifugal force, one that increasingly draws on the particular strangeness of language. We will examine the operations of this increasingly centrifugal force, the ways Joyce draws on Loyola's ironizing power and shapes it into texts that reproduce and exploit that power for its own ends.

This argument aligns with recent analyses of textual relationship relating to affect. As Laura Finch puts it, the study of influence and affect is a 'project . . . that concerns itself with the liminal traces of feeling, rather than the thundering directness of a genealogy' (193). This is in fact, as we'll see, the way the *Exercises* itself works – without that presumed causality leading towards a fixed orthodoxy or limit. The practice of the *Exercises* is centrifugal in itself. As Phillip Endean describes the *Exercises*, 'the concern, rather, is to offer a "way of proceeding," a way of handling realities as yet unforeseen' (64). If there is any influence, then, ontologically it will have boundaries undetermined in advance and will, happily, fail to 'align' in any determinative way.

By taking a more neutral approach to the question of influence, we're able to get away from the question of whether, how, or to what extent Joyce 'believed' Catholic dogma, and we can think more subtly about the status of 'belief' itself. As I'll argue, the Loyolan Position calls for a strange, not strictly logical, and perhaps impossible stance of believing and not

controlling, or ordering, or giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history' (177). This seems to say more about Eliot than about *Ulysses*.