

When this book of essays was still an idea, I contacted Professor Edmund L. Epstein—one of the groundbreaking sages of Joyce studies, who just three years ago published *A Guide Through Finnegans Wake* (2009), an enlightening study of James Joyce’s most challenging work—and invited him to write an article that summed up his vision of the master’s last gift to the world. Eddie was ill but pleased to accept. Over half a century of delighting in, thinking about, teaching, and writing on Joyce left Professor Epstein with more to say. That “more” is at least partly incorporated into this volume’s chapter on *Finnegans Wake*. He dictated the core of the essay, his last words on *Finnegans Wake*, into his daughter Lucy’s cell phone from his hospital bed a few days before he died. Although in a severely weakened state, he was able to complete a little less than half of the essay that he wanted to write. After he passed away, his daughter Bronwen transcribed the recording. With the help of The New School Professor Laura Frost, Bronwen appended notes and suggestions for expanding the essay. With Bronwen’s input, my research assistant, Gina Magnuson, and I did the bulk of the expanding, using his *Guide* as our guide. All of our efforts were supported by the thoughtful critical eye of Eddie’s wife, Tegwen.

We were convinced that he wanted to sum up his sense of *Finnegans Wake* as a grand poetic vision of time, family, and human destiny in a forever recycling universe—a paean to “life as it is,” detailing tragedy and comedy, success and failure, easy passages and difficult ones, loyalties and betrayals, losses and gains, natural impulses and perversities, ugliness and beauty, all acknowledged through the time and space of human existence and leading in the end to understanding, reconciliation, appreciation, and acceptance—what Edmund L. Epstein at the end of his days undoubtedly recognized as, more than desirable for people who pass through this world, necessary. Certainly in part, and

I hope through inspiration as a whole, the essay on *Finnegans Wake* in this volume is Edmund L. Epstein's last cordial gift to the world.

That end, it seems, is a good place to begin in considering the development and ultimate vision of James Joyce, as important a writer as there was in the twentieth century. Like his fellows among crucial thinkers back then, Joyce's work remains a guide for the twenty-first century. His last words as a creator of great works take us back to his beginning when young James Joyce, a brilliant and devoted student of literature, with wonderful gifts of language, was searching for subject matter.

His subjects became more and more personal as Joyce delved into the hidden recesses of his experiences and responses to them in a signally honest search for truths of human being. The result is both personally microcosmic and generally macrocosmic. That is the case for two reasons. Initially, it helps for readers to have a sense of the sweep of Joyce's work, where he began in his quest to speak to the world of readers about things crucial to him, and—through his awareness of the shared concerns of humanity—to them. Joyce venerated Ibsen, among other reasons because he sensed that Ibsen was drawing on his own intimate experiences to speak to his audience about issues crucial to their intimate lives. Joyce saw self-revelation as the price of great writing and, in accordance with that perception, exposed the workings of his own psyche in the creation of his characters, their situations, and their ways of dealing with them.

First, the personal and microcosmic prove general and macrocosmic, as he understands the world, because individuals even in their most intimate moments are responding to the demands of the cultures, languages, religious issues, politics, literature, economics, and social and family situations that constitute their environments. Second, they are general and macrocosmic because humans share physical and psychological features. What one person thinks, feels and does, properly understood, is relevant and applicable to everyone.

“Properly understood” is key. This volume undertakes to assure that Joyce’s works will be approached by readers with sufficient tools and information to richly appreciate him both macrocosmically and microcosmically in their own special ways.

The introductory essay<sup>1</sup> sweeps across Joyce’s life’s work with his brave commitment as its guiding light. It asks and suggests where—and at what cost—Joyce found the truths of human experience that his works explore. Maureen O’Conner’s first essay lays out the worlds Joyce inherited, lived in, and dealt with. Tony Crowley explores the expanse of linguistic issues Joyce was forced to confront, beginning with the fact that the language he exalted in his splendid prose was the language of his nation’s conqueror. From their broad and general perspectives, the volume moves into the more intimate but still wide perspective of Joyce as a whole as Tara Prescott presents the relationship between Joyce’s works and his life.

The volume moves on to explorations of Joyce’s works and enlightening examples of critical approaches to them, the first concerned with Joyce’s early discovery that significance in the modern world must be found in the mundane. Properly approached, everyday and apparently meaningless entities and courses of events can have telling significance. Keys to insight must and can be found, and *Dubliners* presents fifteen apparently unremarkable sets of events to which the keys of meaning are variously distributed and available after helpfully difficult inquiry.

Among the apparently meaningless elements, attitudes toward animals play important roles in our lives, and an essay of a feminist bent explores some of the issues they raise. But in his works beyond the earliest efforts, Joyce’s canvasses are broad, wide, and deep. There are dangers in specifically focused approaches offset by Peter Wagner’s fine deconstruction of one of the most famous and crucial passages in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, one that involves both sensory and intellectual appreciation and involves, both pictorially and physically, animal images of a young woman wading in a stream.

Deconstruction is here properly used in its original sense, the one that placed that philosophical and critical approach at the center of contemporary postmodernism. Language is a living entity. Over time, like all living things, it changes, and “deconstruct” is coming to function as a synonym for “analyze.” “Epiphany and the Woman in the River” returns us to the more unique and crucial importance of the approach. All critical visions analyze; deconstruction seeks to show the limits of apparently conclusive analysis, and this essay holds forth on pictorial and allusive resonances of Joyce’s scene that do not end.

On the other hand, pointed significances in the master’s work live on. The essay on Joyce and Byron exemplifies those possibilities. “Why Byron?” it asks. When prodded by slightly sadistic parochial classmates to name the greatest prose writer and the greatest poet, Stephen Dedalus understandably names as the greatest prose writer Cardinal Newman, a very fine essayist and, from a Roman Catholic perspective, a good moral choice. But as the greatest poet Stephen names the scandalous sexual adventurer Lord Byron and is beaten by his delightedly outraged classmates for it. The choice has wide and specific significances to which this essay draws our attention.

Parker Douglas’s “That’s for the Church to Say” takes us down a more arcane but no less specific path. What role, after his initial break with the Roman Catholic Church, did it play in Joyce’s life and art? Asked when he left the Catholic Church, Joyce responded with the words quoted in the title “That’s for the Church to Say.” Does that suggest that he did not regard himself as apostate? The clear break Stephen Dedalus seems to make in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is modified in Joyce’s later novels, and this biographically turned inquiry suggests that Joyce’s personal sense of his relation to the church involved a troubling but clear sense that in some ways he was still part of it. On the most basic level, he attended the Mass on occasion, found the ceremony aesthetically beautiful and was sometimes moved to tears.

With approaches to Joyce’s major early works, including some of the theories that he developed in preparing for and during the course of

writing those works, audiences are prepared to consider his theories in the context of those of his contemporaries. Modernist writers, performers, filmmakers, and plastic artists, including painters and sculptors, generated an array of theories that introduced what has been regarded as a period largely devoted to theory and criticism, a period, still vibrant in this self-consciously “post” world, that continues to generate proliferant theories and studies today.

But in his final masterworks, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce transcended the wars of contemporary critical approaches, even his own approaches. Epiphany, far from a singular experience, floods the pages of *Ulysses*, which started its life as an idea for *Dubliners*. The story covers less than a day in the lives of its protagonists but, in somewhat more than eighteen hours, stretches back over their experiences, revealing the still-crucial effects of the past and pointing toward the future. The now is seen as a smoldering repository of what was, and what was and is are the springing boards of what will be. Moreover, those very special lives explored in *Ulysses* are seen in the context of what humanity experienced throughout its history, in lived events no less than imagined ones.

Stephen Dedalus continues, as he did in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, to see himself in his professional aspirations as a child of the first great human artist of Ancient Greek mythology, Daedalus. But Stephen now considers himself Icarus, the fallen child, whose wild excitement at being able to fly on the wings his father created led to flying too high and, with the wax wings melted by the sun, plunging to his death. Stephen is fallen, but he would like to cast blame on others. One of those others is his housemate Malachi (Buck) Mulligan, whom Stephen, fancying himself as Telemachus as well as Icarus, wants to condemn as the *Odyssey*'s evil Antinous. But Mulligan is not courting Stephen-Telemachus' mother, “Penelope” May Dedalus. She is dead. Mulligan cannot be said to be dispossessing the would-be bard Stephen from his possession of Ireland because Stephen is only an aspiring bard. He never owned the island. Mulligan is

indeed dispossessing Stephen of the Martello tower they are renting, but renters do not own the dwellings in which they live. Many a reader has been fooled into condemning Mulligan because the perspective from which he is viewed is Stephen's troubled perception of things.

The meter of Malachi Mulligan's names is dactylic, associating him with the rhythm of Homer's verse (Mulligan knows Greek and enjoys quoting Homer); the Bible's Malachi was one of the lesser Hebrew prophets. Thus Buck Mulligan's names relate him to what Mathew Arnold called Hebraism and Hellenism, the ancient fountainheads from which modern Western culture flows. In Hebrew, Malachi means "angels," but does Joyce (let alone Mulligan) know that? And if Joyce does know, does he use the meaning? Stephen Dedalus imagines angels defending the church against heresiarchs like Mulligan, but the word "Malachi" plays no role in those thoughts. The question points to a problem: how far can one profitably go down esoteric streets in trying to understand *Ulysses*?

The real hero of the novel is less esoteric in his thoughts, but no less delightfully difficult to puzzle out. When Leopold Bloom thinks during Paddy Dignam's funeral that it would be more practical, as a space saving device, to bury people vertically instead of horizontally, his simple thoughts about the space occupied by bodies recall for those in the know the *tholoi* or beehive burial chambers of the Mycenaeans, the Hellenic forbearers of whom Homer sings, who in the second millennium BCE buried their dead vertically. But mild mannered everyday Bloom himself is simply thinking practically. Unaware, he is linked by informed readers to Mycenaean Odysseus, Hebrew Moses and Jesus, English Shakespeare, and Irish Charles Stewart Parnell among others, but Bloom himself barely touches on such matters.

In his imagination he becomes the founder of the "the new Bloomusalem," a great and honorable nation. But that is not to be. Bloom, in his realistic assessment of things, sensibly and sympathetically respects Parnell from a political point of view. Yes, he was an adulterer, but he was a powerful political leader, accomplishing great things

peacefully. Bloom accepts both Parnell's complex and troubled personal history and his great political accomplishments and gifts but does not consciously identify with him. Their personal situations are reversed: Parnell, extramaritally mated to a married woman, was an adulterer; Bloom, betrayed, is "adulterated." Still, in a way he is greater than Parnell. Parnell is dead. His fine accomplishments are no more, while bumbling everyday Bloom, the son of a suicide, is working on behalf of the Dignam family, suffering from the suicide loss of its provider; Bloom helps a blind youth cross a street and for that short time lends him sight. In short, Bloom aspires to turn the abuse and suffering he experiences into good for others, defending decency against a murderously one-eyed patriot. Samuel Johnson said: "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel," a remark recorded by James Boswell in the April 7, 1775, entry of *The Life of Samuel Johnson*. No scoundrel, Bloom is a proper hero of modern life, physically no better than other ordinary citizens and subject to common needs, but he is morally exemplary, one who tries to live up to what he believes to be best, to sustain the weak, support the destitute, bring sight to the vision impaired and love to the world. Those are high commitments, and Bloom's mundane accomplishments are great. They provide a model to be aspired to but one few can reach.

*Finnegans Wake*, Joyce's last and most inclusive work, implicitly acknowledges that and follows the lives of a deeply flawed family—of Dubliners, but of the whole family of humanity as well—with all its flaws and failures, in its city, nation, continent, the world, and the universe. Humanity is part of all that is—the great cycling of life in nature, in which children grow into adults and displace their forebears only to be displaced by their children; in which rivers flow into the sea, where their water evaporates into the clouds and drops as rain on the land, filling rivers anew; in which planets circle the sun, producing cycles of seasons; in which, freed of petty individuality, things die and are renewed, mortals sharing the substance of rocks, of water, of the heavens themselves. That process takes us to the end, which circles

back to the beginning and that devotion of Edmund L. Epstein with which we began and whose final essay concludes this book—which is for him and you.

*In Memory of Edmund Lloyd Epstein  
Great Scholar, Great Person, Great Friend*

## Notes

1. There are many different editions of Joyce's works, almost all of them fine in some ways and flawed in others. Many scholars are devoted to specific editions, and all of our contributors have used their favorites. For the convenience of new readers, I have recommended very available and relatively inexpensive editions—like Harry Levin's *Portable James Joyce*, which contains Levin's splendid introduction, all of Joyce's poetry, all of *Dubliners*, all of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and all of *Exiles*, though only selections from *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. To accommodate all possible editions readers may be using, I have not used page numbers when referencing Joyce's works. Poems from *Chamber Music* are identified by their Roman numerals in that volume. Poems that do not have numbers are named. The general locations of quotations from *Dubliners* are indicated by the names of the stories from which they come, and quotations from the novels are linked to chapters. I use a similar approach to Shakespeare and to Homer when locations are obvious, as with the reference to Odysseus as "never at a loss" at the very start of the *Odyssey*. The result is intended to be smooth reading, clear access to thoughts, with the locations of quotations available to those who seek them and utterly in context for those who choose to read the whole of referenced works.

# Joyce, Irish and English: The Problem of Language\_\_\_\_\_

Tony Crowley

## Introduction: The Problem of Language

All writers face the problem of language: the difficulty of finding a style, the mastery of grammar and idiom, the choice of just the right words to represent, say, the lives of the inhabitants of a city, the personal and artistic development of an individual, or a day in the life of a small number of characters. For a writer as fastidious about language as Joyce, the problem was particularly pressing. Thus, in a now famous anecdote, Joyce's friend Frank Budgen recalled how he had asked if work on *Ulysses* was progressing, to which the author replied that he had been working hard on it all day. Budgen then enquired if this meant that Joyce had written a lot, to which the response was: "two sentences." Mistaking the nature of the issue, Budgen suggested that the problem lay in finding "the mot juste," only to be corrected, slightly haughtily, with the answer: "No, I have the words already. What I am seeking is the perfect order of words in the sentence. There is an order in every way appropriate. I think I have it" (Budgen 20). The words in question eventually found their way in to *Ulysses* as, "Perfume of embraces all him assailed. With hungered flesh obscurely, he mutely craved to adore" (*Ulysses* 168). It is Joyce's comment to Budgen on these words, however, that elucidates precisely the scrupulousness with which he worked and thus the difficulty of his task: "You can see for yourself in how many different ways they might be arranged" (Budgen 20).

Yet if Joyce confronted problems similar to those that face all writers (albeit in exacerbated form in his case), there was a sense in which the linguistic difficulties before him were made more complex by the historical situation in which he lived. For Joyce, like a number of modern writers, spent his formative years in a country, Ireland, that had been subject to a prolonged period of colonization, one aspect of which was the policy of linguistic colonialism—the forceful imposition of the

language of the colonial masters (in this case English) over and against the native language of the country (Irish). In this regard then, Joyce again shared a common history with many writers—specifically those who wrote in a situation either of colonial subjugation, or, as with later artists, of postcolonial independence. But while there are ways in which Joyce shared aspects of his historical experience with others, it is important to pay attention to the particular details of the context in which he grew and developed. For although linguistic colonialism was a policy implemented by a variety of colonial powers (Britain, France, Spain, Germany, Portugal, Holland, and Belgium, to name but the major players), it varied widely in practice and in terms of its effects. Ireland's history was not that of India or Kenya, to say nothing of the very different experience of linguistic colonialism in Francophone Africa, Spanish-speaking Latin America, and so on.

Ireland's linguistic history was in fact highly complex and in many ways atypical. Although there were a few attempts to make English the language of Ireland in the early part of the colonizing process (which began, under Henry II and with papal blessing, at the end of the twelfth century), the policy did not become a serious goal of colonial domination until the mid-sixteenth century. The turning point was Henry VIII's Act for the English Order, Habit, and Language (1537), which ordained that English was to be used by all of the king's subjects (including the Irish); those who refused to conform were counted as rebels and were thus subject to the harsh strictures of colonial law. From that period, English colonial policy included as part of its remit the aim of Anglicizing Ireland—making English not simply the language of the large towns (where it was already well-established by the end of the sixteenth century), but the language of everyday commerce, conversation, and, more crucially, religion. It was a strategy that was pursued with varying degrees of rigor throughout the centuries that followed—the seventeenth of war and civil strife and the eighteenth of the establishment of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Indeed, the eighteenth century witnessed extremely harsh measures,

embodied in the Penal Code, against the culture and traditions (including the language) of the native Irish. And yet despite the legislative, political, and practical tactics deployed against Irish, the policy goals of linguistic colonialism in Ireland remained unachieved at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as noted by contemporary observers. For example, one commentator claimed that of a population of around four and a half million, more than half spoke Irish: “At least eight hundred thousand of our countrymen speak Irish only, and there are at least twice that many who speak it in preference” (Stokes 45).

Though the persistence of Irish as an everyday communal language was remarkable in light of the measures taken against it over such a long period, various developments profoundly affected its prospects for survival. The dominant factors included the extension of the Anglophone state in Ireland; industrialization and its demographic consequences; the adoption of English by the Catholic Church and the political wing of Irish nationalism; the impoverishment of the rural areas (Irish-speaking strongholds); the impact of *an Gorta Mór* (the Great Famine); and the cultural prestige and hegemonic status of the English language. Taken together, these forces had a devastating effect on Irish. Though the figures are likely to be an underestimate, the 1851 census, conducted a generation before Joyce’s birth and the first to include a question on the use of Irish, indicates that almost a quarter of the population (1.5 million people) spoke the language, some three hundred thousand of them exclusively. Yet such was the rapid decline in the use of Irish that the 1911 census (taken when Joyce was twenty-nine) recorded that there were fewer than six hundred thousand Irish speakers (just over 13 percent of the population), of whom only some seventeen thousand spoke Irish alone (less than 0.5 percent) (Crowley 158). Given the fact that by that time the decline of the language had become a contentious issue, it is possible that even these figures were exaggerated.

This, then, was a period in which the linguistic contours of the country of Joyce’s birth were being altered radically, though not without a

fierce campaign to preserve and indeed revive the language conducted by a cultural nationalist movement that was to have tremendous social and political influence. Such was the general linguistic context in which Joyce spent his formative years and early adulthood. He grew and developed in a culture that was engaged in what has been described by D. P. Moran, one of its main protagonists, as a “battle of two civilizations”—a contest fought to a great extent on the battlefield of language. For an aspiring author, brought up as an English-speaker in the Dublin metropolis and yet evidently aware of the linguistic history of Ireland, such a context was clearly problematic. Thus if Joyce, like all other writers, faced the problems outlined at the beginning of this paper, he also had to deal with the complexities of living through a historical period during which the language he spoke (and wrote in) was shifting position from a language of prestige to a hegemonic vehicle that was displacing the native language of his homeland. For other writers in this situation, some of whom were contemporary with Joyce and others who came later, the answer was to return to the threatened language as a way of rejecting colonial domination. But for Joyce, as ever, the response was more complex and nuanced.

## Joyce and the Irish Question

One could trace Joyce’s attitude to the Irish language through an analysis of scattered comments in his letters and essays, and indeed in the memoirs of his friends. A more productive approach, however, is to consider episodes in Joyce’s works in which the language features as an important element. Perhaps the first treatment of the issue occurs in *Dubliners*, in “A Mother,” a story that is both a portrayal of an overbearing lower-middle-class mother and her tawdry efforts to ensure the success of her daughter, and a representation of the desperate status of women in colonial Dublin. In pointed fashion, the narrative depicts the Irish language movement as a means of establishing a particular type of social status. Thus, “when the Irish Revival began to be appreciable Mrs. Kearney determined to take advantage of her daughter’s name

# A Joycean Chronology

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- 1882** James Augustine Aloysius Joyce is born on February 2. Adeline Virginia Woolf is born on January 25. The Irish Land League is suppressed in March by Great Britain. Charles Robert Darwin dies on April 19. Lord Frederick Cavendish and Thomas Henry Burke are murdered in Phoenix Park Dublin on May 6. Éamon de Valera is born on October 14. The Irish National League is created in December to replace the Irish Land League. John O'Leary and Douglas Hyde found the Irish National Literary Society. The Electrical Age begins.
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- 1883** Franz Kafka is born. Karl Marx dies. The First Version of the Irish Labourers' Act passes.
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- 1884** The first edition of *Oxford English Dictionary* is published. Michael Cusack founds the Gaelic Athletic Association.
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- 1885** The Irish National League, led by Parnell, wins every seat in national election except those of Dublin University and eastern Ulster. The Second Labourers' Act passes. Ezra Pound is born.
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- 1886** Emily Dickenson dies. The 1883 and 1886 Labourers' Acts are amended. Charles Stewart Parnell and William Ewart Gladstone's Irish Home Rule Bill is defeated. Karl Friedrich Benz patents a gasoline-powered motor vehicle.
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- 1887** Bloody Sunday occurs in London on November 13.
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- 1888** Joyce enrolls in Clongowes Wood College. Thomas Sterns Eliot is born. William Butler Yeats founds the Pan-Celtic Society. George Eastman patents the Kodak Camera.
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- 1889** William Butler Yeats publishes *The Wonderings of Oisín*. Gerard Manley Hopkins dies. Parnell and Katherine O'Shea are involved in adultery scandal. The Paris Exposition is held in France and the Eiffel Tower is built as the entrance to the World's Fair.

# Works by James Joyce

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## Long Fiction

*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1916

*Ulysses*, 1922

*Finnegans Wake*, 1939

*Stephen Hero*, 1944

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## Short Fiction

*Dubliners*, 1914

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## Drama

*Exiles*, 1918

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## Poetry

*Chamber Music*, 1907

*Pomes Penyeach*, 1927

*Collected Poems*, 1936

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## Nonfiction

*Letters of James Joyce*, 1957–1966

*The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, 1959

*Selected Letters of James Joyce*, 1975

*The James Joyce Archives*, 1977–1979

*On Ibsen*, 1999

*Occasional, Critical, and Political Writings*, 2000

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