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The Cast of Characters: A Reading of Ulysses (review)

Patrick A. McCarthy

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Juan] in the pantomime” for all it is worth—and, Jones insists, it is worth considerably more than previous commentary has realized. Not only does the pantomime, with its central transformative moment that moves “from serious to burlesque, folktale to farce, romance to satire” (176) provide an important formal model for Shelley’s practice and Hunt’s theory of satire, it also turns out to be central to the notion of “performative buffoonery” (186) that characterizes Friedrich Schlegel’s notion of Romantic irony and the ideal modern artist. In fact, Jones argues, Byron’s irony has far more to do with the popular pantomime than with German metaphysics. The poem’s anti-philosophical, skeptical, and self-reflexive qualities are all “pantomimic. . . . This amounts to the same thing as saying it exemplifies Romantic irony: but in a way that is actually closer to Schlegel’s *commedia*-inspired theory than most twentieth-century criticism has yet realized” (192).

The final chapter forms a coda on the previous arguments by mediating on the disappearance of Ebenezer Elliott from the canon. By the 1830s, Elliott’s political satire had become antithetical to the dominant literary culture to the extent that Carlyle’s efforts to praise Elliott must depoliticize him, make him “classless and sincere” (216), make him, in short, “anything but what he was: a satirist” (217). This is the literary culture within which the Romantics assume their dominant position in literary history. The success of Jones’s remarkably readable and lucid book is to suggest persuasively that purging satire from the scene of Romantic writing was a crucial, constitutive element of Romantic canonization, and to gauge the degree to which this repressed genre had already shaped the triumphant mode.

John Rieder

University of Hawai‘i, Manoa



The Cast of Characters: A Reading of Ulysses by Paul Schwaber. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999. Pp. xix + 236. \$27.50 cloth.

As he prepares to explore Molly Bloom’s daytime behavior and her nighttime thoughts, thereby laying a foundation for speculations about the sources of her anxiety, Paul Schwaber says he intends to focus on Molly’s “living image” rather than her meaning within a theoretical framework. He will do this, he says, “by staying close to the text and remaining hospitable to other perspectives” (207). This simple formula neatly summarizes Schwaber’s strategy in his eminently readable and humane study of *Ulysses*. Basing his analysis not only on his dual roles as psychoanalyst and literary critic but also on years

of watching his students' responses to Joyce's novel, Schwaber patiently retraces the book's details and considers their implications. Again and again he takes a new look at how the characters think and behave. The result is a fresh and engaging study.

Schwaber examines the minds of individual characters—especially Stephen Dedalus, Leopold Bloom, and Molly Bloom but also several minor characters (Father Conmee, Tom Kernan, Dilly Dedalus, C.P. M'Coy, Gerty MacDowell)—and the means by which Joyce brings their psyches to light. Ultimately, he will explore the sources of Stephen's depression, Bloom's anger, Molly's anxiety, but he is in no hurry to do so: the details of *Ulysses* fascinate him, and he lingers over them, asking a pertinent question here and there before taking up another scene or another side of a character. It is the characters' many-sidedness, their irreducibility to a formula, that he believes accounts for readers' continuing delight in Joyce's narrative. Schwaber's title uses the phrase "cast of characters" in several ways, three of which he outlines in the introduction: the novel's "array of characters" or *dramatis personae*; the "tenacious presence" of the characters that comes to resemble "the cast of a lengthening shadow"; and the individual "cast" of one's character—a "cast of psychological character [that] confirms both inner durability and uniqueness" (xiii–xix).

As a preliminary example of his method, Schwaber looks at a series of minor characters in the Wandering Rocks chapter, choosing those who have an intriguing relationship to one or more of the book's three major characters and who are richly conceived. Of course *Ulysses* includes many examples of what Forster called "flat" characters, but the number of "round" characters is surprisingly large, a fact that Schwaber reads as a sign of the novel's "democratic" nature: in Wandering Rocks, he notes, "the panoramic view and democratic array of characters convey the impression that a good number of Dublin's citizens could reward extended consideration" (24). One after another, minor characters turn out to be complex, interesting, and minutely portrayed, often in ways that complicate our readings of Stephen or Bloom. M'Coy and Kernan, for example, have different (but no less perceptible) affinities to Bloom, while of all the members of his family it is Dilly who most resembles Stephen Dedalus in her desire to fly past the nets of poverty and hopelessness. Yet while he feels sorry for her, Stephen does not offer to share with his sister the wages that he collected that morning from Deasy, although he has already wasted a good share of it on drinks for newspapermen; it is their improvident father, Simon, who gives Dilly a shilling for the family and two pennies to buy food for herself.

Despite his obvious sympathy for Dilly, Stephen feels compelled to keep her at arm's length, fearing that she will "drown" him. Schwaber connects that fear to Stephen's Shakespeare theory, arguing that the theory's emphasis on

betrayal by a brother is a symptom of Stephen's insistence on keeping his own siblings (and brother surrogates) at arm's length, an insistence stemming from the fact that as the oldest child in the family he was repeatedly displaced in his mother's affections through the birth of a new brother or sister. He is now possessed by depression, mourning a mother who died over a year earlier, because "unconsciously he is raging at her for deserting him—for having banished him again and finally" by dying (64). Intellectually Stephen is quite independent of his mother; emotionally he is not. His theory (like his thoughts generally) indicates that he has never developed a mature relationship with a woman and constantly fears betrayal. Feeling exiled from his mother, Stephen turns "for self-acknowledgement and self-worth" to male writers, especially Shakespeare (67). And as Schwaber notes, Stephen's theory is itself an example of what, according to the theory, Shakespeare did in his plays: both Shakespeare and Stephen have "fathered verbally crafted dramatis personae who were transformations" of themselves (66). Shakespeare becomes what Stephen wants, needs, him to be.

Following his discussion of the psychology of the Shakespeare theory, Schwaber devotes two chapters to Leopold Bloom, the first on his Jewishness and the second on the forms and sources of his anger, before turning to "the odd couple"—the meeting, conversation, and parting of Stephen and Bloom—and concluding with a chapter on Molly Bloom's anxiety. There is not room here to summarize each chapter, but it is worth noting that Schwaber looks closely and intelligently at the sources of psychic wounds that continue to afflict the characters. Some of these, like Stephen's, are traceable to the loss of a mother, although Bloom and Molly lost their mothers long ago (in the latter case, so long ago that Molly cannot recall hers). This first loss has left a wound that is reopened by other losses that are recalled more often in the book: Bloom's father's suicide and the death in infancy of Rudy Bloom. The death of their son led both Leopold and Molly Bloom to fear another such loss so much that it seriously affected their sexual relationship. Schwaber's analysis is based on strong textual evidence, and although the material is familiar, there are any number of strikingly new points along the way. For example, both Molly Bloom and the shape of her monologue have been debated for decades now, yet I do not recall anyone having made the case for a clear and consistent pattern in the location of its paragraph breaks. Yet as Schwaber notes, "the paragraph endings prove revealing" (209), and what they tend to reveal is a moment of crisis in Molly's sense of her life. The endings move from elation to desperation, marking points of rupture in Molly's "psychic fluidity that approaches boundarylessness, transgression, and diffusion, that sweeps forward to renewed genitality and back to the earliest stages of development" (211).

What stands out in this study, however, is not the goal but the journey: not the revelation of a source for anxiety, as interesting as that might be, but

the many fine observations made along the way. Indeed, the book is so well written, its evidence handled so judiciously, that I am reluctant to linger over what I regard as its relatively minor deficiencies. For the sake of balance, however, I should note that *Old Times in the Barony*, a brief book by John S. Conmee, S.J., is not “focused on the aristocracy,” as Schwaber believes (27); I have a facsimile reprint of the book, and a glance through its pages confirms my recollection that it has nothing whatsoever to do with the aristocracy. It should also be noted that it is Jacky rather than Tommy Caffrey who supposedly runs into Bloom in the Circe chapter (see Schwaber, 109, and *Ulysses*, Gabler edition, 15.237–38: “Jacky Caffrey, hunted by Tommy Caffrey, runs full tilt against Bloom”). I am also skeptical about the references to Bloom’s “inability . . . to have complete intercourse with his wife” and to their “nongenital [sexual] interaction” (112, 218): Bloom seems *unwilling* rather than *unable* to have what the book calls “complete carnal intercourse, with ejaculation of semen within the natural female organ” (*Ulysses* 17.2278–79) with his wife, and there is no reason to assume their sexual relations are totally nongenital, only that they conclude that way. My suspicion is that Bloom has been practicing premature withdrawal.

Earlier I referred to the scene in which one of the Caffrey twins *supposedly* runs into Bloom, and that note of skepticism also distinguishes my reading from Schwaber’s: he has no doubts that the boys are present in Nighttown, whereas I’m not so sure. A more important difference between our approaches is evident throughout his reading of the Circe episode, for Schwaber seems to assume that all of the events dramatized in the chapter are either real life occurrences or conscious fantasies in the mind of Stephen or of Bloom. This seems to me an untenable reading, in part because, as Schwaber admits, “neither Bloom nor Stephen appears to remember the dramatic interiorities he experienced in Nighttown.” Rather than regarding this failure of memory as a sign that the fantasies “have been repressed,” as Schwaber believes (167), I would argue that it is a sign that the fantasies were those of the narrator rather than the characters. Looking at them in that way helps to explain how the characters can have knowledge of things they could not literally know, and it links the chapter’s technique with the parts of the Cyclops chapter that abandon realistic narration in favor of a burlesque narration that is not tied to the conscious (or unconscious) mind of any individual character.

Then again, these differences between our approaches are reassuring: they demonstrate anew how rich a book *Ulysses* is, how many ways it may be read and reread. Both for its insights and for its reader-friendly style, Schwaber’s book is one of the best on *Ulysses* in recent years. In his last sentence, Schwaber refers to *Ulysses* as “a good read” (223). The same might be said of *The Cast of Characters*, a study that will delight and instruct.

Patrick A. McCarthy
University of Miami