PROJECT MUSE®

James Joyce and German Theory: The Romantic School and All That (review)

Franca Ruggieri Punzo

James Joyce Quarterly, Volume 44, Number 1, Fall 2006, pp. 166-169
(Review)

Published by The University of Tulsa
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jjq.2007.0019>

➔ *For additional information about this article*
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/217435>

ment is no less hydra-headed than the vice it intended to obliterate, so too is Joyce's multifarious assault on that movement. Mullin unveils the spectacle of social-purity crusaders' political, legal, and moral maneuvers to regulate vice and Joyce's outmaneuvering of such social controls over his art. Joyce's conflict with censorship, particularly that motivated by the morally and politically suspect social-purity crusade, lies at the heart of his creative practice, Mullin argues. Joyce, of course, has taught his readers the significance of the throwaway, revealing a world of contestatory social and political discourses lodged in turn-of-the-century cultural ephemera. Yet few readers have so superbly revealed that world half offered by the throwaway. Mullin expertly demonstrates how the forgotten cultural ephemera that Joyce deploys in his work, particularly in *Ulysses*, and that she has retrieved in her book "reveal a sustained, complex and politically freighted assault upon a movement responsible for the international proscription of *Ulysses*, and thus partly productive of his notoriety" (210). That he courts that conflict and benefits from that notoriety form part of his assault. Few readers have so compellingly demonstrated Joyce's complex engagement with and radical critique of the contestatory discourses that shaped his world as Katherine Mullin has proven in *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity*.

Reviewed by Ellen Carol Jones

NOTES

¹ See, for instance, Bonnie Kime Scott, *Joyce and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984).

² Alfred S. Dyer, *The European Slave Trade in English, Irish, and Scottish Girls: A Narrative of Facts* (London: Dyer Brothers, 1880).

³ James Joyce, *Occasional, Critical and Political Writing*, ed. Kevin Barry, trans. Conor Deane (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), p. 144.

⁴ Dora Marsden, "The Chastity of Women," *The Egoist* (2 February 1914), 45.

⁵ See Jane Heap, *The Little Review*, 8 (October 1921), 7.

⁶ Maria Susannah Cummins, *The Lamplighter* (Boston: J. P. Jewett, 1854).

JAMES JOYCE AND GERMAN THEORY: THE ROMANTIC SCHOOL AND ALL THAT, by Barbara Laman. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004. 176 pp. \$39.50.

Barbara Laman's volume opens with Donovan's words in the fifth chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: the brief reference to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing—"the classical school and the romantic school," the "idealistic, German,

ultraprofound" dimension (P 211). The book is the result of much learned research, all well documented and updated in its primary as well as in its secondary sources, by an author who authoritatively masters both Joyce's literary corpus and "German Romantic theories" (20). By this general designation, Laman hints at that exceptionally vast, fruitful season of German literary and philosophical thought that expands from the second half of the eighteenth century to the early decades of the nineteenth one. Her thorough text is organized into six main chapters, prefaced by an illuminating "Introduction," which is an essential, anticipated précis of her argument, and followed by a final, clear "Conclusion." The very titles of the chapters show how this comparative study of influences covers the whole sequence of Joyce's works, from the beginning to *Finnegans Wake*: "German Romantic Theory and Joyce's Early Works"; "From *Stephen Hero* to *Portrait*: The *Kunstlerroman* Revisited"; "Exiles and Romantic Irony"; "Ulysses and the 'Mythic Method'"; "'A Picture of its Age': *Hamlet* Expositions and Revisions"; and "The 'Romantical' *Wake*."

Laman's thesis is that most inquiries into the sources of Joyce's aesthetics have focused on Aristotle, Plato, and Thomas Aquinas, leaving little space for his use of the German aesthetic theories, which "contributed centrally to the Europeanizing of Irish literature" (13). Through the operative presence of Goethe and Lessing, Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich von Schiller, Novalis (Friedrich Leopold) and Richard Wagner, in fact, Joyce could overcome Ireland's parochial status—the subordinate condition that he saw as a basic handicap for Irish culture—and actually "fly by those nets" of "nationality, language, religion." (P 203). One is tempted to emphasize what Laman additionally observes: how closely Wagner's presence has already been examined in Timothy Martin's *Joyce and Wagner* and how later contributions to *Joyce Studies in Italy* focused on the idea that the juvenile Joycean notion of "drama" is borrowed from Wagner's *Prose Works* and Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Il fuoco*.¹ The same could be noted about Lessing: after Fritz Senn, other scholars discovered the presence of *Laokoon: Oder Uber die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* in Joyce.² One should also remember Jacques Aubert's words, when speaking of Joyce's first lecture on James Clarence Mangan (CW 73-83) and the influence on Joyce's thinking of "Hegelian, or rather neo-Hegelian" thought: "Joyce in those days was not in a position to read much of Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, but, as I have demonstrated long ago, he did indeed read the neo-Hegelian *History of Aesthetic*, of Bernard Bosanquet, to which, anyway, is appended the closing section of Hegel's 'Introduction' to his *Aesthetic*."³

It was Senn who, during a lecture, objected to Aubert's thesis, observing ironically that Joyce could have read Hegel in an English translation, which might have made Hegelian thought much more

understandable than in its original German version.⁴ Even if this were true, in some cases, Joyce obviously undertook an untranslated reading of “German theory,” yet he could also have a wider mediated knowledge of it. In our different predicaments, we, as readers of Joyce, must start our analyses from two established, basic notions. The first relates to Joyce’s literary education. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and during the years Joyce spent in elementary and secondary schools and at University College in Dublin, the ordinary cycle of literary education was certainly grounded on several sources but especially on Romantic and Victorian literature. The second notion, which interacts with the first, is that Victorian culture was inflected by a wave of interest in German literature and what Laman calls “German . . . theories.” One could even suggest a random selection of intellectuals and writers immersed in German studies, some of whose books Joyce had in his Trieste library, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the author of *Biographia Literaria*, Sir Walter Scott, the translator of Goethe’s *Goetz of Berlichingen*, George Eliot, the translator of David Friedrich Strauss’s *Leben Jesu*, and Thomas Carlyle, who invited his contemporaries to close their Byron and open their Goethe.⁵ They all could have played the role of mediator between German Romantic literature and Joyce himself. For instance, in that Trieste library, Joyce had a copy of Carlyle’s *Past and Present*, dated 1909, and a second-hand *French Revolution*, dated 1920 by an earlier owner, too late to be of any use in his early formative years,⁶ but do we know which books the young exile carried from Dublin when he left with Nora in 1904? The absence in Trieste of any of Schiller’s works or a copy of Carlyle’s *Life of Friedrich Schiller* or his translation of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* is thus not altogether negative evidence, since Carlyle could have been on Joyce’s secondary-school syllabuses, whereas the absence of Goethe’s original *Wilhelm Meister* from that library might be more significant.⁷

Reviewed by Franca Ruggieri
University of Rome

NOTES

¹ See Timothy Martin, *Joyce and Wagner: A Study of Influence* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991); Franca Ruggieri, ed., *Joyce Studies in Italy: Romantic Joyce*, 8 (Rome: Bulzoni, 2003); Richard Wagner, *Prose Works* (New York: Broude Brothers, 1892); and Gabriele D’Annunzio, *Il fuoco* (Verona: Mondadori, 1930).

² See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laokoon: Oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie. Mit Beiläufigen Erläuterungen Verschiedener Punkte der Alten Kunstgeschichte* (Berlin: C. F. Voss, 1766); Fritz Senn, “Esthetic Theories,” *JJQ*, 2 (Winter 1965), 134-36; and my “Laocoon and Stephen Dedalus,” *Joyce Studies*

in *Italy*, 7, ed. Rosa Maria Bollettieri Bosinelli and Ruggieri (Rome: Bulzoni Press, 2002), 67-76.

³ Jacques Aubert, "Joyce's Romantic Propositions and Position," *Joyce Studies in Italy*, 8 (Rome: Bulzoni, 2003), 14; Bernard Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetic* (London: S. Sonnenschein, 1892); and Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, *Aesthetic* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998).

⁴ Senn, "Byronic Rumblings," a paper delivered at the "Romantic Joyce" conference in Rome, 11-12 April 2002, and included in *Joyce Studies in Italy*, 8 (pp. 25-34).

⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (London: G. Bell and Daldy, 1870); Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goetz of Berlichingen, with the Iron Hand: A Tragedy*, trans. Sir Walter Scott (London: J. Bell, 1799); David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot (London: Chapman Brothers, 1846); and Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: J. M. Dent, 1908), p. 145.

⁶ Carlyle, *Past and Present* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1909), and *The French Revolution: A History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1837).

⁷ Carlyle, *The Life of Friedrich Schiller: Comprehending an Examination of His Work* (London: Taylor and Hennessey, 1825), and Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship: A Novel from the German of Goethe*, trans. Carlyle (London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1824), and *Wilhelm Meister, Goethe's Werke* (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1817-1819).

JOYCE'S MESSIANISM: DANTE, NEGATIVE EXISTENCE, AND THE MESSIANIC SELF, by Gian Balsamo. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004. 168 pp. \$34.95.

RITUALS OF LITERATURE: JOYCE, DANTE, AQUINAS, AND THE TRADITION OF CHRISTIAN EPICS, by Gian Balsamo. Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 2004. 160 pp. \$35.00.

Gian Balsamo reads Joyce as deploying a rhetorical force comparable to the meliorative strain claimed by Holy Scripture. In his two latest books, *Joyce's Messianism: Dante, Negative Existence, and the Messianic Self* and *Rituals of Literature: Joyce, Dante, Aquinas, and the Tradition of Christian Epics*, his third and fourth volumes on the author, the focus is on this imperative from Joyce's early declaration of literature's independence in the essay "Drama and Life" (CW 40) through to *Finnegans Wake*.¹ For Balsamo, this redemptive vein draws on the legacies of sacrificial ritual, Attic theater, and Christian liturgy. Such an amalgam constitutes an apocalyptic poesis, an ideal mode of reading, a messianic accent with the all-inclusive representational horizon of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Balsamo's Joyce is leery of any detraction, figurative or denotative, from this complex plenum. The exploration of creative transcendence