Essays on Joyce
Mary Lowe-Evans


Published by ELT Press

For additional information about this article
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/367517/summary
exchanges been that the Association has now designed a new series of short books bringing together the best of the discussions, and under the general title of “The Occasional Series” the first two titles have been published.

*Hardy's Emma Poems* is the second of these and it provides what the President of the Association calls “a small sample of the intellectual energy that characterises the TTHA website.” The subject is a good one. The poems written after the death of Hardy’s wife, Emma, in 1912 are recognised as among his greatest, and it was to be expected that they would lead to a really worthwhile discussion—and they did. After a questioning and shrewd introduction by William Morgan the screen is open for a wide-ranging and always interesting exchange of views from a wide variety of contributors. Among the subjects discussed are Hardy’s sincerity, his textual revisions, his vocabulary, his mastery of rhythm and metre, and the nature of his relationship with Emma during the thirty-eight years of their marriage.

In one sense this internet meeting of minds is important in that it enables anyone to express opinions and exchange views with a worldwide audience without even leaving home. I have long thought that the questions asked after a formal lecture were either asked in order to exhibit the knowledge of the questioner or so profound that the exhausted lecturer has no possibility of providing a reasonable answer. Even the shy and timid can have their say on the internet and benefit from the response which their contribution attracts. This can be seen in *Emma Poems* where the “professional” and the “amateur” exchange opinions and argue as to the relevance and correctness of such statements as “Women struggle to become free from men all the time,” or the rigidity or otherwise of the first three stanzas of “The Voice.” I welcome the publication of this book as an important move forward in the teaching and understanding of literature.

*James Gibson*
Dorchester, England

**Essays on Joyce**


THIS ESSAY COLLECTION includes pieces nearly all of which have been or will be published elsewhere in different versions as well as
a final essay intended to capstone a decade's worth of critical engagement with Joyce and his interpreters. Those familiar with McGee's work will not be surprised to find, among other preoccupations, McGee's commitment to developing readers who will radically historicize Joyce's works and recognize the imperative in those works to liberate desire. Also familiar is the spirit of critical debate that animates McGee's essays. He "takes on" a wide range of scholars and critics including, among others, Joseph Valente, Julia Kristeva, Emer Nolan, Enda Duffy, Mark Osteen, Margot Norris, Dominic Manganiello, Vicki Mahaffey, John Kidd, Christine Froula, Karl Marx of course, and finally Bernard Benstock. In some cases (for example with Joseph Valente) McGee is antagonistic to his fellow critic; in others he unequivocally concurs with his colleague (Benstock is a case in point). What's more important than McGee's willingness to engage wholeheartedly in critical debate, however, is the fact that he carefully and clearly explains why he positions himself inside, outside, or on the borders of another critic's ground.

McGee claims to have taken special pains to make himself clear in these essays, pains that he has come to feel necessary if he is to reach an important segment of his audience—students. Having required my own students to read McGee's contribution to "Ulysses": A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism edited by Margot Norris (1998), I can attest both to the need for clarification in the original essay and his success at having accomplished it in the version included here. Additionally, to McGee's credit, long before it became trendy to rehabilitate the humanities, he believed and insisted that the work we do (and that Joyce did) is politically significant. Taken together the essays here elaborate that significance more effectively than any single essay does.

In "Pedagogy and Theory," the first essay in Section I, McGee explains how in Ulysses Joyce teaches the reader a new way of reading by providing an opening into an historical context that puts desire in conflict with the real "as the impossible object of historical representation." The Stephen Dedalus of Ulysses, especially beginning in the "Nestor" episode, exemplifies this strategy when he requires his students to attend to the self-reflexive nature of language, an understanding of which gives them a measure of control over meaning and thus over their own subjectivity. As McGee demonstrates, Stephen's "refusal to finalize knowledge on the blackboard forces [his student Cyril Sargent] to teach himself." McGee finds that the pedagogy both represented in and required by Joyce's
work undoes objective knowledge or theory while simultaneously revealing the role of desire in language, the source of our knowledge.

"Is There a Class for This Text?" considers the textual history of *Ulysses* in terms of the political economy brought to light in the debates about Hans Walter Gabler's critical and synoptic edition of Joyce's novel. McGee observes that Gabler's editorial project would have been impossible before the computer era. More pertinent to his argument, McGee stresses that the Gabler edition graphically represents "the historically determinate form of the indeterminate or unstable text [thereby implicitly criticizing] those interpretive approaches to *Ulysses* . . . that locate indeterminacy in an idealized relation between reader and text." In the process of arguing for *Ulysses* as process (and thus for an indeterminacy both more general and more politically significant than heretofore observed) McGee provides a perceptive, detailed account of what might be called the Gabler/Kidd tournament. Kidd's criticisms, Gabler's responses, and the whole publicity event generated by the coverage provide both a lesson about the value-laden field of textual scholarship and evidence of the unstable yet ideologically determinate nature of the text.

Section II, "Social En-genderings," opens with an essay on "Reading Authority" that proposes to demonstrate how feminist assessments of Joyce's work reveal the ways in which the feminist critics' own valuations of gender difference work to construct or deconstruct Joyce's authority or usefulness for their agendas. Beginning with two quotations—one from Julia Kristeva who might be interpreted as pro-Joyce; another from Gayatri Spivak who finds the idea of Joyce's enlistment by the women's movement "faintly comic"—McGee proceeds to analyze the positions of several other critics of Joyce's feminism. Whether arguing with or taking exception to their positions, McGee's point is neither to validate or dismiss feminism, but to encourage our understanding of authority as a "constructed repository of value."

Continuing the critique of the ways in which gender identity has been treated in Joyce criticism, "This Man Who Is Not One" seeks to reveal the social contradictions that produce feminist and queer theory. In the second part of this essay, McGee challenges Joseph Valente's contention in *Quare Joyce* (1988) that the Stephen Dedalus of *Portrait* is repeatedly seized by homosexual panic. For McGee, Valente's argument relies on a heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy, the very binary logic that queer theory purports to overcome. McGee would rather have us see that Ste-
phen resists the social conditioning that pressures him to become a socially acceptable man without choosing (or fleeing from) either heterosexuality or homosexuality. Concluding this essay by considering the connection between Joyce and Oscar Wilde, McGee argues that Joyce found in Wilde's words "a fundamental truth about human desire." Simply put, that desire must be free from class and gender distinctions.

Part III, "Ethical Desires," includes the essays "Ulysses, as Profane Illumination," and "Errors and Expectations in Finnegans Wake," and although the focus of the two is different, the refrain is the same. By ethical desire McGee means identification with the desire of the other. He observes that Joyce represented such ethical desire in Ulysses, at least in part, through Leopold Bloom's bodily associations. Bloom's is both a fully functioning irreducibly material body as well as, in some sense, equivalent to the community body. In Finnegans Wake desire seems always somehow to be represented as the desire of the other. McGee finds, however, that revealing what might be called authentic desire is especially the role of the Gracehoper. Grace is desire itself, but a desire that escapes patriarchal insistence on excluding the pleasure of the other.

The fourth and final section considers "Cultural Transformations." In "Nationalism and Decolonization" McGee addresses Joyce's relation to Irish nationalism. Contrary to what McGee terms a misreading by established Joyce critics, McGee insists not only that Joyce was concerned about Irish nationalism, but that he ceaselessly subverted the language of the colonizer and exposed its "imperialist functions in the Irish context" staging a "utopian revolt" against the "ideological revival" undertaken in the Irish renaissance. In effect, Joyce sought to decolonize the minds of his readers through his works, deconstructing history and thereby making it possible to reshape the future.

In the penultimate essay, "Finnegans Wake as Historical Document," McGee reveals the ubiquitousness of Michael Collins in the Wake. For McGee, Finn MacCool, HCE, and Shem are all progeny of Michael Collins, and all reveal the influence of Irish history on Joyce's final work. However, the dissemination of Collins in the Wake also undercuts the stability of historical fact, exposing conventional history to be an "ideological weapon that dominates the reader."

McGee's final essay "Politicoeconomy and Communism" is dedicated to the memory of Bernard Benstock. In particular McGee finds that Benstock's Joyce-Again's Wake (1965) has never been bested as far as stud-
ies of *Finnegans Wake* are concerned. For one thing, Benstock anticipated current Marxist readings of the *Wake*. For another, McGee finds Benstock’s interpretation of Joyce’s use of Giordano Bruno and Giambatista Vico congenial to his own. Joyce borrows from Vico, for instance, not the principle of divine providence, but the phenomenon of incessant social change.

Most interesting to me in this closing piece is McGee’s argument about Joyce’s position with regard to work, or rather Joyce’s “refusal of work.” McGee contends that after the sheets to *Dubliners* were destroyed in 1912 Joyce never engaged in conventional work again. Rather he purposefully produced materials with no exchange value according to established conventions of literature. By refusing to work in any conventional sense both Joyce and his products refuse to advance the capitalist project. This long chapter covers much ground concerning the forms of communism and Marxism implicitly advocated in the *Wake*. In sum, McGee sees the *Wake* again and again urging the redistribution of wealth and the facilitation of free time both of which potentially eliminate the “exploitative production of surplus value.”

As I read these compelling essays I always felt “in medias res.” Virtually every form of Joyce criticism and numerous Joyce critics are invoked, embraced, or attacked. It is exciting to be pulled so completely into the fray. What’s more, McGee helps me understand the terms of the various debates in ways that will facilitate my own teaching. This collection is a most appropriate addition to the Florida James Joyce series.

*Mary Lowe-Evans*

The University of West Florida

China’s “Yes” to Molly Bloom

Jin Di. *Shamrocks and Chopsticks: James Joyce in China, A Tale of Two Encounters*. Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong, 2001. xxvi + 296 pp. $21.00

WHEN JAMES JOYCE first heard that a French translation of *Ulysses* was planned sometime in the late 20s, he summoned the translator to his room. Wryly, he warned her “not to alter a single word.” Joyce also told his friend, Daniel Hummel, that the book could never be translated, as there was so much of Irish culture—its customs, history, rhythms, tales and speech—that could never be captured. Undaunted by Joyce’s advice, Jin Di, a mainland Chinese translator and teacher who taught English literature in China for twenty-five years, has now braved the task of translating *Ulysses*—into Chinese. According to Jin