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## Joyce Centennial

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comedy of manners after 1910, takes us beyond James and up to Noel Coward and even, momentarily, Pinter, and indicates some of the crucial ways in which the tradition has changed.

*Women of Grace: James's Plays and the Comedy of Manners* is a study of a perhaps undervalued body of work, and yet one cannot help thinking that this short book might have profited from more of the Edel bias, an emphasis—at moments—on the fiction. Carlson makes astute observations on the theatre, but one misses—and misses almost completely—her comments on the crucial interplay between the career of the playwright and that of the professional novelist. Edel and others may read the plays for what they tell us about the late fiction, but surely the early, middle, and even late novels might be read in part for what they tell us about the idiosyncrasies of these plays. Fewer than half of the study's 149 primary pages of text concentrate on the specifics of James's work, and therefore it seems reasonable to regret such omission. Carlson is right to ask that we consider a developed theatrical tradition, but might we not also have the dramas discussed in relation to an equally important background, that of an author's dominant personal tradition?

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#### JOYCE CENTENNIAL

*James Joyce: The Centennial Symposium*, eds. Morris Beja, Phillip Herring, Maurice Harmon, David Norris. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986. \$22.50

At first glance, *James Joyce: The Centennial Symposium* appears to be yet another James Joyce Miscellany. It contains capsule histories of book-making, Pentecost, and syphilis; it explores Joyce's affinities with writers such as Arnold, Yeats, Woolf, and Pynchon; it includes a descriptive account of papers written by Joyce's daughter Lucia (to whom the book is dedicated): disjointed memories, fantasies and dreams patched together at intervals from 1958-1961 in one of the many mental institutions where Lucia spent the last fifty years of her life. The variousness of the volume is real, but there is also a surprising coherence to the collection; the best essays position themselves around a single dominant issue: the relative importance of the individual, unified human subject in Joyce's works.

Interestingly, the debate over what I will call the human "subject"—character, narrator, or author—is a version of the more familiar debate over whether Joyce's works favor symbolism or realism, whether his is the tradition of Blake or Defoe. Realism, such as that of Defoe, presents itself as strictly mimetic, with an emphasis on believable, human characters derived from life. In contrast, a "symbolic" approach will trace in actualities of time, place and character the outlines of myth, resolving the idiosyncrasies of historical,

geographical and personal difference into archetypes. If the term "symbolism" is used to mark an affinity between a given character, or narrative, and myth, "realism" affirms its fidelity to everyday experience. To replace symbolism and realism with terms that measure the unity or diffusion of a speaking subject is to abandon the presupposition that art and life are at odds, and to highlight, instead, the energies that define individual identity from within and without. One result of the "translation" of terms is a reversal of positions: "realism" demanded an emphasis on particulars and on the differences that distinguish individuals and events, in contrast to a symbolist intuition of the "typicality" or unity of individuals and narratives, but the new terminology emphasizes the extent to which a realistic portrayal of individual characters as unified and recognizable is itself a generalization, and it is the diffusion of individual characters or "subjects" into competing, often unidentifiable "voices" that opens up a world of new particulars.

Joyce criticism, to judge from this collection of papers presented at the centennial symposium in Dublin five years ago, has given new currency to the dichotomy that animates Joyce's words by renaming it. Initially, it seems to be the "symbolic" term that has undergone the most dramatic metamorphosis, since a precise concern for individual locutions seems to have displaced the universalizing sweep of a more "mythical method." Derek Attridge, for example, probes the disturbing effects Joyce creates in "Sirens" by replacing the grammatical human subject that we expect to govern individual actions with the name of the exact organ that physically performs the action. Joyce substitutes the part for the whole—lips speak in place of the person who owns them—in a way that "challenges momentarily our untroubled belief in the human subject as unitary, unconstrained, and capable of originating action from a single center of consciousness." The liberation of the part from the whole unleashes the eroticism of the body and unveils the extent to which individual letters lead a life of their own, independent of the words, sentences, and narratives that they also serve.

Karen Lawrence attacks conventional characterization from another angle, by suggesting that the distinctive consciousness typical of a developing character or an authoritative narrator stems in part from cultural privilege. She illuminates the privileged access to Stephen's thoughts and feelings enjoyed by the narrator of *Jacob's Room*, who is frequently denied access, not only to Jacob's perspective, but to certain of his activities, as well. Lawrence argues that for Woolf, "the world of the self is . . . patriarchal, the realm of the male." If Lawrence emphasizes the potential isolation of narrator from character, Bernard Benstock and Jean-Michel Rabaté take as their subject the autonomy of narrative, its independence from a narrator. Benstock's method is more exegetical, Rabaté's more theoretical, but the methods merge in their exposure of how much readers of *Finnegans Wake* tend to invest in the identification of a specific, individual storyteller at any given moment in the dream narrative. The clear implication is that the unitary speaking subject is here subject, not

only to another more powerful speaker (the author), but to the steady fragmentation and reintegration characteristic of the linguistic and narrative processes.

Several of the essays in this volume, together with many of their contemporaries outside the volume, argue that characters, narrators, and authors must be broken down into their constitutive parts, creating an emphasis on the *composition* of character and narrative which refocuses our critical attention on the dynamic interplay of more minute particulars. However, other essays in the same volume represent a critical counter-tendency to resurrect the unified human subject as an indispensable focus and agent of the sacred word; in the process, not surprisingly, these critics reassert the traditional links between the artistic and the divine. Sheldon Brivic assertively retraces the similarity between Joyce's methods of creation and those attributed to God by theological authorities. Beryl Schlossman also examines the relationship between Joyce's work and sacred texts, both Hebrew and Christian, although she freshens this familiar association by defining the link in linguistic terms. She argues that *Finnegans Wake*, like Torah in the eyes of the Kabbalists, is a weave of proper names all celebrating the divinity of naming, and, by implication, the divine unity of what seems to be multiple, since the Kabbalists read the names in Torah as the different names of God. This is an argument that John Cage would love; as Cage has done in a different context, Schlossman asserts and even deifies the omnipresence of the speaking subject, arguing that the main purpose of names is identification, achieved through distinctiveness of sound regardless of meaning, an identification that attests to "the irreducible presence of the subject able to say 'I AM.'"

Schlossman's treatment of the religious significance of names brings the historical importance of the referent once more to the fore, and in the process, it serves as a practical reminder of what we understand quite well in theoretical terms: that a playful commitment to the break-up of the human subject has its dangers, too; as numerous commentators have pointed out, close reading threatens to become "closed" reading. If an insistence on the totality of a human subject (a character, a narrator) entails the subjection of that subject to the total control of a more powerful subject (an author), who is in turn subject to the control of creators more powerful yet (God), if, as my use of language has already implied, "subject" (as a noun) and "subject" (as a verb) have a natural affinity for one another, so that subjects tend to subject other subjects in a potentially infinite series, the deconstruction of a subject in favor of its various, dynamic signifiers threatens to seal off or "close" the linguistic world entirely. Like the older "symbolic" approach to criticism championed by Eliot, post-structuralist approaches may come to resemble a new kind of "New Criticism" oblivious to the complexity of *contextual* play, the play of everchanging personal, historical, and geographical realities.

Seamus Deane's essay is one of the first in the book to promulgate an awareness of the importance of cultural context. He begins by situating the year of

Joyce's birth (which the symposium itself is designed to commemorate) within a diverse array of contemporary events—the patenting of the Maxim machine gun; the performance of Wagner's *Parsifal* at Bayreuth; Edison's designing of the first hydroelectric plant in Wisconsin; the birth of De Valera, Stravinsky, Woolf, Braque. Through his critique of Arnoldian liberalism, Deane affirms the importance of cultural context as something that helps to mitigate "the sterile, atomic view of the individual," while at the same time emphasizing the reciprocity between the individual and the systems that define as well as confine individuality.

If symbolism, by metamorphosing into post-structuralism, gained specificity and linguistic precision in the process, the old chestnut "realism" has taken on a new life as well. Realism, as a critical approach, involves more than mimesis; it requires knowledge of a wide range of historical *facts*, and a willingness to discover how they may be brought to bear on a given work. Realism in this sense is primarily a contextual approach that in its appeal to evidence external to the text brings us back, "by a commodius vicus of recirculation," to its opposite, the "mythical method" celebrated by Eliot, with *fact* replacing *myth*.

It is not surprising to see myth and fact changing places, since Deane, Attridge, Kenner and Litz all suggest that a sensitivity to the contradictory nature of definition is necessary to an understanding of the pleasure Joyce's works afford. As Litz argues, "all readers of *Ulysses* must have a double sense of the work"—a temporal sense of how it unfolds in our mind and in the larger progression of history, and a "spatial"—or mythical, or structural—sense of the work as a timeless artifact shaped by mythic and linguistic correspondences. The double impulses that animate *Ulysses* are the same impulse played out in different arenas and on a different scale. The world of "Realism" was conceived as a more minute (small *and* temporal; adjectival and substantive meanings both apply) realm than that of symbolism, with parameters vastly expanded and arrested by myth and religion. Now, the stress on traditional characterization, which might still be called realistic, is centrifugal in its movement outward from the individual, towards the web of factors that define and threaten identity from without. In contrast, attention to the diffusion of the individual subject is centripetal in its inward concentration on the individual, but since the individual is fragmented into an interior universe of conflicting forces, the configuration that results mirrors, in all but size and location, the "larger" world of historical realities.

Joyce's most attentive readers are always aware of the interplay and identity of external (historical) and internal (linguistic, psychological) realities. They know that both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* reenact the interrelationship between the world as it is lived and the representations through which its relationships are apprehended and brought to consciousness, or internalized. Hugh Kenner uses a discovery of Fitz Senn's to illustrate Joyce's awareness of the extent to which inner and outer realities interfuse: in "Eumaeus," Stephen and Bloom sit in the cabman's shelter with a copy of the *Telegraph* opened out

in front of them and discuss the influence of gaslight on adjoining paraheliotropic trees; this is inside the text. Senn looked outside the text, at the 16 June 1904 issue of the *Telegraph* itself, and found on the front page an article that mentions artificial light and the growth of plants. Evidence of the *realism* of what is putatively fiction is found, not only within, but outside the text as well. As Kenner argues, the stimulus for Bloom and Stephen's conversation is outside the text, the response to that stimulus *inside*, so that our expectations about intra- and extra-textual reality, respectively, have been reversed. If "inner" and "outer" reality are reversible, this suggests that they are formally identical, with opposite orientations.

Kenner, like Senn, delights in the coincidences of internal and external reality, and the way that *Ulysses* continues to produce them. He is quick to frame the significance of the neighbors' response to a plaque put up in Clanbrassill Street to commemorate Bloom's "birthplace": some claimed to remember the Blooms. The point has less to do with the fact that the Blooms being commemorated never existed in the flesh than with the fact that names mark the crossroads of competing realities, some historical, some invented, realities that merge in the mind and reemerge under cover of a familiar sound. Essentially, Kenner illustrates the logic of Joyce's claim that "nature mirrors my art" when he highlights the simultaneous irony and significance of a sign fortuitously posted beneath the hill of Howth: "Don't disturb the Blooms." As Stephen remarks in "Eumaeus," sounds are impostures, and they allow found (or natural) and created (or artistic) realities to meet and collide in verbal duplication of the fortuitous and tragic world of coincidence.

Extra-textual reality finds its serendipitous way inside any "closed" text, but what makes *Ulysses* different is its strategic appreciation of the dynamics of life—and language—as processes that constitute and exceed the individual subject, author, or text. *Ulysses* re-enacts and re-impels the interpenetration of immediate and contemplated (or re-presented) experience. So, as Maud Elmann shows, the body can create non-verbal statements—such as a fart—that re-present verbal language, reversing the identification of subjective and objective reality. Bloom's fart at the end of "Sirens" becomes the subjective commentary, music and language its involuntary objects. *Ulysses* is full of such instances of subjective and objective interplay, all of which remind us that subjection, like subjectivity, may be partly a function of point-of-view—where one is standing as well as how one is seeing.

It is appropriate that Joyce's corpus, animated as it continues to be by the interplay of internal and external reality should be commemorated by a collection of essays that reenacts such interplay. The book balances a discussion of Joyce's treatment of bodily organs with a physician's assessment of the soundness of Joyce's own organs, an exposé of Stephen's patriarchal values with a tribute to the papers of a madwoman: Stephen's tragic counterpart, Joyce's daughter. This is a tribute to the difficult syncretism Joyce fostered, but it is implied rather than self-conscious. The logic of selection and arrangement

speaks quietly for itself. Instead of identifying the critical positions represented in the volume and analyzing the significance of their juxtaposition, *James Joyce: The Centennial Symposium* underplays both its subject and its object, presenting itself as a mere colloquy of voices, still speaking after a hundred years.

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### Briefer Mention

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Brake, Laurel, ed. *The Year's Work in English Studies*, Vol. 65, 1984. London: John Murray; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1987. \$99.00 The most recent volume published for the English Association continues to be an important source of research. The *YWES* is an evaluative bibliography of scholarly writings about literature in English in Britain, America, Africa, Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, and India. This 950-page tome contains useful indices, and *ELT* readers will find sections of Chapters XIV (The Nineteenth Century: Victorian Period) and XV (The Twentieth Century) helpful in summarizing the scope of recent research.

Macaulay, Rose. *They Were Defeated*. Intro. Susan Howatch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. Paper \$6.95 We always like to bring our readers' attention to affordable reprints of original works from *ELT* authors. Macaulay's 1932 novel is introduced by Howatch's brief but useful introduction.

Murphy, Maureen O'Rourke, James MacKillop, eds. *Irish Literature: A Reader*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987. \$22.50 This latest volume in the *Irish Studies* series is intended as text for a course in Irish literature covering writers from the eighth century to the present. The editors, in prefatory remarks, say it "is designed to give undergraduate students access to the immense variety and richness of literature in Ireland." In the later portion of the book there are selections from a number of authors in the *ELT* period (Synge, George Moore, Gogarty, James Stephens, AE), but curiously there is nothing from Somerville and Ross. O'Rourke and MacKillops admit "Some of the greatest Irish writers—Yeats, Joyce, and O'Casey, among others—are not found here, as their works are readily available elsewhere." The concise biographical and critical notes which precede the selections from each author are too brief to give added insights to the subjects. Following each section are selected lists of the particular author's works, as well as other lists which contain bibliographical, biographical and critical information. A reading list of selected general background material, and extensive glossary of words, places, persons and allusions, and a thorough index round out the book.