The Gender of Modernism

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James Joyce has enjoyed the central position in the modernist canon as a writer of prose fiction almost since the day in 1914 when his writing was taken up by Ezra Pound, who heard of him from another modernist giant, William Butler Yeats (Richard Ellmann 349–353). Pound published Joyce’s poem “I Hear an Army” in Des Imagistes despite the fact that it bore little resemblance to official definitions of the imagist movement. He placed additional poetry by Joyce with Harriet Monroe’s Poetry in Chicago and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man for serialization in the Egoist in England.

The pattern of sponsorship by the male avant garde continued with Pound’s appreciative reviews of Dubliners and A Portrait, T. S. Eliot’s defense of Ulysses (published in the Dial as “Ulysses, Order and Myth”), and the serialization of Finnegans Wake in Ford Madox Ford’s transatlantic review and in transition, edited by Eugene Jolas. Joyce’s last work was explicated and justified to the world in Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incarnation of Works in Progress by a dozen men of the avant garde, led by Samuel Beckett.

Joyce’s critical, daily support, however, came from intellectual women, who began as publishers and became much more. Harriet Shaw Weaver of the Egoist was an early publisher and his lifelong patron; their correspondence reveals close communication on his work in progress (Lidderdale and Nicholson; Scott, Joyce and Feminism 85–97). Sylvia Beach, the American proprietor of
the unique Parisian library and bookstore Shakespeare and Company, was his amanuensis during his first decade in Paris and became a publisher to bring out *Ulysses* when no one else would (Fitch; Scott, *Joyce and Feminism* 98–107). Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap were willing to brave jail to publish *Ulysses* in the United States (Ellmann 502–504). Additional help in Paris came from Adrienne Monnier, Beach’s partner in life, an editor, and proprietor of the French bookshop *Les Amies des Livres*, and from Maria Jolas, who took on late, personal burdens.

For contemporary women writers, Joyce was an aesthetic factor to cope with. Critics have used Joyce as a standard against which to judge many of them, including Woolf, West, and Barnes, usually to the women’s detriment. Woolf is represented as a pale imitation of Joyce in Wyndham Lewis’s *Men without Art* (170). Rebecca West fares badly in Hugh MacDiarmid’s comparison, contained in this anthology. The more experimental women writers turned repeatedly to Joyce in working out a modernist aesthetic. This anthology also includes Mina Loy on *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf’s reading notes for *Ulysses*, Woolf’s more formal assessment of Joyce as a Georgian writer in “Modern Fiction,” Rebecca West’s retelling of Weaver’s sponsorship of Joyce, and Dorothy Richardson’s analysis of the processes of *Finnegans Wake.*

Djuna Barnes reported her discussions with Joyce in Paris in the 1920s in the *Double Dealer* and *Vanity Fair*. Barnes saw qualities of “a stricken animal” in Joyce, and in promoting *Ulysses* she de-emphasized his experimental aspect in favor of his lyricism and Rabelaisian qualities. The individualist doctrine of “silence, exile and cunning” pronounced by Stephen Dedalus at the end of *A Portrait* was her banner as well, and indeed Joyce had special appeal to individualist feminists such as Dora Marsden and Harriet Weaver (Scott, *Joyce and Feminism* 108–112). Gertrude Stein resisted classification inJoycean terms and cultivated the image of running a rival Parisian camp to Joyce’s headquarters at Shakespeare and Company, though she and Alice B. Toklas had friendly relations with Beach and Monnier.

Despite his entertainment of Barnes and lesser contacts recalled by Kay Boyle, Joyce was no sponsor of women writers (or any contemporary writers, for that matter). As a young man he wrote a negative review of *Poets and Dreamers* by Lady Isabella Augusta Gregory; despite the fact that he accepted letters of introduction and modest financial help from her. She was also included in his scatological broadside, “The Holy Office” (*Critical Writings* 102–105, 150), distributed after he left Ireland. In *Ulysses*, Lady Gregory is called an “old hake,” and hints are made of a sexual relation with Yeats (who like her was a founder of the Irish Literary Theatre), though these sexist remarks are attributed to Buck Mulligan, whose machismo and medical ethics are subjects of satire (*Ulysses* 177–178). Joyce’s argument against Gregory can be seen as an aspect of his rivalry with Yeats and part of his quarrel with what he regarded as sentimental reversion to the folk favored by the Irish literary revival. Against this, Joyce posed his interest in European writing, an inclination he pursued personally when he left Ireland in 1904.
Feminist opinion of Joyce in the 1970s and 1980s has been divided, though Joyce probably has more positive feminist defenders than do Lawrence, Eliot, or Pound. The early work, which was directed largely against sexism and negative stereotypes of women, includes that of Kate Millett, who found less misogyny in Joyce than in Lawrence and Norman Mailer (285, 296). Mary Ellmann notes his "curiosity . . . for becoming as well as judging the other" sex, but expresses a restiveness over the "liquidity" of the female mind rendered in Molly Bloom (xv, 202), the heroine of *Ulysses*, whose famous nighttime monologue provides the book's ending.

Molly Bloom was less successful in the 1970s as a universal female symbol than she had been through the 1950s;³ she and the bird girl of *A Portrait* tell recent viewers more about male vision than about universal female truth—a concept of otherness that women find hard to embrace (Howe 263–264). Viewed as a realistic being, Molly demonstrates conventional attributes of lethargy in her limited activities and in narcissism; even in her affair with Blazes Boylan she is following prescribed social patterns, according to Elaine Unkeless. Marilyn French shares the view that Molly is largely male fantasy but respects the scope given to her as a "circumference bounding a human (male) world." She also appreciates the androgyny achieved by Molly's husband, Leopold Bloom (*Book as World* 259). Bloom, a Jew who experiences Dublin from ethnic margins, was the less intellectual and less egotistical male successor to Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's imagination. More recently, Frances Restuccia has analyzed Bloom as more masochist than feminist.

The failure of Stephen Dedalus to relinquish his Jesuitical mental habits (which were part of Joyce's own classical, male-centered education⁴) or to interact successfully with women are the subject of useful essays by Margot Norris, Suzette Henke, and Maud Ellmann. Joyce's capacity to render the daily realities of women's lives is discussed in essays contained in the first feminist book on Joyce, *Women in Joyce* (Henke and Unkeless, 1982), in recent collections based on Joyce symposia (Bauerle, Walzl), and in Cheryl Herr's study of Joyce and popular culture, *Joyce's Anatomy of Culture*, which is remarkable for its treatment of the semiotics of costume and gender on the Dublin stage.

The feminine potential of Joyce's style has been the subject of considerable controversy. Colin MacCabe posits a shift away from patriarchal narrative structures of classic realism as Joyce moved from *Dubliners* to *A Portrait* (65–67). Maria DiBattista has argued that Joyce's narrative scaffolding may have been fitting to his "garrulous virility and its generative improvidences" but was ultimately insufficient for Woolf's feminine mind and its reticences (100, 112). Comparative work that no longer denigrates the women writers but instead locates different or shared projects is now available (Froula, Lawrence, Lilienfeld, Marcus, Reizbaum, Scott *[James Joyce]*).

Gilbert and Gubar are currently Joyce's least sympathetic analysts, charging him with the introduction of a "new patrilinguistic epoch" and seeing his
movement into feminine forms as a conversion of *materna lingua* into *patrius sermo* (258–261). The reservation over liquid feminine sentencing, expressed by Mary Ellmann, is amplified in their *No Man's Land*. The argument is of special interest in the debate among various feminist practices because the French semiotic theory of Jacques Lacan embraces a liquid, pulsing, presymbolic language, which it loosely associates with the mother; the theory has been used in defining feminine language. Shari Benstock, Suzette Henke (*Politics of Desire*), and Christine Van Boeheimen have applied poststructuralist theory, including its feminist versions by Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous, to Joyce's presentation of the family romance and the writing of a feminine language. It is notable that Cixous wrote her doctoral dissertation on Joyce and was particularly interested in family life, in both his biography and his writing.

Gender is an implicit subject in virtually all of Joyce's works. Joyce provides models of courtship rhetoric in his earliest poetry (*Chamber Music*). *Dubliners* stories, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and the early chapters of *Ulysses* all present the pressures of gender in a late Victorian, patriarchal Irish social system that divides the sexes, abides by Catholic principles and economies of gender, and suppresses sexuality. If feminine language is of particular interest, there are several places where readers might turn. Most obvious is the final, "Penelope" chapter of *Ulysses* (608–644). Earlier in the work, a young woman, Gerty MacDowell, takes on the discourse of women's magazines and novels (284–313; see Devlin and Henke, "Gerty"), and a typist flirts by mail with Leopold Bloom (63–65). In *Finnegans Wake*, the language of and about the mother figure, Anna Livia Plurabelle (ALP), merits attention as feminine writing. Like Molly Bloom, ALP has the final words of the work (619–628); earlier she is discussed extensively by gossiping washerwomen (198–216), and as a hen she issues her own mamafesta, which reappears in altered form through much of the work (104–107).

Joyce's interest in feminine psychology is probably best pursued in the dream thoughts centering upon a young daughter figure, Issy or Isobel (among the variant forms); she is generally seen as a reflection of Joyce's daughter Lucia, whose drifting into schizophrenia provided what was probably the most agonizing experience of Joyce's later life. As in *Ulysses*, the male figures, HCE (the father), Shem, and Shaun (the artistic and political sons, respectively), show the burden of gender stereotypes and restrictions as readily as the females.

The two items by Joyce included in this anthology are less readily available than the sections of major texts just identified. They help construct a view of Joyce's attitude toward gender when he left Ireland to launch himself on the writing of his celebrated experimental works. At this time, Joyce was writing and revising more conventional material. He had published an essay on Ibsen in the prestigious English periodical the *Fortnightly Review* and had issued his challenge to traditional drama and the Irish literary revival in
school debates and in a self-financed pamphlet, *Two Essays*. In this pamphlet his aesthetic challenges were printed alongside the feminist polemics of his college friend Francis Sheehy-Skeffington (Sheehy-Skeffington, after his marriage).

Joyce had completed most of *Chamber Music*, a cycle of love poems that use Yeats as a partial model for the slightly decadent, brooding male lover but also show Elizabethan form and attitudes toward women. The impoverished Joyce, whose father’s drinking and improvidence had reduced a firmly middle-class, land-owning family to poverty, began the poems against a background of apparent rejection by Dublin’s middle-class Catholic young women. Nora Barnacle, a twenty-year-old, Galway-bred runaway from an unhappy family situation, entered his life and his poems before he was finished with them. He used his verses to woo her years after their alliance and departure from Ireland in October 1904. Nora is widely accepted as a major force in Joyce’s creation of female characters, and particularly as a model for Molly Bloom (Maddox).

With the exception of some experimental epiphanies and an unpublishable essay called “A Portrait of the Artist,” Joyce’s prose was still assignable to realistic, naturalist traditions. He had published several early versions of the short stories that would appear as *Dubliners* in 1914 after much difficulty with publishers who questioned his language and objected to explicit and coded sexual content.

The first of the two selections comes from a second project in prose, the increasingly ungainly novel *Stephen Hero*, which Joyce later revised on modernist experimental lines to publish in 1916 as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. While Joyce did not publish theoretical essays or manifestos as did Pound and Eliot, critics have looked to the “epiphany” as defined in *Stephen Hero* as a staple of modernist fiction, including the work of Woolf and Dorothy Richardson (Beja). This extract from *Stephen Hero* is an autobiographical dialogue between Stephen Dedalus and his mother, in which he seeks her reaction to his essay on modern drama. Stephen has not gone immediately to his mother for “intelligent sympathy,” even though he acknowledges that she is not a “dollard” (83), but other consultants have proved unsatisfactory to his ego. Asking her to read it is clearly a source of “agitation.” There is a lot of analysis of her motivations for listening and asking for further explanations, though Joyce makes it difficult to decipher whether we ever penetrate through Stephen’s suspicions of maternal coercion to attain a view of May Daedalus’s mind. An authoritative narrator seems to suggest that she uses “brave prevarication” to combat her son’s suspicion that, as an ardent Catholic, she is checking up on his reading list.

Interest in plays and Ibsen turns out to be something that makes mother and son more similar than father and son, and Mrs. Daedalus directs the subsequent discussion toward female figures in Ibsen, refusing to ban the subjects that “old people” never talked about. Stephen’s failure to encourage her to openly record her feelings and the labeling of her final observation on
human nature as a "well-worn generality" fail to dispel the surprising view of a woman who has been hungry for intellectual stimulation and who momentarily takes action against her chief suppressor, the patriarch Mr. Daedalus. *Stephen Hero* also offers extensive dialogues between Stephen and a young female undergraduate, Emma Clery (66–68, 152–155, 187–189, 196–199), whose role was greatly reduced in *A Portrait* (Scott, *Joyce and Feminism* 133–155).

The second selection is a 1904 letter to Nora. It describes the religious and family politics Joyce hoped to escape in the couple's possible departure from Ireland. But it warns Nora that he has been guilty of behaviors that victimized his own mother. It also suspects Nora of complicity in traditional values, in that she judges him "inferior to a convention in our present society." Richard Ellmann suggests that "convention" relates to others' opinions of Joyce (169). Brenda Maddox relates it to the convention of marriage, which Joyce's social rebellion would not allow him to enter into with Nora (41).

Joyce eventually bowed to the legalities of inheritance in 1931. Joyce casts himself as a social outsider, a "vagabond," and urges Nora to take up this position with him against slavishly conventional people and to dispense with the conventional illusions created by social masks. The ideas are complex, showing some aspiration for an intellectual ally, though implicitly Nora has warded off the libido's "talking" in Joyce with a troubling look of "tired indifference."

Maddox makes a major point of Nora's sexual experiences prior to Joyce and the early initiatives she took with him (21–23, 28–30, 97–98). The erotic letters the couple exchanged when Joyce was abroad in Ireland in 1909 (only his have survived) suggest that the "talking" and demanding of Joyce on this subject were not over and that in time Joyce satisfied his anal fixation through Nora's efforts (*Selected Letters* 163–195). Gilbert and Gubar represent it as Joyce's begging her "to write a calligraphy of shit," and they offer the overstated (though cleverly put) generalization that "at bottom, for Joyce, woman's scattered logos is a scatalogos, a Swiftian language that issues from the many obscene mouths of the female body" (232).

In this letter Joyce's analysis of the social order has a socialist ring to it, and "socialist" is an appropriate label for Joyce at this stage in his life. The precise observation of people in the streets of Paris is comparable to his scrupulous descriptions of those in Dublin. The voyeuristic male observer is suggestive of the boy of "Araby," the men of "Two Gallants," and Leopold Bloom, particularly in the early chapters of *Ulysses*, which also present the "warm humid smell" of Molly Bloom (*Ulysses* 51–53).

Joyce begins and ends as a thoroughly discomfited young man, showing very human symptoms of being in love and disclosing that Nora has created in him an "anguish of doubt." Throughout his life and his remaining writing career, uncertainty, occasioned by interactions with females and the feminine, was to contend with control, which he had been taught to exact upon language by patriarchal tradition.
NOTES

1. West and Woolf were not entirely favorable on Joyce, and critics have enjoyed quoting Woolf’s most cutting remarks (Scott, Joyce and Feminism 119–124).
2. It remained attractive to feminist critics of the 1970s. See Mary Ellmann 196 and Marilyn French, The Women’s Room 8.
3. A notable exception in this pattern among Joyce’s contemporaries is the critic and Joyce acquaintance Mary (Molly) Colum, who found that Molly had “the mind of a female gorilla” (233–234).
4. The Jesuits were very much in control of Joyce’s education at the privileged residential school Clongowes Wood College and at Dublin’s Belvedere College. When Joyce moved to University College, Dublin, he chose modern languages, the concentration favored by female students in the Royal College system, of which UCD was a part.
5. For a more extensive discussion of feminist criticism of Joyce, see my Joyce and Feminism 116–132 and James Joyce 131 n. 8.
6. For HCE, see 30–47, where a heroic ballad is sung and then turned against the father figure. For Shem, see the childhood courtship games sometimes titled “The Mime of Mick, Nick and the Maggie” 219–259. Shaun (Jaun) is fond of delivering sermons (e.g., 429–457).
7. “By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they were the most delicate and evanescent of moments” (Stephen Hero 211).
8. See Richard Ellmann’s account (156–171). See also Brenda Maddox’s biography of Nora Barnacle Joyce, particularly chap. 3, where Maddox discusses Nora Joyce’s sexual advances and her conventional aspirations for marriage and a settled family life. Maddox records Ellmann’s skepticism about a biography of Nora and his early opinion (which she says he revised) that “there was not even material . . . for a feminist treatise” (xviii).

WORKS CITED


Stephen’s Interview with His Mother
(From Stephen Hero)

His mother had not asked to see the manuscript: she had continued to iron the clothes on the kitchen-table without the “least suspicion of the agitation in the mind of her son.”* He had sat on three or four kitchen chairs, one after the other, and had dangling his legs unsuccessfully from all free corners of the table. At last, unable to control his agitation, he asked her point-blank would she like him to read out his essay.

—O, yes, Stephen—if you don’t mind my ironing a few things ...
—No, I don’t mind.

Stephen read out the essay to her slowly and emphatically and when he had finished reading she said it was very beautifully written but that as there were some things in it which she couldn’t follow, would he mind reading it to her again and explaining some of it. He read it over again and allowed himself a long exposition of his theories “garnished with many crude striking allusions with which he hoped to drive it home the better.” His mother who had never suspected probably that “beauty” could be anything more than a convention of the drawingroom or a natural antecedent to marriage and married life was surprised to see the extraordinary honour which her son conferred upon it. Beauty, to the mind of such a woman, was often a synonym for licentious ways and probably for this reason she was relieved to find that the excesses of this new worship were supervised by a recognised saintly authority. However as the essayist’s recent habits were not very re-assuring she decided to combine a discreet motherly solicitude with an interest, which without being open to the accusation of factitiousness was at first intended as a compliment. While she was nicely folding a handkerchief she said:

—What does Ibsen write, Stephen?
—Plays.
—I never heard of his name before. Is he alive at present?

*Joyce marked certain passages of the manuscript with blue or red crayon. These passages are set off here by « ». 
—Yes, he is. But you know, in Ireland people don’t know much about what is going on out in Europe.
—He must be a great writer from what you say of him.
—Would you like to read some of his plays, mother? I have some.
—Yes. I would like to read the best one. What is the best one?
—I don’t know . . . But do you really want to read Ibsen?
—I do, really.
—To see whether I am reading dangerous authors or not, is that why?
—No, Stephen, answered his mother with a brave prevarication. I think you’re old enough now to know what is right and what is wrong without my dictating to you what you are to read.
—I think so too . . . But I’m surprised to hear you ask about Ibsen. I didn’t imagine you took the least interest in these matters.
Mrs. Daedalus pushed her iron smoothly over a white petticoat «in time to the current of her memory.»
—Well, of course, I don’t speak about it but I’m not so indifferent . . . Before I married your father I used to read a great deal. I used to take an interest in all kinds of new plays.
—But since you married neither of you so much as bought a single book!
—Well, you see, Stephen, your father is not like you: he takes no interest in that sort of thing . . . When he was young he told me he used to spend all his time out after the hounds or rowing on the Lee. He went in for athletics.
—I suspect what he went in for, said Stephen irreverently. I know he doesn’t care a jack straw about what I think or what I write.
—He wants to see you make your way, get on in life, said his mother defensively. That’s his ambition. You shouldn’t blame him for that.
—No, no, no. But it may not be my ambition. That kind of life I often loathe: I find it ugly and cowardly.
—Of course life isn’t what I used to think it was when I was a young girl. That’s why I would like to read some great writer, to see what ideal of life he has—amn’t I right in saying “ideal”?
—Yes, but . . .
—Because sometimes—not that I grumble at the lot Almighty God has given me and I have more or less a happy life with your father—but sometimes I feel that I want to leave this actual life and enter another—for a time.
—But that is wrong: that is the great mistake everyone makes. Art is not an escape from life!
—No?
—You evidently weren’t listening to what I said or else you didn’t understand what I said. Art is not an escape from life. It’s just the very opposite. Art, on the contrary, is the very central expression of life. An artist is not a fellow who dangles a mechanical heaven before the public. The priest does that. The artist affirms out of the fulness of his own life, he creates . . . Do you understand?
And so on. A day or two afterwards Stephen gave his mother a few of the plays to read. She read them with great interest and found Nora Helmer a charming character. Dr. Stockmann she admired but her admiration was naturally checked by her son’s light-heartedly blasphemous description of that stout burgher as ‘Jesus in a frock-coat.’ But the play which she preferred to all others was the *Wild Duck*. Of it she spoke readily and on her own initiative: it had moved her deeply. Stephen, to escape a charge of hot-headedness and partizanship, did not encourage her to an open record of her feelings.

—I hope you’re not going to mention Little Nell in the *Old Curiosity Shop*.
—Of course I like Dickens too but I can see a great difference between Little Nell and that poor little creature—what is her name?
—Hedvig Ekdal?
—Hedvig, yes . . . It’s so sad: it’s terrible to read it even . . . I quite agree with you that Ibsen is a wonderful writer.
—Really?
—Yes, really. His plays have impressed me very much.
—Do you think he is immoral?
—Of course, you know, Stephen, he treats of subjects . . . of which I know very little myself . . . subjects . . .
—Subjects which, you think, should never be talked about?
—Well, that was the old people’s idea but I don’t know if it was right. I don’t know if it is good for people to be entirely ignorant.
—Then why not treat them openly?
—I think it might do harm to some people—uneducated, unbalanced people. People’s natures are so different. You perhaps . . .
—O, never mind me . . . Do you think these plays are unfit for people to read?
—No, I think they’re magnificent plays indeed.
—And not immoral?
—I think that Ibsen . . . has an extraordinary knowledge of human nature . . . And I think that human nature is a very extraordinary thing sometimes.

Stephen had to be contented with this well-worn generality as he recognised in it a genuine sentiment. His mother, in fact, had so far evangelised herself that she undertook the duties of missioner to the heathen; that is to say, she offered some of the plays to her husband to read. He listened to her praises with a somewhat startled air, observing no feature of her face, his eyeglass screwed into an astonished eye and his mouth poised in naïf surprise. He was always interested in novelties, childishly interested and receptive, and this new name and the phenomena it had produced in his house were novelties for him. He made no attempt to discredit his wife’s novel development but he resented both that she should have achieved it unaided by him and that she should be able thereby to act as intermediary between him and his son. He condemned as inopportune but not discredited his son’s wayward researches into strange literature and, though a similar taste was not discoverable in him, he was prepared to
commit that most pious of heroisms namely the extension of one's sympathies
late in life in deference to the advocacy of a junior.


Letter to Nora Barnacle

29 August 1904

60 Shelbourne Road

My dear Nora I have just finished my midnight dinner for which I had no appetite. When I was half way through I discovered I was eating it out of my fingers. I felt sick just as I did last night. I am much distressed. Excuse this dreadful pen and this awful paper.

I may have pained you tonight by what I said but surely it is well that you should know my mind on most things? My mind rejects the whole present social order and Christianity—home, the recognised virtues, classes of life, and religious doctrines. How could I like the idea of home? My home was simply a middle-class affair ruined by spendthrift habits which I have inherited. My mother was slowly killed, I think, by my father's ill-treatment, by years of trouble, and by my cynical frankness of conduct. When I looked on her face as she lay in her coffin—a face grey and wasted with cancer—I understood that I was looking on the face of a victim and I cursed the system which had made her a victim. We were seventeen in family. My brothers and sisters are nothing to me. One brother alone is capable of understanding me.

Six years ago I left the Catholic Church, hating it most fervently. I found it impossible for me to remain in it on account of the impulses of my nature. I made secret war upon it when I was a student and declined to accept the positions it offered me. By doing this I made myself a beggar but I retained my pride. Now I make open war upon it by what I write and say and do. I cannot enter the social order except as a vagabond. I started to study medicine three times, law once, music once. A week ago I was arranging to go away as a travelling actor. I could put no energy into the plan because you kept pulling me by the elbow. The actual difficulties of my life are incredible but I despise them.

When you went in tonight I wandered along towards Grafton St where I stood for a long time leaning against a lamp-post, smoking. The street was full of a life which I have poured a stream of my youth upon. While I stood there I thought of a few sentences I wrote some years ago when I lived in Paris—these sentences which follow—They pass in twos and threes amid the life of the boulevard, walking like people who have leisure in a place lit up for them. They are in the pastry cook's, chattering, crushing little fabrics of pastry, or seated
silently at tables by the café door, or descending from carriages with a busy stir of garments soft as the voice of the adulterer. They pass in an air of perfumes. Under the perfumes their bodies have a warm humid smell’—*

While I was repeating this to myself I knew that that life was still waiting for me if I chose to enter it. It could not give me perhaps the intoxication it had once given but it was still there and now that I am wiser and more controllable it was safe. It would ask no questions, expect nothing from me but a few moments of my life, leaving the rest free, and would promise me pleasure in return. I thought of all this and without regret I rejected it. It was useless for me; it could not give me what I wanted.

You have misunderstood, I think, some passages in a letter I wrote you and I have noticed a certain shyness in your manner as if the recollection of that night troubled you. I however consider it a kind of sacrament and the recollection of it fills me with amazed joy. You will perhaps not understand at once why it is that I honour you so much on account of it as you do not know much of my mind. But at the same time it was a sacrament which left me in a final sense of sorrow and degradation—sorrow because I saw in you an extraordinary, melancholy tenderness which had chosen that sacrament as a compromise, and degradation because I understood that in your eyes I was inferior to a convention of our present society.

I spoke to you satirically tonight but I was speaking of the world not of you. I am an enemy of the ignobleness and slavishness of people but not of you. Can you not see the simplicity which is at the back of all my disguises? We all wear masks. Certain people who know that we are much together often insult me about you. I listen to them calmly, disdaining to answer them but their least word tumbles my heart about like a bird in a storm.

It is not pleasant for me that I have to go to bed now remembering the last look of your eyes—a look of tired indifference—remembering the torture in your voice the other night. No human being has ever stood so close to my soul as you stand, it seems, and yet you can treat my words with painful rudeness (‘I know what is talking now’ you said). When I was younger I had a friend to whom I gave myself freely—in a way more than I give to you and in a way less. He was Irish, that is to say, he was false to me.

I have not said a quarter of what I want to say but it is a great labour writing with this cursed pen. I don’t know what you will think of this letter. Please write to me, won’t you? Believe me, my dear Nora, I honour you very much but I want more than your caresses. You have left me again in an anguish of doubt. 

JAJ

*The passage comprises all except the last sentence of an epiphany (MS, Cornell) of Parisian poules. It is adapted in Ulysses.