

Introduction

The Mime of Mick, Nick, and the Maggies

At the Dublin International James Joyce Symposium of 2004, Joyceans from all over the world gathered to commemorate June 16, 1904, and celebrate Bloomsday 100, the centenary of a day that never took place, or at least a day that never unfolded as recounted in *Ulysses*. Both the sincere enthusiasm of the varied participants and the contradictions inherent in their undertaking provide a ready stimulus for the cynical humor of those who delight in the eccentricities of academics, but that kind of response misses the point. The fascination that Joyceans feel for *Ulysses* comes from the seemingly inexhaustible aesthetic pleasure that the narrative provides. Like the description that Enobarbus applied to Shakespeare's Cleopatra: "Age cannot wither nor custom stale [its] infinite variety."

But academics are never content simply to experience a condition. We must dissect, analyze, and explain to the best of our ability without doing so ad nauseam. This feat can prove quite challenging when confronted with a work that simultaneously acknowledges and disavows the power of temporality and that situates itself within the "ineluctable modality of the visible" while at the same time producing the kinetic sensation of "walking into eternity along Sandymount strand" (*U*, 3.1, 17–18). The Dublin symposium, as others in the past, stands as just one alternative in a range of efforts to delineate the ever-expanding possibilities for meaning emerging from Joyce's text. In organizing this collection of essays of critical perspectives on *Ulysses*, our dominant concern was to explore diverse ways of understanding the range of elements that produce interpretative responses in readers.

That goal, however, does not assure immediate acceptance by readers interested in Joyce's novel. Despite the popularity of *Ulysses*, critical responses to the work have experienced a mixed reception. One of the papers at the Dublin symposium, "Past Its Sell-By Date: When to Stop Reading Joyce Criticism," seems to exemplify the exasperation that sometimes accrues. Despite the flippancy of its title and the implied cynicism in its contents, this sort of approach, nonetheless, provokes a useful question for anyone who reads *Ulysses*, or any of Joyce's other works for that matter: What useful

and fresh interpretive insights does recent Joyce criticism provide? We hope, with the essays collected here, to point toward answers to that question.

Justifying criticism will always be a difficult enterprise. Reading is a highly personal endeavor, and the responses or interpretations (to our minds, synonymous conditions) that come out of engagement with Joyce's text are informed by a variety of subjective elements that vary greatly from person to person. Intratextual conditions—our past experiences with the novel, our familiarity with the allusions that pepper the narrative, our expectations for reading Joyce, and our theoretical inclinations—shape our responses in ways that vary from person to person and even within the individual from day to day. Further, countless mundane extra- and (non)textual concerns—the pollen count, receipt of a tax refund, music playing in the background, and any number of other factors—compound the uniqueness of our way of seeing the novel. Nonetheless, as the Dublin symposium attests, despite the subjectivity of any reading, we have a strong inclination to turn to others for insights or assistance in discerning meaning in *Ulysses*.

Readers have always juggled attention between their own views and those of others, and we suspect that the paper cited above was trying to offer guidance in the process. We take the position here that good criticism serves as a goad. From assignments read in graduate school to essays we have seen in the latest issue of *James Joyce Quarterly*, we benefit from the interpretations of others, but the specificity of that benefit can be difficult to pin down. More often than not it comes down to the ideas of others sparking reactions, sometimes positive and sometimes negative, from us. With this in mind, the essays collected here do not attempt to offer prescriptive interpretations or a converging focus of interpretations or even a converging focus. Rather, they seek to provide readers with diverse starting points for coming to an individual understanding of the role that the work of others has on our understanding of *Ulysses*.

In one sense, this hardly stands as an original project. *Ulysses* has been a topic of public commentary since Valerie Larbaud's December 1921 lecture at Sylvia Beach's Paris bookstore, Shakespeare and Company. Private critiques began even earlier as the letters of Ezra Pound to Joyce during the novel's composition indicate. From the first reviews of the novel by Edmund Wilson, Mary Colum, and T. S. Eliot, among others, and the seminal works by Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's "Ulysses": A Study* (1930), and Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of "Ulysses"* (1934), books and articles on *Ulysses*

continue to appear at regular intervals, and a great many have significantly contributed to our understanding of a novel that an anonymous reviewer of the 1936 Bodley Head edition judged in a January 1937 issue of the *Times Literary Supplement* “obscure enough to have invited several interpretations.” There is much to be said, then, for the opportunity to see a variety of perspectives based on a range of approaches to *Ulysses*. Unfortunately, there has not been such a collection of essays devoted exclusively to the novel since Bernard Benstock’s *Critical Essays on James Joyce’s “Ulysses”* appeared in 1989, and it has been at least thirty years since a number of groundbreaking collections—Clive Hart and David Hayman’s *James Joyce’s “Ulysses”: Critical Essays* (1974), Thomas Staley’s *“Ulysses”: Fifty Years Later* (1974), and Staley and Benstock’s *Approaches to “Ulysses”: Ten Essays* (1970)—appeared and offered interpretive positions that challenged and engaged readers from the start.

No matter how timely those essays were three decades ago and no matter what their continuing impact, the interpretive landscape of Joyce studies has changed radically over the past three decades. Not only have several generations of Joyce readers come to maturity under the influence of these essays, but the range of theoretical approaches to reading *Ulysses* has markedly expanded. It now seems appropriate to give representatives of those generations the opportunity to trace the latest extension of the critical trajectory begun by Larbaud in 1921. The essays in this volume attempt to do just that.

Once this aim of assessing the current state of *Ulysses* criticism and of predicting the directions it was headed crystallized for the editors, the plan of the volume proceeded in a straightforward fashion with each essay in the collection offering both a retrospective and proleptic view of a particular approach. As the late Hugh Kenner was fond of saying, one of the things that *Ulysses* teaches us is how to read *Ulysses*. In fact, readings of Joyce’s novel come down to rereadings that seek to reconcile experience with opportunity. An awareness of what has been said *about* the novel informs our sense of *where* many of our responses to it originate. But *Ulysses* does not cultivate passive reception and predisposed interpretations but rather engages us actively in the creation of meaning. The process takes the form of prolepsis (literally “flash forward”), narrating an event before it has actually occurred. It is a phrase introduced into narrative theory by Gérard Genette and popularly applied to Joyce by David Hayman. In *Ulysses*, prolepsis provokes readers to bridge gaps in the narrative created by this forward glance to anticipate and

complete meaning. This concept fittingly encapsulates the imaginative strategy in Joyce's writing that draws us into the process of creating meaning from the text, and it seems equally applicable to speculations on the direction of criticism of the novel.

Focusing on a specific method for approaching *Ulysses*, each critic contributing to this volume dexterously combines these seemingly contradictory gestures of a backward glance and a forward projection. Each contributor comments on general achievements from a personal point of view, and each conjectures on the direction that a particular approach may take. Like any task undertaken by separate individuals, emphasis on specific elements varies from essay to essay. The contributors have stamped each approach not only with an interpretation of *Ulysses* but also with a unique perspective on reading the novel. And that is as it should be, for no definitive reading of the novel exists and no reading can stand alone. The most effective criticism remains a highly personal reflection that does not provide absolute answers but serves as inspiration for further reading and as a basis for dialogue with others. Divided into four broad, but interrelated, interpretative perspectives, this volume attempts to serve that end—that is, to stimulate and engage readers in an ongoing dialogue of reading and interpreting *Ulysses*.

Part 1, "The Words on the Page," begins with John Paul Riquelme's "Preparatory to anything else': Joyce's Styles as Forms of Memory—The Case of 'Eumaeus.'" Concentrating on the "Eumaeus" episode, Riquelme attends to the elements of language and scrutinizes the active (and necessary) role of memory in reading *Ulysses*. In "Narratology and *Ulysses*," Margot Norris, after providing a brief overview of the genesis of modern narratology, details approaches concentrating on narrative issues in *Ulysses* and speculates on how a continued discussion of narratological theory can enhance our understanding of *Ulysses* and how *Ulysses* can in turn enhance narratology.

Part 2, "Perspectives of the Readers," contains three essays. The first, "Joyce and the Invention of Language" by Sheldon Brivic, looks at the linguistic dynamic of excess and multiple meanings in *Ulysses*, a work that defies a single authoritative interpretation. Brivic anticipates that further discussion of the novel may focus on how readers invent meaning (language) when reading *Ulysses*. In "En-Gendered Choice and Agency in *Ulysses*," Kimberly Devlin summarizes selected feminist approaches to *Ulysses* before examining the themes of gender, choice, and agency. Future feminist studies of the novel, Devlin suggests, may point to even greater political relevance of *Ulysses* by

stressing the connection that these themes have to our conception of male and female and of the masculine and the feminine. Joseph Valente's essay, "Ulysses and Queer Theory: A Continuing History," concludes part 2. Valente explains what queer theory entails and surveys the history of the theory in Joyce studies with attention given to *Ulysses* criticism. He conveniently situates queer theory and *Ulysses* into three critical conceptual stages or waves that can be traced back to Frank Budgen and that can anticipate a fourth characterized by an association between homosexuality, shame, and social reprobation.

Part 3, "Pre- and Post-Publication," consists of four essays. The first, Gregory M. Downing's "Joycean Pop Culture: Fragments toward an Institutional History and Futurology," argues that popular culture provides an important interpretative context for *Ulysses*, a *Sitz im Leben* without which the novel cannot be fully appreciated. Downing predicts that popular culture will broaden its attraction to future readers of Joyce's novel. "Historicizing *Ulysses*," by Ira Nadel, delineates and appraises the invaluable contribution historicism provides (and will continue to provide) the reader of *Ulysses*. In reference to the work itself, Nadel pays particular attention to historicism and textual criticism. In "Before and After: The Manuscripts in Textual and Genetic Criticism of *Ulysses*," Michael Groden provides a and detailed look, assessing the use of manuscripts in *Ulysses* studies from the perspectives of scholarly editing and textual criticism, on the one hand, and from genetic criticism and manuscript study, on the other. These critical perspectives, Groden proposes, will play an even greater role in *Ulysses* scholarship in years to come. William Brockman's "*Ulysses*: Bibliography Revisited" clarifies the different bibliographical approaches to the study of *Ulysses*. Though concentrating on the importance of establishing the primary bibliography of the novel, Brockman does not exclude secondary bibliography of the work. Included is also a chronological checklist of editions, imprints, and important reissues of *Ulysses*.

Allow us to close with a note on the title of this introduction. In *Finnegans Wake*, Shem and Shaun engage in a dramatized version of the Dublin children's game "angels and devils," or "colors," in an effort to gain the attention and affection of Issy and the Maggies. While we two editors of this volume share the given names of the title characters in that performance, our function here is markedly different. Instead of taking on the roles of actors, the editors, for better or worse, have assumed the parts of directors. Further, our

task has proven to be far simpler than that facing Shem or Shaun. Rather than trying to please the willful and petulant Maggies, we worked with a group of critics who were universally enthusiastic, energetic, and generous. Assembling this collection has been a particular pleasure, and we are grateful to all the contributors for making it so.