

# James Joyce Quarterly

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## CONTENTS

- The O'Casey Centenary  
*Robert G. Lowery* 7
- The Comic Mythology of O'Casey  
*David Krause* 11
- "He Lumped the Emancipates Together":  
More Analogues for Joyce's Mr. Duffy  
*Joseph C. Voelker* 23
- Dante in Joyce's *Exiles*  
*Mary T. Reynolds* 35
- Theosophy, Guilt, and "That Word Known  
to All Men" in Joyce's *Ulysses*  
*Cheryl T. Herr* 45
- The Bloom of Motherhood: Couvade as a  
Structural Device in *Ulysses*  
*R. Barrie Walkley* 55
- Current JJ Checklist (14)  
*Alan M. Cohn* 69
- NOTES    Nabil I. Matar, Wilhelm Fuger,  
           David Weir
- REVIEWS    Hans Walter Gabler, Louis O. Mink,  
              Bernard Benstock

Solutions to "A Third James Joyce Crossword" (Summer 1980) appear on page 6 of this issue.

## REVIEWS

"*ULYSSES*" IN PROGRESS, by Michael Groden. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977. xiv + 235 pp. \$13.50.

On 2 February 1922 James Joyce's *Ulysses* appeared. The novel that had been writing for eight years – or was it sixteen? – was given to the world in an instant of time. The act of publication conferred upon it the integrity of a synchronous coexistence and interrelationship of its parts, which in their complexity are thus structured so and not otherwise by force of the text as published. Such synchrony is the mode of public existence of any work of art; and it is both naturally and rightly in its published shape alone that *Ulysses* is recognized as a major work of twentieth-century world literature.

Just as naturally and rightly, however, a diachronous dimension is commonly admitted in the acts of recognition of a literary text. Such acts are indeed ultimately impossible without historical awareness. Only for pure "close reading" exercises is a work made the focus of attention exclusively in the synchrony of its published textual state. Beyond this, no text – and certainly not one of the scope and manifest complexity of *Ulysses* – is self-revelatory on the strength of its aesthetic presence alone. Thus, on practical as much as on theoretical grounds, the general as well as the particular "non-material" aspects of an historical conditioning – such as an author's biography, the literary influences, or the social, intellectual, or artistic climates and conventions to which he, and his text, respond – are felt to be essential objects of exploration in the service both of the analysis and the evaluation of literature.

Inevitably, at some stage along the road of exploration, the critic and scholar is brought face-to-face with the material manifestations of a text's historical conditioning, wherever these are extant – that is, with the substrata of its compositional development, committed to paper in the form of notes, sketches, drafts, revisions. The question that arises, or should arise, is how these "workshop materials," as they are usually called, should be assessed, and dealt with. The suggestion commonly is – for the question is not often too searchingly pursued –

that they be explored like other forms of source materials, since they, in some half-defined manner of greater immediacy, illustrate, and serve to prove "points" in, inquiries into an author's biography, knowledge, thought, psyche, or the development of his art. That is, workshop materials are, as a rule, made subservient to extra-textual, historically oriented research into the literary work, which yet in itself is still predominantly viewed in the synchronous appearance of its finished, and published version. Their own textual status tends to be regarded as that of separate and discrete sub-texts, or side texts. They are not generally considered as textually integral to the work as a whole.

Such dissociation, it is true, appears justifiable by the seemingly accidental, since rare, survival of workshop materials in any quantity. But what is the reason for their rarity? On reflection, it will be seen to follow from the categorical importance attached to the act and moment of publication. This act, by common ideology, supports an illusion of instant creation, which is most effectively upheld by cutting the work loose from its material origins in the workshop, often by suppressing and destroying notes, sketches, and drafts. Admittedly, it would be highly questionable to dispute an author's personal right to do with his manuscripts what he wishes, or to deplore the intention, implied in such suppression and destruction, of bringing the finished text into the foreground of public attention. Yet it does not follow that critics and scholars, whose overall approach to literature is historical, need forsake their historical orientation in the face of the material manifestations of the texts themselves, or adopt as their model of the nature of the literary work the prevailing ideology of instant artistic creation. No work of art in the medium of the spoken or the written language (or in any other artistic medium) springs instantly from the imagination and brain of its creator like Pallas Athene out of the forehead of Zeus. In taking on material shape, it manifests itself in the temporality, or diachrony, of its progression towards completion. In principle, every literary creation exists in the stages (of a sometimes complex chronological and causal relationship) of its notes, sketches, drafts, revisions. By this principle, the accident which has befallen innumerable works in the history of literature is that the manifestations on paper of their textual growth have been lost.

The rich survival of pre-publication textual states of *Ulysses*, which thus is only statistically an "accident," presents an amply documented case from which to work out the implications of the basic assumption that the object of scholarly and critical analysis and study—as opposed to an author's object of publication, and a general public's

reading matter — is not the final product of the writer's art alone, but beyond this, the totality of the Work in Progress. This assumption follows from the theoretical premise that the work of literature possesses in its material medium itself, in its text, or texts, a diachronic as well as a synchronic dimension. The act of publication may confer upon it a synchronous structure. But it does not at the same time have the power to obliterate the coexisting diachronous structure of the work, to which the discrete temporal states of its text coalesce by complex hierarchical interrelationships. The synchronous and diachronous structures combine to form the literary work in the totality of its real presence in the documents of its conception, transmission, and publication. Joyce's textually manifest creation, in the case of *Ulysses*, is not the published text of 1922 alone, but this text in its relationships to the cumulating succession of notebooks, notesheets, drafts, fair copies, typescripts, *Little Review* serializations, and author's augmentations and revisions in the *placards* (or galleys-in-page) and page proofs. The relationships observed require stringent definition and classification. Suitable methods of approach, with their appropriate critical tools, need to be developed to master the analysis of a text of which the elements are not merely juxtaposed as it were spatially, but also succeed one another in time. This is essentially virgin land for criticism. Ultimately, the paradigm offered by *Ulysses* may lead to significant modifications of prevailing theoretical concepts of the literary work of art.

It is an indication of the quality and value of Michael Groden's "*Ulysses*" in *Progress* that it induces such reflections on the ontological status of its object of investigation, and the critical relevance of its matter. As a study, it does not — as the many Joyceans who have read it since its publication in 1977 will realize — construct a theoretical framework for its subject, or develop a systematically reflected methodology for the critical treatment of the textual states that went into the making of *Ulysses*. Advancing from the approach of A. Walton Litz's pioneering investigations in *The Art of James Joyce* (1961), it proceeds with care from perceptive description to interpretation and critical evaluation. Under the temporal categories of an early, middle, and late stage of the writing of *Ulysses* as a whole, the emphasis is on the continuous evolution leading to the fundamental changes in Joyce's aesthetics, narrative technique, and overall artistic concerns which caused the book nearing conclusion to take on a radically different shape from that towards which the early chapters in manuscript and *Little Review* pre-publication were tending. The constant interrelation of composition and revision under the influence of

the work's developing potential and the author's changing concerns are exemplified in discussions of the chapters "Aeolus" and "Cyclops," and a broad survey of the entire process of writing during the composition of the final chapters from "Circe" to "Penelope" concurrent with the revision in typescripts and proofs of the novel in the process of being published. By a wealth of judiciously selected and lucidly organized matter laid out before us with convincing ease, the book increases enormously our factual knowledge of the public and pre-public states of the *Ulysses* text. We perceive the dynamic forces at work, which were more than once threatening to overwhelm Joyce himself. Yet in the end, Groden makes us appreciate just how the "early" *Ulysses* never became wholly submerged by, or perhaps even fully assimilated into, the "late" one; or how, in Groden's words, "[Joyce] presented *Ulysses* as a palimpsest of his development from 1914 to 1922" (p. 23).

But we note that in this pivotal sentence, which may stand as the epitome of the book's insight, the choice of verb and personal pronoun reveals the extent to which Groden takes for granted, and upholds, traditional perspectives on writers' working materials. "*Ulysses*" in *Progress* tells a fascinating history of events essentially to evaluate their outcome, taking occasion only incidentally, as in the discussion of the pre-faircopy drafts of "Cyclops," to analyze the diachrony of textual states in specifically textual terms. At times, a reader may perceive a greater potential in its matter than the book itself spells out. Thus, the suggestive initial statement that "*Ulysses* lies between *A Portrait* and *Finnegans Wake* in ways beyond mere chronology" (p. 13) — serving, as it does, mainly to introduce a competent survey of basic trends in *Ulysses* criticism — is never pursued to the point of raising the central question of why it is that such a rich collection of documents should have accumulated at all from the *Ulysses* workshop. (They have since, as we know, been brought together in the volumes of the *James Joyce Archive* under Groden's own general editorship.) Focusing on the nature of the work as a succession of interrelated textual states extant, one would be able to see that *Ulysses* is in fact situated between *A Portrait*, in which the fiction (at least) at its self-reflective climax adumbrates the aesthetic ideal of instant creation, and the late work, which evolved for seventeen years under the very title of "Work in Progress," and was published as *Finnegans Wake*. Advancing from the one to the other, Joyce appears himself to have become fully conscious of the work-in-progress nature of artistic creation in the course of writing *Ulysses*, and consequently not only (perhaps) to have committed more intermediary work stages to paper, but also to have

preserved more, so that, with the published text, they might reveal the integrative power of his art. It is thus Joyce's own mature conception of his artistry as expressed in a full collocation of all documents that have come down to us which provides the warrant for exploring in his works the complementary diachronous and synchronous structures in textual terms. It permits a definition of *Ulysses* as—to modify Groden's perspective—a palimpsest of the material (textual) states of its development.

In all essentials, *"Ulysses" in Progress* is a thoroughly reliable guide through the mazes of documents that carry the text of *Ulysses*. By its sound and careful pragmatism, it stands as an example to all exploratory work which may be expected to follow. As a contribution to critical scholarship by which we may sharpen the tools of our philological craft, it is a book on which Joyce studies of the future may build.

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