

## Some Notes for the First Reading of *Ulysses*

**The ‘epic’ of *Ulysses* (1922):** ‘It is my epic of two races (Israelite-Irish) and at the same time the cycle of the human body as well as a little story of a day (life). The character of Ulysses always fascinated me even when a boy. Imagine fifteen years ago I started writing it as a short story for *Dubliners*! For seven years I have been working at this book - blast it! It is also a kind of encyclopaedia. My intention is not only to render myth *sub specie temporis nostri* but also to allow each adventure (that is, each hour, every organ, every art being interconnected and interrelated in the structural scheme of the whole) should not only condition but even to create its own technique.’ (Letter to Carlo Linati, 21 Sept. 1920; *Letters*, Viking/Faber, 1959, Vol. I, pp.146-47.)

**Style in *Ulysses* (1):** ‘My head is full of pebbles and rubbish and broken matches and bits of glass picked up ’most everywhere. The task I set myself technically in writing a book from eighteen different points of view and in as many styles, all apparently unknown or undiscovered by my fellow tradesmen, that and the nature of the legend chosen[,] would be enough to upset anyone’s mental balance.’ (Letter to HSW, 24 June 1921; *Selected Letters*, 1975, pp.281-84; p.284.)

**Style in *Ulysses* (2):** ‘I understand that you may begin to regard the various styles of the episodes with dismay and prefer the initial style much as the wanderer did who longed for the rock of Ithaca. But in the compass of one day to compress all these wanderings and clothe them in the form of this day is for me possible only by such variation which, I beg you to believe, is not capricious.’ (6 Aug. 1919; *Selected Letters*, 1975, p.242.)

**Interior monologue:** ‘From my point of view, it hardly matters whether the technique is “veracious” or not; it has served me as a bridge over which to march my eighteen episodes, and, once I have got my troops across, the opposing forces can, for all I care, blow the bridge sky-high.’ (Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce’s Ulysses*, 1952, p.28).

**Stephen/Joyce?:** ‘I just got a letter asking me why I don’t give Bloom a rest. The writer of it wants more Stephen. But Stephen no longer interests me to the same extent. He has a shape that can’t be changed.’ (Quoted in Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses* [1934] Indiana UP 1960 [rep edn.], p.105). Further, Joyce tells Budgen that the reader ‘will know early in the book that SD’s mind is full like everyone else’s of borrowed words’ (*Letters*, Vol. I, p.263.)

**Fit to read?** ‘If *Ulysses* is not fit to read, life is not fit to live.’ (Joyce to Kathleen Murray, on hearing of her mother’s estimate of the novel; interview with Kathleen Murray; quoted in Patricia Hutchins, *James Joyce’s World*, p.139; cited in Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 1959; 1965 Edn., p.551.)

**Irish writers:** ‘You are Irishmen and you must write in your own tradition. Borrowed styles are no good. You must write what is in your blood and not what is in your brain. [...] For myself, I always write about Dublin because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal.’ (Arthur Power, ‘James Joyce - the Irishman’, in *The Irish Times*, 30 Dec. 1944; rep. in *From an Old Waterford House*, London, n.d., p.63-64.)

**Ireland first?:** ‘To me an Irish safety pin is more important than an English epic.’ (Remark to Claud Sykes; quoted in Ellmann, James Joyce, 1965 Edn. p.436.)

**Joyce’s exile:** ‘It is to be safe from the rabid and soul-destroying political atmosphere in Ireland that I live here, for in such an atmosphere it is very difficult to create good work, while in the atmosphere which “Father Murphy” creates it is impossible. At a very early stage I came to the conclusion that to stay in Ireland would be to rot, and I never had any intention of rotting, or at least if I had to, I intended to rot in my own way, and I think most people will agree that I have done that.’ (Joyce to Arthur Power; quoted in Stan Gébler Davies, James Joyce: *A Portrait of the Artist*, Davis-Poynter 1975, p.245.)

**Ireland/England:** ‘Ireland is what she is and therefore I am what I am because of the relations that have existed between England and Ireland. Tell me why you think I ought to wish to change the conditions that gave Ireland and me a shape and a destiny?’ (Joyce to Frank Budgen; quoted in Davies, op. cit., 1975, p.p.245-46.)

**Seamus Heaney:** ‘What had seemed disabling and provincial is suddenly found to be corroborating and fundamental and potentially universal. To belong to Ireland, to speak its dialect, is not necessarily to be cut off from the world’s banquet because that banquet is eaten at the table of one’s own life, savoured by the tongue one speaks. Stephen now trusts what he calls ‘our own language’ and in that trust he will go to encounter what he calls ‘the reality of experience’. But it will be his own specific Dublin experience, with all its religious and historical freight, so different from the English experience to which he had heretofore stood in a subservient relationship. (‘Among Schoolchildren’, Belfast: John Malone Memorial Commemoration., 1983, pp.10-11.) ¶

**Terry Eagleton:** ‘Joyce’s writing is the non-Irish speaking Irish writer’s way of being unintelligible to the British. By subverting the very forms of their language, he struck a blow for all his gagged and humiliated fellow country people.’ (In ‘Form and Ideology in the Anglo-Irish Novel’, in *Búllan, An Irish Studies Journal*, 1 (1994), p.24.)