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The Realism of James Joyce

Autobiography, Intertextuality, and Genius

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HONORS THESIS

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Stately, plump Oliver Gogarty sits down in 1921 to read the mammoth novel that his erstwhile friend and roommate has at last completed, and against all odds published. He is understandably disturbed and surprised by what he finds. For one, his friend, whom he has refused contact for fifteen years, begins his groundbreaking work by painting a picture of Buck Mulligan, a thinly disguised cover for Gogarty. In it he is transformed from a responsible, conceited medical student to the height of insensitivity and betrayal. His inconsideration ranges from the minor, when he commandeers Stephen’s handkerchief to wipe his shaving razor clean, to the major, when he refers to Stephen’s recently deceased mother as “beastly dead.”¹ He unarguably retains his roguish and irreverent charm, both with his mock mass in the midst of shaving, and his “Ballad of the Joking Jesus.”² But the chapter is colored by the polaric interplay between Stephen—quiet, intellectual, and taken advantage of—and Buck—parasite, betrayer, and heretic. The book is *Ulysses*, and the erstwhile friend is none other than James Joyce.

Joyce and Gogarty shared a domicile at the Martello Tower in Dublin bay during the summer of 1904.³ Joyce returned from “studying” in Paris because his mother had fallen ill. After a period of living at home, Joyce could no longer take it in his oppressive and poor household, so he agreed to move in with Gogarty. The financial situation was such that Gogarty paid for everything, from rent to food to the drink that Gogarty got Joyce hooked on. After a time, Joyce began to feel unwelcome, largely due to his financial dependence on his affluent roommate. In early fall, Gogarty invited Trench, an Anglo-Irish friend from Oxford (which Gogarty was attending), to stay with them at the tower. Joyce did not particularly enjoy the company of this Trench, and felt his presence
was Joyce's unofficial eviction. However, the Joyces had lived in and out of most the neighborhoods in Dublin. Since James' youth, his father had given him an expansive education in the art of stalling evictions and debt payments. As such, Gogarty's subtle tactics did not affect Joyce. Tensions came to a head on September 14. Trench had a series of nightmares involving a black panther stalking him in a jungle. In his stupor, Trench grabbed a nearby revolver and fired a shot at the imagined beast, inadvertently discharging it over the slumbering form of Joyce. This naturally disconcerted the would-be poet, and his fears were heightened when Trench began murmuring about the panther again. This time, to avoid an accidental injury, Gogarty seized the gun and fired a shot to placate Trench, conveniently shooting just above Joyce again, this time hitting some of their cookware. Joyce accepted this as his formal eviction. He gathered his things and never returned.

This scene transforms into the introduction to the novel, *Ulysses*. The three men are again at the Martello Tower; however, a few things have been changed. For one, instead of a night in mid-September, the setting is now early morning on June 16, 1904, what is now known as "Bloomsday." Joyce changes this because he has congealed many of his own life experiences into one day of central importance, the first date with his eventual wife, Nora Barnacle. This is one of the most obvious examples in a whole series of alterations Joyce makes for the benefit of the work. While he does in many ways limit his work to factual details about June 16, 1904 (what horse won a race that day for instance), Joyce freely moves events from other days in his life to this central date. As a result of packing more occurrences into this one day, he addresses an extended segment of the human experience, expanding the scope of his work. Also different are the
relationships between the men. Now, it appears that Buck and Stephen are on equal
financial footing, and if anything, Stephen is covering the expenses. This establishes a
different relationship, and makes Buck’s invitation to Haines more insensitive than
Gogarty’s invitation to Trench. Furthermore, Haines (Trench’s character in the book) is
now an English stranger. He is collecting information for a book on Irish culture.
Otherwise he is merely some man Buck met and brought home. No longer is he a friend
of the rent-payer, but a hopeful mark for the perpetual con man. As a legitimate guest, he
does not serve Joyce’s vision in *Ulysses* at all. However, as an unwanted and obnoxious
invader, he further establishes Buck’s abusive relationship with Stephen. This
relationship is what Joyce wants to focus on. Furthermore, he transplants the scene to the
morning following the nightmares. In reality, when this scene would have occurred,
Joyce had already retreated, indignantly, back to his father’s house. In the novel, a brave
Stephen faces the worst of Haines’ storm. Stephen, unlike Joyce, does not feel evicted.
He is merely annoyed that Haines made such a racket. As the scene progresses, Buck
steadily puts Stephen down time after time, eventually emasculating him by taking away
his key. This affront is what motivates Stephen’s vow never to return, or at least not that
night. The relationship, then, becomes a different beast than the one Joyce and Gogarty
enjoyed. Joyce, and most of his loyal friends, thought Gogarty had nefarious designs for
Joyce. He vocally expressed a desire to ruin Joyce by making him a drinker, a pastime
Joyce had avoided until their friendship. Joyce, along with his brother Stanislaus and true
friend Byrne, thought that Gogarty’s motives went beyond the desire for a drinking
buddy. They felt that Gogarty saw the brilliance latent in Joyce, and in a fantastic act of
hubris, wanted to destroy him. This aspect of their relationship is what Joyce focuses on
in the scene at the Martello tower. Had he presented precisely what had gone on, their relationship would have been complicated by the beneficial things that Gogarty did for Joyce. Instead, Buck takes advantage of Stephen at every opportunity, heightening his role as betrayer and usurper.

Joyce’s works, in general, are largely autobiographical. The episode discussed above is representative of the way his writing process worked. Few of his books do not deal directly with his experiences or those of people close to him. Even if Joyce creates an event wholesale, he still embeds characters based on his acquaintances into the scene. This reality basis was a general and all-encompassing choice of his, and it leads to the veracity that pervades the work of *Ulysses* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. To a casual reader, who has a difficult time following what Joyce says even on a basic level, it may seem strange to claim that Joyce is most characterized by realism, but even these confusing passages are merely an attempt to faithfully communicate his perception of reality. In the end, through his emphasis on actual events, characters, and settings—largely taken from his own life—Joyce manages a fantastic culmination of all the things that realism promises.

There may be those who claim that biography is not the proper way to read an author. This is clearly not the case with Joyce. For one, he writes in a largely autobiographical vein. Yet he does not merely record the precise facts of his life, like a diary. As already displayed above in the Martello Tower scene, Joyce takes aspects of his life and alters them slightly, manipulating them into art. There is nothing imitative and mindless about it. However, there are those who would say it is a stretch to draw biography into the discussion of a piece. Most artists include things in their work that are
similar to their experiences. Joyce goes further and injects himself directly, so it would neglect his vision to ignore this lens. If an author positions his story in a prominent historical event, it would be lunacy to suggest that you should not investigate the event to truly understand the work. Similarly, as Joyce puts his own life in his novels, you are forced to analyze *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* through this lens. Further, he addresses the issue in *Ulysses* itself. One of the things that identify Stephen is his *Hamlet* theory, which coincidently, is one that Joyce himself developed and proposed in his criticism during University. Joyce outlines his theory through his mouthpiece (Stephen) in the ninth episode, "Scylla and Charybdis." The scene is set in the National Library. A number of intellectuals are gathered, some librarians, others critics. Stephen claims that Shakespeare identified with Hamlet’s father, not Hamlet himself, and thus put the image of his dead son, Hamnet, into Hamlet. A basic tenet of this theory is that to understand a piece of literature, one must think about the author and where he or she fits into the work. Stephen’s argument is predicated upon knowledge of Shakespeare’s life, and the analysis revolves around how exactly one interprets and locates that knowledge in relation to the play itself. Thus, by looking at his biography, one is able to ascertain what character an author associates himself with. The chapter is dominated by a lively debate over the issue. Many of the characters in the chapter (especially those who are disliked by Stephen and therefore more unsympathetic to the reader) snub the theory without giving it much credence. A.E. (George Russell), an elitist and rude man who is the most unsympathetic character in the scene, rejects the validity of the debate outright, calling issues of biography “purely academic.” He is stating the commonly held view that a work stands by itself, and the addition of any other context and meaning is merely
done for the enjoyment of the person talking. Joyce seemingly rejects this sentiment by putting it in the mouth of a character we cannot help but dislike. Joyce sets up the reader to accept Stephen’s argument and, by fiat, accept the important nature of biographical information in his own work.

Central to Joyce’s autobiographical method is the sources from which he derives his characters. Bloom, the hero of *Ulysses*, interestingly enough does not directly match any particular person in Joyce’s life. Instead, Bloom is an aggregate of many people, illustrating one vital process of his autobiographical writing process. Joyce aggregates characters, as he does with Bloom, by drawing together different details of many people he knew to create an idealized human, who has a large degree of reality, but does not exist in the real world. The other vital process is subtraction, when Joyce eliminates characteristics of a real person from his or her literary alter ego in order to enhance their role. Joyce does this most notably, as previously mentioned, with both Stephen Dedalus and Buck Mulligan. The basic idea for the character of Bloom came from a Jewish Dubliner, Alfred Hunter. Joyce met him in the months following May Joyce’s death in Dublin. Joyce, new to alcohol but trying to act like an old hat, had gotten particularly drunk with his good friend Cosgrave. While they were walking home, he tried to proposition a girl. As it happens, the girl was accompanied and her escort knocked Joyce down and gave him a bloody beating. Hunter just happened to be passing by; he helped Joyce up and walked him home. It was a random act of philanthropy that stuck with Joyce for the rest of his life. He also knew—through the Dublin rumor-mill—that Hunter was ethnically a Jew and that he was supposedly a cuckold, aspects he injects into Bloom. Once an exile in Europe, Joyce began to empathize with the Jews. When he
began planning a modern, Irish version of Odysseus, Joyce felt he had to be a naturalized Jew. Odysseus wanders for most of his tale trying to return to his home, which he never wanted to leave in the first place. While wandering, he finds a number of temporary homes, but doesn’t grow permanent roots in any of them, and perpetually must move once circumstances change. Joyce saw the status of the Jews as the same. They were forcibly expelled from their native soil and forced to wander the world, with no homeland to speak of. They were temporarily accepted into various nations and cultures, but always to be ousted as soon as it served the rest of the population. As he was developing the idea further, he remembered the kindness of Hunter and decided to have his Hunter-Odysseus help out a Joyce-like character towards the end of the work. This decision resulted in the resurrection of Stephen, the autobiographical main character from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Bloom does not, however, end in the crucible of Hunter and Odysseus; he is also an extension of Joyce himself. Joyce felt tremendous loss when his partner, Nora, had a miscarriage in 1908. He was conceptualizing *Ulysses* at the time (although he was not to commence work on it for some years), and was deeply affected by the death of the child. He imports that characteristic as the greatest tragedy of Bloom’s life, the loss of his infant son, Rudy, in 1894. Bloom also reflects Joyce’s tremendously diverse interests. While Joyce was far more single-minded and directed than Bloom—literature was his life—he dabbled in all sorts of disciplines. He relished conversations with people who knew about unfamiliar subjects. It was a large part of how Joyce continued to make as many friends as he did. He was always interested in what he could learn from them.

From most accounts, Bloom’s daily personality comes from Ettore Schmitz, one of Joyce’s students from Trieste. Also, Schmitz’ father was from Hungary (although a
different town than Bloom was supposedly from) and sported the same moustache that Bloom wears. He also was married with one grown daughter when Joyce knew him.

Another acquaintance of Joyce’s was Charles Chance, who also takes part in the patchwork that is Bloom. Chance had numerous occupations, but one of them was as a newspaper ad canvasser. Further, his wife was a professional soprano, who went by the stage name “Madame Marie Tallon,” suspiciously close to “Madame Marion Tweedy.” Lastly, he knew a Joseph Bloom in Dublin, who had converted to Catholicism in order to marry his wife, and lived at 38 Lombard st., which Bloom gives as his old address.

Stephen is a much simpler character to deal with. He is primarily based on Joyce, except with the subtraction of many details about the real Joyce. Stephen’s life is basically contained within Joyce’s, although Joyce’s extends beyond the character of Stephen. Joyce’s father, much like Simon Dedalus in *Ulysses*, could not keep his family in the middle class lifestyle they were used to. As a result of his debt and bankruptcy, Joyce was forced to leave his private school, Clongowes, where he was one of the star pupils. He continually won examination prizes, which supplemented the family’s essentially non-existent income. He considered becoming a Jesuit, but decided against it, frequented brothels regularly from a rather young age, had a religious crisis mirrored in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and then after having a brief and intense religious revival, returned to his hedonistic ways and devoted himself to the pursuit of art. He finally arrived at the conclusion that he must leave Dublin and decided to go study in Paris. He only returned from Paris because of his mother’s approaching death, temporarily lived in the Martello Tower with Gogarty, and then at the end of 1904, left Dublin forever, only to return a handful of time for visits. This is almost an exact
recitation of Stephen’s background. However, Stephen is not allowed to go beyond this. Stephen is no more than a 22 year old when all is said and done. Joyce was always fond of emphasizing that the name of his first book was *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, drawing the focus to Stephen’s youth and inexperience. So while Stephen matches up too precisely not to be an autobiographical protagonist, he is still distanced from Joyce the author, who is a real human being and advanced beyond the point of Stephen. Also, Joyce eliminates certain aspects of himself in his portrayal of Stephen. Stephen is clearly established as an un-athletic youth in both works. He gets beat up on the field and dumped in a muddy puddle in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and clearly does not enjoy the physical sports they play. In *Ulysses*, he elects to avoid swimming in the opening chapter (although this is more a product of his fear of water) and essentially solely exists in the intellectual sphere for the rest of work. In fact, one of the only remaining physical things he does is pick a fight—while drunk—with a soldier and then get beat up. In reality, Joyce was a natural athlete. Further, he was a natural in social circumstances. He could, in a few hours in the morning, meet with as many of his creditors as was necessary and convince them that they did not need their money back yet, and often even ask for more. In each town he lived in—Trieste, Zurich, and then finally Paris—Joyce was a friend of everybody there was to know. Stephen does not have a single real friend, with the possible exception of Cranly. Stephen distances himself from the rest, refusing to trust them. Joyce could have painted Stephen precisely as he himself was, but by removing certain details about his own person and life he creates a much more interesting and useful character.
There is a pair of characters that need to be dealt with in unison. They are Joyce’s two main friends from his days at Dublin University. They are vital in part because they each appear in the two novels, but also because they were so central to Joyce’s psychological development. The first was John Francis Byrne, who appears as Cranly. He was probably one of Joyce’s most legitimate friends. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Cranly is a more simple and loyal friend than any others Stephen has. He clearly disdains the foolish playfulness of nearly all of Stephen’s other acquaintances, and continually exchanges words, and occasionally blows, with them. But he never leaves Stephen’s side. Then, when Stephen has to make a serious decision, such as whether or not to take communion, or whether or not to leave Dublin, it is Cranly he goes to for help. His other friends are more useful to him when he is working out some new theory on aesthetics, but Cranly is the one he goes to for personal advice. Byrne served a similar role in Joyce’s life. They were close until Joyce left for Paris the first time. Upon returning during his mother’s illness, they had a falling out and Byrne is largely absent from Joyce’s life until his exile. This occurred for a number of reasons. Byrne was tired of Joyce’s capricious lifestyle and his poor choice of friends. It ran him through the gamut of emotions to watch his good friend make so many foolish mistakes. Further, he could not keep up with Joyce’s theories and intellect, which naturally caused a deal of bitterness. Lastly, and this was never affirmed by Byrne, Joyce believed that Byrne was in love with a woman whom Joyce had publicly pined after, and Byrne needed to cut ties with Joyce so he could pursue her. In the aftermath of this falling out, Joyce went out and established his relationship with Oliver Gogarty. Likely, Joyce would have made fewer mistakes in the next year if the stabilizing presence of Byrne had not been removed. This
is illustrated by how, in later years when Joyce returned to Dublin, he went to Byrne for help during an emotional crisis. The other college friend was Vincent Cosgrave. Cosgrave appears as Lynch. While they were not as close as Joyce and Byrne were, Cosgrave was for Joyce a good activity friend. He was fun and smart and kept up with Joyce's theories. His main appearance in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* shows a hung over Lynch serving as a sounding board for Stephen's theory of esthetics. Stephen doesn't feel he can rely upon Cranly to have anything to say in the debate, so he turns to Lynch. But their relationship is clearly more antagonistic. While Stephen expostulates his theory, Stephen notices that Lynch's "pallid bloated face expressed benevolent malice." Later in the page, he receives both adjectives "stately" and "plump" tying him directly to our joyful betrayer Buck Mulligan. This apparent antagonism is due to the later severance of relations between the two. Byrne had warned Joyce that Cosgrave was a bad influence, and that he did not have Joyce's best interests at heart. This seemed to be proved when Joyce returned to Dublin in 1909. While there, Joyce called on many of his old friends, with the noted exception of Gogarty. He found Cosgrave less than amiable. Cosgrave was jealous of Joyce's apparent success in Trieste, as his own career in Dublin had gone nowhere. Further, he had competed for Nora Barnacle's affection when Joyce was courting her, and obviously had been less successful. When they met on August 6, 1909, Cosgrave lied to Joyce and told him that Nora had been dating them both simultaneously in 1904, and he had received the same satisfactions as Joyce had. The naturally suspicious Joyce immediately believed the accusations and wrote to Nora breaking off their relationship. This was precisely what the malicious Cosgrave intended. It probably would have ended badly had it not been for the benevolent intervention of Byrne, now a
loyal friend of Joyce again. That night, Joyce stayed at his house, 7 Eccles Street, where Bloom lives in *Ulysses*. There, Byrne cautioned and convinced Joyce that Cosgrave was an unreliable source, and convinced him further that Nora had never been with anyone but Joyce.¹⁴

Joyce’s use of real life is by no means limited to his character development. Joyce paints his picture of Dublin largely from places he was intimately familiar with. The Martello Tower was considered above, but most of the places Stephen is found throughout *Ulysses* were the haunts of young Joyce. During his visit to Dublin—one that was relatively positive with the exception of the above mentioned crisis about Cosgrave and Nora—he spent many if not most of his days in the offices of the *Evening Telegraph*, where he got to know most of the staff and the social circle that surrounded it. He bases the seventh episode, “Aeolus,” on a typical afternoon spent at the *Telegraph*. Most of the characters are people he knew from the paper, and he includes numerous small details about life there, such as which door the paper boys enter through, and which doors people unfamiliar with the paper enter through. Joyce also spent much of his teenage life and young adulthood in the brothels of Dublin. He converted this experience and his numerous prostitute acquaintances into Bella Cohen’s highly stylized brothel. Otherwise, he limits his settings to places of common knowledge. Sandymount Strand, where he locates two of his episodes, was a commonly frequented public place in Dublin, one everyone would be familiar with. Similarly, he places many of his scenes in bars and restaurants in Dublin. These are real bars, and the proprietors are largely based on real people as well. This move has the dual benefit of heightening the reality of the work and appealing to people who will recognize the places he is talking about.
Joyce's relationship with Dublin is vital to the book. He was ambivalent at best about his hometown. When in a good mood, he would intone that the Irish were "the most intelligent, most spiritual, and most civilized people in Europe." However, while teaching in Trieste, Joyce mixed insults with tirades against Ireland as methods of teaching the English language. Joyce mixed pride and disgust in a way many people would have a difficult time coping with. He clearly had some positive emotions tying him to Dublin. He never lived in Ireland after 1904. He continued writing until 1939, and did so exclusively about his native land. He lived in Rome, Paris, Zurich, and Trieste, but never set his works in any of these towns. In fact, one could go as far as to say that he lived in self-imposed exile for the rest of his life to give himself the distance he needed to write about home. But on a conscious level, he was disgusted by everything there. And he knew the town better than most. He had lived in every major district, as his family moved from house to house. He lived in Dublin as a child of the middle class and slummed it with the best of them as a lecherous pauper once his family's fortunes had declined to the perpetually severe condition it eventually occupied. He knew the brothels and the churches, the bar houses and the library, all down to minute detail. However, he felt like a rejected outsider when he lived there and never recovered a sense of belonging. This sense of isolation and alienation is a clear theme in all of his work.

The ensuing result is the viscerally real setting of *Ulysses*. He knew his town, and he represented it to his readers. His cast of characters similarly benefits from his autobiographical approach. He has a multitude of wholly consistent characters in *Ulysses*. One often feels, with a less skilled author, that many of the characters within a tale are merely there to serve their purpose in the book. The real world, strangely enough, is not
like that. Even though I am the protagonist in my own personal life narrative, I know that the people around me are not merely there to serve whatever role they fill relative to my agency. The girls who serve me coffee in the morning go on to do many other infinitely more important things in their days and weeks, and you get a sense that is the case in Joyce’s Dublin. You merely need to take any chapter of *Ulysses* at random and you will find a multitude of three-dimensional characters, whose lives clearly extend beyond the work itself. A perfect example is the eleventh episode, “Sirens.” In this highly stylized chapter, Joyce presents twelve wholly consistent and full characters: the barmaids Lydia and Mina, our friend Bloom, Simon Dedalus, Lenehan, Blazes Boylan, Richie Goulding, Bob Cowley, Ben Dollard, Pat, the blind piano tuner, and Tom Kernan. The focus of the scene is explicitly off our hero, as a majority of these characters do not even notice him. Some of these characters necessitate a certain degree of fullness because of their important roles in the novel, such as Simon Dedalus, Boylan, and Bloom. Others, however, are only present in this episode, and still get a full background. Even more important than their full nature, Joyce creates interrelationships with the extra characters. Richie, who is talking with Bloom, not the collection of “good ol’ boys” inside the bar, is Simon Dedalus’ brother-in-law. They don’t talk anymore, and Goulding hints at the nature of the falling out. This makes both men all the more real, as they are no longer merely individual actors in Bloom’s life. They have a clearly delineated life outside of him, and as a result, outside of this book. A priest, Bob Cowley, is in with these other men, drinking and singing along with them. The revelers refer to him simply as “Bob,” and his presence in no way implies the normal austerity associated with the cloth. This character gains tremendous implied depth with these minor details. He is not a stock
priest, but one who has a full history behind his abnormal characteristics. Joyce is able
to create these effects because these characters are quite literally real. When developing
characters, an author must develop a whole history for his characters to come out this
real. Few can do this with any great quantity of characters. So for those authors who
aren’t geniuses and don’t think to limit the number of characters in their work, the extras
usually come off weak and shallow. However, by limiting himself to characters he
actually knew, somewhat altered and occasionally aggregated, Joyce assured that his
characters came out complete human beings. Joyce includes excellently three-
dimensional characters throughout the narrative. For instance, in the aforementioned
"Scylla and Charybdis" episode, Stephen is merely one of a number of strong
personalities competing for prominence within the conversation. As discussed earlier
A.E. and John Eglinton do not much care about the conversation. Then Joyce further
suggests their outside lives when Eglinton asks A.E. if he will be at a literary party later.
Neither is concerned with Stephen other than for the moment. He matters little to them in
the long run, and serves currently as a short term distraction. The librarians are merely
listeners, and while they seem to care far more about the conversation than the others, it
is because they truly respect Eglinton and A.E., although they appear to have a certain
degree of deference for Stephen as well. However, these characters are not particularly
anxious to remain on scene as long as possible. They know they will exist once the lens
of the reader is off of them. They have things to do and people to see.

These characters also appear so full and complete because of Joyce’s tremendous
use of intertextuality. In the above case, many of these characters have greater life
precisely because they also are present in his book of short stories, *Dubliners*. It is hard to
talk about the reality of *Ulysses* without delving into the intertextuality of it, including Joyce's intertextuality with himself. Once Joyce finished writing one particular work, it was by no means dead. For instance, one of the main characters in *Ulysses* is Stephen Dedalus, who conveniently shares the name and personality with the main character of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Some commentators have tried to claim that the two Stephens are not the same character. At their most essential, both Stephens are Joyce, so of course they are the same Stephen. The Stephen of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is a record of Joyce from childhood until he leaves Dublin for the first time to study in Paris. The Stephen of *Ulysses* is Joyce once he returns to Dublin for his mother's death. While there are certainly differences, they are mostly the result of Stephen’s few extra years of experience and education. One cannot ignore the similarities. His personality is basically the same, and he has a number of icons that tie the two characters together, such as the "ashplant" walking stick Stephen acquires at the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and still has at the beginning of *Ulysses*. By including his old protagonist into his new work, Joyce fleshes out his character infinitely. While he certainly gives added exposition on Stephen, there is already the whole development of the earlier novel, making him a more complete and full character. As I mentioned before, some of the characters of *Dubliners* also show up periodically throughout the work.

However, Joyce's intertextuality is not limited to his own canon. The clearest way in which *Ulysses* is externally intertextual is with *The Odyssey*, where he gets his title and many of his major themes. Joyce conceived his novel as a listless journey, circumnavigating the city of Dublin. As an exile, he was personally interested in the themes of rootlessness and wandering. As stated earlier, he personally related to the
plight of the Jews and saw the modern-day Odysseus as a Jew. He saw this journey mirroring the tale of Odysseus and his extended journey home. However, the tale had to be complicated by the modern world, and Joyce refused to use classic heroic characters. His actors do not go off to war and accomplish their goals with feats of strength and cunning. Instead, they are heroes in that they cope with the everyday disappointments and challenges that characterize modern life. He draws the intertextuality more explicitly into focus when each of his main characters represents one from *The Odyssey*. Joyce’s novel is built around the consciousness of three main characters: Bloom, Stephen, and Molly. They represent Odysseus, Telemachus, and Penelope, in that order. By scrutinizing the relationships between these characters, one comes to a more sophisticated understanding of *Ulysses*. Joyce sets Stephen and Bloom as a possible father/son pair. Stephen is alienated from his father and Bloom has lost his son. In *The Odyssey*, we have a father looking for a son and a son looking for a father. Molly’s infidelity is made to seem worse in the light of Penelope’s loyalty. Further, each of the chapters of *Ulysses* has a name corresponding to a character or scene from *The Odyssey*. Joyce originally planned on including them as chapter headings, but eventually decided it detracted from the intrinsic value of his work, so he struck them from the printings. However, enough people knew about them, so the names have remained as unofficial tags.

It would be an injustice to consider Joyce in the absence of Dante. Dante was one of Joyce’s favorite authors, and he has been quoted as saying that Italian literature “starts and ends with Dante.” Joyce lived much of his later life in Italian speaking nations. Between that and his exile status, which Dante shared, he felt a certain spiritual tie with the author of *The Divine Comedy*. Dante is less clearly reflected in *Ulysses* than Homer,
but his presence is still felt. Joyce was inspired by Dante’s freedom to bring epic form to new genres. *The Divine Comedy* posits itself in the epic tradition, but its subject matter is vastly different than the early epics of Homer (whom Dante hadn’t read) and Virgil. Joyce again alters the subject matter, further revolutionizing the epic. For one, he brings the epic to the novel, which is a big move considering the standing of the novel as a form of literature at the time. While it had certainly earned a reputation as an important modern form, creating an epic novel was certainly a pretentious move. The other thing that Joyce saw in Dante and mirrored was Dante’s freedom with including people from his own life. Dante was motivated by political feelings, but Joyce uses the mechanism nonetheless.

The influence of Ibsen on Joyce can hardly be understated. In Dublin, as a student, Joyce largely committed his career to spreading the word about Ibsen, who was relatively unknown in Ireland at the time. In Ibsen Joyce saw the most compelling aspect of literature: reality. He was touched by Ibsen’s ability to heighten the average man or woman to the point of heroism in their daily life. His first published article was a favorable critique of Ibsen’s play, *When We Dead Awaken*. However, Joyce by no means parroted Ibsen. In fact, a truly casual reader will merely attribute Ibsen’s influence on Joyce as the same influence he has on any modern writer. Joyce neither writes in Ibsenian tone nor on specifically Ibsenian themes. Joyce took Ibsen’s bourgeois realism and spread it to the masses. A loose socialist—and a poor Irishman—Joyce was more interested in the average, poor, exploited man than the rich troubled folk of Ibsen’s plays. As a result, he has a much more egalitarian cast, and instead of dramatically heightening major aspects of certain people’s lives, Joyce heightens more common and typical
aspects of common and typical people. One could not imagine Leopold Bloom as a central character in any Ibsen play; Bloom is simply too normal and sensible.

The distinction between Ibsen's and Joyce's realism highlights Joyce's philosophy in regard to normality. Western literature, since its inception, has been preoccupied with the works of great men. Kings and Queens, valiant warriors or brilliant scholars, the focus has been on the elite. Then, with the advent of Realism, which Joyce respected tremendously, the focus was brought down from the classically heroic kings and warriors to the new capitalist elite, the middle class. Realist authors before Joyce, however, stopped there. The characters of Realism also inhabit a specifically heroic place. They are generally in the midst of great events, and they inhabit heroic characteristics. So much is at stake in these works. Ibsen's plays tend to end with a dramatic and extreme change: the family is destroyed or the heroine kills herself. Joyce takes these half-measures of reality and extends them to their limits. He uses explicitly working class and lower middle class subjects, not exactly the beneficiaries of capitalist excess. Beyond even the choice to use more regular characters, Joyce refuses to make the implications of his events too broad. While the things going on in *Ulysses* are the sort of crises and big decisions that make up most people's lives, they are not earth shattering, and they do not come to a head. Bloom is a cuckold and longs for a surrogate son; he rectifies neither situation in a satisfying or definitive way. Stephen is clearly isolated and disappointed in his life; however, he does nothing about it and in the end of the novel is no better off than he was at the start. Joyce focuses on the charming normality of life. He uses nothing heightened, and in doing so heightens it all. This is a revolutionary use of realism. It is also one of his earliest and most close-minded criticisms. When *A Portrait*
of the Artist as a Young Man came out, Arthur Clutton-Brock said that he wished for "subject-matter of more distinction," and people of more "obvious importance." Works that preceded Joyce were progressively getting closer to using normal circumstances as subject matter. Their characters were less removed from the everyday but still of special non-normative status. The focus of Joyce's craft falls most noticeably on normal people doing normal things. The book begins with one of the most simple and basic things: a man shaving. There is no ulterior motive for this detail, other than the fact that this is what people do in the morning. It is immediately followed by Buck, Stephen and Haines eating breakfast, which they burn. Then the milk woman, a shriveled old peasant, comes in and makes her delivery. The course of events is a completely normal and standard morning. Joyce does not locate his book in heightened circumstances, but in the everyday.

His use of intertextuality brings an important criticism of Joyce to the discussion. The risk of relying so heavily on intertextuality is that the works themselves can suffer as they become more esoteric and therefore less accessible. In casual conversation with people for whom Joyce is a terror worse than public speaking, the general consensus seems to be that people are scared by the tremendous meaning he packs into everything. It seems like one needs to know so many supporting facts and details to truly understand his works. To the extent that he does limit his audience by scaring people off, the intertextuality serves such great ends that it far outweighs the sacrifice. Personally, I have read Ulysses at three different times in my life. The first time I knew almost none of the supporting texts that Joyce employs. I was familiar with Dante and Ibsen at a basic level, but not nearly to the level Joyce uses them. At the time I was just about the ideal
uninformed reader, and the book was entirely manageable. It is certainly a difficult read, but most of the external knowledge that explains the novel does so in a complementary way. The basic story and characters are there; you can read them with no outside knowledge. However, once you come to the novel with the added intertextuality and knowledge, the book unravels at further layers that were missed on the initial reading. While they are important towards explaining the work, they are not necessary.

There is another potential criticism of Joyce’s choices towards his work. Inspired by the tremendous factual accuracy of Kipling’s *Plain Tales from the Hills*, Joyce decided to include only true details about Dublin in his novel. There actually was a funeral for a Patrick Dignam on June 16, 1904. The horse “Throwaway” did indeed win the derby at tremendous odds. While this factual accuracy is certainly an impressive feat of research and restraint, there is a potential problem with his choice to include only actual events. There is a certain limiting effect. There are an infinite number of things Joyce could have made up if he was willing to depart from factuality. Joyce disallows anything that is purely imagined. He could have included small things that expanded the current action of the scene; these near infinite details could have added immense density of meaning to any particular scene. However, this is not what Joyce wants or needs. For one, I challenge anyone to actually claim that *Ulysses* is not complex enough as it is. The real world gave him a large enough pool of details and events to create as deep a work as he needed. In the end, he did not need anything that was not real. One of his major goals with the work was to create something as real as possible. Had he added many connivances of creativity, it would have impinged on the factual nature of his work. Part of his point is that there is an abundance of art in natural life, and that you can create
what you need from that. The horse race is a perfect example. Joyce had searched
unsuccessfully for a corollary to the Trojan Horse which brought Odysseus fame. Joyce
had obtained copies of newspapers from June 16, 1904, and he came upon the results of
the horse race that day. The horse “Throwaway” won against tremendous odds. Joyce
conceived in it a way of sabotaging Bloom’s status in Dublin, much as the original Trojan
Horse sabotaged the security of Troy. In the fifth episode, “The Lotus Eaters,” Bloom
runs into Bantam Lyons, who is fulminating over which horse to back in the day’s
race. He asks if he can borrow Bloom’s paper, and Bloom allows him, saying he doesn’t
need it anymore, that he was just going to “throw it away.” Lyons takes this as a tip from
Bloom, indicating he should bet on the horse Throwaway. In reality, Bloom was merely
saying he didn’t need his paper back. When Lyons decides not to back the horse, and it
wins, he spreads a rumor that Bloom had insider information on the race results. This
rumor gives one more reason for Dubliners to dislike and discriminate against Bloom,
who they now assume is part of a Jewish conspiracy to fix horse races. The details are so
subtle and exquisite, that it is tremendous good fortune that Throwaway did in fact win
the race that day.

Joyce was not as limited by fact as some would claim. While all of his basic
details are grounded in fact, such as events and characters, he regularly changes
secondary details for the sake of his work. As established above, Joyce altered many of
the details about himself, in the act of subtraction, to create the character of Stephen. He
is represented as un-athletic, but according to his brother, Stanislaus, he was able bodied
and a natural at most sports he played. Joyce did not like pain, he opted for sports that
required less contact, cricket over rugby and soccer over hurling. He felt that fact should
be the essence of his work, but refused to stick to it if his novel would suffer as a result. Stephen’s character makes much more sense as a weakling. If nothing else, it suggests that he focused more of his attention and energies towards his mind. Also, his moody and sensitive attitude does not particularly match with the common conception of a “jock.” He correctly assessed that the character would make a lot more sense if he disliked physical activity, and so he created him thus.

The other difficulty of using only real things is that one runs into the criticism of not really creating anything. Anyone can walk around and record precisely what happens, and then pack one day with a lifetime of experiences, right? Quite simply, no. For one thing, Joyce does not merely record his real life; he morphs it into art. He illustrates the distinction between the simple act of recording details and the much more involved one of artistic appropriation. He obsessed over the details of this work. He sifted through the experiences of his life, and the lives of most people he knew, and he extracted exactly what was essential and useful. His characters, discussed above, are a testament to his excellence at seeing potential in things. Bloom may have the personality of one friend, but then he shares his basic life structure with three other men, his name comes from an acquaintance who shared a similar experience of converting to Catholicism, and a few of his most intimate thoughts and desires come from Joyce himself. Joyce had a tremendous eye for important and useful details. He collected them his whole life, in anticipation of creating the great works of literature he aspired to. He was discerning and particular, and only included those things that could be applied to great use. One good example is his retention of anecdotes that end up in Ulysses. Joyce remembered Oliver Gogarty constantly singing silly ballads he invented. One of Gogarty’s favorites was the one
included in the first episode of *Ulysses*, "The Ballad of the Joking Jesus." Similarly, the events surrounding the near drowning that Buck Mulligan intervened with, which take place slightly before the book actually commences, mirror directly the near drowning of one of Joyce's creditors in Dublin. All examples aside, most of these criticisms revolve around the idea that Joyce limits his material by excluding non-real details. But think about it: real events, the world around you, are not these things the stuff that life is made of? What more do you need? Joyce starts with real life, and draws everything of use out to create art that is living. He is, if nothing else, proving that there is art in everything.

One of the important aspects of Joyce's reality is his daring effort to represent the experience of life in words as accurately as he can. The stream-of-consciousness style that dominates most of the work is the main result. Using it, Joyce attempts to approximate the way in which the brain operates. Others have worked (and still continue to) with this form to varying degrees of success. Essentially, most of them employ the device as a running, continuous, linear, inner monologue that follows the tangential nature of internal thought. However, while Joyce employs this style, he augments it with considerably superior style in a number of ways. First of all, Joyce refuses to connect the dots all the way between the various places his characters' minds stop. In reality, many of the spurious logic jumps that occupy our thoughts occur without our conscious recollection of them. The first episode, "Telemachus," is not essentially stream-of-consciousness, but it employs this jumping technique excellently. Buck and Stephen are talking early on, and Buck is trying to convince Stephen to join him in an attempt to "Hellenise" Ireland, a quest which real life Gogarty wanted Joyce to join him in.

Following Buck's comment, there is a line with no other explanation, "Cranly's arm. His
This comment seems meaningless at first, the reader does not even know who is thinking it. Is it Buck? Is it Stephen? Is it a third-person narrator? Taking into account Cranly’s role in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, as a surrogate for Byrne, the sentence takes on new meaning. His friendship with Gogarty was a sort of replacement for Byrne once they split apart. So, Buck’s attempts to tie Stephen to himself mirror Cranly’s earlier attempts to tie their fates together. However, Joyce does not come out and explain this logic chain in each point. Cranly and Buck’s attempts at establishing firm relationships with Stephen are converted into the visual image of offering an arm. Now that Cranly is gone, Buck (the “him” in the quote) has replaced that drive. This is how the mind works. Stephen intimately knows the details of the relationships involved, so he does not need to explain to himself how he ties the two together. This is a potentially alienating style that can make the work less accessible; however, the gained realism is well worth the risk. Another effective style is limiting the character’s knowledge to suggest the frailty of perception. When Stephen is walking alone on Sandymont Strand, he sees a dog. “A point, live dog, grew into sight running across the sweep of sand.” By starting with “a point,” Joyce establishes that Stephen is looking at something without knowing what it is. These minor additions heighten the reality of his perception. Earlier, when the milkwoman enters the tower, the reader is inside of Stephen’s head, and he tells us that “the doorway was darkened by an entering form.” Stephen’s back is turned to the door when she enters, so he cannot actually see her enter. He merely knows that someone has entered because of the indirect evidence, in this case, the limiting of light. A final technique he uses is the explosion of normal writing conventions. Joyce refuses to use quotation marks throughout the work, deeming them
"unsightly and giving an impression of unreality." While he still does mark his dialogue
with dashes, they give a much more organic sensation than the "eyesore" of quotation
marks. Further, in the final episode, "Penelope," he dispenses with almost all
punctuation. He uses one period, and only divides the episode into seven paragraphs.
Both Joyce's mother and Nora wrote without punctuation and they inspired him to write
like this. This episode captures the casual meandering of Molly Bloom's mind as she lies
in bed preparing to fall asleep, so this is an exquisite method for portraying thought.
People do not punctuate their minds, it simply does not happen. Punctuation certainly
assists in the portrayal of speech patterns and styles, but it does not extend its usefulness
to internal monologues.

An important point about Joyce's writing is that he blurs all of the boundaries that
writers generally erect to make their points and characterizations clearer. He meticulously
avoids stock characters, which are either all good or all bad. In doing so he accomplishes
a tremendous reality effect. People in the real world are neither dastardly villains nor
altruistic champions, but somewhere in the grey area in-between. Bloom is a perfect
example. He is tremendously sympathetic. He is sensitive and caring. In his first
appearance, he dotes on his wife, bringing her breakfast in bed, even knowing she's
going to cheat on him with Boylan. When he is trying to get Hynes to return his loan of
"three bob," he avoids directly asking for it, instead subtly getting around to it. He also
evines genuine sympathy for Mrs. Breen, who has a terrible life because of her husband.
Bloom is also quite intelligent in his own uneducated way. He is constantly thinking
about science and biology, or else coming up with ideas for new inventions. If he is not
wondering about whether a cat can "mouse" once its whiskers have been cut, he is trying
to understand the concept of "parallax." If he is not thinking of running an electric tram for funeral processions, he is thinking of little pulley systems in graves so people who are buried alive can communicate to people above ground. He is optimistic almost to a fault, believing that things between him and Molly will improve. The discrimination we see him face automatically draws us to him. "The Citizen" in episode twelve ("Cyclops"), nearly gets in a fight with Bloom over his Jewish ethnicity. If nothing else, we simply see more of him than any other character. But he is not wholly good. McCoy is one of the few people who seem to genuinely like and respect Bloom. When Lenehan maligns Bloom, McCoy stands up for him, saying, "there's a touch of the artist about old Bloom." However, when McCoy pulls Bloom aside for a chat, Bloom is impatient with him and can't wait to get away. Then, he thinks rather negatively of the inferiority of McCoy’s wife's voice. Further, he is corresponding with a woman even though he is married, although his affair pales in comparison to Molly's indiscretion. The scene on the beach with Gerty is certainly not Bloom's best moment. He sits there and masturbates in public while gazing at a minor. This is not the act of a clear hero. Similarly, Molly is not all bad. The first half of the novel builds in the reader a certain degree of animosity towards her because she is rather abusive of Bloom. She expects him to wait on her hand and foot and then plans an extra-marital affair with a mutual acquaintance in her own bed, which she shares with Bloom. However, once we get in her head, we see more of her motives and feelings. She is pretty sure that Bloom is cheating on her, which after reading Marta's letter, we can imagine. Also, Joyce displays his lack of clear distinctions in his strange ambivalence to Dublin, the Catholic Church, and many other focuses of his work.
In his criticism on classical music, George Bernard Shaw delineates the difference between innovation and consummation as indicative of different composers’ style. People who consummate take the traditions and conventions that are delivered to them by their genre and push the limits. They do not do anything technically new; they just bring things to perfect conclusion. Innovators, on the other hand, invent new things that no one has done before. Neither is better than the other, they are just ways of distinguishing methods and styles of different artists. Joyce fits into this model interestingly. He is primarily a consummator. However, because of the extent and the breadth of his consummation, coupled with his tremendous audacity, he often extends into the realm of innovation. Technically, he is not the first to do many of the things he is heralded for. He is not the first to use stream-of-consciousness, although he is arguably the best at it. He received his stream-of-consciousness from Dujardin primarily, but also was inspired by George Moore and Tolstoy. However, as discussed earlier, he draws out methods that significantly improve the style. It is almost tragic, because in his employ, the method reaches its culmination, and anyone who has come after him is almost doomed to imitation. He is not the first to address the everyman, but he draws the focus into lower and lower in the social strata. He is not the first to use simultaneity in a scene, but he certainly draws it further. Flaubert gives us the first notable case of simultaneity in *Madame Bovary*. Flaubert utilizes simultaneity to describe two conversations going on at the same dinner table. As such the focus is more centralized. The two conversations may not be the same thing, but are intimately linked to each other. In the eleventh episode of *Ulysses*, “Sirens,” Joyce gives simultaneous accounts of two separate rooms, within hearing distance of each other. He can switch the focus from room to room, but because
the characters can hear each other, neither scene is ever truly absent. Unlike Flaubert, Joyce’s rooms operate essentially independent of each other. He is not the first to shift styles from segment to segment, as Shakespeare does in *A Winter’s Tale*, but his changes are far more drastic, and he utilizes far more numerous styles. This all joins together, in one mammoth work, to make a rather innovative piece of literature. Further, he does some things that have never before been seen. He is the first person in literature to observe someone taking a dump. He is also the first to experiment with a few of his styles. In episode seven, “Aeolus,” he contains a regular narrative, but intersperses seeming newspaper headlines to break it up into sections. At first it appears merely to be the papers coming off of the press, but after a while there are simply too many headlines and they refer to the action of the scene. He gets some substantial use out of them as another way to talk about the action going on. In episode eleven, “Sirens,” he begins with two pages of gibberish that turn out to be fragments of the coming chapter. Once you tie the things together, you realize that Joyce has given you a sort of table of contents for the chapter at the beginning. Episode twelve, “Cyclops,” uses an unnamed and otherwise unused narrator. Episode fifteen, “Circe,” suddenly switches to a theatrical style, written like a bizarre postmodernist play (you can see where Samuel Beckett was inspired). Episode seventeen, “Ithaca,” is narrated through a catechism style. These various styles become a specific choice to destabilize the importance of standard narrative forms. Besides allowing him to attack the story and the ideas behind it from a number of different angles, it pulls the importance away from the plot and towards the characters and ideas, which is his fundamental focus. This consummation of Joyce becomes comprehensive. By taking old styles to new limits he pushes the promise of realism to its
full potential. He locates himself within an intertextual discourse as to the proper focus of literature. He inserts his own life intricately into the framework of his masterpiece to both heighten the reality and place special emphasis on the normality of life. These various special choices congeal with masterful craft to result in the work of a life, *Ulysses*.

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**Endnotes**


2. Ibid., 19


4. Ellman, 155.

5. Joyce, 180-213.

6. Ibid., 181.


8. Ibid., 268.

9. Ibid., 272.

10. Ibid., 375.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 116-7.


14. For an account of the few days events, turn to Ellman, pp. 278-283.
At the time of his teaching in Trieste a pamphlet was published listing some of his funnier lines. One went as follows. "Dubliners, strictly speaking, are my fellow-countrymen, but I don’t care to speak of our ‘dear, dirty Dublin’ as they do. Dubliners are the most hopeless, useless and inconsistent race of charlatans I have ever come across, on the island or the continent. This is why the English Parliament is full of the greatest windbags in the world. The Dubliner passes his time gabbing and making the rounds in bars or taverns or cathouses, without ever getting ‘fed up’ with the double doses of whiskey and Home Rule, and at night, when he can hold no more and is swollen up with poison like a toad, he staggers from the side-door and, guided by the instinctive desire for stability along the straight line of houses, he goes slithering, his backside against all walls and corners. He goes ‘arsing along’ as we say in English. There’s the Dubliner for you."

Ellman, 217.


In my analysis of this particular aspect of the book, I am heavily indebted to Richard Ellman, whom first proposed the theory as I saw it.

Joyce, Ulysses, 256-291.

Ibid., 184-218.

Ellman, 29.

Ibid., 206.

26 Ibid., 7.

27 Ibid., 45.

28 Ibid., 13.

29 Ellman, 352.

30 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 724-768.

31 Ibid., 292-345.

32 Ibid., 230.

33 Ellman, 358.

34 Joyce, *Ulysses*, 256-291.
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