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13

WHY READ JOYCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

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THE DEATH OF A JOYCE SCHOLAR *AND* FURTHER ADVENTURES OF JAMES JOYCE: *THE CROSSROADS OF TWO READING PUBLICS*

The contemporary fictional texts, *The Death of a Joyce Scholar* by Bartholomew Gill and *Further Adventures of James Joyce* by Colm Herron are rare in that they are books consciously written for two audiences, or reading publics, without compromise. They defy conventional literary classification, bridging the cultural gulf between commercial and academic fiction, being *both* simultaneously and in equal proportion. *Death of a Joyce Scholar* and *Further Adventures* may be read in two legitimate ways, with both reading publics finding content suited to their specialised taste, without noticeable interference from the other. These reading publics don't cross, or meet on any subject except that of James Joyce, who permeates the narratives of *Death of a Joyce Scholar* and *Further Adventures* on the surface and genetic level.

Death of a Joyce Scholar is a 1989 crime novel written by Irish American author Bartholomew Gill. It is part of a series collectively titled: The Peter McGarr Mysteries centralised on the life of a Garda Siochana Peter McGarr from Dublin. In Death of a Joyce Scholar, Professor Kevin Coyle, a lecturer at Trinity College Dublin is fatally stabbed on Bloomsday and found at a location called "Murderer's Ground" in Glasnevin Cemetery. Bloom coins the phrase "Murderer's Ground" (U, 82) to describe 5 Begnal Terrace, a house he passes in "Hades", which was the location of the murder of Thomas Childs on 2 September 1898 (Gifford 1988, 115). In Death of a Joyce Scholar, Coyle is found dead 'propped against the granite block wall of the Prospect Cemetery' (Gill 1989, 2), which is equated precisely as being the 'Murderer's Ground' of Ulysses by Detective McGarr.

It is a tightly plotted mystery with structural elements befitting the literary crime genre. Themes of sex, jealousy and revenge feature heavily in the narrative and at the novel's conclusion, following convention, Peter McGarr

solves the case and the correct murderer is arrested. McGarr uses Holmesian counter-intuition to solve the mystery, so the novel ends with a satisfying twist ending. Death of a Joyce Scholar is marketed to readers of contemporary murder mysteries, including the works of Hennig Mankell, Jo Nesbø, and James Patterson. This specific reading public will receive *Death of a Joyce* Scholar as a crime thriller, and position it comfortably within the boundaries of the genre. The second reading public of *Death of a Joyce Scholar* are fans of James Joyce who have been attracted to the book by the inclusion of their hero's name in the title. They read *Death of a Joyce Scholar* with a total fixation on references to Joyce, with secondary attention to the plotline. In polar opposite to the crime genre reading public, Joyceans may read Death of a Joyce Scholar using genetic and other academic methodologies. In total, there are at least a dozen *Ulysses* quotes hidden within the text of *Death of* a Joyce Scholar, as well as three from Finnegans Wake. You do not have to be a *Ulysses* reader to understand the plot, however. A non-Joycean reader is introduced to *Ulysses* very basically in *Death of a Joyce Scholar*, with simplified synopses of chapter content explained in dialogue. In chapter 5, Peter McGarr, who studies *Ulysses* to help him solve the crime, is told about the "Penelope" chapter by his wife Noreen: "I'll read it to you in bed. It ends with a soliloquy that you'll enjoy hearing and it'll tell you more than you ever wanted to know about women." (*Ibid.*, 47). To a reader familiar with "Penelope", its proposed recitation in the marital bed instantly associates the feminine tone of Noreen's voice with Molly Bloom's. The chapter progression in *Ulysses* and its Dublin locations are given exposition through McGarr's research of the modern Bloomsday celebrations, primarily the themed walking tour organised by the suspect Fergus Flood, a professor at Trinity College. The accompanying extracts from Death of a Joyce Scholar plot landmarks in the "Telemachus", "Lestrygonians" and "Sirens" chapters of Ulysses. In an official interview, in his office in Trinity College, Professor Fergus Flood retells the Bloomsday experience to Detective McGarr: "[I'd] choose the soft or picturesque spots. The Martello Tower, if the weather was fair. Davey Byrne's or the Ormonde, when the food was better, for a few jars and a bite to eat" (*Ibid.*, 33). For lunch, Flood purposely takes the tourists to

¹ Joyce's use of the Viconian cycle of birth, marriage, death and ricorso as motif within *Finnegans Wake* inspires the re-iteration of the four-part order in *Death of a Joyce Scholar* specifically when McGarr muses upon Irish farming: 'Having dismissed all the standard explanations for digging in the earth from re-establishing touch with his ecology to taking direct part in the cycle of birth, growth, harvest and rebirth.' (Gill 1989, 6). See also, Joyce, 1939, 58.8-9.

the same locations where Bloom eats his meals in "Lestrygonians" and "Sirens", which is subtle intertextuality that only a *Ulysses* reader will notice.

But the advanced Joycean, the academic or scholar, is addressed in Death of a Joyce Scholar also, albeit in a manner in which a Joyce novice cannot see. In fragmented and disorganised parts, quotes from *Ulysses* are sampled throughout the narrative, making it an unexpected genetic source within *Death of a Joyce Scholar*. The hot weather during the June 1988 timeframe of Death of a Joyce Scholar: "It began with an unprecedented period of June heat" (*Ibid.*, 3)², means that due a lack of rain in Dublin: "The farmers were [...] making hay with dried grasses" (Ibid., 3). "Making hay" is a unit from the "Calypso" chapter of Ulysses: "Make hay while the sun shines" (U, 49). Dozens of genetic units from *Ulysses* are incorporated into *Death of a Joyce Scholar* with this technique, which is cryptic but not obscure in its application. McGarr's discovery of soap at a suspect's house, and his subsequent comment: "Soap, and as oft and sweet as could be" (Gill 1989, 42), is a reconstruction of the passage: "Mr Bloom raised a [soap] cake to his nostrils. Sweet lemony wax" (U, 69). The respective genetic units from "Nestor" and "Aeolus": "bullockbefriending bard" (U, 29) and "DEAR DIRTY DUBLIN" (U, 119) are both integrated within Peter McGarr's troubled thoughts in chapter six: "[...] staring up over the house tops for one last glimpse of dear, dirty Dublin, the city of which he was the buttocksbefriending bard" (Gill 1989, 66)"; "A fly buzzed from the hall through [McGarr's] kitchen" (Ibid., 25) takes the units "flies buzzed" from "Lestrygonians": "Stuck, the flies buzzed" (U, 144) and the kidney which Bloom cooks in "Calypso" becomes the kidney of "Bang", a murder suspect whom Peter McGarr punches: "The kidneys were next. McGarr would have to lead him through a gauntlet of journalists, and the less obviously pummelled they looked, the better" (Gill 1989, 163). The iconic first four words of *Ulysses*: "Stately plump Buck Mulligan" (*U*, 3) are quoted in *Death of a Joyce* Scholar on multiple occasions. But in one instance, it is accompanied by a genetic unit from the second sentence of *Ulysses*: "A yellow dressing gown, ungirdled, was sustained gently behind [Buck Mulligan] on the mild morning air" (*U*, 3). In *Death of a Joyce Scholar*, these genetic units unite to create a parallel visual image between Peter McGarr's wife and Buck Mulligan:

This cites *Ulysses*' warm setting on June 16^{th} 1904: "Be a warm day I fancy. Specially in these clothes feel it more" (46).

"But [Peter McGarr's] eyes fell on [Noreen's] shoulders and chest and silky dressing gown, and the other promise made him say, "Stadely ploomp Book Molligun – what's the rist of it?" (Gill 1989, 54)³ "The dressing gown" is rewritten as "silky" and feminine, since it is worn by McGarr's wife. In chapter 18, the "Penelope" chapter of *Ulysses* intertextually structures the scene in which Detective Bresnahan sits in the bath and remembers her childhood in Kerry. Bresnahan's thoughts at this time about having sex in her apartment the previous afternoon is a narrative parallel with Molly's affair with Blazes Boylan at 4pm in *Ulysses*: "And suddenly a pall of guilt fell over [*Bresnahan*] like a leaden curtain, and, love or no love, she felt like an utter slut who had abandoned everything decent in her life for drink and easy sex in the middle of the afternoon, for heaven's sake" (Ibid., 228). Bresnahan's feminine monologue is delivered from a relaxed reclining position in the bath, reminiscent of Molly's bed and the imagery of the walls and mountain in her memory are genetic units sourced from "Penelope": "Flower of the mountain ye" (U, 643) and "kissed me under the mountain wall" (U, 643) and this constructs an intertextual visual parallel.

And the high pastures, every stone in the *walls* of which she once knew from helping her father lift and tug and rebuild the grey line which seemed to rise up to heaven. And the *mountain* with the sheet they "left out to God" and collected every now and again and how on a good day on one spin of a heel you could see Tralee, Castlemaine, Killarney, Cahersiveen, and Dingle. (Gill 1989, 298) [*My emphasis*]

Further Adventures of James Joyce by Irish author Colm Herron, published in May 2010, is a work of fiction set in the Northern Ireland town of Derry or Londonderry⁴ at the height of the recent "Troubles". Like Death of a Joyce Scholar, Further Adventures is written for two simultaneous audiences, or reading publics. Colm Herron defines clearly on his website the reading publics he has written Further Adventures for:

A perfect recipe for laughter and relaxation. [Further Adventures of James Joyce] tells what happens on the day James Joyce returns from the dead and shacks up

³ See (3).

⁴ As of 2010, the city is titled 'Derry/Londonderry' in tourist literature. Quoting R.L. Trask, the title dispute between 'Derry' and 'Londonderry' is a 'political problem' and there is 'no politically neutral name'. (Trask 2001, 179)

with book loving nymphomaniac Melanie Muldoon. It's a novel that will have ordinary readers laughing themselves silly while Joyce scholars sit and work out what the hell's behind it all. (Herron)

The first reading public of *Further Adventures* are the 'ordinary readers', whilst the second are 'Joycean scholars'. Herron's 'ordinary' reading public are fans of comic fiction in its most spirited and joyful form, receiving Further Adventures within the fixed boundaries of humour and as a recreational pleasure without intellectual complication. Joyce is a ridiculous comic character to the 'ordinary' reading public of Further Adventures. Flann O'Brien's similar clown-like presentation of Joyce in The Dalkey Archives notably influences Herron's jocular, non-serious form of appreciation. In addition, O'Brien's paranoid hero in At Swim Two Birds, who questions his own existence as a literary character, directly inspires the similar figure of Myles Corrigan who completes Further Adventures of James Joyce once the author 'Colm Herron' contracts writers block. From page 193 onwards, Myles writes two chapters of Further Adventures using the titles of Joycean works including the *Dubliners* short stories "A Painful Case" and "A Little Cloud" as well as subsequent sections called "A Portrait of the Artist in his Prime" and "Exiles (Act 1).

In a 2010 article for the *Derry Journal*, Herron attributes a Flann O'Brien-esque level of absurdity to his writing process, stating that James Joyce is currently living in Derry writing the follow-up novel to *Finnegans Wake*. Herron's treatment of Joyce as a comic figure is not vitriolic or disrespectful to the author, but rather his personal style of artistic homage:

I've always wanted to bring James Joyce [to Derry]. The furthest north he got was Belfast and he went there to see about opening of a cinema. This was about 101 years ago. So I thought 'It's never too late. He may he dead but that won't stop me. [...] And he loved it here [in Derry]. He loved it so much he didn't want to leave. In fact he rented a wee flat in Bishop Street⁵ and that's where he is now, writing like mad. (Quinn 2010, 10)

To Herron's second reading public, the 'Joyceans', Further Adventures is inherently received with a degree of seriousness. A Joycean, in an attempt

⁵ A street located within Derry's city walls, close to Herron's birthplace: Marlborough street.

to 'work out' the novel, in Herron's words, may analyse with a great deal of emphasis Herron's intertextual usage of *Ulysses* to construct *Further Adventures*. Indeed, Herron composed *Further Adventures* with a copy of *Ulysses* at his side at all times.⁶ Owing to its required knowledge of *Ulysses*, this is an approach to *Further Adventures* of interest to Joyceans and not 'ordinary readers'.

Stephen Dedalus' altercation in "Circe" with the drunken Englishmen Privates Carr and Compton is the intertextual model for the scene in *Further Adventures* when Myles Corrigan is questioned by two British soldiers, Soldier A and Soldier B, on patrol in Derry. (Herron 2010, 7-16) Stephen is beaten up for insulting King Edward VII: 'PRIVATE CARR: 'Here. What are you saying about my king?' (*U*, 485) whereas Myles, who has been drinking all day, angers the British soldiers upon being questioned, by insisting that he is James Joyce:

- Okay, mate. Name? said Soldier B.
- You want my name?
- Yeah. Name.
- James Augustine Joyce.
- Very impressive, said Soldier A. That's Roman, isn't it?
- Cork, actually, said Myles. Though I have heard it said -
- Address?
- The Martello Tower...
- Martello Tower.
- ... but I'm not going back.
- Why's that then?
- Two people tried to kill me there last night.
- Really? How was that? Did you report it?
- They both had drink taken, explained Myles. But I want to make it clear right now that Samuel Trench shot at me in good faith. *He* took me for a panther. The other, however –
- And who was the other party?
- The other bastard was Oliver Saint John Gogarty. (Herron 2010, 8-9)

⁶ My Interview with Colm Herron in Derry. Dated December 6th, 2010.

⁷ See (479-480).

In *Further Adventures*, the revised intertextual names for Privates Compton and Carr are Soldiers 'A' and 'B' since during the 'Saville Report', the public enquiry into the deaths of thirteen civilians by British paratroopers on "Bloody Sunday" in January 1972, such alphabetical pseudonyms were used in the official documentation.⁸ Since Soldier B has knowledge about Joyce's writing, despite being a non-reader, Myles is exposed as lying about his name, which places him in danger:

- Hang on, said Soldier B. I know now. Isn't [*Joyce*] the writer? [...] He did porn, didn't he? said Soldier B. He had to leave the country. Roight?'
- What! Snapped Myles. How dare you! Hah! (Ibid., 11)

Myles is subsequently suspected of criminal involvement by the soldiers as he has given "false information" (*Ibid.*, 11) and he is nearly arrested. Although Myles is not beaten up by Soldier A or Soldier B, he encounters a revised form of danger specific to the "Troubles" era. Nothing newsworthy happens in *Ulysses*, but in *Further Adventures* there are acts of violence throughout, including a police raid of Myles' house, a paramilitary punishment shooting of an alleged informant, a notorious sectarian massacre, and the public lynching of two soldiers. Herron frames *Further Adventures* alongside a series of "Troubles" killings in March 1988 which began with the deaths of the "Gibraltar Three" and followed by the retaliatory murders at the "Milltown Massacre" and "Corporals Killings". In total, eight people died and over sixty were injured during these incidents, and they are iconic moments in the "Troubles" owing to the heinous and bloody manner of the attacks perpetrated.

The approaching Republican funeral in Belfast for three IRA members shot dead by the British in Gibraltar is discussed at length during Myles Corrigan's taxi ride through Derry with Conn and Danny. The "Gibraltar

⁸ Since the beginning of the Saville Report in 1998, the phrases 'Soldier A' and 'Soldier B' have entered into the Northern Ireland lexicon meaning: 'An anonymous, generic British soldier.'

⁹ In a "Circe" parallel, with genetic sourcing, Myles is protected and helped by a character during the interrogation. Bloom is the genetic model for Conn Doherty in this chapter of *Further Adventures*. Bloom's statement to the soldiers—"[*Stephen*] doesn't know what he's saying. Taken a little more than is good for him" (*U*, 483)—uses verbal reasoning to prevent the soldiers beating Stephen up. Conn's insistence that Myles is incapable of rational thought: "He's not fit to be questioned" is genetically sourced from Bloom's statement. See Herron 2010, 193-249.

Three", which they became titled, were surprised in a van by SAS troops prior to a bombing campaign and shot dead:

- Are you sure you're wise going up to Belfast? said Conn.
- The soldiers are going to attack the funerals. Sure you know that.
- I heard the IRA fired a military salute this evening already, said the driver. [*The soldiers*] are not going to be there. (*Ibid.*, 78)

Myles attends their funeral in the subsequent section of Further Adventures, but he is primarily visiting the graves of his deceased girlfriend and infant son. His statement about his son: '- Twenty-seven, said Myles. - That's about the age my boy would have been.' (Herron 2010, 103) is a genetic unit adapted from "Calypso": "He would be eleven now if he had lived" (U, 54). These are Bloom's thoughts about his son Rudy, who also died after several days. To the Joycean reader of Further Adventures, Myles' intertextual connection with Bloom, in regards to their dual parental grief, reveals that Herron structures the scenes at Belfast's Milltown Cemetery upon "Hades" in *Ulysses*. Indeed, even prior to Myles' arrival in Belfast, his journey to the funeral, firstly by taxi ride and secondly by car (*Ibid.*, 80)¹⁰ are intertextually modelled on Bloom's carriage ride through Dublin, before reaching Glasnevin (72-83). At the cemetery, Myles experiences first-hand the events of the "Milltown Massacre" on 16th March 1988 wherein he is nearly killed by a lone Loyalist paramilitary, Michael Stone, who ambushed the funeral armed with grenades and semi-automatic pistols. Stone threw grenades at the coffins of "The Gibraltar Three" and shot dead three Republican mourners, seriously injured sixty others before making his failed escape:¹¹

The man was firing into the crowd of diving running falling people. [...] Like someone playing bowls he leaned forward and rolled one grenade after another towards the parked hearses. The air splintered. The screams grew shriller and, above the screams, hoarse loud voices. (*Ibid.*, 82)

¹⁰ Myles Corrigan's car journey over the Glenshane mountain, from Derry to Belfast, like Bloom's carriage trip, incorporates many thoughts about death. Whereas Bloom mourns Rudy and his father Virag, Myles is devastated by the loss of his girlfriend thirty years previously: "I lost everything. All she lost was the moment she died in" (Herron 2010, 80).

¹¹ For a detailed account of events see Dillon 1993.

The thoughts of inevitable mortality which permeate Bloom's mind, upon being surrounded by graves and coffins: "I daresay the soil would be quite fat with corpsemanure, bones, flesh, nails" (*U*, 89) are passing musings. However, in *Further Adventures* the process of death, through violent murder, is contemporaneous narrative action and Myles does not walk peacefully around the cemetery like Bloom, but is shot at by Stone with the bullet missing him by inches and hitting his girlfriend's gravestone (Herron 2010, 80). Myles is subsequently traumatised and psychotically believes, owing to a bold-typed dialogue with his author, that the experience was not reality and that, like Bloom, he is a fictional character:

- Am I dead? Are you finished with me?
- You're not dead.
- Why did you spare me?
- Respect. Respect for the dead. (Ibid., 84)

Myles is mentally disturbed by the shock caused to him, like many "Troubles" victims, and his idiosyncratic psychosis that he is trapped inside a book is sourced from his obsession with Joyce, whom he extensively quotes from in the novel. ¹² In a moment of pure insanity, Myles interviews Joyce from beyond the grave using 'Electronic Voice Phenomenon' technology, (179-188) a paranormal technique used to contact the dead via a radio, computer and tape recorder. Many incidents from Joyce's life, which Herron sources from Ellmann's biography, ¹³ are incorporated into their resulting conversation.

My definition of fixed reading publics in *Death of a Joyce Scholar* and *Further Adventures* insists upon a hypothesis that no reader can belong to both groups, and that they are mutually exclusive. But, in the case of *Death of a Joyce Scholar*, for example, this is not empirically so, since there *are* crime genre fans who like *Ulysses*, and vice versa. Such a reader, a fan of crime fiction *and* Joyce, will begin *Death of a Joyce Scholar* with an unbiased approach to its content, so in theory they alone can review and appreciate it without built-in literary prejudices. However, in practice *Death of a Joyce Scholar* does not allow for such equality since its reader is quickly drawn to

¹² For Myles' recitation from "Gas from a Burner" see: Herron 2010, 51.

¹³ See Ellmann 1983, 592 in relation to biographical material about how Joyce once asked James Stephens, an Irish novelist, to complete *Finnegans Wake*. Herron details this extensively in Joyce's conversation with Myles (187).

certain aspects of the novel more than others, so even the most impartial of these crime /Joycean fans will find their allegiance to one of their reading publics challenged. As *Death of a Joyce Scholar* progresses, a conscious preference to one reading public will be unconsciously made, and the remainder of the novel will be received in this way. In conclusion, Bartholomew Gill and Colm Herron demonstrate accomplished knowledge of Joyce's works, but they are careful not to alienate the non-Joycean by the integration of *Ulysses* genetic units within their texts. Gill and Herron occupy the middle ground between the oppositional reading publics, who will believe their approach to *Death of a Joyce Scholar* or *Further Adventures* is definitive. The Joycean reading public, with its collective expert knowledge of *Ulysses*, can enjoy deciphering the content in both novels, which initiates genetic research and academic appreciation. The genetic units from *Ulysses* will not be off-putting to commercial and crime fiction reading publics since they are covertly incorporated, and are unobtrusive within the narratives. *Death* of a Joyce Scholar and Further Adventures therefore subvert our literary conventions, uniting two reading publics thought to be irreconcilable within a text's totality. It is suitable that is the figure of James Joyce who structures this complex arrangement by standing at the crossroads which links the reading publics together.

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