

JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY

13

**WHY READ JOYCE
IN THE 21ST CENTURY?**

Edited by
FRANCA RUGGIERI AND ENRICO TERRINONI

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HAVE YOU EVER “SEEN” JOYCE?
THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN THE
POPULARIZATION OF THE MAN AND HIS WORK

What exactly do you mean by “read” Joyce?
Who can pride himself on having “read” Joyce?
Jacques Derrida, ‘Two Words for Joyce’

Popular Joyce

In the opening sentence of his essay “Two Words for Joyce,” Jacques Derrida reveals a common anxiety among Joyce scholars: “It is very late, it is always too late with Joyce” (1984, 145). The impression of belatedness of readers’ responses to Joyce together with Derrida’s definition of his own complex relationship with the Irish novelist’s work—the reduction of his own critical writing to a mere “metonymic dwarf” (*Ibid.*, 149) of the gigantic Joycean *oeuvre*—convey the idea of the aura of respect which surrounds the figure of Joyce in the academic world. Hardly any traces of this *sacer horror*, however, can be detected in contemporary readers’ responses to Joyce’s work and in contemporary representations and reworkings of Joycean references: the “conscious Joyce”—as Vincent J. Cheng terms it, referring to “what Joyce means, if anything at all, in mass culture; Joyce in the popular consciousness” (1996, 180)—reflects a common negative attitude towards the hard task of reading and understanding Joyce’s language: “the adjectives appropriate to the ‘conscious Joyce’ are various but mostly negative in connotation and attitude: obscure; obscene; esoteric; formidable; weird; degenerate; even insane” (*Ibid.*, 180).

In short, to paraphrase Cheng’s words, James Joyce seems to get “no respect” (*Ibid.*, 180), since the abundance of intertextual references to his writings in heterogeneous contemporary cultural contexts may be some-

times perceived as a form of “parodic reduction”, apt to exorcise the uneasiness which any approach to the Irish author commonly generates. Nonetheless, as Cheng aptly assesses, the variety of approaches, indeed the seeming disrespectfulness of some of them, indicates that Joyce “has come a long way in the popular consciousness”: “If imitation and even parody are the sincerest forms of flattery, even if sometimes unacknowledged or perhaps unconscious [...] Joyce is obviously getting a good deal of flattery and respect” (*Ibid.*, 192). So much so: paying homage to Joyce entails considering him not only as “a cultural figure within the popular culture of today”, but as an *icon*, “whose uses in a postmodern age, within academy as well as without, have been polymorphous, if not downright perverse” (Kershner 1996, 1).

This paper thus looks to that branch of cultural studies which deals with the cross-fertilization of high culture and popular culture. It analyses the impact of Joyce’s figure and works on some forms of contemporary mass culture such as the Internet and hypertext fiction, in the attempt both to assess to what extent popular culture uses (and/or misuses) literary tradition and to detect how the Internet challenges the meaning of “popular”, particularly when used as a label to describe Joyce’s work. My approach seeks to be in line with the recent British perspective on the subject, which, in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith’s view, considers modern culture as a single intertextual field, “whose signifying elements are perpetually being recombined and played off against each other [in] a growing interchange of forms” (quot. in Kershner 1996, 31). I will adopt the terms “popular culture” and “mass culture”, purposefully disregarding any strict definition, though aware of the terminological debate which regards them. This debate aims at reconciling the dichotomy between high culture and popular culture imposed by advocates of modernism, and has attempted to free the term “mass culture” from any ideological and political connotations, carrying with them “the implication that homogeneous masses are being freely manipulated by someone or something” (Kershner 1996, 2). In my review of Joyce’s appropriation by contemporary popular culture, the two terms overlap, viewed as they are in the same dialectical/dialogical relationship which links *élite* and popular cultures in his very work (Kershner 1989, 13), thus contributing, to the same extent, to Joyce’s broad accessibility by means of general consumption items and the mass media.¹

¹ I endorse Dominic Strinati’s view of popular culture (one which he quotes from Hebdige’s *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things*—1988—and in which the terms “popular” and

Derek Attridge's explanation of the importance of refusing cultural hierarchies in order to grasp the underlying openness of Joyce's work may be of use in this context; the critic rightly assumes that

by refusing the cultural hierarchies that most of his readers take for granted, Joyce builds a principle of accessibility into his work; or, to put it another way, there is a whole series of minority audiences, each of which has access to special knowledge that will illuminate one aspect of his writing, but no one of which occupies a privileged position *vis-à-vis* the text's meaning [...] Above all, readers would have to give up the fundamental presupposition that reading is an attempt at textual mastery; that is, that the words on the page possess a meaning that can be got from them by the appropriate process of translation, a process that, if successful, entirely exhausts the text's potential meaning [...] Acknowledging that texts are always in contexts, that contexts are always themselves contextualized, and that contexts are never exhaustible or predictable is one way of recognizing the inadequacy of the notion of reading as mastery (Attridge 1996, 24-25).

Of course, Attridge is touching on an issue dear to Joyce's readers who try to get to a definite meaning out of Joyce's texts, deeming to master both the man and his work. In particular, his notion of "contextualization" is most relevant here, in so far as it may be applied not only to the texts' interpretation, but also to the readers' perception of the author himself; since in a postmodern age the work of art—as Attridge states elsewhere—is open to the contingencies of the context which makes use of it:

the fact that the work of art is experienced as a singular *event*, by an individual with specific (and changing) needs, expectations, memories, and associations, at a particular time and place, is not factored out as far as it is possible to do

"mass" cross) as "a set of generally available artefacts: films, records, clothes, TV programmes, modes of transport, etc." Popular culture "can be found in different societies, within different groups in societies, and among societies and groups in different historical periods. It is therefore not to have a strict and exclusive definition" (Strinati 2004, xvi). Perhaps, even distinguishing popular culture in folklore and mass culture according to the level of industrialization attained by modern societies—as some popular culture critics do, in Strinati's summary—would also be improper, since it would imply fixing the "form" of popular culture while denying both its energy and "its constant recycling and bending of the old to newly hybrid purposes" (Kershner 1996, 29).

so [...] but is factored *in* as an essential part of the work's mode of operation (Attridge 2000, 118).

The work of art appears as a “social event” whose fruition and interpretation are susceptible and responsive to the changes occurring within societies and social groups in time and space. Complex as they are, issues of contextualization, interpretation and appropriation are even more complicated in a period in which the web promotes and spreads new sets of ideas and values.² As a technology of free communication (and one which has—we may presume—a gradual “democratizing” effect on culture), the Internet provides “convenient, and often inexpensive, access to an unprecedented range of familiar and new kinds of material”, thus requiring us to “move away from the ‘linear’ and hierarchical arguments privileged by print technologies towards postmodern, ‘multivocal’ networks of meaning” (Browner et al. 2000, 169-70). By imposing a redefinition of both the role of the readers (the whole host of “netizens,” the socially and culturally varied group of citizens of the Internet, which form a substantial part of the contemporary reading public), who are empowered with new tools of analysis and interpretation—which obviously modify their “sense of what counts as a text” (*Ibid.*, 170)—and the presence (or absence) of the original author during the process of appropriation, the Internet enters the high culture/popular culture debate, dramatically modifying the meaning of “popular”.

Cyber-Joyce

Joyce's ghost haunts the bits and pixels so insistently that reading Joyce in the 21st century necessarily implies “reading Joyce's work online”, as attested by recent efforts to transpose Joyce's works digitally as hypertext and hypermedia fictions, which will be the object of my analysis. However, a

² In *The Internet Galaxy* (2001), Manuel Castells offers a lucid evaluation of the all-embracing presence of the Internet in modern societies and of its key role in determining and transforming the features of a particular context: “The Internet Galaxy is a new communicative environment. Because communication is the essence of human activity, all domains of social life are being modified by the pervasive uses of the Internet [...]. A new social form, the network society, is being constituted around the planet, albeit in a diversity of shapes, and with considerable differences in its consequences for people's lives, depending on history, culture, and institutions” (quot. in Gupta 2009, 77).

discussion of the relationship the web creates with Joyce must include an appraisal of how the Internet appropriates the Irish author as an everlasting source of new imagery. In particular, the Internet exploits the “Joycean vein” to extract new visual images (from cartoons to strips to e-cards); hence, web artists follow the path traced by the earliest cartoonists dealing with Joyce, who often offered satirical accounts of his work focusing on the difficult task of coping with his language.³ Interestingly enough, however, several contemporary web approaches to Joyce tend to concentrate more on the man than on his work, thus contributing to the consolidation of a “cyber-Joyce myth”, which not only confirms Kershner’s assessment of Joyce’s iconicity but also accounts for the strong influence one’s own reading of and response to a text have on the creation of a peculiar image of the author himself. As a result, the underlying mood of Joycean web representations varies according to the authors’ particular experience of Joyce’s texts and the extent to which James Joyce has penetrated their consciousness.

The analysis of web images appropriating the Irish author may start from a well-known and funny one: *The Creation of Joyce* by Eddie Maloney. It is a postmodern version of Michelangelo’s *Creation of Adam* in which Joyce’s face is boldly set on Adam’s body, in the act of receiving God’s life-giving touch. The collage is far from being blasphemous since it offers, in my view, an excellent testimony of the meaning of the high culture/popular culture dialogical relationship I have described above. On a higher level, the visual fusion of Joyce and Adam may establish a connection between the two figures and also with God, since the three of them are associated with the performative energy of the “word,” though in different ways. God’s creation, in fact, is originated by language, His well-known “fiat lux” setting the pattern of His creative act. Adam himself uses lan-

³ American cartoonist Dan Schiff, for example, gives an account of a drawing appeared in *Dublin Opinion* in January 1924, that Joyce himself described to his brother Stanislaus as “the first caricature of *Ulysses* [he] saw.” In a prison cell, an annoyed convict is handing a bulky volume to the warden. The dialogue between the two is set in the caption and it takes a hit at Joyce’s book: the perplexed warden wonders what else the prisoner wants, since he has been taken off hard labour and received Joyce’s *Ulysses* to read; the convict replies decisively “More oakum!” (Schiff 1992, 202). After only a couple of years since the book’s appearance, the common reader could sympathize with the convict’s feeling: reading Joyce represented a harder task than hard labour. Schiff himself has contributed extensively to Joyce’s re-creation in the visual arts by self-publishing in 1996 his own collection of Joyce cartoons, *Let’s All Chortle: A James Joyce Cartoonbook*. Some of his sketches are available online in the electronic journal *Hypermedia Joyce Studies* (<http://hjs.ff.cuni.cz/archives/v2/schiff/index.html>).

guage to master the world around him: his very act of naming living things represents a creative act on a different level, since it implies giving life to things as we know them. Finally, as a master appropriator of language, and one who is always conscious of the wide range of potentialities of the written word, Joyce is able to experiment with English and other languages (Epstein 1983, 58) without submitting to any of them. Like Adam, Joyce gives life to the world of his own imagination through his semiotic way of dealing with things.

The fruitful convergence of high and popular culture emerges more clearly (and, perhaps, more surprisingly) in a recent appropriation of Maloney's image, which is worth noting here. The March 15, 2008 post of *Neidin's Weblog* opens with a picture slightly—but significantly—modifying Maloney's *Creation* with a touch of “additional blasphemy”: just behind the two hands that hardly touch, in that blank space between God and Joyce-Adam, Ireland's patron saint makes his appearance in green Episcopal apparel, pastoral and mitre (just as he appears in popular iconography), his own hand stretching out to join the two in front of him as if he wanted to have his share in the creation and also as if he were blessing the union. Indeed, however perplexing, St. Patrick's inclusion in the picture reveals the relationship which binds the three figures on the level of language, evangelization being one of the effects of the energy of the “word”. The visual effect is astounding: distinct and one at the same time, God, Joyce and St. Patrick are attached to the same root, just like the three leaves of the shamrock to their stem. The post is significantly titled “Thirteen pieces of advice on St. Patrick's Day” and the blogger (an Irish woman living in Brisbane, Australia) is at pains to explain that St. Patrick's Day as they understand it outside Ireland “is not the St. Patrick's Day of Ireland” and that “not everybody is Irish on St. Patrick's Day”; in particular, she recommends people to “read some Irish poetry before setting out, or Joyce,” because they “[get] one in the mood”. Thus, religion, literature and folklore smartly blend in one compressed and inclusive view of Ireland, or (rather, in the light of the blogger's instructive pieces of advice) of how Ireland is *perceived* by non-Irish eyes.

Joyce's craftsmanship with language is emphasized in *James Joyce*, a black and white drawing by Pohlenz, uploaded on Toonpool.com—a German website that displays among its portfolios an ample folder with several “famous people cartoons”—on January 8, 2008. The information accompanying the cartoon should be read in sequence with the title; it runs as fol-

lows: “destroying and re-building language”. The peculiarity of the cartoon (indeed of the site itself) lies in its being a commodity to be freely shared among the site guests and posted as a link on social networks. Moreover, it can be sent as an e-card to all the contacts on one’s mailing list, thus spreading Joyce’s “gospel” even to a non-academic audience. Pohlenz’s version of Joyce’s commitment to language falls within that familiar Joyce iconography which depicts the Irish author wearing a pair of round glasses and a fedora, thus making him a clearly recognizable figure. However, the cartoonist adds an uncommon touch: Joyce is represented as a mason, holding a brick and a trowel, his back leaning against a freshly built capital “J”. In the background other bits of brickwork words can be discerned. Joyce seems so fixed in what he is doing that he is not able to notice what is going on at the foot of the “J”, where a tiny figure, half Joyce half goblin, is caught in the very act of destroying the mason’s creation. One may presume that the goblin figure stands for something more than Joyce’s alter ego: it may suggest either the Joyce reader or the Joyce critic, involved in the act of “destroying” language during the interpretive process which should lead them to a full understanding of Joyce’s work.

Not surprisingly, some of the images deal with that painful sensation often associated with reading Joyce, that “mixed feeling” of being inflicted a sort of corporal punishment and the frustration at not being able to grasp meanings entirely. Interestingly, however, those sketches do not simply depict the frustration of students and scholars: they also deal with the hard task of “teaching” Joyce to unexperienced young people. The cartoons I have chosen here (both appearing on the Cartoonstock.com website) represent a brilliant example of how the “conscious Joyce” finds in the Internet an excellent mode of expression. Wilbur Dawbarn’s sketch is set in a professors’ lounge; a man has just entered the room, one hand covering his face in a desperate gesture. The caption relates the character’s words and helps the viewer understand his role: he is a professor of English literature who has just introduced Joyce’s work to his class. The outcome is unpredictable and depressing: “New career low—gave out a page of *Ulysses* to my freshmen and they thought it was a wordsearch.” To a generation of readers, used to receiving explicit messages from mass media, Joyce’s language appears obscure, esoteric, his words apparently meaningless; therefore the Irish author is dismissed as a riddle no one really cares to solve. Different scene, same underlying mood: cartoonist Chris Wildt confers on another academic character the right to comment on a student’s review of *Ulysses*. The character

ironically stresses the “originality” of the student’s interpretation, which, as a matter of fact, in spite of shedding light on the book, clarifies that unkind dismissal of Joyce described above: “Interesting take on *Ulysses* by James Joyce. I’ve never heard stream-of-consciousness narrative described as ‘one long Twitter’.” The capital “t” in “Twitter” is, I assume, relevant in this context, since it transposes the word to the semantic field which is proper to the Internet, Twitter being one the most popular social networking and microblogging systems available nowadays. Once again, the Internet proves a profitable mass-marketplace where high culture items can be traded, sometimes providing good bargains. These two Joycean sketches are part of a collection of cartoons that can be bought as such or as decorative elements on a series of artefacts of consumption (such as t-shirts, umbrellas and mugs) which anyone might use in their everyday life. Thanks to e-commerce, Joyce is no longer limited to the bookshelves.

The Joycean web appropriations sometimes reflect the remarkable attraction that the “dark side” of Joyce’s language and life exerts on his readers and that has won him a reputation of obscenity, indecency or morbidity. The Internet intrudes upon Joyce’s privacy and eagerly exploits his letters to Nora. The images resulting from the reworking of the original text offer an amusing account of the writer’s sexual tastes;⁴ at the same time they depict the readers’ bewilderment towards such letters. One wonders if such a reaction grows out of the discovery that Joyce was not simply a *name* but a *real* human being, after all. The sketch I have selected is particularly interesting in this context since it exemplifies how the contemporary Joyce reader exploits the Internet as a communication tool and as an easy access to his works. In addition, it refers to the possibility of transposing Joyce’s letters to Nora into another form, one which, in its immediacy and extreme accessibility, could reach the widest possible reading public: graphic storytelling. It is a four panel strip, posted in a blog in 2009 and bearing a significant title, *History Mysteries*, which does not make the message of the strip any clearer but probably deals with the mysterious ways in which history and literature affect the reader’s imagination. The protagonist is presumably a cartoonist and is chatting with a friend of hers, who suggests she should “do a comic” about Joyce’s letters. She accepts willingly, but first of all she

⁴ See, for example, Robert Goodin’s illustration for the New York Press “Joyce getting a face full of fart” (2008, available at www.comicartcollective.com), showing James Joyce’s face in ecstasy in front of Nora’s bottom.

has to “look those up”; thus, she uses the Internet to access to some online library and get all the material she needs, just like canonical researchers do. The third panel shows her astonished (or, to say it better, disgusted) face fixing the screen, her eyes almost popping out of her head; a reader’s reaction to Joyce’s explicit descriptions of sexual intercourse could not be better depicted. Apparently, she abandons the project, but it is too late: Joyce’s ghost has already penetrated her consciousness, albeit only to haunt her sleepless nights. Thus, in the very last panel another version of the “conscious Joyce” appears: Joyce the “pervert” peeps from a balloon, sneering at the poor cartoonist, and trying to lure her with promising words (“I wrote you a letter”). We cannot but sympathize with our heroine, whose desperate appeal voices many a reader’s distress when trying to give sense to Joyce’s words: “Get away from me James Joyce”. Literature moves through the web in mysterious ways indeed: what the Internet user sees when hitting on the strip is a postmodern graphic reworking of Joyce’s “dirty” words. Of course, while it does not respond to the protagonist’s abandoned original project of a graphic novel version, it proves more effective in alluding to them rather than in quoting them.

Visual *Ulysses*

The character’s trauma in the closing panel of *History Mysteries* offers a good example of how the Joycean text sometimes affects the reader’s mind, thus contributing to the creation of what Vincent J. Cheng terms “the Joycean Unconscious”, a “culturally constructed consciousness of Joyce and his texts in the psyche of our mass culture” (1996, 182).⁵ Moreover, in proposing a feasible re-elaboration of Joyce’s work in graphic novel form, the strip also testifies to a recent trend in the creative interpretive approach to the Joycean text. I am referring in particular to the adaptation of *Ulysses* in graphic novel form for the web by the *Throwaway Horse* team, whose

⁵ In his essay, Cheng refers in particular to the impact of Joyce’s works on other mass culture forms of consumption, pointing out how embedded references to Joyce’s work in some famous Hollywood movies and in popular songs have the advantage of “get[ting] high school students interested in Joyce” (192), thus spreading the “Joycean word” and making it more attractive even for a non-academic audience. His definition may be profitably applied to the Joycean images on the web, insofar as, weird as they may appear, they grip the audience’s attention and confirm the commitment of contemporary mass culture to our author.

goal is “fostering understanding of public domain literary masterworks by joining the visual aid of the graphic novel with the explicatory aid of the Internet” (Reid 2010), thus pointing out the essential role of the Internet in the popularization of canonical literary texts. Indeed, as artist Robert Berry admits in the “About this comic” section of the site, *Ulysses “Seen”* (an ambitious project available at www.ulyssesseen.com and aiming at reworking the whole novel at a rate of two chapters a year—Reid 2010) is meant as a complement to the experience of *reading* the novel and as such it does not claim to replace it.⁶

The site may be considered a graphic version of “axial hypertext,” as David Ciccoricco terms it, indicating a “translation of conventional print texts into digital text, a form of organization in which references, variant readings, and other supplements to the main text radiate from it in the manner of branches from a tree” (2007, 5). In fact, readers can both enjoy Berry’s graphic adaptation as it is, without interrupting the linearity of reading, or click on panels (or on links appearing on top of every page) and be redirected to Mike Barsanti’s “Reader’s guide”. Barsanti’s guide proves a very useful tool for fostering first-hand readers’ understanding of Joyce’s novel insofar as it provides references to the corresponding lines in the Gabler’s edition of *Ulysses* for every webpage and explains the panels, shedding light on Joyce’s literary allusions and historical references and on key concepts of his poetics; moreover, the text is interspersed with hypertextual links and keywords readers can click on in order to delve into the themes Barsanti anticipates. The structure of the guide shows how powerful and empowering a tool the Internet is: Barsanti’s analysis is followed by a blog section where users are exhorted to comment on the drawings, give their feedback, or post whatever they feel consistent with the general theme of the page, thus actively contributing to the development of the project. The general impression is one of a constant contact between different users and between users and the *Throwaway Horse* team, a contact which generates a flow of new, stimulating ideas.

Ulysses “Seen” opens with a full page panel depicting a view of Dublin Bay and Martello Tower, Sandycove, an “establishing shot” indicating where

⁶ The print and the web texts are curiously related in their being a “publishing event” of their days. *Throwaway Horse*, in fact, encountered severe opposition on part of Apple when *Ulysses “Seen”* was proposed as an application for the iPad because of some nudity (the milk-woman’s breasts and Mulligan’s penis). Media attention and the reading public pressure were so strong that finally Apple relented and accepted the app (Reid 2010), which came out in 2011.

the action takes place and visualizing the complex set of overlapping references that run through the novel; as Mike Barsanti explains:

[A] castle overlooking the sea: Hamlet. A castle with a view a port for leaving the island: the Odyssey. And it ties out to a moment [in] Joyce's life, and a moment in Irish history as well. A perfect "overdetermined" multiple overlaying of the personal, the literary, the historical [...] and we haven't even talked about the religious elements... and we're just getting started!
(<http://ulyssesseen.com/landing/2009/04/telemachus-2/>)

The panel exemplifies how the artist's imagination has worked to fill the descriptive gaps of the novel (as Berry affirms, *Ulysses* represents Mount Everest for a cartoonist: "[t]he imagery, the phrasing; Joyce wasn't that visual and we didn't take out much of the text"), in the attempt "to capture the book[s] plasticity of time" (Reid 2010). The artist's ability in handling his material and his effort to render that sense of plasticity of time through evocative images unfold in particular when it comes to giving form to Stephen Dedalus' thoughts and recollections. I would like to focus on Berry's adaptation of Stephen's recollection of his dead mother (*U*, 1.102-10, 249-79), an episode the artist lingers over, devoting three full pages to it, thus pointing out its obsessiveness for the protagonist.

A constant feature in the graphic novel, relevant fragments of the original text appear in captions written in the panels, to create a perfect continuum of words and images. Much more than this: the comics form allows one to reproduce the overlapping of narrative past and present in its immediacy in panels which are not distinguished by different frames or any other graphic expedient. Hence, in the very last panels of the pages depicting Stephen's recollection, Berry brings the reader back to the present, shifting to Stephen's pale face (p. 0026), or to his darkened half-length silhouette, standing where we met him first, on top of Martello Tower (p. 0027). Following Joyce's lines, May Dedalus' presence is only hinted at, thus stressing the will to adhere to the original as much as possible; the artist pauses upon the objects that Stephen identifies with his mother (a fan, some powdered ball carnets, a "gaud of amber beads") or that belong to May Dedalus' memories ("a birdcage hung in the sunny window of her house when she was a girl," p. 0027), depicting them in detail. Even when she comes to Stephen in a dream, May Dedalus is identified by objects (the beads her dead hands clasp, or the cameo brooch on her neck). Never does the artist offer a real close-up of her face, never does the reader get a view

of those “glazing eyes” that “shake and bend” Stephen’s soul: her image is fragmented, blurred, disturbing. The viewer almost feels the pressure of her gaze on Stephen’s bent head and perceives her ghostly presence, as if she were not there to haunt the protagonist only. One cannot but sympathize with Stephen’s exasperated dismissal of her, which, in Berry’s version (“No, mother. Let me be and live”), omitting the second “let me” of the original text (“No, mother! Let me be and let me live” *U*, 1.279), sounds strangely as a command to her to “live her own life” while leaving her son alone (p. 0028).

The *Throwaway Horse* project, as well as the brief roundup of Joycean web images that I have offered, show to what extent the act of appropriation and re-elaboration both of the bulk of Joycean work and concepts and of the Joyce figure through the Internet narrows the gap between low- and high-profile cultures. Hierarchies no longer exist: re-contextualized as he is in the new media, Joyce enters “the popular conscious at subconscious, subliminal levels” (Cheng 1996, 181), exerting his attraction on whoever happens to cross his path. In representing a strong imaginative resource for our own time, the “cyber-Joyce” may stand for a good starting point to transform persisting opinions regarding the inaccessibility of Joyce’s work to an ordinary reader. Joyce’s representations on the web respond to the main principles of the appropriation technique. Despite the heterogeneity, irreverence, and even “perversity” in the way it rethinks the Irish author as a new cultural product, the web activates and reactivates Joyce’s canonical status as a writer,⁷ while at the same time giving evidence of his public availability and relevance to a wide audience.

Back to Derrida, then, the reinterpretation of Joyce’s works and figure through mass culture forms of consumption shows that maybe it is not always too late: the scenario of the contemporary cultural market dealing with Joyce, as I have tried to depict it, testifies to a constant effort to read Joyce in new, contemporary perspectives, and to come to terms with his legacy. In this way, he has finally become our contemporary. Perhaps.

⁷ “Adaptations and appropriations prove complicit in activating and reactivating the canonical status of certain texts and writers, even when the more politicized appropriation may be seeking to challenge that very status” (Sanders 2006, 22).

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