

Ulysses: An ordinary reader slings off by Colleen Isaac

I first read Ulysses some forty years ago. Okay, I didn't read it all, just the dirty bits but then I was a student, pressed for time and nineteen years old. An earnest tutor had lectured us on the importance of James Joyce . I learned:

1. The greatest of his novels was *Ulysses*. "A new way of writing, forcing language into new moulds," I was told. This was called Stream of Consciousness.
2. Molly Bloom was an Earth Mother. That's when I learned what an earth mother was. Mainly she seemed fat, and lay about a lot.

I passed my exams and for the last forty years *Ulysses* has bubbled along merrily without troubling me much until Frances and Di started these Bloomsday events. Armed with stream of consciousness, Molly the Earth Mother and the dirty bits I knew, I was charmed by the whimsy in the passages that the actors chose to dramatise (and punctuate), the clever use of speech, the aplomb of the Bloomsday Players, and yes, I could hear that *Ulysses* was great.

Then came this year and Philip and Frances asked me to tackle *Ulysses* again. But this time I had a new take. On our frequent car trips we have been listening spellbound to Robert Fagel's new translation of Homer's *Odyssey* on tape. It would be fun, I thought, to compare them.

In the Odyssey young Telemachus is chatted up by Athena to go and look for his father, while Penelope's suitors plot to kill him and wed the prize. (Telemachus of course must be Stephen, but really, would Stephen's father have wanted to come home if Stephen had found him?(Now there's a plotline!))

My problem is: Stephen, dour, withdrawn, crassly undutiful to his mother, and paralysed in his duties as a teacher, does not set the Liffey on fire as a hero. It feels like hard work following him. Stream of Consciousness, I decide, is not all it was cracked up to be.

After the first two delightful episodes - the first made vivid by Buck Mulligan's presence, and the second acid in its mockery of the school and the fatuity of Mr Deasey's ambition - we get to Stream of Consciousness and the Ineluctable Modality of the Visible.. He goes down onto the sand and watches the midwives; (there are no midwives in the *Odyssey* - lots of maidens with phials of sweet oil, and bathing and dressing and soft fleeces and.. but I digress) ... Stephen observes the cockle gatherers and their dog. I was delighted: the man can write: listen to this- *At the lacefringe of the tide [the dog] halted with stiff forehoofs, seawardpointed ears. His snout lifted , barked at the wavenoise, herds of seamorse. They*

serpented towards his feet, curling, unfurling many crests, every ninth, breaking, plashing, from far, from farther out, waves and waves. - But then on and on Stephen maunders about people he knew in Paris, about his relatives - and a rum lot they are - and more and more about himself.

What's he DOING? I asked myself. He's sitting on the sand. ..

All this turbulence and tides and flumes.. Suddenly I KNOW what he's doing... and it's not very interesting, particularly when you know he's killing time before going to the pub to drink up his week's wages. Homer's Telemachus is a good boy , not a great character , but this lad... spare us his thoughts!

In *Odysseus* Ulysses visits many Strangers' halls, and all having supped and drunk their fill, he tells them about his hair-raising adventures, who bedded him, whom he bedded, and the wise and wonderful people he met - and the fearsome monsters. I started feeling somewhat apprehensive as I approached Chapter 2.

But I'm a charitable sort. Leopold Bloom, after all, is the central character and -well- Ulysses was a bit of a lad, hopped into bed with the most alarming ladies, so Bloom's irritating habit of mentally undressing women has precedents...but the comparisons are going nowhere. Circe or Calypso could have knocked the socks off Molly by the age of ten. I have a problem, too, identifying with a main character who brings his wife breakfast in bed, knowing that he has also brought up to her a letter from the man who means to cuckold him, but OK, I let this go. But things do not get better. He buys the kidneys. Very slowly. (Outside my door the cat is yowling to be fed, and the dog is getting restive. My computer looks reproachful.)

Come on, Poldy (POLDY! Spare me) Get on with it! Get her her wretched breakfast so that we can get to what has to be a good day, as I know from those acute bits of Bloomsday play-acting. I feed the cat and sit down again. Disaster! Leopold Bloom burnt the kidneys! Or thinks so! Can I face the day? Yes.

But let me go to the heart of the matter, the source of my concern.

I believe that there is an understanding, a contract, between a writer and the reader. "Come with me and I'll show you the wonders of the world. Trust me. It'll be all right. You will be told what you need to know."

Break faith with that contract and you deserve to lose your reader.

James Joyce seems to want something entirely contrary:

"The thought of Ulysses is very simple," he says, "it is only the method which is difficult." Yeah. But this is also a writer who has a taste for the trivial, a penchant for the particular to the point of utter tedium. James Joyce, it seems to me, had two choices. Present us with interesting characters or take us with him on a voyage of exploration. He fails to do either

I struggle along in his wake, ooze and mud sucking me down into the morass and if I do not leave him, I drown.

When Macbeth, hearing of his wife's death says, "She should have died hereafter. There would be time for such a word." we too feel his bleak despair. As Anna Karenina stares at the iron wheel of the goods train and judges her moment, we can hate every second of it and Vronsky as well, but it has an inevitability about it that raises it to high art, where language, plot and character coalesce in a climax, a fusion of reason and feeling that characterises all great art for me. Joyce prefers to experiment with how to express a fart.

A masterpiece takes your breath away, it changes your life. You are swept along by the contrivances, you live, breathe and bleed for the characters, and grow in wisdom for having spent time with them. Joyce does none of these things for me..

In the library discussion about Hamlet he seems to admit as much. He has Russell say: "The supreme question about a work of art is out of how deep a life does it spring. The deepest poetry of Shelley, the words of Hamlet, bring our mind into contact with the eternal wisdom, Plato's world of ideas. All the rest is the the speculation of schoolboys for schoolboys." (My emphases)

Amen to that say I.

But Stephen cannot understand. He retorts: "Hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past." So we are stuck with Leopold, poor lustful Leopold, the epitome, the incarnation of ordinariness, possibly made interesting by having forgotten to punctuate himself.

I sail between Scylla and Charybdis in my relation to Joyce. I doubt if I want to denounce Joyce or his characters completely. In bits they are vivid, good, amusing. Scylla says: you just need to understand better. You're stupid; you don't pick up the irony; and you have not read all the books Joyce read. To which I retort: I've only one pair hands.. From the vortex Charybdis sounds:

If you are affronted by the mundane, the quotidian, then you have fallen for the old lie of the hero, and look where he has got you: wars, nationalists, politicians, footballers, Shane Warne... Surviving is the triumph, and where the real heroism lies.

I wish I believed Charybdis.

I think I'll just slip between the two and go read *Anna Karenina* again.

Will I finish this book? Eventually yes, but the cat will be let in, and the dog walked, even my own long-delayed book finished before I actually sit down to READ much more. And in the meantime, let the Bloomsday Players entertain us with their interpretations — much more fun!

A Confessional Reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses* - Patricia ní Ivor

I came to reading Joyce late in life and by a circuitous, not very honourable path. I am telling you this not only so that I can be in concert with the confessional inner voices through which Joyce reveals truths and banalities of human existence, but also to give courage to those of you whose interests are less literary, less academic, or less honourable than more distinguished readers.

That *Ulysses* was a book to be read, in every present-day, post-modern meaning of the verb "to be read", first came to my attention through a report in *The Age* of this very event – Bloomsday in Melbourne – in 198 something, the year when Gough read his chapter.

Gough has figured in my dreams as a luminescent archetypal figure for as long as I can remember – a 1970's reading of Jung convinced me that it was not Gough himself that I fancied (for all the dreams were erotic) but that the great man represented my inner, Jungian "Wise Old Man" and so I was doubly blessed, through a narcissistic, sexual rendering of Gough's divinity taken into my own sub-conscious.

So when Gough read *Ulysses*, and was reported as saying that he could remember (for Gough's sake) chapter and verse of it, so startling was this achievement – of a man pacing the corridors of his home, book in hand, booming the words out while committing them to memory, then later going public about it – that I stashed the information into the back drawer of my sub-conscious for a time when my life might iron itself out a bit and I could, maybe, find the time and the capacity to compete with such an accomplishment. One day...

Then I met Dr Frances Devlin Glass. We had been together at the University of Queensland thirty years before in the hey day of the 60's student rebellions. The fact that I did not remember her at all and that she remembered me only for throwing myself in front of LBJ's car on his ill timed "all-the-way-with" visit to Australia, was reflected also in the other twin facts that Frances has a Doctorate in English Literature, has read Joyce every other day for the intervening thirty years and is one of the organisers of this very event, Bloomsday in Melbourne. I, on the other hand, at the time of our meeting, had only a back drawer full of sub-conscious yearning to compete with an internalised Gough. So, I bought the book. A fine, cloth bound hard cover edition, with lithographed illustrations using black and gold inks. Copyright to the estate of James Joyce etc. etc.

My first encounter with the Joyce industry! If it was an authorised version, in that it was authorised by the grandson of James, Stephen Joyce, then it was not *that* authorised as the tattered Random House or Bodley Head editions of my soon to be fellow readers. My beautiful Folio edition was non PC.

I faced that humiliation with aplomb akin to Gough's, for the book is beautiful to touch, the text wondrously set, the paper smelling like childhood Christmases of books and the Preface by the said Stephen Joyce one hell of a read when you come to understand the politics of its various publications.

Stephen has strong words to say about some editions and is almost apoplectic about the so called "Reader's edition" – produced, he claims, because some say that *Ulysses* is unreadable. He doesn't express a view of the internet cartoon version of "Ulysses for Dummies", which I found immensely useful in the beginning days, although it doesn't take a Joycean imagination to predict what his view might be.

Stephen Joyce is equally scathing about academics, blaming them for strewing obstacles between creator/writer and the reading public. "Academics," he says, "the ubiquitous, at times perverse, Joyce industry, have gotten the bit between their teeth and the idea has been spread that *Ulysses* is a complex, difficult book – an unscaleable mountain that requires skilled, trained mountain guides, or rather trained scholars, to lead the reader over this epic novel's treacherous, abrupt slopes."

But it was the academics which saved me in my reading. Armed with advice from my new/old colleague, Frances and an indispensable companion text which annotated every nuance with scholarly references to the *Odyssey*, to Catholicism, to schisms and heresies within the Judeo-Christian traditions, to metaphysics, to Irish faeries and mythologies, to contemporary gossip and cant in Dublin and Europe, to 1904 gossip and cant in Dublin and Europe, to imaginary figures and imaginary places figured within real streetscapes and newspaper reports – all this I could not have understood without the fabulous companion text. I was graduating from Dummie to Novice. I love the Catholic references, the underlying rituals of daily life which define a culture and its inhabitants. I love the Irishness of Joyce's enmity towards the English and the echoes of my own father and maiden aunts in his turn of phrase. I love his smart-arsed-ness as he demonstrates his literacy in western thought and archetype, politics and writing, high life and low.

I bought the *Odyssey*. "I'll master the archetypes of western civilisation," I thought. "I'll fortify my reading of Jung, move on from a shoddy, hippy fascination with Gough and a trifling assessment of Odysseus as a rather foolish boy to be bewitched by Sirens.

But other of this background was simply out of date for me. No matter how important some of the finer points of canonical law or theological debate may have been to western culture early this century, the events of World Wars, of ecumenism post Vatican Council 11, of multiculturalism and global economies have rendered these once passionate arguments to a significance now no greater than a backroom of Jesuits arguing over the numbers of angels on the heads of pins.

So, for me, Joyce's phenomenal grasp of the literature of the west and the culture of his native Ireland was beginning to pale. The smart-arsedness of context – the bits that made reading the book so complex – were beginning to show, not cracks, but fine hair line fractures. And then we came upon Edna O'Brien. Her post-feminist biographical picture of Joyce shows a man whose other great skill was self-promotion – a late 20th century man, indeed, able to market himself and the promise of his product in exchange for years of research and development - a possible dot.com Executive in search of an indulgent venture capitalist patron!

But it was the writer who finally won the day. I said at the beginning that my journey to *Ulysses* – my mini odyssey - was less than honourable. The truth is I also set out in the study group to impress the other, conscious, real-time man in my life. Our conversations would go something like this:

“Tuesday? No, not Tuesday, I read *Ulysses* then. At home, at my place. Just a few of us. Yes, every Tuesday.”

Then a few weeks later, “No, certainly not Tuesday. Joyce, you know. Still reading? Yes, of course...MOST interesting.”

“What do I find interesting about it?” I could afford to be gracious with this much high literary ground behind me and I offered the man the book to be held.

“Well, it's the politics, of course,” I babbled. “And the rest. Drank himself to death if you read between the lines. Did you know one of his relatives is a member of Alcoholics Anonymous and conducts tours in Dublin of the places in the novel? Can you imagine that – sober and visiting imaginary pubs and other places? And people paying good money to go along with it. What sort of an imagination is that? “

But my rhetoric and gossip were lost on the man. There he was, at my kitchen table, my blue Folio edition in his big hands, immersed in the text, reading, then reading aloud. “Christ”, he said, “it's beautiful. It's poetry.” ...

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A vote for Persseday by Geoff Wyatt

Jill Kitson, Broadcaster/Slasher read this piece as her contribution to Live It or Cricket. She explained that she much preferred to listen to Joyce than to read him.

In addition to the annually-observed Bloomsday celebrating James Joyce's *Ulysses*, we should also celebrate a symbolic Persseday, specifically to celebrate *Finnegans Wake*. I shall return to some Persseday wordplay later.

Bloomsday was only the start of it: in *Ulysses* the words, most of them, are familiar to us but the form is not, as the compassionate cuckold, Leopold Bloom, circles, or is encircled by, a series of unremarkable but enormously significant encounters.

In his next great work, *Finnegans*, Joyce would complete his task of reinventing the wheel, in which neither structure nor language is immediately familiar, but which when penetrated yields profound psychological insight into our existential predicament. We might say that whereas Herman Melville used a traditional sounding line to plumb the depths of *Moby Dick*, Joyce plunged headlong beneath the surface of reality in order to make his strange observations.

Despite its reputation as a baffling, self-serving verbal chaos, *Finnegans* is a straight novel with a plot; moreover, and complexities aside, that plot is as simple as a plot can be, as some of our best minds have revealed.

Joseph Campbell, author of the four-volume *Masks of God* mythology series, which ranks with Frazer's *Golden Bough*, produced an important book called *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*. The 1992 Penguin edition of *Finnegans*, introduced by Seamus Deane, recommends 17 source books including Anthony Burgess's *Here Comes Everybody*. Burgess also edited

A Shorter Finnegans Wake, an invaluable sentrypoint.

Firstly, Joyce did not, as the pedantic claim he did, leave out an apostrophe in *Finnegans*; the title was meant to indicate the imperative, not the possessive mood. Title, and part of the plot, are based on a fragment of Irish-American folk-poetry in which Tim Finnegan, a bricklayer fond of the bottle falls from his ladder to his death. At his wake, and in the best Irish tradition, a shrunken sprawl freaks out, and Fineagain is roused from the dead.

And Timothy, jumping up from bed,

Sez, 'Whirl your liquor around like blazes

Souls to the devil! D'ye think I'm dead?

Beginning and ending the novel with an interrupted sentence, Joyce creates a circular effect. *Finnegans* opens with the masterly words:

riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay....

And ends with Anna Livia Plurabelle's own end, in infinite sadness and longing for renewal:

A way a lone a last a last a loved a long the

If you attach the last unfinished sentence to the beginning of the first, you have Joyce's view of endlessness in death and renewal:

A way a lone a last a last a loved a long the riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodious vicus of recirculation back to Howarth Castle and Environs.

In 'vicus of recirculation' Joyce echoes the belief of the 18th century Italian philosopher and writer, Giovanni Battista Vico, that civilisations move in evolutionary cycles: from primitive awe of the god behind the thunder, leading to theocracy; on to aristocracy; and thence to democracy and its inevitable breakdown; before returning in awe to Joyce's hundred-letter thunderclaps. Howarth Castle and Environs contracts to the initial capitals of our hero, HCE.

Incidentally, the first Tom Wolfe, Thomas Clayton Wolfe, who wrote *Look Homeward, Angel*, was much influenced by Joyce, perhaps because he too understood deeply the cyclic movement of a time and tide of human events. In the opening sequence of that beautiful first novel we find:

Each of us is all the sums he has not counted: subtract us in nakedness and night again, and you shall see begin in Crete four thousand years ago the love that ended yesterday in Texas.

We return to the dream novel, where we meet the family padraic, Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, or HCE, an acronym for Here Comes Everybody. He is also a publican named Porter, which name appears in a thunderclap. Eve and Adam's, which in that opening sentence appears to be a reference to the Garden of Eden, was actually the name of a Liffeside hotel, possibly named after an Eve Someone and an Adam Someone.

Now let us examine the second paragraph, a magnificent compression of history, language and literature preceding a sudden Fall from Paradise, as announced with a thunderclap:

Sir Tristram, violer d'amores, fr'over the short sea, had passencore rearrived from North Armorica on this side of the scraggy isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his penisolate war: nor had topsawyer's rocks by the stream Oconee exaggerated themselfe to Laurens County's giorgios while they went doublin their mumper all the time: nor avoice from afire bellowsed mishe mishe to tautauf thuartpeatrick: not yet, though venissoon after, had a kidscad buttended a bland old isaac; not yet, though all's fair in vanessy, where sosie sesthers wroth with twone nathandjoe. Rot a peck of pa's malt had Jhem or Shen brewed by arlight and rory end to the regginbrow was to be seen ringsome on the aquaface.

This Sir Tristram, caught up in the several legends of Tristram and Iseult, and the complicated betrayals within, clearly predates the couple's presence in the Arthurian cycle, since Joyce describes Sir Tristram's passage from Brittany - North Armorica - where the ultimate legend is said to be sourced. Thomas the Rymer of Erceldoune is believed to have reshaped the story for AngloSaxon ears.

A violator of loves, Sir Tristram has come to an Edenic Ireland sexually to penetrate the Wealas' withinness: that is the Celts, or dwellers in the weald, who have isolated themselves in Wales, Ireland and Scotland. For Ireland especially, Joyce reshapes the Italian *isolato* to convey the sense of being separated by an island.

We know that the new world has not yet been discovered: Joyce tells us that Laurens County in Georgia, America, which will one day have a city named Dublin, does not exist. In 'topsawyer' we find Mark Twain, another King Mark echo of the Tristram-Iseult fable; and Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, or Finn again. American new-worlder giorgios, a name sourced in the Greek Yorgos, 'farmer', would go on to build new Dublins as they crisscrossed the Atlantic to and from Laurencetown, County Mayo.

Nor had a crossbreeding religion asserted itself to baptise these people of the Irish peat-rick: redoubled in German: tauftauf, thou art Patricks. Thus are to be converted by the baptismal 'thou art' the Tuatha De Danann, in Gaelic mythology the gods, people of the goddess Danu, whence the Danube River of their early days; and offering possible softening from Tuatha to Arthur.

Very soon these new Patricks learn from the Bible how Jacob, clad in kidskin, disguises himself as his older brother Esau, by which trick he wins his blind old father's blessing. Literally, a 'kidskad buttended a bland old isaac'.

In 'sosie sesthers wroth' we find Susannah, Esther and Ruth, all of whom were loved by older men.

Joyce encapsulates the relationships to include HCE's love for his daughter Issy, which can be a pet form of both Isabella and Iseult/Isolda/Isolt/, as derived from the French Iseut/Isaut. We can infer that Anna Livia Plurabelle's names are made up of Hannah, Mother of the Blessed Virgin, as mentioned in various apocryphal gospels; Livia, wife of Augustus and mother of his two sons; and Plurabelle, which name gives HCE belles plural: his wife and his daughter.

In his allusion, 'all's fair in vanessy', Joyce is referring to Swift's love for Stella, his diminutive name for Esther Johnson, and also for Vanessa, his pet name for Esther Vanhomrigh (pronounced 'Vanummery'.) The names Esther and Stella can both be linked to the word 'star'. Joyce's point appears to be that the same guiding star can be found in two separate women.

The doppelganger name, 'twone nathandjoe' introduces Nathan and Joseph, resisters of incest. If we look at Lydia, the Greek form of Livia, we find the woman mentioned in Acts XVI who is identified with a daughter of Joseph of Nazareth. In this passage Joyce also introduces HCE's two sons, Shem and Shaun, in the guise of Jhem and Shen, by inference Ham and Japhet, who replace their father Noah.

In less time than it takes us to track his wordspoor, Joyce has now placed us aboard the Ark, under 'arclight'. In the final sentence we have the allusion of God the father bringing this cycle to roaring end beneath the regginbrow, the rainbow, which is to be seen, in the felicitous phrase, 'ringsome on the aquaface', reflected in rings upon the face of the waters.

And there we have it, prelude to a mighty verbal thunderclap announcing the Fall:

'Lukkedoerendunandurraskewdylooshoofermoyportertooryzooyshal nabortandsportthaokansakroidverjkapakkapuk.'

Joyce then proceeds from chaos, leading us to riverrun renewal, endlessly.

I pause for a moment to reflect on my suggestion that we celebrate an annual Persseday, as well as a Bloomsday. The multiple names of HCE are wonderful examples of the rolling lingual pun. Joyce shifts the Earwhicker of Humphrey Chimpden Earwhicker into Earwig, which becomes the French *persse-orielle*, which is returned to Irish as Perce O'Rielly. Persseday - *dresser les orielles* - fortuitously chimes with Thursday, or Thor's Day, which has important symbolic meaning both in the novel's intermittent series of thunderclaps and in Vico's recurring cycles of human civilisation.

We now turn to HCE's wife, Anna Livia Plurabelle, personification of Dublin's River Liffey, and great earthrivermother of humanity. Anna Livia Plurabelle is occasionally abbreviated to acronym in order that Joyce

may spring the pun: ALP the sacred river[run].

We meet their sons Shem and Shaun, believed actually and respectively to have been portraits of the author and his brother Stanislaus; and a huge supporting cast of Dublarneys including Mamalujo, or Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the four posts of the Earwhickers' bed. In the company of these people Joyce embedded the historical guilt-laden myth of the entire Western world, consisting largely of betrayal, deceit, usurpation, and cowardly submission to political and dictatorial power - as foreshadowed by Sir Tristram's intrusive visit.

HCE through bleary eyes is also dreamed guilty of harbouring an unhealthy lippitudinous interest in his own daughter, Issy, or Isabella, indivisibly part of Plurabelle, and such is his stammering recoil that he can only refer to the charge as one of 'insects'.

Contrapuntal Shem and Shaun are HCE's divided, mutually antagonistic halves, each attempting, in his own way, to alleviate, exonerate, absorb, overcome or otherwise rise above his father's symbolic guilt and so return him to his wholeness. (In this enactment of Vico's theory, Finnegan thus represents theocracy; HCE aristocracy; and the boys, neither of whom is fit to govern on his own, a return through dissolution to the thunder.)

Meanwhile Anna Livia of the Liffey (on one sly occasion referred to as 'Mississliffi'), is and always has been above it all; she defends her dying husband, guilty or not.

Simple though the plot may be, no one person can claim to understand the novel to its last allusion; and perhaps no one ever

shall, or should. As we have 'venissoon' seen, *Finnegans*, while described by most as a lasting literary clashing, still reads like Greek rocks: it is often difficult to _____ [kah-tah-lah-vetee, with slight stress on 'lah'], or 'ontherstand'. However, we have first of all to acknowledge the breadth and buttress of the Irish imagination, both Celturally and relinquishly, if we are to follow Finnegainin.

Also, in Joyce's view the language of consciousness was not up to the task of articulating the kind of subconscious sargasso of which perhaps only an Irishman could conceive; and he had perforce to wharf it and whoop it to suit his own triptych ends, supported by words from more than sixty-five languages including 'sanscreed'. In the nature of dreams, each and every one of these characters may change names at Wim and Will; and language is transmuted to glide with unexpected shapeshifts of the dreaming process. At the same tome the author is enjoying himself whickerdly.

In the longer span, a complete literal understanding is not necessarily prerequisite to rewarding comprehension. In fact anyone who enjoys reading for reading's sake, who is curious about language, who seeks to be informed and entertained, and who is willing to work with the author, should unhesitatingly put a toe in the water, again and again, aided and abutted by those scholars who have sketched simple entry maps to what is generally regarded as forbidden territory.

We may now read on, then, in one of two ways: either with a reference library; or with a glass of wine. If you read randomly, quickly, listening not for sense but for music, you'll find that the text by some mysterious rhythmic process gradually becomes, well, not luminous, but less and less opaque.

Then, to dip a voice in the water is to read the novel aloud: its music reveals to the ear more 'collideoscopic' riches than can the glide of an eye.)

And now, James Joyce, we who are about to sigh, dilute you:

For the reader, the result of these verbal obfuscations is, at first contact at least, confoundion: it is as though a shipdock is barqueing and bayouing at the moon, while someone has come in the night and thrust a lewdeed rueful in someone else's hands; and at times this person feels obliged to hoot from the ship.

All the cliquots stream away like folk and smock into the shadowy campagne, veuvage, yet still in vico veritas, shanging chape before one's fiery eyes, before one has a chance to grasp their aperient shambolic message. Unpredictable hence unpronuncippable tautologies are ingested, as are spangling artiststipples, back-parses, flick-pauses, presentimental persses, Uri Geller spoonerisms, and splayed infinitudes.

In the end and after a long, motionless journey, HCE - Humphrey
Chimpden Earwicker - Here Comes Everybody - Howarth Castle
Environs - Huges Caput Earlyfouler - plain Mr Porter - or
[_____]: koo-koo-vah-ee-yah, slight stress on 'ee'] he really is,
eventually goes by Athenian owl-light to his lost roosting place; and,
as Anna Livia Plurabelle completes her own dying journey to the sea,
where she, HCE, Shem and Shaun and the rest of us will be renewed,
the riverruns on, and on, anon, for its inevitable return to Page One.

And now, echoing publican Mr Porter, it is tome, shemmermen, please.
In parsing, 'gentes and laitymen, fullstoppers and semicolonials,
hybrids and lubberds', may I say it is overture ownselves and Finickin.

Meanwhile Geoff Wyatt advises that he hopes to bring to Bloomsday 2001
as much of Finnegans Wake as he can decipher in the next twelve
months.

David Sornig

I know nothing about *Ulysses*. Yes I have read it twice, I have written papers on it, I have devised stories trying to emulate its style, I have played Stephen Dedalus in a theatrical production, and Leopold Bloom in a film I collaborated on. But still I don't think that I know anything about it. So instead of talking about it, I'm going to talk around it by telling you a story about how I came to know about *Ulysses*. I call the story *Molly of Avila*.

Sometime between the beginning and end of 1992, I think it was at the Espy in St Kilda, or maybe it was in someone's lounge room in Prahran, or perhaps even in my little green 1984 Pulsar as it spluttered over the Westgate bridge one cold Saturday afternoon in July, an old friend told me a story about an Australian woman he had known, let's call her Molly, who for two weeks in the middle of a long hot Spanish summer had locked herself in the small room she was renting in a house in the town of Avila. It was said that the day before her withdrawal into her chamber, Molly had been to the local store and bought enough rations of food, water, coffee and cigarettes to last her through a nuclear winter and then left a note on the refrigerator:

'Dear Leo, Steve and Milly, I need to be alone, don't bother me! Love Molly.'

Why she had suffered this sudden bout of monasticism was a mystery to all her friends, she hadn't been acting strangely, nor had she been smoking as much pot as the rest of her friends had. There really seemed to be no good reason for it. So every morning her friends would gather outside her door or under her balcony and call for her to come out with them for a drink at the bar, or to spend the day shopping with them, or to take a trip into the countryside. But Molly kept her door locked and her shutters closed, refusing to speak to them.

This went on day after day for almost two weeks, when finally on a mercilessly hot August night, just like the Neil Diamond live album of 1972, while her friends were again discussing whether or not to break down the door and rescue her from herself, Molly emerged from the room smelling just as you would imagine an unwashed chain-smoking woman might smell in the middle of a Spanish summer, looking haggard, and seemingly closer to her maker than she had ever come before.

Her friends ran to her, concerned that she was about to fall to the ground. And fall she did, exhausted and spent, but my friend managed to catch her just in time. But while they all stood around her, staring in shock at her wasted body, at the veneer of filth, grime and destitution she was encrusted in, they noticed that something had changed

about her. They said that her eyes were shining in a way they had never done before. They said it was clear that she had had a revelation.

But no one could work out what the source of this jubilant epiphany was. None of her friends had ever known her to be in any way spiritual, or even just the slightest bit introspective, and no great plume of marijuana smoke had billowed out of the room when she opened the door. My friend said that he wondered if the town they were in, Avila, the home of Saint Teresa of the mystical ecstasies, had affected Molly so greatly that she had been overwhelmed by the Catholic habits of her childhood and knelt before the image of the burning-hearted Jesus that was already on the wall when she moved in, all the time quietly muttering rosaries until she was visited by a vision of the Holy Mother of God herself bearing prophecies for the future of humankind.

After a minute when her friends weren't even sure if she was still breathing, she opened her mouth to speak but all she could manage was a feeble croak. There were no words, the heat and her long silence had taken their toll on her vocal cords. So someone ran to the kitchen to get her a glass of water and when she'd drunk it she finally managed to whisper something, but her voice was so quiet that no one could understand her, so my old friend, the one who told me *this* story, put his ear down to her mouth, and listened.

'I understand it,' she whispered. 'I understand everything.'

'What?' asked my friend. 'What do you understand?'

She took a deep agonised breath, and then with all the energy left in her body breathed out a single word, '*Ulysses*.'

And with that, Molly the Australian of Avila, died.

I sat there, wherever it was I was listening to the story, in the pub, or in someone's lounge room, or in my car, in absolute silence. I didn't press my friend into telling me whether Molly had really died from exhaustion or from some strange disease. For me it was enough to imagine that it was *Ulysses* that had killed her and that she took to the grave the secrets she had learned about it.

And to be honest there was another reason for my silence. It was because I was ashamed, ashamed because this was my first introduction to *Ulysses*. That in truth, I had never even heard of it before. But I knew that once I knew about it, I could never not know it again.

I was left with such an enormous sense of awe at Molly's monastic asceticism, with the sheer futile will it took to endure this great book until its meaning could be grasped, that *Ulysses* for me became an object for which I now had a deep fearful reverence. It became a menacing shadow hanging over all the stories I wanted to write and

all the books I wanted to read. It had the potential to engulf my life, just as it had Molly's. *Ulysses* to me had become like a God. And the mere mention of its name scared me shitless. So just like I had always done with God, I decided to stay right away from it.

But I couldn't avoid it. Everywhere I went someone would mention it, or I would see it in bookshops where I had never noticed it before, and so finally, just a few months later, in a fit of nihilistic gloom, I went out, bought my very own copy of the book, sat down and started to read it. An hour later I put it down, sick to the stomach and thoroughly confused, swearing never to pick it up again. This book was impossible to understand. And it wasn't until the summer of 1998 that I did approach it again, older, perhaps a little wiser, and definitely more cynical.

I found myself with enough time, reason and inclination to plonk myself in the backyard on the kind of green plastic outdoor chair that you can pick up from any Kmart for about ten dollars, and read it from cover to cover. And read I did. I read and I read and I read and I read. The days were long and hot, and I tried cooling myself with beer, but it only made me drowsy, and I couldn't let myself sleep in the middle of a sentences like 'Hot mockturtle vapour and steam of newbaked jampuffs rolypoly poured out from Harrisons.' But sentences like that only made me hotter and the sun was burning my skin. So I went to Ikea and bought a cheap canvas umbrella from that little corner near the cash registers that is full of shop-soiled goods. My wife tried to talk to me. I nodded politely. My friends came to call on me, and with an eerie echo of Molly of Avila only a few years before, I turned them away. I slept a little. But always I read and read and read, until finally I came to that last page, to that last beautiful word, Yes.

And when I got there, all I could say was No. No I had understood nothing. And I went away and over the next couple of years I read it again, and I wrote papers on it and I acted the part of Stephen Dedalus in a theatrical version and became Leopold Bloom in one of the few attempts at filming just a few moments of June 16, 1904, but still I didn't get it. And I still don't get it. And I am glad that I can't be like Molly of Avila. But I do feel sorry for her, I think that she failed to grasp a simple concept with a catacomb like *Ulysses*, she didn't understand that it is impossible to ever find a way out of it. It is impossible to say 'I understand *Ulysses*.' To try it is like trying to step out of your own skin. It is like trying to understand life, or God, or death. What I think I have come to understand about *Ulysses* is that like life, like God, and like death, the only way to respond to it is to make up a story and say that *this* is what I want it to be, *this* is how I dream about *Ulysses*. And that just like the story of Molly the Australian of Avila, it doesn't matter very much whether or not those stories are true.

Gillian Hardy, Actor and Body-Line Expert

I was first introduced to Joyce at the age of 18 when, as a first year student at Queensland University, I was required to read Ulysses for one of my literature units. A quarter of the way into the book I gave up in disgust, deciding it was **far too Big and far too Boring**, bluffing my way through the course requirements by relying on potted student guides. My only memory of the book at that stage was that it was **seemingly endless!** It certainly didn't speak to me enough to capture me. Looking back, I believe I was far too young to appreciate Ulysses – too involved in student theatre to waste precious time on an endless book – too much the **doer**, too little the **contemplator**.

Some 20 years later, whilst working on a theatre program at 3CR, I became re-acquainted with Francis Devlin Glass, who I had known from Queensland days. Fran made me the **irresistible offer of playing the role of Bella Cohen, the whoremistress**, in their first "Bloomsday Melbourne" celebration. How could I resist such a juicy offer?

So my first real contact with Joyce, excluding my early pitiful attempt, was through the character of Bella Cohen. That first taste of Joyce was a liberating experience, in more ways than one **[those who have seen me in my Bella costume will now know what I mean!]**

With Simon McGuinness as my Bloom, and with minimal rehearsal time, we threw ourselves in the deep end, performing at Molly Blooms Pub in South Melbourne, with no stage, just a raw, boots and all, performance amongst the pub regulars, who were all rather bemused by our thespian antics. That was 7 years ago today.

For me, all of 4'11", playing the "**massive whoremistress**" Bella, who has a "**sprouting moustache**" and is described as "**heavy, slightly sweated, and full-nosed, with orangetainted nostrils**", was a challenge in itself. When I then discovered that **Bella transforms**, miraculously, **into Bello**, from woman to man, in full view of the audience, and Bloom transforms from man to woman,

I was both alarmed, and fascinated, by the unpredictability of Joyce. It was a wonderful introduction to the many possibilities that lie within Ulysses.

I returned to the book hoping to discover what Joyce was trying to communicate to his readers – what the transformation of these characters from man to woman, and woman to man, was actually saying about Bloom and about Bella. Because Joyce saw no barriers to this fluid exchange of identity, the audience become the peeping Toms, prying on Blooms sexual fantasies, and **discover in Bella a surprisingly skilled psychologist**. For within the sado-masochistic framework of the whorehouse, Bella fully understands Blooms needs –

what it is in him that makes him hunger for a woman like her. During this evening's performance, I believe you will hear more about Joyce's belief that brothels were the one place where human beings were truly unmasked.

One of the practical difficulties of Bloomsday is that we never have the luxury of a full rehearsal period. What makes it work, year after year, is a whole bunch of dedicated people pulling out all the stops – as Simon and I did that first night at Molly Blooms Pub – and just going for it with the maximum amount of energy and passion.

Having to take an interior piece, written as a novel, and externalise it sufficiently that it succeeds theatrically, has enhanced my understanding of the novel. **I believe it has also allowed the novel to speak to many other people who, like me, had never succeeded in opening themselves to its possibilities.**

By externalising these characters, I've found myself drawn to the language – to its rhythms, its musicality. **I've learnt about Joyce**, and Ulysses in particular, **through performance**. I'd now like you to listen to a little bit of Bella, to demonstrate how the inventiveness, and sheer power of her character, captured me.

Hound of Dishonour! Adorer of the Adulterous Rump!

Dung Devourer! Down! You will fall You are falling. On your hands down!

Feel my entire weight. Bow, bonds slave, before the throne of your despot's glorious heels, so glistening in their proud erectness.

Holy Smoke! You little know what's in store for you. I'm the tartar to settle your little lot and break you in! I'll bet Kentucky cocktails all round I'll shame it out of you, old son.

Cheek me, I dare you. If you do, tremble in anticipation of heel discipline to be inflicted in gym costume.

Come, ducky dear, I want a word with you, darling, just to administer correction. Just a little heart to heart talk, sweetie.

There's a good girly now. I only want to correct you for your own good on a soft, safe spot. How's that tender behind? O, ever so gently, pet, begin to get ready.

The nosering, the pliers, the bastinado, the hanging hook, the knout I'll make you kiss while the flutes play the nubian slave of old. You're in for it this time. I'll make you remember me for the balance of your natural life!

Where Bella is a 2 dimensional character who doesn't exist beyond the brothel, **Molly, on the other hand, is a rich and complex character**. For a complete contrast to Bella, I'd now like to give you a taste of the romantic Molly. Of course, Molly can be just as tough as

Bella in her own way, but I want you to hear the lyricism of the romantic Molly to demonstrate her ability to win the hearts of her audience, in spite of all her faults. **I believe Joyce wanted us to love Molly.**

The sun shines for you, he said, the day we were lying among the rhododendrons on Howth head, in the grey tweed suit and the straw hat, the day I got him to propose to me – Yes first I gave him the bit of seedcake out of my mouth and it was leap year like now – Yes sixteen years ago – My God after that long kiss I nearly lost my breath – Yes he said - I was a flower of the mountain – yes so we are, flowers all – a woman’s body – Yes that was one true thing he said in his life – and the sun shines for you today – Yes that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is – and I knew I could always get round him – and I gave him all the pleasure I could leading him on till he asked me to say yes – and I wouldn’t answer first – only looked out over the sea and the sky – I was thinking of so many things he didn’t know of – and then I thought – well as well him as another – and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again – yes – and then he asked me would I – yes – to say yes – my mountain flower – and first I put my arms around him – Yes – and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts- all perfume – yes – and his heart was going like mad – and yes I said – yes – I will – Yes

There are **other Molly’s**. Despite that romantic moment, Molly is truthful, and real and doesn’t romanticize what it is to be a woman at all; the Molly who can cut through the cant to sum things up pragmatically; there’s the fool-hardy Molly; the self-centred and hard-hearted Molly; the raunchy Molly; the Molly with the heart of gold. **Molly has so many flaws yet so much depth and so much heart.** By using his **stream of consciousness method**, Joyce provided us with a peep-hole into her psyche – into **the very essence of Molly**. Molly’s thoughts ramble in an apparently unconnected and aimless fashion, until they finally loop back around to reinforce themselves, giving us the fully-rounded human being that is Molly Bloom.

At the end she is still open to life and to all its possibilities.

She is still saying - YES!

So I’m glad I ran into Fran again after all those years.

Thanks, Fran.

A JOURNEY WITH JOYCE by Shane Conway

I first became interested in the mystique and aura surrounding James Joyce and *Ulysses* when studying Matriculation English Literature at St. Patricks College Ballarat in 1965. I had read about Joyce and knew a little about *Ulysses* particularly Molly Blooms soliloquy which I had read descriptions and critiques of, but never the original work. In my final school year I won the class prize for Religious Knowledge. Prior to the school prize giving ceremony, the boys who had won prizes were assembled and taken to Halls Book shop in Sturt St., Ballarat to chose books for their prizes. Having chosen some innocuous text for the General Maths prize, I then scoured the shop for my RE prize, and chanced upon a copy of the Bodley Head edition of *Ulysses*. I was aware that *Ulysses* was still on the Vatican Curia list which meant Catholics were supposedly prohibited from reading it. However I picked up *Ulysses* and took it to the counter where stood Mr. Hall, a tall patrician and urbane book purveyor, and with tongue in cheek asked whether it would be suitable for presentation as the RE prize for St. Patricks College. Mr Hall looked over the top of his glasses with a faint smile and said, "Oh no young man I don't think the Bishop would consider that an appropriate book for you."

The following year I commenced studying medicine at Monash University. Monash had the then enlightened policy of requiring first year medical students to do one non-medical subject. I chose English 1 and as part of the curriculum studied Joyce for the first time in 'Portrait of a Artist as a Young Man.' I felt that my eyes were opened to Joyce by Portrait and at my then age of 18 could empathize and identify with the journey which Joyce and Stephen Dedalis were undertaking, as in some ways it mirrored my own journey through the Catholic education system and through a childhood and adolescent inculcation of the Catholic religion. I was also embarking on a great voyage as were Joyce and Stephen, through six years of University study with the eventual outcome a career in medicine. I felt empathy with Joyce's initial desire to study medicine, and Ellmann noted that he commenced medical studies on three occasions initially in Dublin at the University College Dublin, then in Paris, and finally again in Dublin at Trinity College. After reading Portrait, I became immersed in Joyce, and subsequently read *Dubliners*, *Ulysses*, and obsessively forced myself to read *Finnigans Wake* from first to last word. I read *Ulysses* without any sort of guide or aid to the structure of the book or the literary, philosophical and historical allusions which Joyce used. In retrospect I must have missed a good deal of what Joyce was saying but nevertheless picked up the story and understood much of the religious and some of the historical references. Even then I became aware of some of Joyce's literary techniques including his epiphanies and his stream of consciousness writing.

Dubliners I found to be a wonderful book of carefully crafted vignettes of Dublin lives, and wondered at the genius of the author. *Finnigans Wake* was heavy going, again approached with only a rudimentary knowledge of the structure of the book and the themes contained within, but reading whatever I could along the way to enlighten my understanding. I began to comprehend the style and the language more as I progressed through the book, but must confess that the only valid claim I could make on finishing the final page was to be able to say that I had done it.

The obsessive trait is useful and common among medical students for it helps to memorize page after page of *Grays Anatomy* and to learn by rote long epiphanies of causes of disease, branches of the sciatic nerve, differential diagnoses and the like. It also enabled me to finish reading *Finnigans Wake* and to then embark upon *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, to try and understand why Joyce had based his *Bloomsday* tale on *Ulysses*.

I also embarked on the reading of Dostoevsky, Gogol, Satre, Camus, Kafka, Nabokov, T.S.Elliot and others and was surprised at the final exams that year that I had gained a Distinction in English 1, passed Chemistry and failed Physics and Biology. My failure was only narrow however, qualifying for supplementary exams over the summer period. This naturally frightened the 'bejaysus' out of me, made me knuckle down and study sciences at the expenses of my foray into literature and become a medical nerd for the next five years while I finished my medical degree.

I remained interested but not passionate about Joyce for the next thirty four years, until my daughter who is studying at Deakin, announced that she was studying Joyce and the Irish Literary Renaissance in first semester this year. This rekindled my enthusiasm and I considered joining her in enrolling formally for the subject and completing the assignments, however eventually decided to do part of the work with her purely for enjoyment. My wife and I attended an early *Bloomsday* planning meeting at the Celtic Club, and Jennifer and I found a *Ulysses* reading group where we read part of *Ulysses*, and followed the structure and Joyce's references in Gifford and Seidman's *Ulysses Annotated* I have also revisited some of the stories in the *Dubliners* and parts of *Portrait of the Artist*.

I then became more interested in Joyce himself and read Edna O'Briens, 'James Joyce', which I felt painted him in somewhat an unflattering light, leaving me with the impression that he was an insufferable intellectual snob not to mention a chronic alcoholic, hopeless manager and inveterate spendthrift.

Ellmann James Joyce became my next journey of discovery on the long road and one in which I am currently engaged and have traversed only part way. Ellmann's is an exquisite life, encyclopaedic and

meticulous in detail, but humane and non-judgmental in its conclusions. Ellmann has helped me to see and understand Joyce and the genius of his achievement more comprehensively than I was previously able to; to understand the simplicity and at the same time the complexity of Joyce and the thought processes and literary experimentation and honing of his writing skills which Joyce brought to the body of his work.

In conclusion I wish to briefly present one of Ellmann's observations of the young Jim Joyce: "But the principal new pressure upon him was the work of Ibsen, another genius who arose from a small parochial people. Joyce approved of the quality of aloofness in Ibsen that led him to leave his country and call himself an exile. Truth as judgement and disclosure, and exile as the artistic condition, these were to be the positive and negative poles of Joyce's own state of mind."

In 1900 at the age of eighteen, Joyce wrote a review of Ibsen's play 'When We Dead Awaken' from a French translation which was published in the Fortnightly Review. Ibsen subsequently wrote to the publishers 'I have read a review by Mr. James Joyce in the Fortnightly review which is very benevolent and for which I would greatly like to thank the author if only I had sufficient knowledge of the language.'

Joyce replied. 'Dear Sir, I wish to thank you for your kindness in writing to me, I am a young Irishman, eighteen years old, and the words of Ibsen I shall keep in my heart all my life.'

Ellmann concluded "Before Ibsen's letter, Joyce was an Irishman, after it he was a European. He set himself to master languages and literature and read so widely that it is hard to say definitely of any important creative work published in the late 19th century that Joyce had not read it."