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Mapping gender. Old images ; new figures

Martha C. Carpentier (ed.), *Joycean Legacies*

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REFERENCES

Martha C. Carpentier (ed.), *Joycean Legacies* (New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2015) 290 p, ISBN 978-1137503619

- 1 Although, on the face of it, one might have expected *Joycean Legacies* to be a cartography or record of the reaches of Joyce's influence on subsequent generations of writers, the collection of essays put together by Martha C. Carpentier also turns out to be a very reflective book about the complexities of relating to a predominant literary figure, the negotiation of some vital space for creative expression under the shadow of that overbearing precedent, and the strategies – parasitic or revisionist – employed by all those who cannot altogether ignore his presence. All the articles concern specific authors and may be understood as case studies. According to Carpentier, the essays engage “the mystery of influence” (3). Derek Attridge's preface definitely sets the tone by presenting a typology of the relationships that an author may entertain with the Joycean text, and these include modes of imitation ranging from “assertion”, “nod” to “echo” and “countersignature”. Another outstanding trait of the collection, about which the editor is very explicit in her introduction, is that the accent falls primarily on the *explication de texte*, the close scrutiny of specific pieces of work, and the detection of subtle allusive traces.
- 2 Among the twelve contributions that constitute the volume, four concentrate on Irish authors: Kate O'Brien, Brendan Behan, J.G. Farrell and Patrick McCabe. *Joyce's Legacy* then goes on to examine the cases of J.R.R. Tolkien, Anthony Burgess, Martin Amis, Will Self and Jonathan Coe. Two essays address more specifically the question of the short story as a genre (Franck Mc Court and Raymond Carver). Finally it considers Joyce's “global legacy” through the figure of Derek Walcott and Sadeq Hedayat. Because

these are so many case studies, one cannot attempt a synthetic assessment of the volume without having first accounted separately for the various contributions brought together, so as to do justice to the variety of imports and arguments that are put forward in the pages of *Joycean Legacies*.

- 3 In the first article of the collection, Foley O'Connor endeavours to account for the necessity of "silence, cunning and exile" (13) in Joyce and O'Brien. If realism ambitions the exposure of dysfunctional institutions within a given society, its work, she contends, is necessarily complicated by the perverse mechanisms of stigmatization of deviance that according to the two authors characterize the Irish. There lies, according to O'Connor, the meaning of Joyce's secretiveness, which he sets up in protection of his strategy of exile. O'Connor recognizes in O'Brien's *Without My Cloak* echoes of *Ulysses* insofar as the representation of female characters is concerned. Thus, she pits the passive submission of O'Brien's characters to male desire against the agency of Molly Bloom and Gertie McDowell – two women who take advantage of the male gaze to serve their own purpose – a rereading that departs substantially from the more common understanding of *Without My cloak*.
- 4 Thomas O'Grady reconstitutes the context of the production of Brendan Behan's poem "Buiochas le Joyce", where Behan explicitly addresses Joyce in a gesture of worship that is both flippantly comic and bitterly self-conscious. He relates the poem to the scholarly interest that Joyce elicited from the forties on, in part because of the American "GI Bill" that introduced government financed education for American Veterans – one of the factors that boosted the Joyce industry Behan deplored. In the poem, though, Behan is pictured as taking advantage of that wave of interest, passing himself off as a Joyce specialist to drink his fill at the expense of eager students.
- 5 O'Grady delivers a remarkable exegesis of "Buiochas le Joyce", retrieving the nuances of the original Irish version that had been obscured in the various translations. Paying attention to the form of the sonnet and its cultural implications, he is attentive to Behan's technique and to his awareness of the role of "conteur" or "raconteur" that has accrued to the Irish author who endeavours to express the Irish experience for the benefit of a foreign audience.
- 6 On the face of it, there is no direct references to Joyce in J. G. Farrell's *Troubles* – the central subject of Steven Morrisson's essay. Yet the latter suggests a deeper and more fundamental engagement with *Ulysses*, located in its construction of history and the record of how it "impacts the minutiae of people's lives" (57). Arguably, *Ulysses* holds the record of the book that refers most extensively to a dense historical context without which it cannot be read. Likewise, in *Troubles*, the events are perceived through the lens of a British character who is largely ignorant of Irish history, and the novel dramatizes the process whereby confrontation with experience forces him to reconsider his prejudices. What it shares with *Ulysses*, then, is a meditation on the idea of historical determination and the possibility of freedom.
- 7 Ellen McWilliams concerns herself with the intertextual relation of McCabe's fiction with Joyce's prose. She concentrates on McCabe's adaptation of "a number of Joycean frames", including the counter revivalist tradition, the refusal of grand narratives and the leveling down of the distinction between "high" and "low" literature. She evokes the strong critical reactions that have interrogated the centrality of Joyce, the cult that he has spawned, and how it bears on contemporary literary enterprises. *Dead School* is, according to McWilliams, McCabe's "most audacious Joycean experiment". It abounds

in references to popular musical and filmic culture and challenges the pastoral nationalist ideology, bringing to visibility the trash and litter that partly constitute the contemporary experience.

- 8 Ruth Hoberman dedicates her contribution to the study of Orwell's *A Clergyman's Daughter*. There again, in spite of the general assessment of Orwell as a realist at odds with the experimental thrust of Joyce's enterprise, Hoberman finds the protagonist of the novel propelled in situations that resemble the trials undergone by Stephen Dedalus. In particular, the scene where Dorothy, struck by amnesia, wanders off into the streets is treated in a manner reminiscent of Stephen's ramblings in *Nighttown*. The character, now a blank slate, is successively impressed by the discourse uttered by the various characters she comes across in her roaming, lending credit to the Joycean idea put forward in *Nausicaa* (the first excerpt from *Ulysses* that Orwell laid his eye upon in a magazine) that identities and desires are constructed by texts. The comparison is stimulating, and it opens on a dense and far-reaching reflection on the rejection of the maternal dramatized in Joyce and Orwell – maternity being in Joyce that element that complicates theology. In illustration of this, Hoberman cites Blake's dictum that "brothels are built with the bricks of religion", as quoted by Stuart Gilbert in *James Joyce's Ulysses*.
- 9 Margaret Hiley bases her study on a short manuscript by Tolkien containing notes on Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. Once more, we are invited to consider the possible relationships between two authors whose association in any anthology would be highly unlikely. Tolkien's reflection, spurred by the reading of Joyce, concerns the connection between sounds, graphic traces and meaning. In his observations, he explicitly gives priority to the invention of fictional languages, with particular attention to their harmony, thereby eliciting a "fascination with pure sound", although he notes that the latter stimulates the "meaning faculty". On this subject, Tolkien appears to criticize Joyce for not being radical enough. Margaret Hiley introduces the idea that *The Lord of the Rings*, like Joyce's last piece of work, strives towards "a narrative strategy [that] illuminates the process of interpretation on the part of the reader and writer" (119).
- 10 In "The Baroque Weaving Machine': Contrasting Counterpoint in James Joyce and Anthony Burgess", Jim Clarke contends that when Burgess, a musician, attempted to achieve the integration of a musical form in literature, he was consciously treading a path on which he had been preceded by Joyce, yet one along which the latter had only gone half way. Whereas the modernists seem to have been particularly attracted to the counterpoint – an old and very conventional technique in the field of musical composition – Burgess for his own part seems to have been drawn to the realization of textual polyphony which he believed to be "closer to harmony than counterpoint". Jim Clarke pays particular attention to "Sirens" as well as *Finnegans Wake* which he interprets as "an attempt ... at composing a fully musicalized language" (132). He then turns to Burgess's production with special attention to *A Vision of Battlements*, *Napoleon Symphony*, where the experimentation with the form is most blatant, 1985, a less formally risky piece, and *Mozart and the Wolf Gang*, his "most successful experiment in literary counterpoint" (140).
- 11 Vichnar reflects upon the historical volte-face of that has allegedly deflected the path of literature away from experimentation after the Second World War and quotes Bradford on the "process of dispersion and neutralization of the modernist experiment within contemporary British fiction" (152). Joyce, he says, is envisioned by its

detractors as the very example or “modernist genius”, that is, the obdurate pursuit of an individual project of literary creation, regardless of the reader’s expectations, which unleashes the interpretative activity of scholars and critics. Thereby, the modernist author becomes the “teacher’s pet” (153). Yet as Vichnar remarks, Amiss, however critical he is of such enterprise, has also incorporated in his own fiction techniques and styles elaborated by Joyce. Thrust as he is by his anti-modernism, he paradoxically reproduces Joyce’s solipsistic genius, which he most vehemently rejects, becoming himself “trapped in his own book, its sole inhabitant” (158). Eventually, Vichnar is led to argue in favour of an account of Amiss which combines modernist and anti-modernist trends, a construction that he also applies to Jonathan Coe and Will Self.

- 12 Franck McCourt has been accused of pandering to an American audience, exploiting Irish stereotypes for his benefit. According to Martha Carpentier, those who passed this harsh judgment on him failed to understand the irony in *Angela’s Ashes*. Although the book is technically related to *Ulysses*, the novel owes much more to *The Portrait* insofar as plot and theme are concerned: both deal with the brutal enforcement of conformity in a Catholic system of education, and both mount a scathing criticism of Irish nationalism. Drawing a parallel between the two texts, Carpentier brings out the similitudes and the differences between Joyce’s Ireland and McCourt’s, these being indicative, according to her, of the way Ireland has “changed and not changed between the 1890s and the 1940s” (178).
- 13 Nathan Oakes’s main purpose is to make it apparent how much Joyce has impacted Raymond Carver’s late fiction, paying specific attention to his use of epiphanies. In the second part of his career, Oakes argues, Carver effected a move from detachment to compassion. Oakes then undertakes a series of comparative reading, putting side by side “Fat and “Eveline” to bring out a similar sense of resignation in the two texts, and demonstrate how both authors manage to reveal to the reader the full extent of their character’s entrapment, of which they are partly oblivious. Likewise, a parallel reading of “Araby” and “The Student’s Wife” yields similar observations about the impossibility to align the contradictory elements constituting the text. Ultimately, Oakes recognizes in the quality of compassion or kindness that typifies Carver’s late style his indebtedness to Joyce.
- 14 Maria McGarrity contends that Derek Walcott’s *Omeros* is marked by its author’s acute consciousness of the similitude between the Irish (“the niggers of Britain”) and the people of the Caribbean. Derek Walcott acknowledges that they hold in common an affinity with the maritime as well as a shared experience of displacement and forced exile. Both fell victims to the trickery of a colonial master and Joyce’s imaginary projections of a New World, his “awareness of a transatlantic nexus” (215), are resonant with the archipelagic imaginary of Walcott. His *Omeros*, recounting the voyage of a protagonist who enters Europe through Lisbon (a town founded in honor of Ulysses) to reach the coast of Ireland binds St Lucia and Ireland and inscribes the Caribbean in the periphery of Dublin. Just as *Finnegans Wake*, *Omeros* refuses closure and relies on circular motifs.
- 15 In *The Blind Owl*, Sadeq Hedayat registers the influence of modern European literature (a fact that the author openly admits) and wields it with Persian traditions. Just as Stephen in the *Portrait*, the first-person narrator of *The Blind Owl* goes through spells of morbidity and mystical exaltation, punctuated by problematic epiphanies. The two books share the same imagery of visionary radiance. In turn, the protagonist of

Hedayat's novel becomes a masochistic figure whose hallucinatory imagination spins fantasies of deathly seductresses, akin to Bloom's fantasmagoria in *Ulysses*. Leila Baradaran Jamili and Bahman Zarrinjooee take particular care to illustrate how *The Blind Owl* "recreates the non-linearity of dynamic realities in Persian society, culture and literature" (242). Not only is it resonant with its Persian context, but it wholly emerges, as it is, from the complexities of its referential substratum. The authors suggest a deep affinity between the process of orientalizing the Persian and the treatment of the Irish as exotic others at the hands of the British. Animated by a common intent, both Joyce and Hedayat sought to strike past the ideological construction of the female other by allowing contradictory currents of desire and hatred to flow into their narrative.

- 16 Thanks to the breadth and variety of the contributions, the volume as a whole succeeds in sketching a panorama of Joycean influences which casts a light on the complexities of inheritance and tradition – especially when that tradition is predicated upon innovation and “the new”. One of the interests of the collection is that it largely relies on the critical insight of scholars who, although they are well-versed in the detail of Joyce's oeuvre and its attendant criticism, are not primarily Joycean scholar. As such, they breathe a different air into the debate and the oblique angle of approach they favour is a welcome addition to the more monographic volumes on the author which, however wide-ranging in their implications, remain nonetheless Joyce-centric. (Carpentier pointedly notes in her introduction that Joycean studies have been affected by three trends in recent years: the globalization of Joyce, his recontextualization in earlier historical traditions, and the use of reception theory.) Undoubtedly, Joycean specialists have a long standing reputation for their hospitality, having always opened a space for discussions to scholars from outside the field – most notably, Lacan and Derrida. Somehow, *Joycean Legacy* is faithful to this intent – albeit much more concerned with the minutiae of textual inquiry than with theoretical generalities – and is definitely worth reading for all those who wish to encompass the ramifications of Joyce's hypertextual resonances – whether deliberate or accidental – and the problems set by his institutionalization.

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