



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
FIRENZE

FLORE

Repository istituzionale dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze

Joyce, the War, and “The coolest chap our country ever knew”

Questa è la Versione finale referata (Post print/Accepted manuscript) della seguente pubblicazione:

Original Citation:

Joyce, the War, and “The coolest chap our country ever knew” / Ilaria Natali. - In: JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY. - ISSN 2281-373X. - STAMPA. - 27:(2025), pp. 215-231.

Availability:

The webpage <https://hdl.handle.net/2158/1441618> of the repository was last updated on 2026-01-20T22:36:26Z

Terms of use:

Open Access

La pubblicazione è resa disponibile sotto le norme e i termini della licenza di deposito, secondo quanto stabilito dalla Policy per l'accesso aperto dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze (<https://www.sba.unifi.it/upload/policy-oa-2016-1.pdf>)

Publisher copyright claim:

La data sopra indicata si riferisce all'ultimo aggiornamento della scheda del Repository FloRe - The above-mentioned date refers to the last update of the record in the Institutional Repository FloRe

(Article begins on next page)

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI ROMA TRE
THE JAMES JOYCE ITALIAN FOUNDATION

JSI – Joyce Studies in Italy

Founder: Giorgio Melchiori

General editor: Franca Ruggieri

Editorial Board: Roberto Baronti Marchiò (Università di Cassino e del Lazio Meridionale), Andrea Binelli (Università di Trento), Sonia Buttinelli (Università di Cassino e del Lazio Meridionale), Fabio Luppi (Università Roma Tre), Enrico Terrinoni (Università per Stranieri, Perugia), Jolanta Wawrzycka (Radford University, USA), Serenella Zanotti (Università Roma Tre).

Board of Advisors: Richard Alan Barlow (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore), Morris Beja (Ohio State University), Richard Brown (University of Leeds), Daniel Ferrer (ITEM, CNRS/ENS, France), Anne Fogarty (University College Dublin), Lia Guerra (Università di Pavia), Ellen Carol Jones (Columbus, Ohio), Geert Lernout (University of Antwerp), Timothy Martin (Rutgers University), Francesca Romana Paci (Università del Piemonte Orientale), Paola Pugliatti (Università di Firenze), Fritz Senn (Zurich), Carla Vaglio Marengo (Università di Torino).

Responsible for reviews: Fabio Luppi (Università Roma Tre).

Joyce Studies in Italy is a peer-reviewed journal aimed at collecting materials that throw light on Joyce's work and world. It is open to essays from scholars both from Italy and abroad, and its broad intertextual approach is intended to develop a greater understanding of James Joyce, the man and the artist. The project was initiated in the early 1980s by a research team at the University of Rome, 'La Sapienza' led by Giorgio Melchiori. It subsequently passed to the Università Roma Tre. Originally no house style was imposed regarding the individual essays in the collection, but in recent issues a standardized style sheet has been adopted which can be found at the end of each volume.

Under the patronage of honorary members Umberto Eco and Giorgio Melchiori, the James Joyce Italian Foundation was founded in 2006 (<http://host.uniroma3.it/Associazioni/jjif>). The work of the Foundation, and the issues of the Piccola Biblioteca Joyciana series, are intended to promote and further the work undertaken by "Joyce Studies in Italy" (website: <http://joycestudiesinitaly.netsons.org/index.php/>)

JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY

27

JOYCE AND US

Edited by
Arianna Antonielli and Ilaria Natali

ea
anicia

TUTTI I DIRITTI RISERVATI

È vietata la traduzione, la memorizzazione elettronica, la riproduzione totale o parziale, con qualsiasi mezzo, compresa la fotocopia, anche ad uso interno o didattico. L'illecito sarà penalmente perseguibile a norma dell'art.171 della legge n.633 del 22/04/ 1941.

Direttore responsabile: Franca Ruggieri

Registrazione Num.R.G, 1885/2016, Tribunale Ordinario di Cassino

ISSN 2281 – 373X

© 2025, Editoriale Anicia s.r.l. - Roma

<http://www.edizionianicia.it/store/>

info@edizionianicia.it

Single copy price: €18.00

Subscription rates (one issue annually):

Personal: €18.00

Institutional: €30.00

The journal will be published on the following website:

<https://thejamesjoyceitalianfoundation.wordpress.com/>

Purchases can be made by directly contacting the publisher and then completing a bank transfer covering the price of the book and postage costs (this is €5.00 within Italy, but varies according to the country of destination).

Address: James Joyce Italian Foundation

Dipartimento di Lingue, Culture e Letterature Straniere

Via Valco di San Paolo, 19

00146 Roma

joyce_found@os.uniroma3.it

CONTENTS

Arianna Antonielli and Ilaria Natali <i>The Perpetual Contemporary: Joyce and Us</i>	7
Paul Fagan <i>The Nonhuman Abject in Finnegans Wake</i>	15
Laura Pelaschiar, with MA students Erika Bidini, Sabrina Calò, Maria Letizia Giugni, Tommaso Piccolo, Arianna Rossi, Olga Vaccaro, Manlio Valenza <i>“And from time to time I lie back and listen to my hair growing white”: Aging and old age in James Joyce’s Ulysses</i>	35
Jonathan McCreedy <i>EnJoyce the (Silent.): Writing for the First Time through John Cage’s Roaratorio and His Mesostic ‘Serial Stor[ies]’</i>	51
Chiara Sciarrino <i>Grace Notes: Religion and Music in the Fiction of Joyce and Rooney</i>	73
Christopher J. Kreiser <i>“Preparatory to Anything Else”: Improv Practices, Possibilities, and Readings of Ulysses</i>	93
Irakli Tskhvediani <i>The Oriental Within: Leopold Bloom and the Deconstruction of Imperial Otherness in Joyce’s Ulysses</i>	107
John Carney <i>Suggestions of Assault: The Spectre of Violence in Joyce’s Dubliners</i>	133

Mina M. Đurić

Joyce's Ulysses, Ferrante's My Brilliant Friend, and Bastašić's Catch the Rabbit as Novels on Friendology 149

Mary Lawton

"Seim Anew": Joyce's Prankquean and Belinda 173

Arianna Antonielli

The Visionary as Craftsman: Joyce's Blake in the 1912 Trieste Lecture 193

Ilaria Natali

Joyce, the War, and "The coolest chap our country ever knew" 215

BOOK REVIEWS edited by Fabio Luppi 233

Enrico Terrinoni, La vita dell'altro. Svevo, Joyce

un'amicizia geniale (Davide Crosara)

Ilaria Aletto, Lo sguardo della coscienza. La ricezione di Joyce nell'estetica di Ėjzenštejn (Enrico Terrinoni)

Annalisa Mastronardi, James Joyce's Legacies in Contemporary Irish Women's Writing (Chiara Valcelli)

Sam Slote, Marc A. Mamigonian, and John Turner, Annotations to James Joyce's Ulysses (Fabio Luppi)

CONTRIBUTORS 247

JOYCE, THE WAR, AND “THE COOLEST CHAP OUR
COUNTRY EVER KNEW”

Abstract: This essay reconsiders James Joyce’s engagement with war and political conflict through the neglected satirical song “Dooleysprudence”, composed around 1916 amid the crises of the Great War and the Easter Rising. Joyce’s creative reworking of Billy Jerome and Jean Schwartz’s 1901 music-hall number “Mister Dooley” and its ties to Finley Peter Dunne’s Irish-American satire situate the piece within the transatlantic circulation of popular and political humour. By tracing the song’s afterlives in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, the essay reveals a continuous “Dooley lineage” that threads through Joyce’s fiction, shaping his sustained exploration of satire, irony, and dissent. Ultimately, “Dooleysprudence” emerges as another vital piece in the larger puzzle of Joyce’s politics of neutrality and his self-fashioned public stance of scornful detachment.

Keywords: “Dooleysprudence”, Joyce and Music, Joyce and Satire, Transnational Modernity

The persistent spectre of war and violent conflict, one of the most urgent crises of the twenty-first century, calls for a renewed critical examination of the ideological frameworks and cultural narratives that continue to legitimize violence. Such reflection inevitably entails questioning the inherited myths of nationhood, empire, and historical progress. Central to these ideas is the historical crucible of the early twentieth century – the world that James Joyce inhabited amid the upheavals of the Great War and the Easter Rising – which opens the way to a still-topical reconsideration of the enduring tension between aesthetic autonomy and historical responsibility, between the freedom of art and the moral demands of its epoch.

As is well known, Joyce's response to conflict resisted simple classification. It emerged as a form of critical pacifism sustained by profound scepticism toward all determinist ideologies. By dismantling the illusion of a coherent national subject and rejecting its binding imperatives, Joyce created an aesthetic of fragmentation and "chaosmos" (*FW* 118.21) set against the centripetal forces on which nationalist mobilization depends, proposing instead an art of dispersion – an ethical refusal to consolidate identity through exclusion or force.

Many contemporaries remarked upon Joyce's silence during the years of the First World War. While he was said to have taken part in Irish political discussions "from afar" during his Trieste years (Svevo 1969: 14; Benco 1979: 53), after his move to neutral Zurich in 1915 Frank Budgen observed that he became "more uncommunicative than any man I know" on political matters (1960: 187). Even in his letters Joyce seldom referred to specific war events, speaking instead in general terms of "troubled days" (*Letters I* 442). Most comments attributed to him suggest detached irony: he reportedly told Oscar Schwarz that he had happened to hear about "a war going on in Europe" (Ellmann 1982: 472) and, after the Armistice, he asked Budgen with provocation, "Who won this war?" (Budgen 1960: 166) – a question that intimates a sense of a Pyrrhic victory, one in which the immense human cost rendered any claim to triumph morally hollow.

The turmoil in Ireland during these years complicated the picture. Joyce composed *Ulysses* as the Easter Rising of 1916, the executions that followed, and the subsequent Anglo-Irish War convulsed his homeland. He made clear his lack of sympathy with the revolutionaries' aims, reportedly saying, when asked whether he looked forward to an independent Ireland, "So that I might declare myself its first enemy?" (Gorman 1948: 234). Yet he remained acutely aware of the political condition of his city and his country wherever he lived, drawing on newspapers clippings sent by friends as well as other reports and correspondence.

Joyce likewise observed the shifting course of European and global affairs with close and restless attention. Eugene Jolas remarked that although he professed little concern for "pure politics and economics", he nonetheless "followed events faithfully" (1963: 83). Claud Sykes recalled him reading newspapers daily (qtd. in Groden 2010: 130), and Ellmann records that he once abandoned the pro-Allied *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* for

the pro-German *Zürcher Post* in anger at British policies (1982: 441). After all, as Vincent Sherry underlines, “to be anti-nationalist [...] is not to be apolitical” (2004: 11) and, in a similar vein, Declan Kiberd notes that Joyce “affected an unconcern” but was “touched [...] to the quick” by conflict (2000: ix). These accounts and critical perspectives reveal a crucial distinction between carelessness and conviction: Joyce did not adopt “a kind of know-nothing indifference to all ideas and causes” (Adams 1974: 171). His apparent detachment was a form of strategic indifference, a stance arising from deliberate choice, grounded in the belief that non-cooperation might constitute the most fitting response to circumstance. When intention replaces passivity, withdrawal becomes an act of negative agency, the conscious exercise of the power not to confer legitimacy.

In this sense, it scarcely needs recalling that scholars have long recognized how the Great War permeates Joyce’s writing in subtle yet pervasive ways. Peter Barham describes *Ulysses* as “a war novel par excellence that is permeated by the war without once mentioning it” (2007: 389) and Jane Goldman, among others, observes that the coordinates following Molly Bloom’s final “Yes” – Trieste, Zurich, Paris, 1914 to 1921 – invite readers to measure the war’s imprint on making of the book (2017: 204).

The strategies Stephen Dedalus reserves for himself, “silence, exile, and cunning” (*P* 247), also characterize Joyce’s own positioning within the political sphere (Rabaté 2001: 20). In 1915 he seemed disengaged, entirely absorbed in the fortunes of his first novel, as though war did not exist around him; as Forrest Read observes, “he always remained, like his Mr. Dooley-ooley-ooley-oo, *au-dessus de la mêlée*” (Pound 1967: 59). It is precisely this allusion to Mr Dooley that invites a reconsideration of Joyce’s apparent detachment, offering further insight into satire as his chosen mode of entering political discourse.

1. Silence, exile, and scorn

James Joyce’s short satirical song “Dooleysprudence” (sometimes cited as “Dooley’s Prudence”) occupies a peculiar half-life at the margins of his canon. Written probably around 1916, during the First World War and amid the turmoil of the Easter Rising, the piece was never submitted for

publication and remained largely unknown in Joyce's lifetime, save for the few lines reproduced by Frank Budgen in 1934 (1960: 201) and the single stanza quoted by Herbert Gorman in 1939 (1948: 240-41). Both drew on it when seeking to characterise Joyce's political outlook, presenting the song as emblematic of his stance toward the war.

The most complete version of "Dooleysprudence" available to date appeared in print only in 1959, when Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann included it in *The Critical Writings of James Joyce* (1989: 246-48)³¹. They reproduced the song as a six-stanza lyric with a recurring comic refrain and characterised Mr Dooley as "the homely comrade to the heroic stag of 'The Holy Office' " (Mason and Ellmann 1989: 9). Since then, it has been reprinted in *Poems and Shorter Writings* (1991) and routinely listed in bibliographies and reference works. "Dooleysprudence" is often described as a poem or broadside, although both the surviving archival evidence and its intertextual affinities with music-hall culture suggest that Joyce conceived it as a performance piece rather than as a text intended for the printed page. Mason and Ellmann, in fact, note that their transcription derives from a typescript preserved at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (Slocum Joyce Collection), but they make no reference to the autograph manuscript now held at Cornell University, which is the only extant document in Joyce's hand. This fragment, catalogued as Box 1, Folder 9 in the Joyce Collection, consists of a single leaf of music-ruled paper containing five bars of melody and text (Cornell Joyce Collection 1961: 26), indicating that Joyce treated the work as musically composed.

"Dooleysprudence" is not an original production, or rather, it participates in a form of unoriginality more literal than Joyce's usual practice. It is best understood as a work of parody, whose direct source lies in the 1901 music-hall song "Mister Dooley", a popular vaudeville number with lyrics by Billy (William) Jerome and music by Jean Schwartz³². Apparently, Joyce was very familiar with this number and often

³¹ All subsequent references to this work are given in the text as *CW* followed by the page number.

³² Versions of "Mister Dooley" (1902) are available on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_nyr1GskWk> (10/2025).

demonstrated appreciation for it: in his typical moments of pedagogical wit, he was in the habit of performing it for his language students in Trieste (Ellmann 1982: 341).

Centred on the figure of the Irish-American everyman, Jerome and Schwartz's "Mister Dooley" combines a comic, playful, and colloquial tone with an upbeat melody built on the traditional verse-chorus pattern of music-hall tunes, designed for broad appeal and easy memorability. Joyce's reworking of this material retains much of the original's form and tone: he preserves its structure, melody, rhythm, and humour, but reshapes the lyrics to serve his own satiric and critical ends. As in Jerome and Schwartz's version, each refrain in "Dooleysprudence" closes with the sung name of the protagonist, "Dooley-ooley-ooley-oo" (*CW* 246-47). Joyce also echoes several of the original's phrases and syntactic patterns: for instance, the refrain "The greatest man the country ever knew" becomes "the coolest chap the country ever knew", "the mildest man the country ever knew", and so forth (*CW* 246-47). At the same time, he introduces new lines targeting the Great War and its ideological pretensions.

The popular song that Joyce reworked also emerged from an earlier transatlantic lineage. Jerome and Schwartz's "Mister Dooley" was inspired by the humorous character of Mr Martin J. Dooley, the fictional Irish-American bartender of Chicago's Bridgeport neighbourhood, created by the journalist Finley Peter Dunne (1867-1936). Dooley was the voice of a long-running series of satirical columns published primarily between 1893 and 1915, with occasional later reappearances. The shrewd Irish immigrant rose to national prominence during the Spanish-American War, when Dunne's commentaries on the conflict propelled both the character and his creator into the spotlight. Dunne's Dooley sketches, hailed as "the first truly memorable Irish character in American literature" (Caraher 2009: 286), were frequently reprinted and collected in volumes such as *Mr. Dooley in Peace and in War* (1898) and *Mr. Dooley's Opinions* (1901). The success of these collections secured Dunne's place among the leading humourists of his age, earning him comparisons with Mark Twain (F.C.S. 1970: 8).

Dooley was renowned for his caustic observations on local and international politics, delivered in a vivid Irish brogue, the dialect voice that Charles Fanning has described as "the first [...] of genius in American literature" (qtd. in Pierce 2000: 59). Through this character, Dunne offered

acerbic commentary on contemporary affairs, particularly the dubious conduct of politicians, but his reflections extended well beyond local interest to encompass topics such as the Great Irish Famine, immigration, urban life, and the shifting moral climate of the new century. Joyce, for his part, could hardly have been unaware of Dunne's work. Suffice it to mention that in 1899 Dunne visited Dublin amid widespread attention: as Elmer Ellis recounts, "[h]is reputation had preceded him there, and at his hotel in Dublin reporters called to see Mr. Dooley" (1969: 130). It is highly probable that Joyce encountered at least these accounts of the visit in the press.

Joyce's appropriation of Dooley represents a strategic relocation of the vernacular voice. By taking this figure of Irish diasporic satire and transplanting him to wartime Europe, Joyce achieves the critical distance necessary to address both European imperialism and Irish nationalism without being constrained by either. At the same time, "Dooleysprudence" introduces another form of distance: while it reanimates the familiar cadences of a popular tune, it resists the public exposure of print. If the song circulated at all, it likely did so only within Joyce's immediate milieu and lingered in that semi-private sphere for nearly two decades.

The 1930s marked a significant change: Joyce appears to have introduced "Dooleysprudence" into the public sphere. The song was known to both Budgen and Gorman, a fact that can hardly be dismissed as coincidence: since Joyce was involved in the preparation of their books, he may well have shared the text himself. Without entering the details of his collaboration with Budgen, suffice it to recall Georges Léon's letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver noting Joyce's intense engagement with the project: "It is a long time since I have seen Mr. Joyce so interested in anything as he has been in this work – making suggestions, remembering points, etc. Even after Mr. Budgen's departure he kept dictating to me various suggestions to be wrought in the text" (*Letters III* 286). It is therefore plausible that Joyce encouraged the inclusion of the song – or at the very least, did not prevent its wider circulation.

"Dooleysprudence" thus constitutes a neglected piece in the larger puzzle of Joyce's fashioning of his own public persona and his procedures of self-representation. Its renewed circulation was likely prompted by the fact that, by the 1930s, many intellectuals regarded neutrality as an

untenable position. For his ostentatious indifference, Joyce had already drawn the disapproval of Margaret “Storm” Jameson, whom he, like many others, regarded as a leading figure in the contemporary literary world. Her name appears twice in the notebooks that Joyce used in 1936-1937 for the composition of *Finnegans Wake* (VI.C.14, 159 and 161), included among lists of prominent cultural figures whom he probably intended to contact or meet.

Those were also the years when he was solicited by another writer, Nancy Cunard, whose 1937 broadsheet “Spain: The Question” declared that “it is impossible any longer to take no side” in the struggle against fascism – a call to which Joyce reportedly gave a terse reply, insisting that politics was all too pervasive (Ellmann 1982: 704). The intellectual climate of the period was shaped by a shared conviction that writers possessed not only the moral right but also the duty to speak out. Anti-fascist thinkers denounced any form of moral abstention, especially the refusal to oppose tyranny, as a kind of ethical failure. Within this atmosphere, Joyce’s decision to resurrect his First World War satire may be read as his oblique and ironic response to the prevailing demand for political and moral commitment.

Indeed, Joyce’s “Dooleysprudence” may seem, on the surface, to be a celebration of disengagement. In fact, that withdrawal operates as a critical mode of quiet subversion, generating a profound crisis of representational legitimacy for any structure of power. Non-participation or conscious detachment functions as an ethical interruption, an assertion of inner moral sovereignty, and a deliberate act of boundary-setting. By foregrounding a text built upon active indifference, Joyce articulates a protest that refuses the very terms of political debate, dismissing all stances as equally complicit in sustaining discredited structures of authority.

2. The Comedy of Refusal

The title “Dooleysprudence” is a playful pun on “jurisprudence” and indicates the law and wisdom according to Mr Dooley, or better, as Mason and Ellmann suggest, the practice of “substituting private good sense for the folly of society’s legal code” (*CW* 246). Paradoxically, Joyce’s song achieves its comic and destabilising effect through a refusal of order itself,

spurning its demand for meaning and coherence and refusing to engage in the binary choice of either obedience or active rebellion – Dooley “declines to go to church”, “doesn’t care a damn / About the yellow peril or problem of Siam”, “won’t salute the State / Or serve Nebuchadnezzar or proletariat” (hereafter cited from *CW* 246-48). This political approach amounts to a strategy of intellectual resistance in that it neutralizes the system by suspending its core function – the ability to receive action. Thus, the song is far from apolitical; rather, it is actively anti-political in its comprehensive rejection of collective ideology, indicating “both Church and governments as causes for the bloodshed” (Manganiello 2015: 153).

The opening of Joyce’s song specifies that when “all the gallant nations run to war”, Dooley opts for the individual and quotidian pursuit, choosing to go home “to have his dinner by the very first cablecar”. The theme of social and economic exploitation is thus introduced from the outset: the term “gallant” marks a liminal space between inherited aristocratic ideals of valour and the bourgeois performance of refinement, signalling a morality grounded in appearances, one that prizes polish and decorum over principle. Dooley’s “cablecar”, by contrast, evokes the pragmatism of the working and lower-middle classes, for whom the grand gestures of war acquire a comic aspect: “the blatant bulletins of the rulers of the earth” provoke “mirth”, reducing the rhetoric of heroism to absurdity. The refrain, “They are out to collar / The dime and dollar”, exposes greed as the true motor of conflict, concealed beneath the masquerade of nobility and courage.

The common man is likewise imperilled by the complicity of organised religion with the machinery of war, as Dooley emphasises when he notes that “pope and priest and parson left the poor man in the lurch”. These lines closely resemble “The Holy Office”, where the poetic personae laments “Those things for which Grandmother Church / Left me severely in the lurch” (Joyce 1966: 36). The betrayal is profound: clerical pacifism gives way to the obscene doctrine that “the only way to save all human souls / Was piercing human bodies through with dum dum bulletholes”. In this grotesque convergence of Christian theology and military technology, spiritual institutions appear co-opted and corrupted by nationalist jingoism, generating a monstrous hybrid deity, “Jingo Jesus”, from whom one must pray to be delivered.

In the light of these elements, the song proceeds to formalise a stance of radical neutrality. Dooley, the “meek philosopher”, rejects the racist anxieties of his age, such as “the yellow peril or problem of Siam”, and systematically dismantles the propaganda myths circulated by both belligerent sides. He refuses to believe that the British sailor (“British Tar”) is “water from life’s fount”, and declines to “gulp the gospel of the German on the Mount”, a bitter pun on the Sermon on the Mount that exposes the corruption of sacred teaching by ideology. This even-handed condemnation culminates in “The curse of Moses / On both your houses”, an echo of Mercutio’s dying words, “A plague o’ both your houses” in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (Act 3, Sc.1, 92) which implies, by association, that the modern conflict brings the suffering of the innocent, devastation on both sides, and fatal social consequences.

As Joyce turns his satirical eye to the entrenched power of the state’s legal apparatus, Dooley, a “cheerful imbecile”, enacts his contempt for juridical formalism by lighting his pipe with the foundational texts of Western law and with the medieval “Doomsday Book” – a punning deformation of *Domesday Book* that anticipates the recurring Domesday / Doomsday book motif in *Finnegans Wake* (notably in III.3 material and early drafts). He ridicules the theatrical pomp of the judiciary, mentioning disturbing wigs “made out / Of someone else’s hair”; once again, the wig’s sheen becomes a class performance, where what appears as respectable polish is in fact the conversion of working-class bodies into bourgeois ornament. The artificiality and emptiness of the legal system are further exposed in the thought that modern legal ritual “inherits its toilette / From Pontius Pilate”, an image that links contemporary authority to self-serving and hypocritical gestures of absolution.

Humorously, Joyce’s focus also extends to the realm of petty non-compliance, focusing on tax and postage as symbols of arbitrary fiscal extraction by the state. Dooley’s banal gesture of licking a postage stamp – which calls to mind Bloom’s musing on “Stamps: stickyback pictures” (*U* 4.67-68) – transforms itself into an act of scorn and culminates in a scatological, anti-imperial joke: the adhesive side of the stamp, the sovereign’s “backside gummy”, gives Dooley a stomach-ache. This Swiftian injection of low humour deliberately punctures royal and imperial pretensions, exposing the body behind the emblem of authority.

The closing lines deliver the song's essential message. Mr Dooley appears as "the tranquil gentleman who won't salute the State or serve Nebuchadnezzar or proletariat". The references span the full spectrum of power: Nebuchadnezzar, a long-standing emblem of absolutism and imperial hubris, evokes the tyranny of totalitarian regimes, while "the proletariat" represents the opposite pole of revolutionary or socialist authority. Joyce's anti-hero refuses allegiance to either cause, rejecting all grand political crusades. Instead, he "thinks that every son of man has quite enough to do to paddle down the stream of life his personal canoe", a metaphor that celebrates the dignity of personal responsibility. The refrain that follows, "Poor Europe ambles like sheep to shambles", ends the piece on a sombre note: "shambles" here signifying the slaughterhouse, as Europe's peoples march meekly toward their own destruction. In contrast, Mr Dooley, "the wisest wight", remains the one figure who stands apart, preserving his sanity amid the general derangement.

As Colin McCabe observes, "[t]he critical tradition has identified Joyce with Dooley and seen Joyce's immature attachment to socialism give way to a mature individualism. But this perspective ignores the time and place of Joyce's writing. It ignores the fact that Dooley is consciously a political subversive" (1984: 137). Indeed, the lyrics of "Dooleysprudence" stage a systematic repudiation of modern institutions and ideologies, targeting war, religion, law, and state governance with surgical precision. This rejection of all authority structures, together with its affirmation of individual autonomy and scepticism, aligns the comic figure of Dooley with the ethos of "*non serviam*" articulated by Stephen Dedalus (*P* 117). To some extent, the two characters share even a satirical vein, as Joyce ultimately exposes Stephen as a failed artist and rebel, whose grand designs remain unfulfilled by the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, as well as in *Ulysses*. In other words, Stephen's proud *non serviam* can be read as both heroic and hubristic – a brave stand against conformity, but also a youthful arrogance that Joyce subjects to irony.

3. The Dooley Lineage

John Whittier Ferguson notes that "Dooleysprudence" advances arguments "similar to Woolf's in *Three Guineas*" (1996: 26). The connection,

however, should be understood as largely thematic rather than substantive. The differences between the two works are in fact more marked than their affinities, not least because *Three Guineas* was written two decades later (1938), in a different political climate. Woolf's explicitly anti-war essay links militarism to the structures of male authority; what it shares with Joyce's satire is a recognition that war originates in hierarchical systems of power and that the institutions claiming to preserve civilisation are themselves complicit in causing the very collapse they profess to contain.

Even more intriguing are the influences identified by Martha Fodaski Black, who suggests that "Dooleysprudence" can be read as Joyce's response to George Bernard Shaw's 1914 essay "Common Sense about the War" – a title that itself recalls Thomas Paine's 1776 revolutionary pamphlet (Black 1996: 44). Extending this genealogy, in 1931 Shaw drew a comparison between his work and "Swift's classic pamphlet on The Conduct of the Allies" (Weintraub 1971: 328).

Shaw's polemical analysis of the First World War provoked intense controversy and widespread condemnation. His fierce intellectual independence, coupled with his outrageous and deliberately outraging sense of humour, alienated nearly every faction of public opinion. Perceived as unpatriotic, Shaw's assessment systematically attacks both the British and German governments, exposing the Machiavellian motives underlying each side's rhetoric (1914: 15). He fears and derides "the Junkers and Militarists of England and Germany jumping at the chance [...] of smashing one another and establishing their own oligarchy as the dominant military power in the world" (Shaw 1914: 12). Similarly to Joyce's song, this critique portrays ordinary people as the pawns of self-interested powers engaged in organised murder. Rejecting hypocrisy and false heroics, Shaw's critique – like Joyce's – identifies the conflict's true logic in economic self-interest, recasting patriotic struggle as a competition for material gain (1914: 31).

Joyce likely shared much of Shaw's critical outlook, particularly the latter's articulation of his Irish vantage point: "I shall retain my Irish capacity for criticizing England with something of the detachment of a foreigner, and perhaps with a certain slightly malicious taste for taking the conceit out of her" (1914, 11). "Dooleysprudence" appears to inherit this multifaceted and cold-blooded Irish detachment, defending neutrality

through a double-edged mode: on one side, self-directed irony aimed at Dooley's own withdrawal from action; on the other, a biting mockery of the self-serving warmongers who mistake cruelty for conviction.

According to Black, while both defending and ridiculing neutrality, Joyce's song operates as the passive counterpart to Shaw's courageous exposé of the vested interests of power brokers and the victimisation of ordinary citizens by war. In this light, "Dooleysprudence" would run parallel to Shaw's "Common Sense about the War"; yet whereas Shaw's text stands as a notoriously public manifesto, Joyce's private piece advances the same unpalatable heterodoxies through more oblique and self-effacing means. In short, according to Black the affinity is shadowed by a temperamental divergence: "the equivocal Joyce despised Shaw because his activism, his success, and his ability to get the public spotlight, whether as scapegoat or redeemer, were reproofs and reminders of his own inadequacies" (1996: 47).

Joyce's so-called "inadequacies" were, in part, the product of necessity. He had practical reasons to remain silent: in 1915 he and his family were permitted to leave Trieste for Switzerland only after he assured the Austrian authorities that he would maintain political neutrality in exchange for the visa enabling their passage (Ellmann 1982: 386). He later described his official status, with mordant irony, as that of "a prisoner of war liberated on parole to Switzerland" (*Letters II* 439) – a phrase that fuses bureaucratic absurdity with the genuine captivity of his brother Stanislaus, interned for four years. The episode confirmed for Joyce the theatrical and arbitrary nature of state power and national allegiance, and his outward neutrality thus emerged as both a gesture of pragmatic self-preservation and an expression of deeper intellectual detachment: he saw little reason to wish victory upon either side. His occasional remarks in favour of the Habsburg Empire, such as "I wish to God there were more such empires" (Ellmann 1982: 389), stem not from loyalty but from a preference for the porous, multi-ethnic structure of a fading monarchy over the fervent nationalisms that fuelled the war's violence.

In a related way, probably Dunne's columns had nourished in Joyce a fascination with cultural cross-fertilisation and, more specifically, with the coexistence of disparate idioms. Both writers, indeed, share a taste for linguistic hybridity, and it is not unlikely that what Jesse Bier terms

“Dooleymorphisms” (1968: 188) offered a stimulus for Joyce’s later verbal polymorphisms and plurilingual acrobatics. One can easily imagine Joyce relishing Dunne’s column on the Dreyfus case, where Mr Dooley mimics Émile Zola’s cry of “J’Accuse!” as “Jackuse” (Dunne 1898: 236-37) or his mocking account of the Boxer War, in which blind patriotic slogans are burlesqued through the Irish-inflected “Hock German Michael”, “hock mesilf”, a comic play on the German *hoch* (“high”, as in “long live”; Dunne 1906: 94).

Of course, “Dooleysprudence” has multiple afterlives within Joyce’s oeuvre, for no work by Joyce remains self-contained but continually overflows into others. For one thing, the pacifist philosophy articulated in the song provides, in thematic terms, an ideological blueprint for the political confrontations that animate *Ulysses*. Nowhere is this more evident than in the “Cyclops” episode, the most explicitly political of the book. The chapter’s central opposition between the belligerent Citizen and Leopold Bloom, aptly described as “the prudent member” (*U* 12.211), reprises the dialectic already established in “Dooleysprudence”. The song’s critique of nationalism, militarism, and organised ideology is partially inherited by Bloom, whose intellectual temper recalls that of Mr Dooley: a rationalist inclined toward empirical thought, who speaks in terms of “phenomen[a]” (*U* 12.465-67) and resists any inflated idealism that contradict reason. In this sense, Bloom emerges as a dooleysprudent Irishman fashioning a new post-national identity that is self-consciously unstable and programmatically unfixed.

Joyce’s fiction also reveals striking affinities with Dunne’s satirical journalism, as several of Bloom’s puns and Stephen’s wordplays echo turns of phrase first coined by Mr Dooley (Eckley 1981: 148). When Bloom sees John Howard Parnell on the street, looking uncannily like his dead brother Charles, the sight prompts the thought “poached eyes on ghost” (*U* 8.508) – a conceit adapted from Mr Dooley, who had described microbes “with eyes like pooched eggs” (Dunne 1901: 5). Similarly, Stephen Dedalus’s recollection of his debt to the mystic poet A.E. (George Russell) – “A.E.I.O.U.” (*U* 9.213) – recalls Dooley’s joke about an aged millionaire approaching Newport and asking, “An’ is that where Mr. A.E.I.O.U. an’ sometimes W. an’ Y. Belcoort lives an’ has his bein’?” (Dunne 1901: 14-15). Both writers draw upon a shared reservoir of Irish vernacular and

folklore, so that many details – such as turning a picture to the wall or using a potato as a charm against rheumatism – belong less to any single author than to a collective tradition.

The lineage extends, with suitably Joycean mischief, into *Finnegans Wake*. Mr Dooley reappears in the “Willingdone Museyroom” section, accompanied by his perennial sidekick, Hennessy: “This is hiena hinnessy laughing alout at the Willingdone. This is lipsyg dooley krieging the funk from the hinnessy. This is the hinndoo Shimar Shin between the dooley boy and the hinnessy” (*FW* 10.4-7). The passage stages a parodic conflation of the Battles of Jena (“hiena”) and Leipzig (“lipsyg”), where “hinnessy” is as laughing aloud, a lot, and boorishly (“alout”) at the defeated (“done”) Duke of Wellington, while Dooley is mock-Germanically “krieging”, waging war to drive “the funk”, the fear – or possibly the stench? – out of him. What unfolds is less a grand battle than a tavern brawl, a parody of Europe’s own bellicose absurdity, into which an “hinndoo” variant of Shem and Shaun is drawn to restore a semblance of order. True to the *Wake*’s method of universal contamination, the passage interlaces the several Dooleys: Dunne’s original columnist, the character of Jerome’s music-hall song, and Joyce’s own anti-hero. One of Jerome and Schwartz’s choruses, in fact, runs:

Napoleon had an army of a hundred thousand men.
He marched them up the hill and then he marched them down again.
[...] And though Napoleon marched them up who was it called them down?
'Twas Mister Dooley, 'twas Mister Dooley [...]. (Jerome and Schwartz 1902)

This revival of the satirical, working-class Irish-American voice amid the tangled retelling of European history confirms the persistence of Joyce’s original anti-imperial impulse. By placing subversive laughter at the centre of the *Wake*’s mock-commemoration of Wellington’s monuments and military triumphs, Joyce underscores that the systematic satirical dismantling of state power and heroic narrative, first achieved in the 1916 song, remained integral to his lifelong project and to the encyclopaedic architecture his oeuvre. The stage is reset for the cynical, irreverent Irish common man, bound and beaten by the twin powers of Church and State,

whose vengeance is a triumph of subversive indifference: by meddling with sublime unconcern in the affairs of the mighty, he undoes them. It is through this very refusal to care that he secures, paradoxically and forever, his entry into the pages of grand history³³.

Works Cited

- Adams, Robert M. (1974). "The Bent Knife Blade: Joyce in the 1960's". In *Joyce: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by William M. Chace, 166-75. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Barham, Peter (2007). *Forgotten Lunatics of the Great War*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Benco, Silvio (1979). "James Joyce in Trieste". In *Portraits of the Artist in Exile: Recollections of James Joyce by Europeans*, edited by Willard Potts, 49-58. Seattle-London: University of Washington Press.
- Bier, Jesse (1968). *The Rise and Fall of American Humor*. New York-Chicago-San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Black, Martha F. (1995). *Shaw and Joyce: The Last Word in Stolen Telling*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Budgen, Frank (1960). *James Joyce and the Making of "Ulysses"*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Caraher, Brian G. (2009). "Irish and European Politics: Nationalism, Socialism, Empire". In *James Joyce in Context*, edited by John McCourt, 285-98. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cunard, Nancy (1937). "Spain: The Question". In *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*. London: Left Review. <<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/netzquelle/a-37891.pdf>> (10/2025).
- Dunne, Finley P. (1898). *Mr. Dooley in Peace and in War*. Boston: Small, Maynard & Company.
- (1901). *Mr. Dooley's Opinions*. New York: R. H. Russell.
- (1906). *Mr. Dooley's Philosophy*. New York-London: Harper and Brothers.
- Eckley, Grace (1981). *Finley Peter Dunne*. Boston: Twayne.
- Elliott, John E. (1969). *Mr. Dooley's America*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

³³ For Mr Dooley's further afterlives, see Tom Stoppard's play *Travesties* (1982: 48-50).

- Ellmann, Richard (1982). *James Joyce*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- F.C.S. (1970). "Finley Peter Dunne". In *Mr. Dooley's Philosophy*, edited by Finley P. Dunne, 7-8. Upper Saddle River: Literature House.
- Goldman, Jane (2017). *Modernism, 1910-1945: Image to Apocalypse*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Gorman, Herbert (1948). *James Joyce*. New York: Rinehart.
- Groden, Michael (2010). *Ulysses in Focus: Genetic, Textual, and Personal Views*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Jolas, Eugene (1963). "My Friend James Joyce". In *James Joyce: Two Decades of Criticism*, edited by Seon Givens, 3-18. New York: Vanguard Press.
- Joyce, James (1966). *Pomes Penyeach, and Other Verses*. London: Faber and Faber.
- (1989). *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, edited by Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Kiberd, Declan (2000). "Introduction". In *Ulysses*, xi-xxxvi. London: Penguin Books.
- MacCabe, Colin (1984). *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*. London: Macmillan.
- Manganiello, Dominic (2015). *Joyce's Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Mason, Ellsworth, and Richard Ellmann (1989). "Introduction". In *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, 7-11. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Pierce, David (ed.) (2000). *Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader*. Cork: Cork University Press.
- Pound, Ezra (1967). *Pound/Joyce: The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce, with Pound's Essays on Joyce*, edited by Forrest Read. New York: New Directions.
- Rabaté, Jean-Michel (2001). *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shakespeare, William (1980). *Romeo and Juliet*, edited by Brian Gibbons. London-New York: Methuen.
- Sherry, Vincent B. (2004). "Introduction". In *James Joyce's Ulysses*, 1-21. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stoppard, Tom (1982). *Travesties*. New York: Grove Press.
- Svevo, Italo (1969). *James Joyce*, translated by Stanislaus Joyce. San Francisco: City Lights.
- The Cornell Joyce Collection: A Catalogue. (1961). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Weintraub, Stanley (1971). *Journey to Heartbreak*. New York: Weybright and Talley.

Whittier-Ferguson, John (1996). *Framing Pieces: Designs of the Gloss in Joyce, Woolf, and Pound*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Websites

Jerome, William, and Jean Schwartz (1902). “Mister Dooley”. *YouTube*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_nyr1GskWk> (10/2025).

Finito di stampare
nel mese di dicembre 2025
per i tipi dell'Editoriale Anicia S.r.l.