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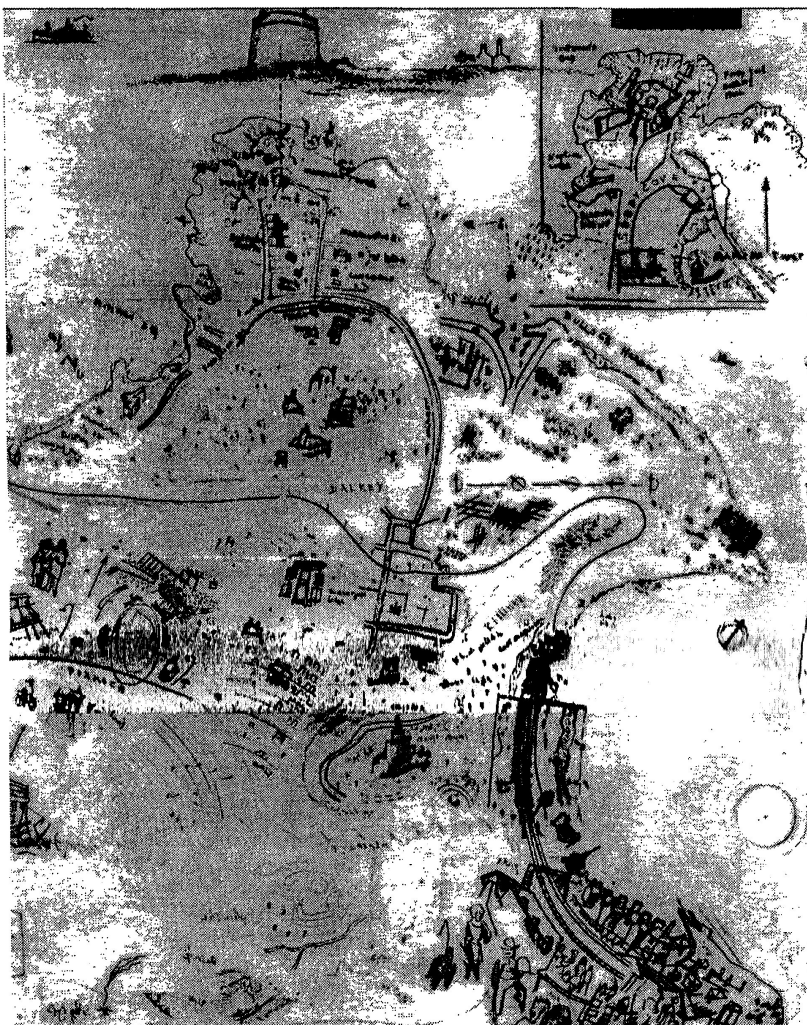
(Article begins on next page)



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ☐ **FRITZ SENN**, *Ulyssean Close-ups*.
 Reviewed by ILARIA NATALI (2)
- ☐ **IDA KLITGÅRD**, *Fictions of Hybridity: Translating Style in James Joyce Ulysses*.
 Reviewed by ROY ARTHUR SWANSON (3-4)
- ☐ **RICHARD BECKMAN**, *Joyce's Rare View: The Name of Things in Finnegans Wake*.
 Reviewed by DAMIAN HEY (5-6)
- ☐ **LEN PLATT**, *Joyce, Race, and Finnegans Wake*.
 Reviewed by SHELDON BRIVIC (7-8)
- ☐ **LUCA CRISPI and SAM SLOTE, EDITORS**.
How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake.
 Reviewed by Colleen Jaurrette (9)
- ☐ **PHILIP KITCHER**, *Joyce's Kaleidoscope: An Invitation to Finnegans Wake*.
 Reviewed by LEN PLATT (10-11)
- ☐ "David Lilburn's *In Medias Res*,"
 by STEPH HURST (11)
- ☐ "A Bit of Sunlight on 'In the Shade of the Palm,'"
 by JUDITH HARRINGTON (12-13)
- ☐ "In Memoriam: Jane Ford and David Wright,"
 by MARGOT NORRIS (13)
- ☐ "In Memoriam: David Wright,"
 by CHRIS ACKERLEY (13)
- ☐ **A. NICHOLAS FARGNOLI and MICHAEL PATRICK GILLESPIE**, *Critical Companion to James Joyce: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*.
 Reviewed by VICTOR LUFTIG (14-15)
- ☐ **E. JOSEPH SHARKEY**, *Idling the Engine: Linguistic Skepticism in an Around Cortázar, Kafka and Joyce*.
 Reviewed by KERSTIN GROSS-STRANZ (15)
- ☐ **JOHN PAUL RIQUELME, EDITOR**, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.
 Reviewed by VIVIAN VALVANO LYNCH (16-18)
- ☐ "Basking Again in the Panaroma,"
 by VALENTINA PARADISI (18)
- ☐ "Joyce's Already Thereness and Other Observations,"
 by JENNIFER WELLMAN and KELLY J.S. MCGOVERN (19-20)
- ☐ *Papers on Joyce*, Nos. 10/11 (2004-05), Guest editors: Carmelo Medina Casado, Antonio Raúl de Toro Santos, Alberto Lázaro Lafuente, and Jefferey Simons. *Papers on Joyce*, No. 12 (2006). Edited by Francisco García Tortosa and Carmelo Medina Casado.
 Reviewed by PATRICK O'NEILL 20-21
- ☐ **ANDREW GIBSON**, *Beckett & Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency*. Reviewed by ERIC P. LEVY (22-23)
- ☐ **YOSHIKI TAJIRI**, *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: The Organs and Senses in Modernism*. Reviewed by Tom Cousineau (23)
- ☐ **JUAN A. SUÁREZ**, *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday*.
 Reviewed by Michael Wutz (24-25)
- ☐ **RICHARD FINNERAN, EDITOR**, *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies*.
 Reviewed by Daniel Shea (25)
- ☐ **EMER NOLAN**, *Catholic Emancipation: Irish Fiction from Thomas Moore to James Joyce*.
 Reviewed by MARY LOWE-EVANS (26)
- ☐ **JOHN WILSON FOSTER, EDITOR**, *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*.
 Reviewed by ALISON ARMSTRONG (27)
- ☐ **JOHN MARX**, *The Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire*. Reviewed by AGATA SZCZESZAK-BREWER. .. (28)

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Close-ups on Body Language and Other Ulyssean Subjects

FRITZ SENN.

Ulyssean Close-ups.

Roma: Bulzoni, 2007. € 10

Reviewed by
ILARIA NATALI

THE RECENT FOUNDATION of the "Piccola Biblioteca Joyciana," directed by Franca Ruggieri, reflects a defining moment in Joyce studies. Such a phenomenon basically consists in a reinvigoration of Joyce criticism achieved through publications and conferences that actually contribute to a new dialogue and add to previous debate. A large part of this project is being carried out by the James Joyce Italian Foundation, founded in May 2006 and based in Rome, actively encouraging both Italian research and international cooperation.

Ulyssean Close-ups, a fresh look into Joyce's texts from a *maestro*, represents a lively fruit of such critical orientation in Joyce studies; it proves that productive continuity can be coupled with innovation. The intriguing originality of Fritz Senn's analyses stems from his text-based approach, which does not miss Joyce's intellectual bearings and biographical background. What perhaps represents the most striking feature of the book is Senn's ability to fuse well-grounded information and stimulating theses.

The book comprises five essays ("In Full Gait: Aesthetics of Footsteps," "From Efficacious Words to Eutrapelia," "Stephen Telegraphos," "An Aeolian Gap?" and "Authorial Awareness"), varying in length from three to about thirty pages. Senn specifies how some texts of the collection are not intended as a detailed study, but rather aim to open various issues to further consideration and investigation. This does not mean that depth or complexity are overlooked; actually *Ulyssean Close-ups* highlights what is usually passed over in reading and examining Joyce's texts. By analysing passages and features of *Ulysses* that are only apparently uncomplicated, Senn reveals new connections, alternative interpretations, and the weaving and unweaving of syntactic, phonetic, and rhythmic patterns in Joyce's texts.

The title well describes the character of the book, as the attention to both detail and the "kinematographic" features of *Ulysses* represents one of its thematically cohesive elements. In framing a detail, a character, a linguistic choice, Senn also keeps in mind its context and stresses the dynamic quality of the text. As the author remarks elsewhere, "works are not a static assemblage of properties, but something live, full of tensions, contradictions, incongruities" (*Joycean Murmurs* 107). This conception is definitely behind the collection as a whole, and permeates the first essay in particular.

"In Full Gait: Aesthetics of Footsteps" emphasizes the dynamics of *Ulysses*. The word "dynamics" is to be intended here in a twofold perspective: on the one hand,

Senn analyses the body language of several Joycean characters in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*. On the other hand, the multidirectional feature of the texts is emphasized, as Senn reveals how physical and cognitive processes are—often contemporarily—expressed in *Ulysses*. The study of phonological, lexical, and syntactic aspects of the narration reveals a variety of connections between physical movement and its linguistic expression. For instance, prose rhythm proves to suggest diverse modalities of movement, or to be determined by movement. Hurried, wavering, uncoordinated actions are generally echoed, if not expressed, by the syntactic structures.

Among the interesting issues that emerge from Senn's treatment of this subject, some elements are particularly worth mentioning: the author identifies typical procedures that characterise the narrative of *Ulysses*. The textual phenomenon he defines as "provection" implies "a process of escalation and deflection" (22); such process can result in repetition and modification of motives throughout the text. Examples include Bloom's and Mr. Deasy's ways of walking.

When discussing the "Nausicaa" episode, Senn illustrates a second procedure, which might be defined "procrastination": it involves Joyce's diffuse technique of deferring relevant information, causing an effect of surprise in the reader. As Senn points out, we learn of Gerty's disability at the end of the episode. Nonetheless, in the light of this information it is possible to retrospectively find textual indications that hint to the girl's condition.

It appears evident that these phenomena, observed here in reference to gait and movement, can be widely applied to other topics. What Senn provides is not only an interesting look at physical and linguistic movements, but also some instruments of analysis, a methodological starting point for various investigations of *Ulysses*.

"In Full Gait: Aesthetics of Footsteps" analyzes textual dynamics also in terms of intertextual connections; the sketch is enriched by various references to Ovid and Homer. Senn, whose mastery of the classics is already well known, reveals novel relationships between Joyce's works, *Metamorphoses*, and *The Odyssey*, widening the interpretative possibilities of several passages.

The second sketch included in *Ulyssean Close-ups*, "From Efficacious Words to Eutrapelia," appears a natural prosecution to the first essay. "In Full Gait: Aesthetics of Footsteps" opens with the myth of Morpheus, able to imitate any way of walking and mode of speaking. While gait was the object of the first investigation, the focus now becomes speech, conversation, and especially the social use of language in *Ulysses*. Senn not only underlines how Joyce was able to reproduce various functions of language, but he also reveals the different modalities of communicational interchange in *Ulysses*. A first distinction can be made between language which "can be significant" and that which represents

"mere diversion on the surface" (49). Consequently, the essay moves from "momentous" expressions to everyday speech, and culminates in the concept of *eutrapelia*, which might be translated as "lively wit" (71). This second sketch mainly illustrates two ways in which linguistic formulas are undermined in *Ulysses*: conventional or traditional expressions generally appear transformed, and, when unchanged, they are often included in the "wrong context." Senn mainly shows deviations and ruptures of religious discourse in Joyce's text, underlining linguistic twistings and multiple refractions.

The six sections in "From Efficacious Words to Eutrapelia" illustrate as many different functions and uses of language in the novel: focus is respectively on prayers, blessings, curses, oaths, predictions and, finally, *eutrapelia*. In each section, the author provides cross-references, exhaustive exemplification, and information about etymological origins of the terms.

The third essay of the collection, "Stephen Telegraphos," reaffirms Senn's interest in tracing etymological sources and webs of connections. This brief sketch opens with the relationship between Stephen and Telemachos, characters who share a tendency to stay away from conflict ("éle means far and machos is the word for battle" 81). Stephen also appears closely related to telegrams; following Senn's line of reasoning, it might be added that *Ulysses* suggests a subtle connection between *machos*, battle, and *graphma*, letter. Indeed telegrams, letters, and written communications appear as fields of controversy in *Ulysses*, as they generally contain errors, omissions, additions, and misspellings. Senn underlines the peculiar telegrams Stephen sends and receives, such as the message transmitted to Mulligan and Haines from College Green and the well-known French telegram which announces Mrs. Dedalus's impending death. He also analyses other "disturbed" written exchanges, including the report on Dignam's funeral on the *Evening Telegraph* and the mysterious telegram mentioned at the end of "Oxen of the Sun."

"An Aeolian Gap?" as the punctuation in the title suggests, intends to pose questions rather than to present a full-length analysis. In *Ulysses*, Joyce weaves the threads of his narrative with a particular mastery, simulating the simultaneity of different events on the written page; he is "generally aware of what his characters are doing when the narrative spotlight is not on them" (92). Therefore, it appears noteworthy that "Aeolus" presents a presumably interrupted narrative, never fully recovered; a "strange temporal gap" (91) which has hardly received any critical attention so far. The open conclusion of this well-grounded and detailed question will undoubtedly captivate the reader.

The last essay in the collection, "Authorial Awareness," discusses the difficult question of the information that might have actually been available to Joyce

when writing *Ulysses*. As the author's knowledge is impossible to reconstruct, Senn limits his analysis to a few specific cases in which "the consciousness of the artist ... would have reverberations" (96) on textual interpretation, providing two extensive exemplifications.

The first instance deals with the pseudonym Henry Flower, which Bloom adopts in his secret correspondence with Martha Clifford. A real Henry Flower, charged with murder in 1900, could have had an influence in the choice of this particular name. Of course it is difficult to establish whether Joyce was actually aware of this case, and if so, whether "he would have made Bloom aware of it" (98). The latter question opens a wide and complex issue, which deserves some attention. It can be noted that the fictional world does not necessarily mirror the real one in every detail, and it might be difficult to prove that a murderer named Henry Flower had existed in Bloom and Martha's fictional Dublin. In short, Senn's questions appear to also obliquely raise the problem of the ontological status of the characters and of what appears in the novel.

In the second example, Senn analyses Crawford's report of the "murder in Phoenix park," underlining the inaccuracies in the character's words. The episode shows how "history ... is based on what seemed important enough to be passed on, doubtful, incomplete, erroneous, biased reports and documents that somehow survived" (105). "On the one hand, the treatment of this subject opens the way to a new debate regarding conscious/unconscious errors in *Ulysses*; on the other, it presents new insights about Joyce's conception of history, or better, of the transmission of social memory.

Ulyssean Close-ups represents a stimulating, enlivening study that can indeed be recommended. The collection encourages the reader to re-discover *Ulysses*, since Senn admirably shows how the text of the novel appears to renew itself with each reading. What is more, the book offers a number of genuinely new ideas and issues in a fluent, witty, and enjoyable way. ■

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