

Jacques Lacan

The Sinthome

The Seminar of Jacques Lacan
Book XXIII

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READING NOTES

Jacques Aubert

References to *Stephen Hero* are from the 1963 New Directions edition, edited by J. J. Slocum and H. Cahoon, which includes five additional manuscript pages that were missing from earlier editions; references to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are from the 1977 Viking Press edition, which follows the same pagination as the 1964 Critical Library corrected text, edited (with criticism and notes) by Chester G. Anderson; the edition of *Ulysses* referenced below is the Oxford World's Classics edition (which reproduces the original 1922 Shakespeare & Co. text).

I

Joyce, in the first chapter of Ulysses, expressed his wish to Hellenize: see Ulysses, p. 7: 'God, Kinch [nickname given to Stephen Dedalus by Buck Mulligan], if you and I could only work together we might do something for the island. Hellenise it.' Mulligan has been elaborating on this same theme from the very start. It was only in Trieste, from 1905 on, that Joyce started studying Greek and mixing with some delight with the Greek rabble, in whom he must have found something of the Dublin rabble (see Mando Aravantinou, 'Joyce et ses amis grecs', in James Joyce, L'Herne, 1985, pp. 58–64).

... as someone [...], Philippe Sollers, has remarked in Tel Quel ...: Philippe Sollers, 'Joyce et Cie', in Tel Quel, Issue 64, Winter 1975, pp. 15–24.

... opening a Joyce symposium ...: this was the fifth International Joyce Symposium, held in Paris over 16–20 June, 1975. The proceedings were collected and presented by Jacques Aubert and Maria Jolas in collaboration with the CNRS Press and the University of

Lille-III, in a two volume set, under the title Joyce & Paris (1902 ... 1920 1940 ... 1975), 1979. Volume I included the first ever publication of the Lacan lecture that features in the appendix to the present book.¹

... Adam [...] was a Madam ...: see Ulysses, p. 132: 'Madam, I'm Adam. And Able was I ere I saw Elba.' The palindrome is uttered by Lenehan, the group joker, whom we met back in Dubliners. The 'Abel'/'able' pun will be taken up again in Finnegans Wake (287.11): 'I cain but are you able?', where signifier and voice are interwoven in a yet more subtle manner.

... Joyce had slaved quite enough over this saint homme: the young Joyce claimed to have composed a treatise of aesthetic theory based on texts by Saint Thomas Aquinas. See A Portrait of the Artist, p. 209.

... Jacques Aubert's book ...: the book in question is Introduction à l'esthétique de James Joyce, Paris: Didier, 1973. It was substantially revised and expanded for the English-language edition: The Aesthetics of James Joyce, John Hopkins University Press, 1992.

The Freeman's Journal represented this Home Rule ...: see Ulysses, p. 55: 'What Arthur Griffith said about the headpiece over the Freeman leader: a homerule sun rising up in the northwest from the laneway behind the bank of Ireland.' The 'Home Rule' slogan of the Irish autonomists of the 1880s and '90s is also evocative of the Bloom couple.

... the heretic: from the time of his earliest writings Joyce showed a certain fascination for the position of the heretic, embodied in his eyes by Giordano Bruno. See for example 'The Bruno Philosophy' (in Critical Writings of James Joyce, ed. E. Mason and R. Ellmann, New York: Viking Press, 1966, pp. 132–34); the penultimate chapter of A Portrait of the Artist; and also Ulysses, pp. 20–21, p. 199. In each case, alongside the question of the Church, the question of the position of the Father in the Trinity is posed.

... a boozing father who was more or less a Fenian ...: Joyce's father was less Fenian (as in the mid-nineteenth-century violent nationalist movement) than feignant, lazy.

... the critics ...: Richard Ellman (James Joyce, Oxford University Press, revised edition, 1982, p. 703) reports the following reply from

Joyce to Jacob Schwartz, who asked him, 'Why have you written the book this way?' – 'To keep the critics busy for three hundred years.' He also reproduces the reply Joyce gave to Max Eastman: 'The demand that I make of my reader is that he should devote his whole life to reading my works.'

... *the edition to get* . . . : Jacques Lacan is alluding to the edition that he recommended in the flyer announcing the Seminar: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Text, Criticism and Notes*, ed. C. G. Anderson, New York: Viking Critical Library, 1968. The text has the same pagination as the later edition from the same publisher, which we are referencing here.

... *Beeb or Beeb-ie?*: Jacques Lacan is enquiring as to the pronunciation of the name of the author Maurice Beebe, whose article features in the edition in question under the title 'The Artist as Hero' (pp. 340–57).

... *Hugh Kenner* . . . : his article bears the title, 'The Portrait in perspective' (pp. 416–39), taken from his book, *Dublin's Joyce*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1955.

... *umpire*: an allusion to the debate in the second episode of *Ulysses* (pp. 29–30) between Stephen Dedalus and Mr Deasy, the director of the school where Stephen teaches, an Anglo-Irishman loyal to the British empire and a willing umpire between his pupils. Lacan's remark draws its significance from the previous page where we hear Stephen pondering over the body of one of his pupils and the body of the child he once was. Joyce's stance in relation to his country is clearly linked to the regulation of Irish bodies by the joint forces of the Catholic church and Anglo-Saxon Puritanism, which united in spectacular fashion against the hero of his youth, Parnell, an advocate of Irish independence; hence the importance of his departure in October 1904, with a woman, Nora Barnacle, and his later refusal to return. This return was dramatized in *Exiles*, where there is an insistent questioning of woman's desire, sexual relationship, and jealousy. See too the story told by Davin in *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 182–3.

... *the uncreated conscience of my race*.: *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 252–3: 'I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.'

II

... *sentimental* . . . : Cf. *Ulysses*, p. 191, Stephen's telegram announcing the end of his friendship with Buck Mulligan: 'The sentimentalist is he who would enjoy without incurring the immense debtorship for a thing done.'²

How can an art target in an expressly divinatory way . . . : this is undoubtedly an allusion to the passages in *A Portrait of the Artist* (pp. 224–6) where Stephen Dedalus presents himself, not without a certain distance, as an augur; he will remember this in *Ulysses*, p. 209; see also p. 534. In *Ulysses* the matter is clearly linked to a subject's peculiarly poetic questioning of his shadow (p. 48):

Why not endless till the farthest star? Darkly they are there behind this light, darkness shining in the brightness, delta of Cassiopeia, worlds. Me sits there with his augur's rod of ash, in borrowed sandals, by day beside a livid sea, unbeheld, in violet night walking beneath a reign of uncouth stars. I throw this ended shadow from me, manshape ineluctable, call it back. Endless, would it be mine, form of my form?

IV

... *a book here, by a certain Robert Martin Adams* . . . : *Surface and Symbol: The Consistency of James Joyce's Ulysses*, London/New York: Oxford University Press, 1962. On several occasions Adams insists (for example p. 33) on the importance of enigma in *Ulysses*. He also readily uses the term 'symptomatic', in a way that is rather vague (p. 25, p. 59n).

... *Trinity College, if I remember rightly*.: Stephen actually teaches in a public school in Dalkey, a Dublin suburb. He has taught neither at Trinity College, nor at University College where, like Joyce, he is supposed to have done his higher education, nor even at Belvedere College, the Jesuit secondary school he attended as an adolescent. Lacan's slip can of course be read in light of his interest in the Trinitarian, notably in relation to the psychosis of Newton, who was a professor at Trinity³ ('Television', in *Television/A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, New York: Norton, 1990, p. 36). Thus, the two cases are brought together, the question of the Trinity appearing at the right place in *Ulysses* in its close relationship with heresy. On this subject, see Jean-Louis Houdebine and

Philippe Sollers, 'La Trinité de Joyce, I et II', *Tel Quel*, 83, Spring 1980, pp. 36–88.

... *a certain Février* ...: James G. Février, *Histoire de l'écriture*, revised edition, Paris: Payot, 1959.⁴

... *Stephen*, whose name also begins with an *S*: it has also been observed that *Ulysses* begins and ends with an 'S': 'Stately [. . .] Yes.'

Beauty according to Hogarth: an allusion to Hogarth's line of beauty, to which Joyce returns on many occasions in his early texts, in particular in *A Portrait of the Artist* (p. 181) when he mentions his schoolfellow Davin, the typical young nationalist peasant:

His nurse had taught him Irish and shaped his rude imagination by the broken lights of Irish myth. He stood towards the myth upon which no individual mind had ever drawn out a line of beauty and to its unwieldy tales that divided against themselves as they moved down the cycles in the same attitude as towards the Roman catholic religion.

Joyce is pointing out the distance that lies between the artist and productions of the unconscious that have colonizing effects.

... *really not for him* ...: see *Ulysses*, pp. 648–9.

... *far too implausible to attribute to Bloom a knowledge of Shakespeare* ...: this has to do with an enigma in *Ulysses* pointed out by Adams, op. cit., pp. 95–9, that carries remarkable significance in the ordering of the structure. In Bloom's 'interior monologue' on p. 269, two lines reappear that had first emerged in Stephen's discourse on p. 193 (and to which he returns on p. 615):

Do and do. Thing done. In a rosery of Fetter Lane of Gerard, herbalist, he walks, greyedauburn. An azured harebell like her veins. Lids of Juno's eyes, violets. He walks. One life is all. One body. Do. But do. Afar, in a reek of lust and squalor, hands are laid on whiteness.

These fragments and their apparent discordance, which raises the question of the relationship of identification between Bloom and Stephen, are all the more remarkable in that they knot the signifiers of identity to the body, and above all to the act. Furthermore, the

intertextuality points up the question of debt: 'Thing done' is an echo of the telegram Stephen sent to Buck Mulligan: 'The sentimentalist is he who would enjoy without incurring the immense debtorship for a thing done.' (p. 191).

... *Blephen and Stoom* ...: see *Ulysses*, p. 635, and Adams, p. 95.

... *a book of himself*.: does the knot lie exactly where Lacan suggests it does? See *Ulysses*, p. 179, where the librarian at the National Library quotes Mallarmé commenting on *Hamlet*: 'He says: *il se promene, lisant au livre de lui-même*, don't you know, reading the book of himself.'

... *a certain Shechner* ...: Mark Shechner, *Joyce in Nighttown, A Psychoanalytic Inquiry into Ulysses*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.

The cock crew ...: This riddle is in the second episode of *Ulysses*, 'Nestor', p. 27. A few lines above (p. 26), Stephen gives the start of another conundrum, which follows the evocation of the shadow of Jesus and his riddles 'woven and woven on the church's looms':

*Riddle me, riddle me, randy ro.
My father gave me seeds to sow.*

The solution, which Joyce omits, is noteworthy:

*The seed was black and the ground was white.
Riddle me that and I'll give you a pipe.*

*Answer: writing a letter.*⁵

The fox burying ...: *Ulysses*, p. 27.

... *whether he's a father or a mother*.: see *Ulysses*, p. 323: '... every male that's born they think it may be their Messiah. And every Jew is in a tall state of excitement, I believe, till he knows if he's a father or a mother.'

He believes that he carries her in his belly.: I have not been able to locate any part of the text that goes in this direction. Joyce uses this idea instead in relation to his work. On the other hand, he does see Nora pregnant with him (cf. for example, his letters to Nora on

5 September 1909 ('O that I could nestle in your womb like a child') and on 24 September ('take me into the dark sanctuary of your womb'), in *Letters of James Joyce, Vol. II*, ed. R. Ellmann, New York: Viking, p. 248, p. 281.

... *inconceivably private jokes.*: from Adams, op. cit., p. 200.

... *eftsoon*: 'eftsoon' can be found in *Finnegans Wake* at 473.18. Here Lacan is pointing out the style of *reading* to which Joyce pushes us, rather than his *writing* style: a style of reading that follows a metonymic line, even though his writing cannot be defined in this way (unlike that of Wolfson, for example).

V

Scribbledehobble: the full title is *Scribbledehobble: The Ur-Workbook for Finnegans Wake*, ed. Thomas E. Connolly, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1961. Dr Lacan is clearly confusing this academic with Cyril Connolly (1903–1974), editor-in-chief of the literary magazine *Horizon* (1940–1949) which published British authors from the 1930s and '40s, alongside some French and American writers. Cyril Connolly is surely better known as the author of *The Unquiet Grave; A Word Cycle by Palinurus* (1944, reprinted in 1961), a voyage into the mind of a writer haunted by the wandering ghost of Palinurus, the helmsman of Aeneas' ship. One may wonder whether it is not in relation to this background figure of 'A-Father', who also comes from Troy, albeit in a different way, that Lacan, turning his interest to the story of Ulysses, finds this Connolly again. See also footnote 3 on p. 7 of the second volume of Joyce's complete works in French, *Œuvres* (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), about Connolly Norman, who seems to have been the first Irish psychiatrist to come across Freud's work.⁶

... *letters ... unpublishable.*: in fact, most of these letters (with the exception of those of 8 and 9 December 1909, to which Jacques Lacan nevertheless had access even prior to the 1975 publication of *Selected Letters*), which were absent from *Volume I*, had been published in *Volumes II* and *III* (1966).

... *Tweedledum and Tweedledee.*: Joyce uses these two names in his 24 June 1921 letter to Harriet S. Weaver, in *Letters, Vol. I*, ed. S. Gilbert, New York: Viking, 1966, p. 167:

A batch of people in Zurich persuaded themselves that I was gradually going mad and actually endeavoured to induce me to enter a sanatorium where a certain Doctor Jung (the Swiss Tweedledum who is not to be confused with the Viennese Tweedledee, Dr. Freud) amuses himself at the expense (in every sense of the word) of ladies and gentlemen who are troubled by bees in their bonnets.

Cranly questions him ...: *A Portrait of the Artist*, p. 243.

In Stephen Hero, there are traces.: notably where Joyce plays with the 'enigma of a manner' (p. 27), the fantasies of heroism, of 'egoism', of redemption,⁷ and then the slide towards the poetic route offered by Franciscan literature. See, too, the note on 'a book of himself', above.

... *the Church diplomatic.*: see *Stephen Hero*, p. 172. See also the passages mentioning the Jesuits and their duplicity in *A Portrait of the Artist*, such as p. 184 and p. 189.

... *his calling.*: see *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 172–3 and p. 252, entry of 16 April.

VI

... *Lucia ... sending telepath.*: see Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, op. cit., p. 677 (letter to Harriet S. Weaver of 21 October 1934), p. 682, and p. 684.

... *the initial fault ...*: fault, and its return in the theme of the Fall/falling, is staged throughout *Finnegans Wake*.

VIII

... *Madame Blavatsky ...*: Clive Hart (in *Structure and Motif in Finnegans Wake*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1962, p. 49, pp. 56–7 and *passim*) makes a great deal of Madame Blavatsky's theses, as well as those of Jung.

... *Finnegans Wake, ... a nightmare ...*: see *Ulysses*, p. 34: 'History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.' One will recall that *La temme* in the plural in *Finnegans Wake*, Anna

Livia Plurabelle, is generally designated by her acronym, ALP, which in German means 'nightmare', when she does not expressly turn into the 'cunningnest couchmare' (576.28).⁸

X

... atop Mount Nebo the Law was given to us.: I am unable to find where Joyce ever could have written this sentence, even to attribute a blunder to someone or other (in Deuteronomy 32:49, it is actually the site of the death of Moses, overlooking Canaan).⁹ The rhythm is vaguely reminiscent of a (parodic?) student song.

Cork: this anecdote is reported by Richard Ellmann in his biography, *James Joyce*, op. cit., p. 551.

... the little table of points of correspondence . . . : the two most commonly accessible tables, one of which Joyce entrusted to his friend Carlo Linati, and the other, later, to Herbert Gorman, his first biographer, are detailed episode by episode at the end of each *notice* in the French edition of *Œuvres*, op. cit., tome II.¹⁰

... a hiding.: this incident features in the second chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist*, pp. 80–82.

... masochism . . . He insisted enough on this point with Bloom.: see, for example, some of the passages from the 'Circe' episode in *Ulysses* and, of course, Joyce's letters to Nora, like the letter of 13 December 1909 (*Letters of James Joyce*, Vol. II).

... epiphanies. Joyce's epiphanies were first published as *Epiphanies*, ed. O. Silverman, Buffalo: University of Buffalo/Easy Hill Press, 1956; then in Robert Scholes and Richard M. Kain, *The Workshop of Daedalus: James Joyce and the raw materials for A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Evanston: Northwestern Press, 1965; and finally in *Poems and Shorter Writings*, ed. R. Ellmann and A. W. Litz, London: Faber & Faber, 1991.

Joyce the Symptom

... at seventeen . . . : there is a mistake here regarding Lacan's age, since Joyce only arrived in Paris in 1920 when Lacan was nineteen. The following sentence suggests that Lacan was present on

7 December 1921 ('when [he] was twenty') in Adrienne Monnier's bookshop, for the first public reading of fragments from *Ulysses* in English and French. [Indeed, Lacan told me that he had been present at this reading – J.-A. M.]

... freudened . . . : *Finnegans Wake*, 115.22-23: 'when they were young and easily freudened.'

This reference to the importance of being called Ernest arises more than once in Finnegans Wake: a surprising remark given that *The Importance of Being Earnest* only appears in *Finnegans Wake* at 233.20. *De Profundis* is the most-cited work of Wilde's. It is possible that Lacan was familiar with Hester Travers-Smith's book *Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde*, published in 1924, which launches a ferocious attack on *Ulysses* and is considered to be the source of pp. 534 to 538 of *Finnegans Wake*.

Mr Atherton . . .: James S. Atherton, *The Books at the Wake: A Study of Literary Allusions in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake*, New York: Viking Press, 1960, revised and expanded edition, 1974.

Work that was in Progress for seventeen years: Joyce began his book in the spring of 1923; the first copy was given to him on 30 January 1939, ahead of his birthday on 2 February, but the book was not actually released until 4 May, in London and New York.

... letter, litter: see Jacques Lacan, 'Lituraterre', translated by B. Khiara-Foxton and A. R. Price, in *Hurly-Burly*, 9, May 2013, p. 29. And, of course, *Finnegans Wake*.¹¹

Who ails tongue coddeau . . .: *Finnegans Wake* (15.18).¹²

... each as baneful as the other.: see *Ulysses*, p. 20.

Chamber Music: see the first poem in the collection.