

Text of *Ulysses*: Joyce's (Re)writing of His(s)tory

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Introduction

The attention to the theme of Joyce and history seems to have begun appearing in the late 1980s. For instance, *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* edited and introduced by Seamus Deane, includes essays by Eagleton, Jameson and Said on Ireland, colonialism, nationalism and Joyce. In the 1990s, there followed a number of books focused on Joycean text in relation to Irish history. These works include, James Fairhall's *James Joyce and the Question of History* (1993), Robert Spoo's *James Joyce and the Language of History* (1994), Enda Duffy's *Subaltern "Ulysses"* (1994), Emer Nolan's *James Joyce and Nationalism* (1995), *Joyce and the Subject of History*, a collection of essays edited by Mark Wollaeger, Victor Luftig and Robert Spoo (1996), and so on. And in the 2000s, there were published Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes' collection of essays entitled *Semicolonial Joyce* (2000), Andrew Gibson's *Joyce's Revenge* (2002), Andras Ungar's *Joyce's Ulysses as National Epic* (2002), Andrew Gibson and Len Platt's collection of essays called *Joyce, Ireland, Britain* (2006) and so on. In these books, various arguments have been made on this theme.

In this paper, I cannot afford to summarize these arguments, but, taking them into account, I will discuss the theme of the text of *Ulysses* and history, from my own point of view.

The authorized history and the everyday-life history

The text of *Ulysses* reflects to great degree the historical circumstances toward the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. It reflects, of course, the British colonialism and the Irish nationalism reactions, including the Irish Literary Revivals. Bloom's Jewishness and his suffering from persecution may reflect the anti-Semitism in Europe: for example, the Russian Pogroms, the Limerick pogrom, the Dreyfus affair and so on.

In *Ulysses*, however, these historical facts are not described directly. The text of *Ulysses* describes everyday lives of Dubliners on a day. These historical circumstances, of course, have a certain influence upon their lives, whether they are aware or not. Their influence and significance are, however, much different according to the way people view and react to them.

The second episode 'Nestor', whose 'art' is 'history' according to Joyce's schema for *Ulysses*, begins with the scene of history class, where Stephen Dedalus is teaching about the Battle of Asculum. The Battle of Asculum took place in 279 BC between the Romans and the Epirotes under the command of the Greek king Pyrrhus. Pyrrhus won the battle, but both sides lost a great number of soldiers. What Pyrrhus said after the battle is quoted in the text, "Another victory like that and we are done for." (2.14), and Stephen thinks, "That phrase all the world had remembered. A dull ease of the mind." (2.15) The reason why he thinks so is that bloody history like that has been repeated in the world, above all, between Britain and Ireland. And Stephen seems very

reluctant to teach the bloody history of battles.

After the class, Stephen visited the schoolmaster, Deasy Garrett, and they had a discussion about history.

— History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.

From the playfield the boys raised a shout. A whirring whistle: goal. What if that nightmare gave you a back kick?

— The ways of the Creator are not our ways, Mr Deasy said. All human history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God. Stephen jerked his thumb towards the window, saying:

— That is God.

Hooray! Ay! Whrrrwheel!

— What? Mr Deasy asked.

— A shout in the street, Stephen answered, shrugging his shoulders. (2.377-386)

Stephen makes an objection against Mr Deasy's teleological concept of history, and says what moves history is "a shout in the street." That means that history lies in everyday life, and involves almost infinite possibilities.

Prior to this conversation, Mr Deasy said,

— England is in the hands of the jews. ... And they are signs of a nation's decay.

Wherever they gather they eat up the nation's vital strength. ... Old England is dying. (2.346-351)

As Robert Spoo suggests (Spoo 1994: 78), we can find here a very simplified causality. This may be an extreme case, but it seems that historical discourse tends to fall into such simplification of causality. Historians cannot describe every detail of reality. They select among millions of facts rather arbitrarily, and thread them by causality into a story or history according to their interpretations. Nevertheless, history claims to be authorized because it is based on facts, and excludes or suppresses various facts and possibilities. It often becomes a dominant discourse over society as well.

In order to awake from "a nightmare of history", Stephen has to release history from the historical views made up through such processes, and to create a new historical discourse different from that of the authorized history. Stephen himself seems not to be able to do so in *Ulysses*. Instead the text of *Ulysses* suggests its possibilities. For now, I only suggest that the text of *Ulysses* sets the everyday-life history against the authorized history and that it describes details of everyday life on a day in Dublin and shows us various voices of those who live there.

Undermining the authority of historical statements

The case of ‘The Phoenix Park Murders’ is referred to several times in *Ulysses*. These murders were carried out in the park on 6 May 1882. The murderers, members of a Nationalist society called the Invincibles, killed two British Officials, Lord Frederick Cavendish, chief secretary for Ireland, and Mr. Thomas Henry Burke, an undersecretary in Dublin Castle. In the seventh episode, ‘Aeolus’, referring to this murder case, Myles Crawford, an editor of the *Evening Telegraph*, recounts the efforts of Ignatius Gallaher, a journalist who also appears in *Dubliners*, to convey details of the event to the *New York World* newspaper. All this time Stephen Dedalus regards it as a scene from the bloody history repeated between Ireland and the British Empire, referring to it as a “Nightmare from which you never awake” (7.678). And in the 12th episode ‘Cyclops’, Citizen, an Irish nationalist, says, “die for your country,” and drinks a toast to these “martyrs.” Here Bloom is persecuted as a Jew by Citizen, and refutes it like this:

— Are you talking about the new Jerusalem? says the citizen.

— I’m talking about injustice, says Bloom.

— Right, says John Wyse. Stand up to it then with force like men.

[……]

— But it’s no use, says he. Force, hatred, history, all that. That’s not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it’s the very opposite of that that is really life.

— What? Says Alf.

— Love, says Bloom. I mean the opposite of hatred. … (12, 1473-85)

Bloom hates the violence and thinks that it brings no solution.

This incident is also referred to in the 16th episode (‘Eumaeus’). Bloom and Stephen visit a pub called “the cabman’s shelter.” And a rumor is referred to that the shopkeeper is James Fitzharris known by the name of ‘Skin-the-Goat’, a member of the Invincibles who participated in the Phoenix Park Murders as the driver of one of the getaway cars. And here another rumor is referred to that Parnell has not been dead and will return to Ireland from his refuge. These rumors totally lack historical authenticity. And what is suggested here seems to be the process in which history is fictionalized through rumors.

Thus it is suggested that history can be described in different ways from different viewpoints. And this suggestion seems to undermine the authority of historical statements. Historical statements claim that they are objective descriptions of facts. And that warrants their authority. The text of *Ulysses*, however, undermines such authority of historical statements, though suggesting that they cannot be objective descriptions.

History and fiction

As I said above, the text of *Ulysses* reflects historical circumstances at that time. In addition, it

reflects realities in Dublin and Joyce's personal history as well.

About *Ulysses*, Joyce says to his friend, Frank Budgen, "I want to give a picture of Dublin so completely that if the city one day suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of my book." (Budgen 1972: 69) Joyce was, in fact, very particular about details of reality in Dublin: he drew his details from contemporary newspapers, maps, and city directories, and so on. *Ulysses* gives us a faithful and detailed picture of the city of Dublin, indeed.

Stephen Dedalus, who appeared as a fictional counterpart of Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, also appears in *Ulysses*. He reflects Joyce's personal history, and readers seem to approve that tacitly. In the 9th episode, 'Scylla and Charybdis', Stephen develops his Shakespeare theory in front of A. E. or George Russell, John Eglinton, Mr Best and Lyster at the national library. A. E. leaves in the middle and Mulligan joins them. A remarkable characteristic of this episode is that these characters really existed and appear under real names, except Stephen and Mulligan. Stephen's Shakespeare theory is not original, but a mix of ideas drawn from a number of well-known Shakespearian critics of the day: for example, George Brandes, Frank Harris, Sidney Lee and so on. Stephen claims that Shakespeare's works reflect his real life, and that two of his brothers appear in his works under their real names, that is, Richard and Edmund.

Richard, a whoreson crookback, misbegotten, makes love to a widowed Ann (what's in a name?), woos and wins her, a whoreson merry widow. Richard the conqueror, third brother, came after William the conquered. The other four acts of that play hang limply from that first. Of all his kings Richard is the only king unshielded by Shakespeare's reverence, the angel of the world. Why is the underplot of *King Lear* in which Edmund figures lifted out of Sidney's *Arcadia* and spatchcocked on to a Celtic legend older than history? (9.985-92) (Underline mine)

The point I want to suggest here is that the characteristic of this episode I suggested above corresponds to Stephen's Shakespeare theory: Both of Shakespeare's works and *Ulysses* reflect the authors' real life, and those who really existed appear in their works. In other words, his Shakespeare theory is a self-referential meta-language of this episode. On the basis of his theory, some readers may be induced to attempt a biological interpretation of this episode. For instance, James Michels says in his paper, "'Scylla and Charybdis': Revenge in James Joyce's *Ulysses*", as follows:

Stephen sees the activities in "Scylla and Charybdis" as a reenactment of Hamlet. He casts Russell, Best, Eglinton, and Lyster collectively as Claudius, himself as the young Prince, and Joyce, his future self, as the Ghost. (Michels 1983: 175)

And he regards this episode as a revenge tragedy, saying, "In this episode, Stephen commits an elaborate verbal "murder" upon his Claudius,"

Just as Circe gives Odysseus a chart with which to sail between Scylla and Charybdis, this episode seems to provide the reader a chart leading him/her to biographical interpretations of

Ulysses. Soon, however, we find it a very complicated chart. As Stephen develops his theory, the text reveals arbitrariness of his interpretation: Stephen selects Shakespeare's biographical facts the way he wants, and sometimes even tells a lie. It is not surprising that "No, Stephen said promptly", answering Eglinton's question, "Do you believe you own theory?" This episode leads the reader to biographical interpretations, but, at the same time, reveals that they cannot but be arbitrary and unreliable. Stephen's interpretation, as it were, mirrors the process of history writing in which historians select facts and thread them arbitrarily.

While the first half of *Ulysses* has rather realistic descriptions, in the latter half, very artificial narrative styles are used. This episode also mirrors that structure of *Ulysses*. In the middle of this episode, a dramatic term, "Entr' acte"(9.484) appears, and after that, from line 895 to 941, dramatic style is used. This episode, which is a turning point of narrative styles of *Ulysses*, reflects the structure of *Ulysses*. In other words, this episode forms a model of *Ulysses* as a whole.

While this episode leads readers to read the text as real, it warns that such a reading will lead to nothing but an arbitrary interpretation. In the latter half, very fictional narrative styles appear, and manifest that this episode is a fiction. As a model of *Ulysses*, it also warns the reader not to read *Ulysses* as real. And in the latter half, *Ulysses* declares itself that it is a fiction by using very fictional narrative styles.

As mentioned above, *Ulysses* reflects historical realities to great extent. It claims, however, that it is a fiction. *Ulysses* denies the authority of history, and tries to recover, in the form of fiction, what is excluded or suppressed by history.

Narrative styles in *Ulysses* specific to fiction show these excluded or repressed facts from viewpoints different from those of the authorized history.

Conclusion: various voices

While Stephen's discourse is dominant in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, there is no dominant discourse in *Ulysses*. Stephen's discourse is, of course, nothing but one of those in *Ulysses*. Even Bloom's discourse is not a dominant one. We can find various discourses or voices in *Ulysses*: a nationalist's voice in the 12th episode, 'Cyclops', Gerty's voice as a subaltern in the 13th episode, 'Nausicaa', Molly's voice as a female discourse in the last episode, 'Penelope', and so on.

I cannot afford to discuss all these discourses here. As an example, let me take Gerty MacDowell's case in the 13th episode. Gerty MacDowell lives in hard circumstances.

But that vile decoction which has ruined so many hearths and homes had cast its shadow over her childhood days. Nay, she had even witnessed in the home circle deeds of violence caused by intemperance and had seen her own father, a prey to the fumes of intoxication, forget himself completely for if there was one thing of all things that Gerty knew it was that the man who lifts his hand to a woman save in the way of kindness, deserves to be branded as the lowest of the low. (13:296-302)

It seems that her father is a drunkard and uses violence on his family. The world described in

this episode presents a striking contrast to the masculine world of the previous episode full of liquor, politics and violence. In this masculine world women like Eveline in *Dubliners*, Stephen's mother and Gerty are forced into making a sacrifice. They cannot be educated, and remain helpless throughout their lives. Gerty is "lame." She is twenty one years old, and suggested not to be able to get married, although she longs to. Under such circumstances, Gerty loses herself in daydreams, which she draws from women's fashion magazines, Victorian sentimental women's popular novels and so on. And she identifies herself with the heroin, her namesake, of *The Lamplighter*, a novel written by an American woman novelist, Maria Cummins, which was very popular in Britain at that time.

Gerty's discourse is a saccharine female one derived from those women's magazines and sentimental women's novels. Her discourse cannot be a counter-discourse to the masculine discourse dominant over Irish society. The masculine discourse forces her to be an ideal woman required by the masculine society. And she's not able to stand against it. She has no education, and cannot make up a counter-discourse. Instead, she loses herself in daydreams, by imitating the saccharine, romantic discourse from women's magazines and sentimental women's novels. That might be an only way for her to live in such hard circumstances. Thus, this episode reveals Gerty's situation, by using the saccharine style derived from women's magazines and women's novels.

Ulysses is a fiction as its text stresses, but it shows the realities which were excluded or suppressed by history. And through its fictional styles and techniques, the text of *Ulysses* reveals those various voices of people from various viewpoints, which cannot be described by a single viewpoint of history seeking authority. Joyce shows that both history and culture are pluralistic and cannot be described by a single discourse.

Thus, in *Ulysses*, Joyce tries to re-read and re-write history through writing his story.

(Notes)

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*The text used in this paper is 'James Joyce, *Ulysses: A Critical Synoptic Edition*, (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984), and all references are to episode number and lines in this edition.

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Synopsis

Text of *Ulysses*: Joyce's (Re)writing of His(s)tory

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In *Ulysses*, Joyce described a day in Dublin. His description is very realistic in a way. For instance, in the ninth episode, 'Scylla and Charybdis', persons who really existed appear under their real names; A.E. (George Russell), John Eglinton (William K. Magee), Mr. Best (Richard Best), and so on. Of course, *Ulysses* is not real, but a fiction. If nobody knows everything that really happened, however, what is the difference between the real and fiction?

Historians may try to describe 'historical facts' as they are, but they have to interpret history and give significance to 'historical facts' according to their interpretations. In *Ulysses*, "the Phoenix Park murders" are referred to several times. These murders were carried out in the park on 6 May 1882. The murderers, members of a Nationalist society called the Invincibles, killed two British Officials, Lord Frederick Cavendish, chief secretary for Ireland, and Mr. Thomas Henry Burke, an undersecretary in Dublin Castle. In the seventh episode, 'Aeolus', referring to this murder case, Myles Crawford, an editor of the Evening Telegraph, recounts the efforts of Ignatius Gallaher, a journalist who also appears in *Dubliners*, to convey details of the event to the *New York World* newspaper. All this time Stephen Dedalus regards it as a scene from the bloody history repeated between Ireland and the British Empire, referring to it as a "Nightmare from which you never awake". In the 12th episode, 'Cyclops', 'Citizen', a nationalist, praises the murderers as "martyrs". Thus it is suggested that 'historical facts' are given different meanings from different viewpoints. Suggesting this awareness, Joyce seems to try to undermine the authority of historical statements, and to show that history can be re-read and re-written.

The purpose of this paper is to show through examining the text structure of *Ulysses* that, while writing his story, Joyce also tried to re-write Irish history.