“I need not anthrapologise…” – Anthropological Encounters with James Joyce

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Abstract: *After a brief look at the use of small elements of anthropological theory in the setting of an interpretive cultural centre, in this case devoted to the works of author James Joyce, I look at the ways in which Joyce's work resonates with recent concerns in anthropology, particularly in relation to subjectivity, identity, and representation. Joyce's works have been analysed by scholars in terms of Irish and especially postcolonial identity and subjectivity, but they also offer opportunities for thinking about writing and the representation of subjectivities in the modern and postmodern world.*

Key words: *James Joyce; subjectivity; postcolonial theory; ethnography.*

Asked to write about the ways in which I use anthropology in the course of my work at the James Joyce Centre, I thought ‘Naaah – there'd be nothing to write about.’ But I realised there were some things in a talk I was writing at the time that wouldn't have been there if not for anthropology, so I figured that might do for a start. But who wants to hear about my job? Joyce and his books are so much more interesting that I thought I might use this space to do a bit of propagandising on behalf of Joyce by looking at his relationship with anthropology.

I don't intend that this should be, by any means, a comprehensive, all-inclusive look at Joyce and anthropology. Rather, my hope is that those who don't already know so, will discover that Joyce, in his writing, problematises issues of subjectivity and identification in terms that should be familiar to anthropologists; that his writing styles and self-reflexivity problematise the possibility of representation in ways that are meaningful for anthropologists today; and that, in the end, if he doesn't help you do better anthropology, at least reading him might possibly provide a distraction from fieldwork or writing up!

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So how did I come to be doing Joyce rather than anthropology? The answer is: accidentally. My BA was a double degree in English and anthropology, and was followed by a Masters and a PhD in anthropology. While I was writing up my doctoral dissertation, I applied for a summer job as a tour guide at the National Library of Ireland's Joyce exhibition. That turned into a two-year stay at the Library during which I also worked as one of the curators on the WB Yeats exhibition which replaced the Joyce exhibition. As Joyce closed at the Library, I was offered a job at the James Joyce Centre and I've been there since.

My research in anthropology centred on issues of identity and shifting subjectivities, and it seems to me that these are central concerns of Joyce's writing. Joyce writes about Dublin at a time when there were numerous competing ideas about what it meant to be Irish, a moment of ferment in which everything was up for grabs, when Ireland seemed to be on the threshold between old and new but was as yet unsettled, stuck in transition.

Joyce's characters, too, are often presented to us in liminal states, on the threshold of significant moments in their lives, estranged from others around them, conscious of being outsiders, or not feeling at home in their own homes. And it was van Gennep's ideas about rites of passage and liminality that I was using in that talk I was writing. The Joyce Centre was going to host a ‘Dead Weekend,’ a weekend of talks and activities to celebrate ‘The Dead,’ the final story in Joyce's collection Dubliners. As the story opens, ‘Lily, the caretaker's daughter, was literally run off her feet’ (Joyce 1996:175). It's the Misses Morkan's annual Christmas party and Lily is acting as doorkeeper, rushing backwards and forwards, from the hall door to a makeshift cloakroom, and back to the door again as the next guests arrive.

The opening of the story is set, literally, on the threshold (bear in mind that ‘liminal’ is derived from the Latin limen meaning ‘threshold’), and those crossing the threshold can be seen as disengaging themselves from normal life, dressing in their party clothes, eating the sumptuous Christmas fare, and engaging in party activities like dancing and singing. The world of the Christmas party is something out-of-the-ordinary, and Joyce piles on the liminal references. The party takes place sometime between the first and the sixth of January. Officially, it's still Christmastime, at least until the sixth of January, but it's already after New Year, so we're stuck somewhere between an old year that hasn't quite ended yet and a new year that hasn't quite begun yet. Janus, the presiding god of January, has two faces, mirror images on one another, one looking backwards and one looking forwards, and he is the patron of doorkeepers and caretakers, and god of beginnings and endings, indicating that he too is stuck on the threshold between one thing and another.

Lily, the caretaker's daughter, also seems to be in a liminal state. When Gabriel Conroy, the main character, arrives, he thinks of her as a girl, and

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remembers her playing on the steps of the house with her rag doll. When he asks if she still goes to school, she answers that she's been done with schooling for a year. 'O, then, said Gabriel gaily, I suppose we'll be going to your wedding one of these fine days with your young man, eh?' to which Lily retorts bitterly, 'The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you' (Joyce 1996:178). Gabriel's expectation is that Lily will go from being somebody's daughter to being somebody's husband, and he's disconcerted to find that she's neither one nor the other, neither a little girl nor a married woman. More than that, it seems that her experience with men, whatever it may have been, has embittered her to the extent that she might never complete the transition to married woman, thus ending up a spinster like the other three women in the house.

In addition, Lily's bitter retort is not exactly the kind of response Gabriel anticipates from a servant. Though we are told he speaks to her 'in a friendly tone,' (ibid.) he comes across as being patronising and condescending, smiling at the three syllables she gives his surname, Conroy, and by which her lower class accent is betrayed. Lily's answer seems to reflect a reluctance to be patronised, but she's also acting outside the role she's expected to perform as servant – her 'back answers' are not what you expect from a servant – and that adds to Gabriel's disconcertion.

Gabriel is very conscious of how he presents himself to the world and throughout the evening he is forced to confront differences between how he sees himself and how others see him. Lily's bitter retort makes him feel that even she, the simple serving girl, can see through his mask, and his self-image suffers another blow when Miss Ivors, albeit mockingly, calls him a 'West Briton' (Joyce 1996:188) in front of others. But it is not until the end of the story that his self-image is properly shattered. Catching a glimpse of himself in a mirror in a room of the Gresham Hotel, Gabriel Conroy sees himself as he really is.

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Let me leave my work there for a moment and turn instead to some questions about Joyce and anthropology. Can Joyce be of any use to anthropologists? Certainly Norman Denzin (1997) thinks so and, in his book Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the Twenty-first Century, he titles the introductory chapter 'Lessons James Joyce Teaches Us.' Interpretive anthropologists in particular seem to be partial to Joyce and, according to James Lett '[i]nterpretive anthropologists are more likely to allude to James Joyce or Jean-Paul Sartre than they are to Franz Boas or Alfred Kroeber....' (1997:6). According to Professor Ray McDermott (1997), cognitive anthropologist Harold Conklin considered verbal play among the Hanunóo of Mindoro in the Philippines to be so similar to that practiced by Dubliners that he applied to the James Joyce Society of Trieste for a small grant to study Hanunóo ways of speaking.

However, if anthropologists have been reading Joyce, it seems less clear that Joyce was reading anthropology. There are numerous anthropological references in his works, especially in his final novel, Finnegans Wake. Indeed as early as 1944, just five years after Finnegans Wake was published, Richard Chase wrote an anthropological study of it, and the first book-length study of it (also published in 1944) was written by mythologist Joseph Campbell with Henry Morton Robinson (2005). Joyce's library in Trieste contained Herbert Spencer's The Study of Sociology, and a volume by Italian social scientist Guglielmo Ferrero.

So far as I can make out, the only anthropologist Joyce ever met was Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, who happened to be in Copenhagen at the same time as Joyce in 1936. As it turned out, Lévy-Bruhl was an admirer of Joyce's Ulysses and they may have had some correspondence after their Danish encounter. Lévy-Bruhl makes a personal appearance – or, rather, has three incarnations – in Finnegans Wake (Joyce 2012b). Shem is giving out about anthropology ('I need not anthrapologise for any obintentional…downtrodding on my foes,' he says (2012b:151)), and Lévy-Bruhl appears first as 'Professor Loewy-Brueller' (2012b:150), a pun on the German word 'Löwe' (lion) and the German verb 'brüllen' (to roar), and on the names Lévy-Bruhl and Robert Lowie (McHugh 2006:150). Lowie, a student of Franz Boas, launched a major attack on Lévy-Bruhl's evolutionist ideas about the primitive mentality. His second appearance a page later comes as Shem starts to present the findings of 'Professor Levi-Brullo, F.D. of Sexe-Weiman-Eitelnaky' (2012b:151). By the end of that page, he has reincarnated as the Welsh 'Professor Llewellys ap Bryllars, F.D.' There is also a mention of a 'deathbone' in Finnegans Wake (2012b:193) that seems to come from Lévy-Bruhl's account of Australian Aboriginal practice of cursing enemies by pointing a bone at them (McHugh 2006:193), but beyond this, there seems to have been no direct contact between Joyce and anthropologists.

So how is it, then, that Joyce and anthropology fit together at all? Let me return to Gabriel Conroy catching a glimpse of himself in the mirror in the room at the Gresham Hotel. Joyce saw himself as holding up a mirror to Irish society. He makes this explicit in a letter to his publisher Grant Richards on 23 June 1906, at a time when Richards was threatening not to publish Dubliners unless Joyce made changes to it. Joyce, defending his use of gritty, realistic details in his depiction of Dublin, wrote to say:

> It is not my fault that the odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal hangs round my stories. I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilisation in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass. (Joyce 1996:277)

This idea of holding up a mirror to Irish life is a central concern of Joyce's works. At the beginning of Ulysses, Buck Mulligan uses a cracked mirror that he has taken from his aunt's servant and, for Stephen Dedalus, this cracked looking-glass of the servant becomes a symbol of Irish art (Joyce 2012a: 8). Implicit in this is the position of Ireland as servant to England, the colonial master, though, as Stephen says about himself a short while later, 'I am the servant of two masters… an English and an Italian…and a third…there is who wants me for odd jobs' (2012a:17), the Italian being the Roman Catholic Church, and the third being Ireland herself. Mulligan holds the mirror up for Stephen to see himself in, and Stephen sees himself '[a]s he and others see me,' but Mulligan, laughing, pulls the mirror away and says 'The rage of Caliban at not seeing his face in a mirror…If Wilde were only alive to see you' (2012a:7). The comment about Caliban comes from the Preface to Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray where

> The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass. (Wilde 2003:17)

In Shakespeare's The Tempest, Caliban's rightful position as master of the island has been usurped by the occupier Prospero, and recent commentators have read this as reflecting the colonisation of Ireland (Brown 1995). According to Joyce

> Wilde entered that literary tradition of Irish comic playwrights that stretches from the days of Sheridan and Goldsmith to Bernard Shaw, and became, like them, court jester to the English. (Joyce 2000:149)

So the jester (who is, after all, a servant) holds up a mirror in which perhaps both the colonised and the coloniser can see themselves reflected in a cracked, distorted manner, and all of these ideas (reflection, mirroring, distorting) and these relations (of dominance and subservience, of colonised and coloniser, of jester and king) go to the heart of the issues of subjectivity and identity in Joyce's work.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the collapse of Irish political power in Westminster after the fall of Parnell had left a vacuum which was filled by the Celtic Revival movement. Revivalists asserted a distinct Irish identity by linking it to a literary and cultural heritage of folklore, mythology and legend, and to an idealised west-of-Ireland peasant life. At the centre of this Revival was the literary work of WB Yeats, Augusta Gregory, George Russell, and JM Synge, all of whom were known to Joyce, and all of whom were helpful to him in his early days. But Joyce reacted against this Revivalism and the identity it produced. As Gregory Castle puts it:

> Joyce holds up a mirror to *in*authentic lives and, while the people he reflects may fail to amend their lives, to find a way to live authentically, his stories accomplish an important first step toward that goal by representing, with a kind of ethnographic fidelity, the effects of Revivalism on the construction of Irish identity. (Castle 2001:82, original emphasis)

Castle's book examines the impact of anthropology on writers of the Celtic Revival, like WB Yeats and JM Synge, and also on Joyce. The efforts of Yeats and Synge to create a new identity for the Irish through the revival of folklore and mythology – what Castle refers to as the 'redemptive mode of ethnography' (2001:173) – made use of the same political and cultural discourses that the Revivalists sought to undermine. Joyce, however,

> …chose to create a national literature by engaging in an immanent critique of Revivalism in which colonial and anthropological discourses are appropriated and criticized in a more sustained and consistent fashion…to arrive at a position from which he can challenge the theories and practices by which the Irish people are represented. (2001:175)

So, as far as Castle is concerned, Joyce 'foregrounded the problems of "doing" ethnography…and anticipated some aspects of the revisionist anthropology of recent years' (2001:210). Shifting his attention from the stories in Dubliners and from Joyce's first novel, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Castle says that critics of Joyce's major novel Ulysses have ignored its anthropological character, and he claims that,

> Ulysses can be regarded as a persistent refusal to adopt the model of autonomous and sovereign subjectivity presupposed as foundational for the authority of the ethnographic participant-observer… (2001:211)

Castle argues that the 'I was there' validation of the participant-observer's view 'relies on the same sovereign subjectivity that allows the colonialist to distinguish between civilized and primitive peoples,' but that, in Ulysses, the gaze can be 'reconsidered in terms of a parodic critique of ethnographic observation.' (2001:211)

Some commentators have claimed that Joyce's Ulysses begins with an account of an ethnographic encounter. Stephen Dedalus has spent a restless night at the Martello Tower in Sandycove terrorised by Haines, the Englishman, who has been dreaming of a black panther and shooting off his revolver. Buck Mulligan offers Stephen to Haines as a suitable subject for the material on Irish life that Haines is there to gather. For Vincent Cheng, this episode at the Martello Tower is

> …an ethnographic encounter with a 'native' population, in which the British anthropologist ventures out in the wilderness to study the primitive 'wild Irish' and their folkways, in the presence of a willing informant (Mulligan) and the latter's semi-willing specimen of study (Stephen).' (Cheng 1995:152)

For Enda Duffy, this is 'a scathing indictment of the apparently benevolent ethnographic interest in Irish folk life that was central to the fin de siècle Celtic revival' (Duffy 1994:47), and, as if to add to this sense of the treacherous Englishman, Castle notes that later in the book Haines appears carrying a portfolio of Celtic literature in one hand and a phial of poison in the other (Castle 2001:214).

Cheng and Duffy are among a number of commentators who, in the early- and mid-1990s, turned the spotlight of postcolonial critical theories on Joyce's works. Others include Patrick McGee (1992), David Lloyd (1993), and Emer Nolan (1995). Enda Duffy sees Joyce's Ulysses as 'the text of Ireland's independence' and starts his book by posing a radical question: 'How might an IRA terrorist read Ulysses? Or how might a victim of terrorism read the novel, given the opportunity?' (1994:1). Duffy sets out to reclaim Ulysses and to

> …return it to readers everywhere as a novel preoccupied…with both the means by which oppressed communities fight their way out of abjection and the potential pitfalls of anticolonial struggles. (ibid.)

More recent anthropological encounters with Joyce have focused on the culture concept and the issue of ethnography. Marc Manganaro's Culture, 1922: The Emergence of a Concept (2002) traces the development of the culture concept in the early part of the twentieth century, but focuses of the seminal year of 1922 when three world-renowned modernist books appeared: TS Eliot's The Waste Land, Joyce's Ulysses, and Malinowski's Argonauts of the Western Pacific.

For many, 'difficulty' is considered one of the hallmarks of modernist literature, and has led to it being considered elitist (for discussion around this see, for instance, Carey (1992), Diepeveen (2003) and Howarth (2012)). This notion of the elite products of 'culture' seems to stand in stark contrast to the notion of cultures-in-the-plural, which is central to the modern anthropological sense of 'culture.' Manganaro demonstrates how these two ideas have been interrelated in the early-twentieth-century development of studies of literature and anthropology, and sees the works of Eliot, Joyce and Malinowski and their critical reception as attempts at defining just what culture is.

A different view of culture and its relation to Joyce's work can be found in James Buzard's article '"Culture" and the Critics of Dubliners' (1999/2000). Buzard believes that

> …any discussion of Joyce's work must sooner or later involve itself in issues pertinent to the study of "cultures"…although critics have tended not to handle such issues in a manner open to the idiom or conceptual framework of anthropology… (1999/2000:45)

In tracing the connection between the critical treatment of Joyce's book Dubliners and the growth of modern ethnographic science, Buzard claims that

> What links the early Joyce and his critics with the ethnographers is the pursuit of authority over a culture, understood as a unified 'field' not to be grasped directly but inferred as the occult network of connections among all phenomena in the field. Regarded in broad outline, the last century's professional Joyce criticism and cultural anthropology proceeded along parallel tracks. (1999/2000:46)

Part of Buzard's argument is that, if the authority of the critics derives from their standpoint – 'an outsider's insideness,' similar to the standpoint of the ethnographer – then Joyce's authority derives from 'an insider's outsideness' or an auto-ethnographic standpoint (1999/2000:55). This can also be seen as deriving from Joyce's own views on the role and position of the artist as someone who stands outside and above society and who, from that standpoint, can better see society. Joyce put this idea into very literal practice in his own life by exiling himself from the city of Dublin but never writing about anywhere else.

Outsiders and their standpoint are crucial to Joyce's works. As I mentioned earlier, many of the characters in Dubliners feel themselves to be outsiders, and we are presented with ambiguous views of their world seen through the narration and through access to the thoughts of the characters. 'Lily, the caretaker's daughter, was literally run off her feet,' the first line of the story 'The Dead,' is an example of this ambiguity. Lily cannot be 'literally' run off her feet, but this 'literally' certainly reflects the way Lily would think about herself on this busy evening. This technique, known as 'free indirect discourse' (or what Joycean Hugh Kenner calls the 'Uncle Charles principle' (Kenner 2007)), allows the linguistic traits and characteristic ways of thinking of a character to be integrated into the dominant narratorial voice, which sounds like what a good ethnographer would try to do.

William Mottolese (2002) takes the question of Joyce's ethnographic stance a step further by examining the 'Wandering Rocks' episode of Ulysses as ethnography. This episode marks a couple of significant departures from the rest of the book. Firstly, all the other episodes of Ulysses have some parallels with Homer's Odyssey, but the 'Wandering Rocks' episode occurs in the story of Jason and the Argonauts, not in the Odyssey. In fact, Odysseus chooses to sail by the twin monsters Scylla and Charybdis rather than go by way of the Wandering Rocks, so the episode is, as it were, an intrusion from outside, breaking into and undermining the otherwise straightforward paralleling of the Odyssey. As if to emphasise that interpolation, the episode is broken into nineteen scenes and each of the scenes is broken into by further interpolations, with the insertion into one scene of events that are occurring somewhere else entirely at the same time. Secondly, most of the time in Ulysses we are centrally concerned with the two main characters, Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, but in 'Wandering Rocks' we seem to become detached from that grounding and to float over the city, seeing disparate and connected elements from outside or above. We see both Stephen and Bloom in separate scenes, but they are no longer the focus of our attention.

Mottolese claims that in this episode Joyce 'takes a distinctly ethnographic turn,' and that the narrative voice of this episode is akin to that of 'a Joycean participant observer, who is intimate with the inside of Dublin and detached enough to see Dublin "as others see [it]"' (2002:252, quoting here from a letter Joyce wrote to his brother). Significantly, however, Mottolese goes on to claim that

> Joyce equally undermines his own ethnographic aspirations in this episode, showing the inability of ethnographic discourse – a discourse historically tied to colonialism – to do anything but represent in a partial, fragmented way a culture already fragmented and paralyzed by colonialism. (ibid.)

Throughout Ulysses Joyce changes the style of writing for each episode in order to match it to the content of the episode, so that what the episode is about and how the episode is written coincide. So, for instance, the 'Aeolus' episode is set in a newspaper office, with conversation about famous news stories and journalists, and with the business of making a newspaper taking place all around. No surprise, then, that Joyce writes the episode in the form of a newspaper, inserting mini-headlines that break up the text, adverting to and commenting on the action of the episode. With 'Wandering Rocks,' Mottolese says, Joyce's subject matter is what we call culture in a modern sense – all aspects of life and living – and, as a style of presentation, 'Joyce invokes a discourse, ethnography, that befits, albeit ironically, the subject matter of the episode' (2002:253), and consistent 'with the trope of cultural holism, Joyce's narrator attempts a cultural totality by representing the particular as well as the vast' (2002:259).

Even so, Mottolese believes that the method fails, fragmenting the episode and leaving the reader to 'navigate among the connections, misconnections, and illusions' (2002:265) that the episode presents. Ethnographic discourse is therefore seen as 'useful but ultimately limited, since any "culture" or "nation" resists any easy categorization or representation' (2002:266). Mottolese considers that Dubliners are a people 'whom the pen of the ethnographer or novelist can never fully represent,' (2002:268) and he concludes by saying that

> For Joyce, a modernist skepticism toward representation is accompanied by a postcolonial awareness of the disfiguring, objectifying power of ethnographic representation in the hands of the conqueror. With great irony, Joyce crafts an episode dominated by a discursive mode that freezes and fragments in order to reveal a culture frozen and fragmented by imperialism… (Ibid.)

If, in this moment, Joyce can leave behind the colonial anthropological view of Ireland, it does not, I think, signal his abandonment of anthropology entirely. His final novel, Finnegans Wake, is nothing if not a vast ethnographic attempt to encompass in one book every aspect of life in Ireland! But it's done, perhaps, not from a single standpoint, but from multiple standpoints, taking in many possible views. In this, Joyce expends enormous energy doing anthropology: making 'the strange familiar and the familiar strange.'

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