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## Joyce's Representation and Experience of Disability

JEREMY COLANGELO: *Joyce Writing Disability*.  
Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2022.  
\$85.00 hardcover.

### Carrie Kancilia

In the elegant foreword, Maren Linett notes that “[Joyce’s] representations of disabled characters are among the most varied and complex of modernist literature” (viii), and the subsequent nine essays that make up this collection substantiate the appraisal. Indeed, these essays contribute vital and fresh readings of the disabled figures of Joyce’s work, adding to the prior insights of many Joyce scholars, including Angela Lea Nemecek, Andre Cormier, Dominika Bednarska, Jen Shelton, and Linett herself.

Jeremy Colangelo begins the collection with a humorous essay on the ubiquity of discussions around paralysis in analyses of Joyce’s *Dubliners*. Colangelo points out that this scholarly fixation has rendered paralysis an overused and subsequently meaningless symbol in *Dubliners*. As an antidote, Colangelo offers a reimaging of paralysis that has readers consider the variegated uses and representations of hemiplegia in *Dubliners* with the apparent goal of moving the term’s conception from a catch-all descriptive of atmosphere to the lived experience of the book’s characters. Colangelo aims to reimagine paralysis “not as a state of nonmotion, but rather as an instance of affective arrest, rising from and depending on the extreme mobility of bodies, minds, and affects all throughout the stories” (26). To do that, he ties each story to hemiplegia, a specific type of paralysis that affects only one side of the body. While *Dubliners* features the common understanding of paralysis (three strokes killed Father Flynn of “The Sisters”), Colangelo uses hemiplegia to show the book’s characters as experiencing a holistic bifurcation in which one part of them moves while the other does not. This lends nuance to readings of many of the stories in *Dubliners*, including “An Encounter,” whose protagonist both loves and hates Mahony, and a reading of “Araby” that renders the protagonist immobile due to the friction between reality and fantasy. Colangelo succeeds in presenting the characters of *Dubliners* as split in two, with one half eager for movement or change and the other half unable to oblige. These readings provide a fresh take on paralysis in *Dubliners*; as op-

posed to static, the characters, always only partly inert, are at perpetual odds with their own bodies, minds, and desires.

In the second essay, "Limping and Devious," Casey Lawrence opens with a continuation of the conversation around paralysis in *Dubliners*, noting that "A Mother" has been understudied, especially in terms of its links to disability studies. Lawrence argues that with the disabled character Holohan, "Joyce relies on the association between disabled bodies and moral failings in order to present [him] in the worst possible light" (48). Lawrence also clocks the frequent uses of "limp" in the story as a pejorative to describe failings in both men and women, noting that Joyce would continue using the word "limp" later in demeaning reference to Gerty MacDowell in the "Nausicaa" episode of *Ulysses*. Lawrence goes on to offer that Joyce likely modeled *Dubliners'* Holohan after a real-life Mr. Holohan, who expressed romantic interest in Joyce's future wife, Nora Barnacle, suggesting that the development of the disabled Holohan as a repugnant character was exacting some type of literary revenge on a rival. Because Joyce conflated Holohan's limp and generally unethical behavior, he is framed as "physically and morally unbalanced" (62): an instance of problematic implementation of disability rhetoric by Joyce.

Boriana Alexandrova's essay, "When the Personal Becomes Historical," centers around the 2004 publication of *Die Revolte des Körpers* by Alex Alice Miller, which collects previously unpublished letters written about the child abuse stories of many modernist writers, including James Joyce. This publication includes excerpts from Joyce's letters in which he alludes to his father's poor treatment of his mother and his suspicion that his father had slowly killed her. Alexandrova acknowledges Joyce as an ingenious "trickster" not only for his facility with language but in his ability to balance the ugliness of trauma with linguistic levity. This essay frames Joyce's work with an awareness of trauma theory that we acknowledge in the 2020s. Embedded in Joyce's writing, Alexandrova suggests, are many trauma narratives that we might not immediately perceive as such. The essay asserts that Joyce is important to trauma studies from his perspective as colonized subject and because he continually alludes to types of sexual violence. The author notes that childhood trauma and incest are themes that have not gone entirely unnoticed by previous scholars in terms of *Finnegans Wake* and *Ulysses* but also that analysis of these incidences of sexual violence accept them as symbolic. Alexandrova remarks that mentions of incest are treated with Joyce's characteristic levity; for example, HCE's "infatuation" with his daughter is, in fact, a form of incest. This essay opens readings of Joyce to the framework of the 2020s Me Too era and provides an innovative perspective with which to read trauma narratives explored by Joyce.

Kathleen Morrissey's exciting "Debility as Disability: Disorderly Eating in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*" explores the inhibitory eating habits of Stephen Dedalus as a direct opposition to his father's conspicuous consumption, and persuasively links a familial atmosphere of precarity to an inevitable food neurosis (92). Dedalus uses restriction and asceticism to control his environment; his rejection of gluttony, Morrissey asserts, also reflects Irish post-famine trauma. Morrissey additionally reads Stephen's reluctance to eat as protest; when heated conversations arise about the role of the Catholic Church in politics, the dining room table becomes a site of conflict with heightened emotion at which not only does Stephen refuse to eat, but his mother and Dante likewise reject the lavish dinner. Morrissey reads Stephen's minimal food intake as a reflection of the internalized fear of poverty, but also a rejection of all his father represents.

With "'Dark Men in Mien and Movement': Blindness and the Body in *Ulysses*," Rafael Hernandez observes that *Ulysses* "depicts an Ireland under colonial rule, whose subjects were historically represented in dominant colonial discourses as nonnormative, infantile, of a lower order, and disabled" (107). The essay foregrounds the blind stripling who appears with Leopold Bloom in "Lestrygonians." Hernandez reads the stripling as a complicated yet commanding disabled figure in *Ulysses*, noting that the stripling endures "the double marginalization as a colonial subject of the English imperial state and as a disabled subject in an ableist society" (110). The disabled figure of the stripling is racialized when being thought of as "dark" by Dedalus in the "Nestor" episode of *Ulysses* and later by Bloom during their encounter. Indeed, Bloom's use of "dark man," Hernandez asserts, reflects a euphemism for the visually impaired, but he also relies on racialized thinking about disabled people, assuming the stripling both to be of a lower order and to have a heightened sense of smell, a common assumption about those with a prominent disability of one of the senses. Borrowing from Maren Linett's reading, Hernandez also observes that while there are problematic reactions to the stripling, he nonetheless expresses sexuality, a quality often stripped from disabled characters in literature and beyond. Ultimately, this essay suggests that the stripling features as a central and organizing figure in *Ulysses*—one that holds "utopian potential" (126). This unnamed but essential character represents uncertainty and change.

Marion Quirici takes the innovative approach of cataloging negative responses to Joyce's early work at a time when critics repeatedly couched their distaste for Joyce in problematic language around disability. Quirici cites incensed responses to Joyce's work in which he is referred to as a lunatic, demented, insane, and a degenerate, a pervert, and a deviant. These unenthu-

siastic critics borrowed heavily from the postulations of modernist thinkers such as Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau, who ascribed deviance, degeneration, and moral decline in the modernist period to newly urban landscapes in metropolitan Europe and certain large groups, including artists and women. Quirici even notes a former American neurologist, Joseph Collins, who referred to Joyce as a psychopath, aligning his particular genius with madness, a conflation about talented artists that has since become a worn trope. This essay points out that Virginia Woolf, whose own struggles with mental illness are seemingly never absent in appraisals of her writing, expressed disgust in response to *Ulysses*; she herself used the accusation of Joyce's emotional disability to justify her critiques. Quirici observes that a common grievance in unfavorable reviews of Joyce's work is a mention of the impenetrability of his prose, and these complaints often devolve into personal medical diagnoses of the writer. Quirici acknowledges Joyce's attention to embodiment and degeneracy in the character of Shem in *Finnegans Wake*—the extremely atypical body, loose liver, and fractured buttocks, as well as allusions to degeneration and the now-debunked study of phrenology regarding Shem's nonnormative skull. This essay presents an extremely interesting account of the ways in which critics who misunderstood or disliked Joyce used the language of disability to pathologize his unusual artistry.

John Morey investigates links between Pierre Boulez's *Third Sonata* and the composer's fascination with *Finnegans Wake*. Morey observes that the sonata might not easily be identified as inspired by the novel, but that it nonetheless contains "clear elements of deformed and dysfunctional Wakean semantics, sonic aesthetics, and poetics" (158). The author highlights the musicality of both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* and affixes a specific importance to this quality; Morey identifies the act of reading either of these novels as highly disorienting and challenging to one's normal mode of reading (160). According to Morey, the reader of Joyce's later novels feels deficient or at a disadvantage while reading, even in the less abstruse or labyrinthine chapters. The essay therefore positions the reader as temporarily disabled by Joyce's prose. Along with other authors in this collection, Morey mentions Joyce's own health concerns and his worries over those of his daughter at the time of writing *Finnegans Wake*, but ultimately attributes the alienating effect of *Finnegans Wake* to its complex musicality: "The meticulous unweaving and reweaving of plot, character, and location in *Finnegans Wake* can engage an extralinguistic spatial and temporal sense in readers akin to that required in listening to polyphonic music" (175). The essay collapses rigid categorizations of seemingly disparate modes of artistic expression—music and literature—linking the *Third Sonata* and *Finnegans Wake* as texts that challenge and

disorient even the audiences most inclined to understand them.

The last couple of essays focus upon Joyce's biographical ties to disability, with Giovanna Vincenti analyzing the intersection of Joyce's writer's block in the mid-1920s, the several eye surgeries he underwent at that time, and the debilitating influence of his required medications, which included arsenic. Vincenti makes a compelling argument that Joyce's 1928 essay "Twilight of Blindness Descends on Swift" launched a general fascination with Swift's failing health and madness as a way to conceptualize and minimize his own health issues, a tactic he would retain in *Finnegans Wake*, where allusions to Swift abound. Vincenti remarks on Joyce's preoccupation with folklore about Swift's madness and the truth of his experience with Ménière's disease at roughly the same time Joyce was suffering from nervous breakdowns and enduring periods of blindness that would halt his writing and protract the completion of *Finnegans Wake* to seventeen years. Jennifer Marchisotto similarly looks at Joyce's personal experiences with disability as inspiration for his writing, aligning depictions of madness in *Finnegans Wake* with Lucia Joyce's diagnosis and institutionalization for schizophrenia. Marchisotto contends that part of the goal of *Finnegans Wake* was to place Lucia's experiences in an historical context that could ultimately destigmatize mental illness in women and sees *Finnegans Wake* as a "counterdiagnostic narrative" (200) that frames mental illness as incompatible with uncomplicated evaluation. The essay reads Lucia Joyce as akin to *Finnegans Wake*'s Issy, who employs a type of "the free association of language that caused others to label Ophelia as mad" (207). Throughout the essay, Issy, Ophelia, and Lucia Joyce coexist as similar models of misunderstood women.

The core strength of this collection lies in the breadth of the contributors' applications of disability frameworks to the work of James Joyce. Each of Joyce's major fictional works receives attention, and the personal experiences with disability for the author and his daughter, Lucia, are shown to have had profound influence on the artist's work. It is a testament to the strength of these essays that, while some inevitable overlap occurs, each essay offers unique insights about Joyce's incorporation of themes around disability. On a personal note, while I generally aim to eschew the biographical in my own research and teaching, this collection makes exceptionally compelling use of Joyce's lived experience as text.

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