

## A PORTRAIT OF A SCHOLAR: LOST IN JAMES JOYCE'S DUBLIN

**A**s a medievalist working on the Icelandic 'Family Sagas' at the University of Leicester, I am no stranger to the workings of the constructed landscape in literature. A rock, a dell, a waterfall: all with their own history and names, all of which serve as significant locations within the saga narrative, acting not only as backdrops, but almost as an extra character, contributing to the historic and legendary events that are preserved in the leaves of thirteenth-century manuscripts.

Fostered from birth, and cultivated throughout our lifetime, the recognition and navigation of our surroundings is, perhaps, one of the most fundamental relationships that we maintain. In literature, however, it is easy for us to forget that the places and locations we read about often have their basis in a physical reality, and that if we were to compare the constructed landscape with a map (yet another construction, but that is another story for another time), we could visit many sites. It is possible to experience the physical and material reality that our favourite writers and characters experienced; to follow in their footsteps in order to gain a subtle—yet significant—understanding of a lived reality.



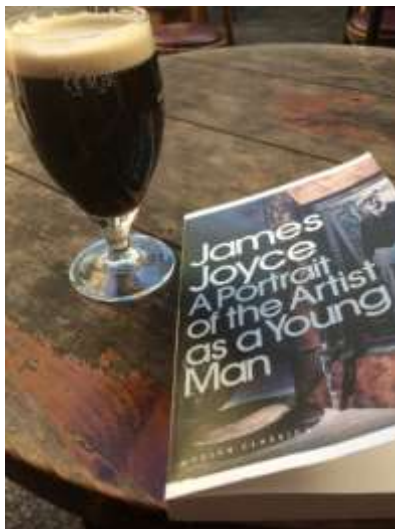
James Joyce's Dublin is one such reality. The 'sluttish streets' of the early twentieth century are still present for all to traverse, and while it is unlikely he would recognise a Tesco Extra, there are many landmarks and routes in modern Dublin with which Joyce would be familiar. One of the many joys I experienced while working with Marsh's Library on the digitisation of the *James Joyce: Apocalypse & Exile* exhibition catalogue was the opportunity to do just that: to follow in Joyce's footsteps, and to experience parts of Dublin as he experienced it.

Well, *almost*... It seems pertinent to add that this scholar's sense of direction is appalling, and in a city as dense and meandering as Dublin, it was only inevitable that I got lost. Therefore, it took the best part of two hours of hopeless wandering to see the Church of the Immaculate Conception (perhaps better known as Adam and Eve's) on Merchant's Quay, the site of the beginning and end of *Finnegans Wake* (1939).



I then moved on to find St. Mary of the Angels Capuchin Friary on Church Street, as described in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). However, I was able to rest at the Brazen Head,

Ireland's oldest pub. Reputedly, there has been a tavern on this site since the twelfth century, making it a very appropriate place for this intrepid medievalist to sample a swift half of the black stuff. Supposedly, Joyce himself was also a patron, so it seemed doubly fitting to enjoy my first Guinness in Ireland here, and read a few lines written by the man himself.



Rejuvenated, I was up to the task of navigating my way to O'Connell Street in order to take in the site of the 1916 Easter Rising. There are plenty of statues here to see, but my two favourites were of Daniel O'Connell himself, a nineteenth century political leader, known as the Liberator or the Emancipator, due to his campaigning on behalf of Catholic emancipation; and the monument dedicated to Charles

Stuart Parnell, an Irish Nationalist politician who features throughout Joyce's works. Incidentally, just off O'Connell Street is a statue of Joyce himself, which was almost impossible to see due to the large crowds of people posing with him and taking pictures. I wondered what he would have made of that, had he been able to tell me?

As I spent the majority of the day getting lost, I had to take a second trip through Dublin to explore other Joycean places of interest. My first stop was the National Library, via St. Stephen's Green. Here Joyce used to visit the Reading Room. While I couldn't get into the Reading Room myself, I did take the opportunity to look around the W.B. Yeats exhibition.



From there it was an almost (but not quite) straightforward walk to the famous Sweny's Pharmacy, which makes an appearance in *Ulysses* (1922), as it is where Bloom purchases his cake of lemon soap. Sweny's is fundamentally as it was during Joyce's time, preserved as a place of historic and cultural interest. The staff sell second-hand copies of Joyce's works, and host a number of multi-lingual reading groups.

Due to Sweny's proximity to Trinity College, I seized the chance to look at the Book of Kells, which was a humbling and affective experience. As this day was my birthday, I couldn't think of a better way to spend it than exploring as many of the literary treasures of Dublin as humanly possible! Therefore, it was delightful to discover the Long Room at the Book of Kells exhibition, which was stacked floor to



ceiling with books, as well as busts of the Literary Greats.

Among them was Jonathan Swift, perhaps best known for his satirical *Gulliver's Travels*, (1726) and, incidentally, was once a Governor (trustee) of Marsh's Library. Fun fact: nestled in one of the reading cages in Marsh's is a replica cast of the skull of Esther Johnson, more famously known as 'Stella' in Swift's *A Journal to Stella*, (1766).

From Trinity, I made my way to the north end of O'Connell Street once more, primarily in search of the James Joyce Centre, but also Belvedere College, where Joyce went to school from the age of eleven, and where Stephen Dedalus also received his secondary education. Sadly, due to my lack of navigational skills, I did not find the James Joyce Centre. However, I *was* able to locate Belvedere College on Great Denmark Street, and was struck by a somewhat surreal and disorienting series of emotions. I had just read about Stephen's role in the play that was staged at Belvedere, and had just experienced Stephen's torment while in the throes of love. I had imagined this all taking place in a faux gothic, almost mythic structure. In reality, it was sombre: a plain Georgian building which has played witness to the mundanities of hundreds of schoolboy lives.

When I was confronted with the reality of Belvedere, I wasn't entirely sure about how I had been reading *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, or how I was going to continue reading it. When reading, the imagination absorbs the written word and fills in the gaps with a collage of archived visual stimuli. I made a semantic connection between 'Jesuit school' and something akin to a medieval monastery, when in reality, the building is the epitome of middle-class respectability. This subtle realignment of time, place, and character changed how I imagined Stephen as he traversed Dublin. He may drift from one Dublin locale to another in the space of time it takes to read a passage of interior monologue, but in real time, that probably works out at forty minutes to an hour (and that's without getting lost!).



This knowledge has made me realise that *Portrait* was not quite an exercise in stream-of-consciousness, or as free-flowing as it first appears. Instead, it is disjointed and fractured, and as meandering and chaotic as the city of Dublin itself. It seems unwise to try and separate the interior and exterior urban landscapes represented in Joyce's writing. To all intents and purposes, they are one and the same.

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