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Literary Modernism and the Fate of Reading

David Spurr

In Paul Auster's *City of Glass* there is a writer who, while in the waiting room of a train station, finds himself sitting next to a girl chewing gum and reading one of his novels. Without identifying himself as the author, he eagerly solicits her judgment of the work. She replies with a shrug, "[i]t passes the time, I guess. Anyway, it's no big deal. It's just a book" (65). One can imagine a similar fate for *City of Glass.* Auster satirizes at once the vanity of the author, the indifference of the reader, and the unpredictable manner in which the text may be put to uses less exalted than those for which it was intended. At this point we are not exactly outside the text. But we are at least at a point in the text where its outside, and its fate on the outside, is imagined. Indeed a characteristic feature of the literary text in the twentieth century is this preemptive strike at reception, this tactic of including within the content of the text the range of possible interpretations to which the text might be subjected. It is a strategy which often takes the form of representing within the frame of the text, whether ironically or in some other mode, the scene in which the text is to be read.

Here then, I suggest, is one way of approaching "the limits of textuality." Such scenes of reading in literature can serve as material for reflection on the nature of reading as a cultural practice, in part because they attempt to define the time and space of reading. Beyond this, the literary representation of reading is one way literature defines itself and even foresees its own destiny in the reader's hands, which is to say in the world beyond the text. As Walter Benjamin reminds us, books have their fates (61). The limits of the text would be found, in this sense, at precisely those points where the text conceives of itself, or of any other text, as an object sent forth into a material world beyond its own boundaries. At issue here is the larger question of how the form of a literary text is related to reading practices, either as the text

conforms to existing conventions of reading, or as it resists such conventions and seeks to impose new kinds of reading.

The preoccupation of the literary text with the problem of its own limits is symptomatic of a historical moment of radical uncertainty concerning both the practice of reading and the nature of the reading public. This moment, I suggest, belongs to the twentieth century. Reading in the nineteenth century was more likely to be considered a mode of participation in an activity of public dimensions, national importance, and historical meaning. Even so deeply personal a poem as Keats' "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" is written in such a way as to suggest the importance of reading to a collective human polity. The poet's own history as a reader is rendered as a knowledge of "states and kingdoms," while its final vision, of Cortez' men gathered on the edge of the Pacific, relies on an image of collective endeavor and discovery:

> Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken;
> Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
> He star'd at the Pacific – and all his men
> Look'd at each other with a wild surmise –
> Silent, upon a peak in Darien. (9-14)

In comparing his personal experience as a reader to the great discoveries of science and geographical exploration, Keats redefines reading as an act of historical as well as personal significance. Three things happen in the poem: first, reading serves to unveil the realm of the sublime, and so belongs to a Romantic repertoire of the means to such unveilings; second, a privileged instance of reading creates an irreversible transformation in the life of the subject, he will never again be the same; and finally, both this unveiling and this transformation are implicitly assigned to a more general historical moment: a "subjective turn" which makes of subjectivity itself the next great field of exploration, the path to whose discovery lies through the literary text, as written and read.

The nineteenth-century novel, like the lyric poem, was written for a broad-based, national readership. In form and subject matter it implied a collective public imagination and a society unified by the act of reading, even if such a society did not in fact exist. Although this preoccupation with cultural unity forged through a common experience of reading is commonly associated with the name of Matthew Arnold, it was shared by Victorian

writers as different in sensibility as Dickens and Ruskin. Dickens not only wrote very deliberately for a national audience, but exhausted himself in public readings in the belief that he was establishing harmony among the social classes by creating a single culture of readers (Small 275). Ruskin's most popular book, *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), originally took the form of a public address urging the support of public libraries, a project designed to alleviate the distressed condition of the people by offering them the neglected treasures of the book. Ruskin sees the book as the common reader's introduction to an exclusive society, an invitation to enter into conversation with the great and noble minds of the cultural Pantheon. In terms of the politics of culture, this philanthropic project represents a means of pacifying the forces of social unrest by redistributing the cultural capital in order to create, in theory at least, a sense of unity among the classes through the establishment of a shared cultural heritage.

The literary modernists of the twentieth century simply do not share this vision of a unified reading public, either as a social reality or as a desired objective in the writing of literary texts. Rather, they find themselves responding to a condition that Wlad Godzich has described as a "new heterogeneity in the culture of literacy," part of an economic climate where increasing specialization in the production of goods and services leads to a corresponding elaboration of linguistic codes, such as those of medicine and law, and later, those of politics and literary criticism (8). To this list of newly elaborated codes I would add literary modernism.

The language of modernism is not only predicated on the breakup of a unified reading public; it also reflects a crisis in the representation of reading. Mallarmé's line, "La chaire est triste, hélas, et j'ai lu tous les livres," (in *Brise marine*, 1865) is echoed 68 years later by Gertrude Stein's avowed fear that her voracious reading would exhaust a limited supply of books worthy to be read, and that eventually she would reach a point when "there would be nothing unread to read" (68). These remarks belong to a more general thematic in modernism devoted to what one might call the end of reading, or the death of the reader as such, i.e. as the figure summoned up by both Keats and Ruskin, who masters heroically the distances between the reader's subjective experience, the national historical moment, and the eternal values of a classical Pantheon.

The modernist revision of the scene of reading may be traced to Proust's 1905 preface to his translation of Ruskin, where the Victorian writer's heroic vision is subjected to an ironic turn. Proust hears in Ruskin a muted echo of the Enlightenment and particularly of Descartes, for whom "la lecture de tous

les bons livres est comme une conversation avec les plus honnêtes gens des siècles passés qui en ont été les auteurs" [the reading of all good books is like a conversation with those who have been writers among the best people of centuries past]. This is the thought one finds throughout Ruskin's essay, "enveloppée seulement dans un or apollonien où fondent des brumes anglaises, pareil à celui dont la gloire illumine les paysages de son peintre préféré" (*Sur la lecture* 61) [only enveloped in an Apollonian gold dissolved in English fog, like the one that gloriously illuminates the landscapes of his favorite painter].

Seeing through the Turneresque fog of Ruskin's thinking, Proust arrives at a different idea of reading. "La lecture, au rebours de la conversation, [consiste] pour chacun de nous à recevoir communication d'une autre pensée, mais tout en restant seul, c'est-à-dire en continuant à jouir de la puissance intellectuelle qu'on a dans la solitude et que la conversation dissipe immédiatement" (*Sur la lecture* 63). [Reading, unlike conversation, consists for each of us in receiving the communication of another's thought while yet remaining alone, that is while continuing to enjoy the intellectual power one has in solitude and which conversation immediately dissipates.]

In this definition Proust distances himself at once from the rationalism of the Enlightenment, from bourgeois good intentions, and from fin-de-siècle decadence. Rather, he seeks to redefine reading in a way that addresses the specific predicament of the modern subject – that of restoring a sense of personal unity by reconciling his own present and past. But unlike Ruskin's, this is a very private project for Proust, one to which conversation can only serve as a distraction. The very idea of a national culture, to say nothing of such a culture being defined by a collective polity of readers, has been thoroughly discredited by the Dreyfus affair. On the contrary, Proust defines the reader precisely as one removed from the public sphere.

Proust is the first modern writer to explore in detail the time and space of reading in such a way as to redefine the practice in a specifically modern context. On one hand, reading occurs in Proust as a ritualized invocation of the spirit of solitude, a privileged moment rescued from the deteriorating scene of modernity. On the other hand, the act of reading bears the signs of a dying art, and Proust writes a kind of elegy for the Romantic experience we have witnessed in Keats, of reading as an unveiling of the sublime, as an irreversible transformation of the subject, and as the defining practice of a new moment in history. In his very celebration of reading in its occult and ritualized nature, Proust implicitly acknowledges that the Romantic mode of reading is no longer possible, neither for his narrator nor for twentieth-

century life. Reading becomes more precious and rarefied for Proust insofar as it is understood as an endangered species of experience.

Proust's elegy for the "lost time" of reading can itself be read in three distinct scenes occurring in the beginning, middle and final volumes of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. The first of these scenes is one that Proust's narrator recalls from his childhood summers at Combray, where he would pass long hours reading, often in bed, in tomblike solitude behind shutters closed against the afternoon sun. Sent outside for the sake of his health, the child seeks refuge in the garden shed, where the act of reading distorts his awareness of the passing of time marked by the church bells of Saint-Hilaire. "A chaque heure il me semblait que c'était quelques instants auparavants que la précédente avait sonné" [at every hour it seemed to me that the previous hour had rung only a few instants before]:

> Quelquefois même cette heure prématurée sonnait deux coups de plus que la dernière; il y en avait donc une que je n'avais pas entendue, quelque chose qui avait eu lieu n'avait pas eu lieu pour moi; l'intérêt de la lecture, magique comme un profond sommeil, avait donné le change à mes oreilles hallucinées et effacé la cloche d'or sur la surface azurée du silence. (*CS* 108)

> [Sometimes this premature hour even rang two bells more than the last; there had thus been one that I had not heard, something that had happened had not happened for me; the magic attraction of reading, like a profound sleep, had altered my hallucinated ears and effaced the golden bell from the azured surface of the silence.]

The passage, as told by a narrator who no longer experiences reading in this way, remembers nostalgically a readerly life lived in concealment and in pleasurable indifference to the surrounding world of servants and of troops passing in the streets – indifference, that is, to the world of work and war. The passage renders homage to the lost time of reading, but it nonetheless makes clear that reading takes place outside of life; indeed it constitutes a kind of antithesis to the more lively, active hermeneutic which the narrator will finally recognize as essential to his vocation as a writer. The point has been made by Antoine Compagnon, who has demonstrated the many ways in which Proust condemns reading as an idolatry of the letter leading to the death of the spirit. In contrast to the antiquarianism of Ruskin, Proust sees a library as a great cemetery, a monument to the fetishism of the book. For Proust there is death in books and death by books (Compagnon 224).

It is in this light that one might reread the famous passage in which Proust's narrator is seized with a sudden urge to see his grandmother, whose phantomlike voice he has heard at the end of a long-distance telephone line. Arriving without warning at her apartment in Paris, he enters the salon to find her buried deep in her cherished volume of Mme de Sévigné. Unperceived, he pauses a moment before announcing himself, briefly present at the scene of his own absence, and so is struck inadvertently by a coldly objective view of her, like one caught in a snapshot:

> pour la première fois et seulement pour un instant, car elle disparut bien vite, j'aperçus sur le canapé, sous la lampe, rouge, lourde et vulgaire, malade, rêvassant, promenant au-dessus d'un livre des yeux un peu fous, une vieille femme que je ne connaissais pas. (*CG* 169)
>
> [for the first time and only for a moment, because it quickly disappeared, I saw – on the sofa, under the lamp, reddened, heavy and coarse, sick and musing, with slightly crazed eyes running over the pages of a book – an old woman whom I did not know.]

This scene is traditionally read as exposing the way one habitually perceives others through a veil of affect, but it belongs equally to the logic of Proust's necromancy of reading. The narrator suddenly sees his beloved grandmother in her gross corporeality, so that the act of reading is rendered excessively material and physical, as the automatic movement of a dying body. When one considers, moreover, the historical specificity of the character of the grandmother – her devotion to Mme de Sévigné combined with her uneasy relation to the world of telephones and photographs – it is possible to see the scene as Proust's emblem of the death of the reader as a certain kind of historical figure.

Near the end of Proust's work a final scene of reading, or rather of reading's impossibility, makes the narrator painfully aware of his own mortality. Retained for a few moments in the library of the Prince de Guermantes, he takes down a copy of George Sand's *François le Champi*, one of his favorite books as a child. Only now he is unable to find any pleasure in the book, because it calls forth the child he was once, but who is now a stranger to him. The book, he feels, can only be read by this phantom of a child, and not by the aged man who holds it in his hand: "immédiatement en moi un enfant se lève qui prend ma place, qui seul a le droit de lire ce titre: *François le Champi*" (*TR* 245) [immediately in me a child rises to take my place, a child who alone has the right to read this title: *François le Champi*]. Far from being remembered fondly, this child is "l'étranger qui venait me faire mal"

(243), the stranger who comes to do him harm, to supplant and exclude him from the innocent pleasures of the book. The narrator finds himself on the losing side of an Oedipal conflict, not with his child, but with the child he was, the ghost of his former self. He can no longer read, not merely because he is haunted by the reader he was, but also because the world in which a certain kind of reading could take place has passed out of existence. He understands now that in order to write he must turn away from the world of books, and seek to read instead the mysterious text of his own life, that "livre intérieur de signes inconnus" (*TR* 238) [interior book of unknown signs].

One might well ask how Proust envisioned the fate of his own work in a world where reading had become so problematic. Against a nineteenth-century novelistic tradition dominated by the art of narrative, he offered a text which seemed without narrative restraint, and written in a mode which relied on subjective impression as the sole measure of internal and external reality. In renouncing this tradition, Proust was also implicitly renouncing its claims to a transparent and coherent structural unity. The material which became his great fictional work retains much of its original character as a collection of the heterogeneous pieces which Proust described as his various projects in 1908: a study of the nobility, a Parisian novel, an essay on Sainte-Beuve and Flaubert, an essay on women, an essay on homosexuality, a study of stained-glass windows, a study of tombstones, a study of the novel (*Correspondance* 112-13). It is no wonder that, in the second decade of this century, even some of the most sensitive readers found Proust's work unreadable. Rejecting it for publication by the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (*NRF*) in 1913, André Gide merely skimmed the manuscript, put off by the long sentences and by the author's seemingly endless ratiocinations (Diesbach 508).

No-one was more acutely aware than Proust himself of his work's illegibility given the conventions of reading practice. In the course of its composition he had proposed to read it aloud to a group of friends, but had to give up the idea because of its length, and above all the length of sentences (Diesbach 453), which exceeded the limits of his already fragile respiratory system. Proust's is the first novel in French that cannot physically be read aloud, and by this fact alone it forces a transformation in the *technè* even of silent reading. Proust writes to a friend, Prince Antoine Bibesco, that the composition of his work is "très stricte, mais d'un ordre trop complexe pour être d'abord perceptible" (Diesbach 502) [very disciplined, but of an order too complex to be immediately perceived]. The first version (1913) was not published until Proust himself proposed to pay Bernard Grasset the costs of printing and advertising. When Gaston Gallimard's *NRF* finally agreed to

publish the completed version in 1920-21, Proust had found the right audience. The *NRF* group were an intellectual élite that Proust judged to be most favorable to "the maturation and dissemination" of the ideas contained in his book. He knew that the unified public for which George Sand wrote no longer existed. The fragmentation of this public necessarily limited the readership of a writer like Proust, but it also created the conditions for literary modernism; that is, the very heterogeneity of the new reading public made it possible to rewrite the conventions of reading, and to find an audience among those who were willing to accept them. It was perhaps inevitable that the works of literary modernism should merely intensify the differences in readership that had formed the conditions of their possibility, a situation that would eventually be institutionalized by the teaching of modern literature as part of a standard university education. Joyce himself would remark, "[m]y immortality does not lie through the reader but through generations of professors" (Fitch 356).

It is instructive to compare Proust to Joyce, for the two writers stand in symmetrical relation to each other. Proust is the modern writer who recovers the inner unity of the subject through a detailed observation of the social universe; Joyce is the one who reveals the outward forms of modern culture through their impressions on the inner consciousness of the subject. Apart from this, there are a number of historical parallels between *A la recherche du temps perdu* and *Ulysses*. Both works were written during the decade 1910-1920, both were published in fragmentary episodes which only gradually took form as an ensemble, both found their publication hindered by their perceived indecency and the fact that neither was written in conventionally novelistic form, and both were published in Paris, under extraordinary conditions, within a year of one another. Finally, both writers, meeting for the only time at a dinner at the Ritz in 1922, claimed not to have read the other's work (Ellmann 508).

As for the scene of reading, if Proust writes its elegy amid the newly heterogeneous conditions of modernity, then Joyce's way of reviving it is to incorporate these same conditions within the form of the text itself, thus ensuring its survival in the fragmented environment of reading in the twentieth century. In *Ulysses*, the scene of reading is multiplied in an endless variety of interpretive moments embedded within the fabric of daily life. Reading is not, as in Proust, set apart as a ritualized invocation of the spirit of solitude. Rather, Joyce effaces the boundaries dividing the time and space of reading from the rest of life, drawing attention to its radical materiality, its relation to

bodily enjoyment, its integration into the rhythms of the city, its haptic, aleatory, transitory, and fragmentary qualities.

In this explosion of the scene of reading onto the cultural landscape of modernity, readers in Joyce consume and are consumed by banal advertisements, pompous editorials, sensational headlines, ladies' magazines, physical exercise manuals, exotic postcards, pornographic novels, obscene letters, suicide notes, and throwaway flyers announcing the coming of Elijah. Such scenes are freely combined with allusions to an immense range of texts representing the entire range of the Western literary, philosophical, and religious traditions, from Shakespeare to Wilde, from Aristotle to Marx, from the *hagadah* to the Roman Catholic burial service. The effect of this integration of trivial reading with the classical tradition is not the debasement of the canon, but rather the universalization of reading as a hermeneutic devoted to the forms of modern culture.

The note of heterogeneity in reading is struck at an early point in Joyce's novel, where Stephen Dedalus walks along Sandymount Strand and sees the "[s]ignatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot (3.2, i.e. chapter 3, line 2). The allusion is to the seventeenth-century *Signatura rerum* of Jakob Boehme, but closer to Stephen's own time and Romantic consciousness is Whitman, whose walks on the shores of Paumonok likewise evoke a hermeneutic of debris: "I too but signify at the utmost a little wash'd-up drift" (202, the passage cited is from the poem "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life"). However, Stephen's disjointed reading of the landscape belong finally to a different order, failing to achieve the older poet's unified vision. The dispersed and fragmentary objects of Stephen's perception are a direct extension of his habit as a reader of books, "[r]eading two pages apiece of seven books every night" (3.136). Of all the characters in *Ulysses*, Stephen is the only one who could conceivably read *Ulysses* itself, and in the scattered nature of his reading Joyce mocks the discontinuities of his own work, a work of such loosely drifting sequence that narrative progress can only be measured by the time of day, a work composed of eighteen episodes written in nearly as many different styles. In this respect, reading *Ulysses* is a little like reading two pages apiece of seven books.

The form of *Ulysses*, as well as the kind of imposition it makes on the reader, is further parodied in the "Circe" episode, which Proust would describe privately, despite his professed ignorance of Joyce's work, as "magnificent, a new Inferno in full sail" (Ellmann 508). A major part of this Joycean *Walpurgisnacht* is devoted to a hallucinatory criminal trial of Leopold

Bloom. When asked to name his profession, Bloom poses as Mr. Philip Beaufoy of the Playgoers' Club, London, a writer of popular fiction. While relieving his bowels earlier in the day, Bloom has read one of Beaufoy's stories, and torn pages from it in order to wipe himself. The scene is one of many in Joyce where the act of reading is quite physically combined with the functions of the body, whether excremental or erotic. In his guise as Beaufoy, Bloom claims to have invented a new collection of prize stories, "something that is an entirely new departure" (15.803), and accuses Bloom himself of having plagiarized some of his best-selling copy, "really gorgeous stuff, the love passages in which are beneath suspicion" (15.824). A more precise account of Bloom's compositions, however, are testified to by a Mrs. Bellingham, a society matron who claims to have received obscene letters from him:

> He addressed me in several handwritings with fulsome compliments as a Venus in furs. . . . He implored me to soil his letter in an unspeakable manner, to chastise him as he richly deserves, to bestride and ride him, to give him a most vicious horsewhipping. (15.1045-73)

Apart from the allusion to Sacher-Masoch's novel *Venus im Pelz*, also satirized here is the indignant reception of Joyce's work by an American lady of the same social class as the fictional Mrs. Bellingham. While Joyce was writing the "Circe" episode in the summer of 1920, the American magazine *The Little Review* printed the "Nausicaa" episode as part of its serial publication of Joyce's novel. This is the episode which culminates with Bloom masturbating into his trousers at Gertie MacDowell's erotic exhibition of her underthings. In an attempt to attract new subscribers, the issue of *The Little Review* with this episode was sent unsolicited to some readers, including the daughter of a prominent New York attorney. This person found the material offensive, and turned it over to her father with the demand that the magazine be prosecuted for obscenity (Vanderham 37). The result was a legal ban on the publication of *Ulysses* in the United States, which remained in effect until overturned more than a decade later by the U.S. District Court.

The Mrs. Bellingham of "Circe" has certain things in common with the New York attorney's daughter: both represent the bourgeois morality that was officially embodied in the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, both receive the offending reading matter as unsolicited mail, both turn their personal indignation into a case for legal prosecution. In the trial of Bloom as obscene writer, Joyce thus unleashes his satirical weaponry against the enemies of *Ulysses*, freely adapting his text to the trials it is already un-

dergoing in the courts and in the hands of hostile readers. I offer this as a minor but instructive example of how literary modernism could actually take form in response to conventional reading practice, wagering on its own capacity to provoke new counter-practices in reading.

However, a detail of Mrs. Bellingham's testimony suggests that Bloom's letters have a distinctive formal characteristic quite apart from their obscene content: they are written in several handwritings, and as such are roughly analogous to the form of *Ulysses*, itself written in several styles. In an obscene letter, such a tactic would presumably serve to conceal the writer's identity, whereas Joyce's several styles have a more defensible aesthetic purpose. The effect of Joyce's trial scene, however, is to make the very heterogeneity of the text part of the offense committed against bourgeois readerly expectations, and in this way he fires a preemptive shot against anticipated readings of *Ulysses*.

Apart from the activity of his writing in itself, Joyce did more than most writers to prepare for a favorable reception of his work in those quarters which he accurately judged to be most powerful in ensuring its critical and commercial success. It is difficult to think of any other writer who could organize a scholarly symposium on his own *Work in Progress*, assign topics to the assembled experts, and publish the results, complete with a "letter of protest" written by himself under an assumed name (cf. Beckett). However, it is doubtful that even Joyce could have anticipated the extent to which *Ulysses* took on a life of its own in the world outside the text. Since its publication in 1922 the fate of *Ulysses* testifies to a range of readings and other uses not only beyond the author's control, but also beyond the control of any authority that might conceivably be exercised by the text itself.

Ulysses is not just a book. It is one of those cultural icons, of the kind defined by Roland Barthes, that can be emptied of one set of meanings and filled with another according to the forces of economics and ideology. As such, it has been variously personified in the discourses of the media and of literary criticism, where it has suffered a series of misadventures comparable in their rigor to those of Odysseus himself: thus one has seen trials of *Ulysses* and scandals of *Ulysses*. The recent publication of a so-called "reader's edition" has been described by Stephen Joyce as "the rape of *Ulysses*" (*TLS* June 27, 1997).

What the *Times Literary Supplement* has sensationally called "The Real Scandal of *Ulysses*" (January 31, 1997) concerns the manner in which Shakespeare and Co.'s original edition of the novel was sold in a limited "deluxe" edition of 1,000 copies offered in large part to dealers who in turn

sold to collectors, making the novel inaccessible in a real sense to readers of ordinary means. Based on the publicity the book had garnered mainly through the obscenity trials, Joyce and his publishers accurately predicted that copies of the first edition would rise substantially in value. Writing on this episode in publishing history, Lawrence Rainey argues that the strategy of offering *Ulysses* in a deluxe edition reconceived the idea of readership, transforming the reader into "a collector, an investor, or even a speculator" (539). The book had entered into an economy of value which had little to do with the practice of reading itself.

Two points can be made here about the transformation of the reading public that had taken place since the nineteenth century. The first is that the unified public addressed by Victorian writers had been segmented according to differing tastes, or what Pierre Bourdieu would define as levels of cultural capital. Second, this segmentation was also marked by real economic difference, i.e. by the uneven distribution of capital itself. The modernist movement was closely associated with this phenomenon, with perilous consequences for the fate of reading. As Rainey remarks, "the effect of modernism was not so much to encourage reading as to render it superfluous" (542).

If, quite apart from its artistic merits, *Ulysses* became the first wholly commodified novel, its integration in recent years into the economy of popular culture has transformed it into something that I propose to call a hypercommodity. By this I mean an object that not only has market value in itself, but which in addition serves as a vehicle for marketing other commodities, services, and institutions. One example is the use of Joyce's name and of *Ulysses* for marketing Jameson's Irish whiskey. Advertising in a special Bloomsday supplement to the *Irish Times* (June 16, 1998), the Jameson distillery exploits Joyce's own supposed preference for this drink, and points out the identity of Joyce's initials with those of the distiller John Jameson. Allusions to the whiskey are quoted from *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Finally, Jameson's announces its sponsorship of a series of public readings of *Ulysses* to take place around the world on Bloomsday:

> Beginning with Chapter One in Melbourne at 8 a.m. Irish time, the reading moves westward through 18 cities, including Tokyo, Trieste, Paris, London, Dublin, and New York. An extract from each of the 18 chapters is being read in each city.

In this truly postmodern event, a simulacrum of reading takes place, fragmented in space and time on a global scale, and orchestrated by the corporate planning skills of international business. One could hardly wish for a better

demonstration of the coincidence of modernist literary form, the dispersion of readership, and the globalization of markets.

Perhaps more remarkable from the political perspective is the extent to which the governments of Dublin Corporation and the Irish Republic, historically hostile to Joyce, have now adopted the author and *Ulysses* as symbols of the Irish capital, the Irish nation, and by extension their own legitimacy. Among those participating in Jameson's worldwide reading of *Ulysses* was Mary McAleese, president of the Republic of Ireland. Joyce's portrait now appears on the Irish ten-pound note, with a tribute to Anna Livia Plurabelle on the verso face. In Dublin, *Ulysses* is heavily used as a vehicle for promoting tourism in the city, with recommended pubs and other locations mentioned in the novel. Amid the euphoria, it is not mentioned that Joyce could not publish his work in Ireland, that *Ulysses* contains scathing critiques of Irish nationalism as well as British imperialism, that Joyce refused to visit his native country after the civil war of 1920-21, that he never accepted the principle of partition, and that he held on to his British passport rather than accept citizenship from the truncated Irish Free State.

When any practice becomes sufficiently heterogeneous, it reaches a point of self-annihilation, that is, where the various forms of the practice have less in common with one another than with any number of other practices. The fate of reading appears to have reached this point, where it disappears into the accelerated time and space of modernity, there to merge with the variegated and fragmentary impulses of perception itself. Joyce understood this, and saw that the form of "reading" most adapted to the contemporary environment is the instantaneous and mostly unconscious apprehension of advertisement. So it is that Bloom's "final meditations" have a prophetic character. They are of an ideal text consisting of

> some one sole unique advertisement to cause passers to stop in wonder, a poster novelty, . . . reduced to its simplest and most efficient terms not exceeding the span of casual vision and congruous with the velocity of modern life.
>
> (17.1770-73)

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