

## Into The West: Joyce On Aran

John McCourt

### Introduction

This chapter will focus on Joyce's occasional journalism for the Trieste daily newspaper, *Il Piccolo della Sera*. While arguing for the singularity and topicality of these pieces, a note of caution will be sounded against attributing excessive importance to them. In this Italian journalism, Joyce is rehearsing some of the themes he would later recast into his fiction, mostly in a more humorous and sometimes in a more caustic key. Namely: his interest (and the Irish Revival's interest) in the West of Ireland, in the Irish islands in general (what he calls in his "Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages" lecture "the small islands that stand like pickets at the advance outpost of Europe facing the western hemisphere" [OCPW 109]), and the Aran Islands in particular. However, the occasional and often throwaway nature of these articles should be kept in mind. To claim, as Derek Gladwin does in his excellent "Joyce the Travel Writer," that "Joyce composed them with the ambition to later develop them as a book for wider European readership with the Genoese publisher Angelo Fortunato Formiggini" is to speculate.<sup>1</sup> There is no hard textual or biographical evidence that this was Joyce's initial intention. It seems more likely that he published the articles primarily because

they provided him with needed profile and with welcome cash in Trieste. The idea to publish them in book form presumably came later to Joyce retrospectively when he realised their coherence as a series of writings.

Joyce's Italian journalism, therefore, should not be made to punch above its weight in readings of his entire output. It should also be remembered that much of the content of the Italian articles is borrowed from existing writings on the subjects in which he is interested and then seamlessly and successfully inserted into and camouflaged by his impressive Italian prose.

Unfortunately no remnants of Joyce's notes for these articles remain but there seems little doubt that Joyce was already engaged in a practice that he would take to an extreme in the composition of *Finnegans Wake*, of taking notes and borrowings from his readings with a view to later recyclings. As Kevin Barry so convincingly showed in his "Introduction" to his *James Joyce: Occasional, Political and Critical Writings*, much of Joyce's Italian journalism, and especially much of the historical content in "The City of the Tribes" and "The Mirage of the Fisherman of Aran", is lifted from "the reference shelves of a library," and

bolstered by dates that derive from Arthur Griffith's editorials." While it is well known that James Hardiman's *History of Galway* was a particularly useful source for Joyce (OCPW xxi), there were other, lesser-known sources for his recycling such as Oliver J. Burke's *The South Isles of Aran* (1887), a key and as yet unacknowledged source for his 5 September 1912 article in *II*

**Commentato [A1]:** We were hoping that you might add a brief sentence or note here explaining differences and continuities between what Joyce does here in borrowing for the Triestine journalism and his later note-taking and borrowing practice for *Ulysses* and the *Wake*? You say this later on, but it would be good to show that you'll come to it.

**Commentato [A2]:** We like having the Italian titles, but they do make sentence clarity difficult in some places and at other times you do use the English titles. We wondered if it would be easier to use the standard translated form in *OCPW*? We could put something in the introduction of the volume about this if you would like, for example:

"As John McCourt reminds us in his chapter, it is too easily forgotten by readers of Joyce's Triestine non-fiction, that these were not only *originally* published in Italian, but several of these texts had no real existence for him in English at all. (etc, etc. . .). In this volume, we bow to convenience and print all titles in accordance with the translations in *OCPW*, but stress this difficulty (etc. etc...)"

Let us know what you think.  
I'm ok with just using the English titles as long as the issue is raised, as you suggest, in the intro.

*Piccolo della Sera*: "The Mirage of the Fisherman of Aran." The fact that much of the content of Joyce's journalism is borrowed should not, however, detract from the manner in which it signals many of the Irish themes that would later be worked through in his fiction (which itself, of course, absorbs a myriad of other texts).

One of the enduring problems with treatments of Joyce's Italian writings is the tendency to read them in English and to forget that they initially saw the light in the Italian language. Similarly, the complicated problem of audience is often brushed aside. We should be wary of reading this work in any simple or straightforward sense as an expression of Joyce's political, philosophical, or critical views without first understanding the particular ways that Joyce shaped these pieces with a hybrid audience of *Triestini* in mind. While it is true that Joyce's journalism can profitably be read not only within the context of his overall fictional output—or as a prompt for or key to some of the themes in that same fiction—it also demands to be seen within the context of its primary audience, that is, his mostly Irredentist, Italian-speaking, Triestine readers, most of whom would only have had, at best, a passing knowledge of Ireland. And yet, despite their publication in *Il Piccolo della Sera*, Joyce always had one eye to Ireland — and his Italian writings consciously address a possible future Irish or international readership. These multiple audiences need to be kept in mind in our attempts to understand these writings.

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Joyce's Aran: Second-hand news

In 1907, Joyce put the following question to his brother Stanislaus: "How many copies of Synge's 'Aran Isles,' that he showed me five years ago in Paris, will be sold, do you think?"<sup>2</sup> This question signals both his interest in and perhaps his envy of Synge's already prominent position in the Irish cultural panorama. Synge was a good few steps ahead of the twenty-five year old Joyce, who would have to wait a further seven years to see *Dubliners* finally in print. Three years after Joyce's question, in *Hail and Farewell*, George Moore, another precursor, but a far less appreciated one, imagined a genius emerging, "completely unequipped" on a western island: "If such a one were to write a book about his island he would rank above all living writers, and he would be known evermore as the Irish Dante".<sup>3</sup>

Of course neither Yeats, Synge, or Joyce came from a Western Island (or, if we prefer, they all did), but all three were among a throng of writers who attempted, in different ways and with varying levels of intensity and success, to give voice to Ireland's West and to its western islands. Turn-of-the-century writings tended to favour ahistorical, primitivist, romanticizing versions of the Aran islands and Joyce would take issue with such readings in both his journalism and, later, in his fiction. In his *Il Piccolo della Sera* "The City of the Tribes" and "The Mirage of

the Fisherman of Aran" articles, he pointedly inserts Galway and Aran into various historical contexts, undermining the islands' supposed timeless, "backward" qualities, their much vaunted isolation that was so often celebrated by other visitors. In the first article, he notes the region's commercial connectedness and trading past:

[i]n the Middle Ages, these waters were ploughed by thousands of foreign ships. The signs on the street corners recall the connections of the city with Latin Europe: Madeira Street, Merchant Street, Spaniards Walk, Madeira Island, Lombard Street, Velasquez Palmyra Avenue. Oliver Cromwell's letters testify that Galway was the second port of the United Kingdom, and the first in the whole kingdom for Spanish and Italian trade (OCPW 197).

But Joyce also notes that Galway is "lying over countless little islands, is veined in all directions by small rivers, cataracts, ponds, and canals. It lies on the bottom of a vast inlet on the Atlantic Ocean in which the entire British navy could anchor" (OCPW 197). As Derek Gladwin points out, in penning such a vision of the city, "Joyce is able to represent Galway as a geographical centre attracting cosmopolitan Europeans on a global scale, while also maintaining the intimate sense of a place containing nature and culture".<sup>4</sup> Later, in Ulysses, Joyce would come to question the very notion of island-hood, challenging the ideal of isolation that it was supposed to imply.

Aran, as is well known, was a place that because of its isolation and its lack of development assumed symbolic importance within the Irish Revival as a container of what was considered and celebrated as an older, more authentic, uncontaminated form of Irishness. It was depicted as a paradise lost or rather one that lay waiting to be discovered. A paradise it was not, however, for those struggling to eke out a life there. And so it is no surprise to know that as outside interest in the Irish islands grew over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their populations fell quite dramatically: in 1841 Ireland had boasted 176 inhabited islands but by 1901 this number was down to 119 (today it is approximately 60).<sup>5</sup>

The majority of writings about the islands were written by Dublin or London-based Irish mainlanders who looked to the islands through a romanticizing lens as places of simple, primitive life to be celebrated as a source or as a mythical Ithaca, an originary homeplace that could be evoked so as to symbolise an image to which the emerging nation might aspire. Not for nothing would Joyce allude to "the lazy Dubliner" in the *incipit* of his "The City of the Tribes" article (OCPW 196). Michael MacDonagh encapsulated the idea of island purity in 1890, writing: "In these islands you find the pure and undiluted Celt, descended without any intermixture of foreign blood..."<sup>6</sup> Many of these writers failed to see the irony of their own positions: their very presence as island visitors contradicted their desire to characterise the islands as "pure." In an early poem called 'The

**Commentato [A3]:** We have had a little trouble finding a source for this information and it would be nice to have one if possible. Could you perhaps point us to something we could put in the notes?

**Commentato [A4]:** Again, for consistency, we wanted to check whether you prefer to use the English or Italian titles. Yes let's go with English

White Birds,' published in *The Rose* (1893), the early Romantic Yeats has his lovesick speaker exclaim to his beloved:

I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan  
shore,  
Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come near  
us no more.<sup>7</sup>

In this poem, the voice is that of a sentimentalizing outsider celebrating primitive lifestyles in an idealised way. Again, in his preface to Synge's *Well of the Saints*, (and later, in *Autobiographies*) Yeats wrote of "those grey islands where men must reap with knives because of the stones."<sup>8</sup> However heroic such an image may have seemed to the poet, it cannot but make us think of the harsh realities of life on Aran which he more realistically calls, in "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," "a most desolate stony place."<sup>9</sup> Later the poet famously acknowledged his romanticizing theme in "Coole and Ballylee, 1931" where he wrote: "We were the last romantics - chose for theme/Traditional sanctity and loveliness."<sup>10</sup> Although he had only a very select handful of "last romantics" in mind, in reality, as far as Ireland's West and its islands were concerned, they were something of a throng.

If the images of the Aran islands were predominantly those of isolation, the paths to and around the islands were, as Miss Ivors in Joyce's "The Dead" could attest, frequently well-trodden by visitors. Inis Mór, in particular, was a busy tourist attraction around the turn of the century. Thus, in writing about Aran for an

Italian newspaper Joyce was joining in a tradition of travelers and outsiders visiting and describing the islands. Down through the years, a long list of island visitors and chroniclers emerged including Roderic O'Flaherty, James Hardiman, Martin Haverty, Oliver Burke, Arthur Symons, Somerville & Ross, J.M. Synge, Alice Dease, Lady Gregory, Padraic Pearse, Michael Collins, and, among many others, Ethna Carberry. Roderic O Flaherty's *A Chorographical Description of West or H-Iar Connaught* (1684) was published by James Hardiman for the Irish Archeological Society in 1846; Martin Haverty's *The Aran Isles: or, A report of the excursion of the Ethnological section of the British association from Dublin to the western islands of Aran* appeared in 1857 (originally in the *Freeman's Journal*). Oliver Burke followed with *The South Isles of Aran* (1887), Arthur Symons contributed a chapter on Aran in his *Cities and Sea - Coasts and Islands* (1897) while Somerville and Ross published "An Outpost of Ireland" in their *Some Irish Yesterdays* (1906). Ethna Carberry's Aran poems were published in 1906 while Alice Dease's "A Western Island" appeared in *Down West and Other Sketches of Irish Life* in 1914. Not for nothing would Joyce, in *Stephen Hero*, write of Emma, having "gone away to the Isles of Aran with a Gaelic party" (SH 146). Similarly in "The Dead," the sense of Aran as a location attracting groups of Gaelic language tourists is communicated through Miss Ivors: "O Mr Conroy ... will you come for an excursion to the Aran Isles this summer? We're going to stay there a whole month. It will be splendid out in the Atlantic. You ought to come" (D 188-9). By the time we get



to *Ulysses*, Bloom lists Aran as just another tourist destination, depriving it of the singularity that was ascribed to it in earlier depictions. Thus, it appears in a list, typical of *Ulysses*, in "Ithaca":

The cliffs of Moher, the windy wilds of Connemara, lough Neagh with submerged petrified city, the Giant's Causeway, Fort Camden and Fort Carlisle, the Golden Vale of Tipperary, the islands of Aran, the pastures of royal Meath, Brigid's elm in Kildare, the Queen's Island shipyard in Belfast, the Salmon Leap, the lakes of Killarney (*U*<sub>17</sub>.1974-79).

In terms of the Irish Literary Revival which roused such mixed reactions in Joyce, his two most prominent precursors on Aran were Yeats and Synge. Writing of Yeats, Seamus Heaney stressed his romanticizing treatment of the West, noting how he "had embarked upon a deliberately counter-cultural movement to reinstate the fairies, to make the world more magical than materialistic."<sup>11</sup> Yeats sought to root Irish literature in place and language, and, again in Heaney's words: "the classic moment in this endeavour was his encounter with Synge [ . . . ] At that moment, a new country of the mind was conceived in English, the west that the poets imagined, full of tragic fishermen and poetic peasants."<sup>12</sup> Or, as he put it in "A Tale of Two Islands: Reflections on The Irish Literary Revival":

These Anglo-Irish counter-cultural Romantics found in the west of Ireland corroboration for their image of an Ireland untouched by geniality, inoculated against mere opinions

and unified by an instinctive sense of beauty. All this, of course, was artistically proper and exhilarating. Writers need images and situations which release in them whatever is latent and submerged and allow them to appease their perhaps unconscious yearnings and tensions. One has a sense that for Synge there was enormous exultation and confirmation and destination in the Aran experience [ . . . ] And Synge's certitude transfused Yeats also...<sup>13</sup>

Is it possible to speculate on Joyce's opinion about Synge's "certitude"? We know that Joyce and Synge spent a week or so in each other's company in Paris. On this occasion, Synge gave Joyce *Riders to the Sea* to read. Yeats had told Joyce that *Riders* was a tragedy in the Greek style but Joyce dismissed it as being non-Aristotelian and pointed out its flaws to Synge and, in a letter, to Stanislaus:

I am glad to say that ever since I read it I have been riddling it mentally till it has [not] a sound spot. It is tragic about all the men that are drowned in the islands: but thanks be to God Synge isn't an Aristotelian (*L II* 35).

Joyce objected to the play's catastrophe on the grounds that it was provoked by an animal rather than by the sea. He also felt that its brevity deprived it of a more comprehensive power, reducing it to the category of a tragic poem. Synge defended his work as "a good play, as good as any one-act play can be" only for Joyce to reply that "Ireland needed less small talk and more irrefutable art," concluding: "No one-act play, no dwarf-drama can

be a knockdown argument" (JJ 124). For all of his objections, Joyce's need to be confrontational with Synge seems to have been caused by his recognition that Synge was a real writer. In Stanislaus Joyce's words: "Jim found something in Synge's mind akin to his own [ . . . ] he thought Synge's art more original than his own."<sup>14</sup> Joyce returned to Synge's writings, many times over, in his life and writing. Just a couple of years into his sojourn in Trieste, he translated *Riders to the Sea* into Italian with Nicolò Vidacovich and ten years later, in Zurich, saw to it that Synge's play was one of three one-act plays performed by the English Players at the Pfauen Theater in 1918 and even persuaded Nora to play the part of Cathleen.

Apart from his appreciation of Synge's use of language, Joyce would also have noted Synge's tendency to de-romanticise the islands, his introduction of an element of real time into a world that was routinely depicted as timeless. Joyce would soon engage in a more radical de-romanticizing in his *Il Piccolo della Sera* article. Here he is careful to avoid antiquity and to show how the Aran islands are, in any case, far from immune to the influence of trade and modernity. In order to achieve this, he introduces time and global politics, religion and economics into the island setting. He writes in part to combat depictions of the islands (and, by extension, Ireland) as pure or separate places. He would go on to play with the very idea of the uncontaminated island throughout his writing largely in order to undermine it. A pure island was for Joyce as impossible a concept as that of a pure

language or a pure race. His "Ireland Island of Saints and Sages" lecture vibrantly suggests that the island of Ireland was permeated by religion, politics, and language from abroad and that generations of islanders, men of religious belief, were not content with their island lives in Ireland but rather sought contact and influence in a wider, European world. Contact, contamination, influence, and commerce were as inevitable between islands as they were between mainland languages and races.

In his Trieste diary, Stanislaus provides unchecked testimony that these issues were very prominently on Joyce's mind by noting down his conversations on the subject with Jim. On 28 April 1907, he reports both his own opinions and Joyce's responses. In Stannie's view, "the weakness of the Irish character was that it could not assimilate" while the "English character could, it was like a sponge, absorbing everything; but Ireland was still suffering from indigestion of the English who landed in it over nine hundred years ago."<sup>15</sup> Stanislaus criticises the "Sinn Fein" policy for "promoting" what he calls Irish indignation against "Britain." Joyce sees it differently: "What did they [Sinn Fein] want their own mercantile fleet and their own consuls for if not to have intercourse with all the nations of the world?" Stannie again disagrees and believe the Irish want only "commercial intercourse":

The word "foreign" in Ireland meant corrupt, vicious, and godless; they were afraid the continent would corrupt their island purity. In Ireland they spoke of foreigners with the

same contempt as the ancient Greeks spoke of barbarians. Berkeley puts the idea of a brass wall twenty cubits high enclosing and protecting an island that could live for itself and on itself and develop out of itself. If it did so the character of the people would be weakened as surely as those families fall into imbecility in which relatives intermarry. Jim said that both were exaggerations, and that the brass wall idea was only a reaction against the idea constantly instilled into us at school that the English were a superior race in everything but morals and that without England, Ireland could not live.<sup>16</sup>

If anything, Stanislaus is even more convinced and critical of Irish closure than Joyce who argues that the Irish actually do want a certain amount of "intercourse with all the nations of the world." Even if they do not, he knows well that an Irish Ireland with sealed borders is only a fiction and he undermines such an ideology both in these early Italian essays but also, and far more effectively, in his fiction, where, among other things, he furnishes a series of examples of islands that are not really islands at all but merely bear the name, islands that feign isolation but are intricately connected. The image of Galway "lying over countless little islands" becomes quite prophetic of the connectedness of the many islands in Joyce's fiction.

As stated earlier, while caution is necessary in tracing sources for Joyce's Italian journalism, especially given that Joyce was drawing on texts in English and then writing (and

translating them) into Italian, there do appear to be many textual echoes between Joyce's Aran essay and Oliver J. Burke's *The South Isles Of Aran* (1887). In his essay, having noted the group nature of the trip out to the islands: "[t]he little ship" was "carrying a small load of travelers," Joyce continues: "We leave for Aranmor, the holy island which sleeps like a large shark on the grey waters of the Atlantic Ocean which the islanders call the Old Sea" (OCPW 201). Similarly, Burke had described: "the great waterway between 'the old sea,' as the natives call the Atlantic, and the Bay of Galway."<sup>17</sup> As he and his fellow travelers leave Galway, Joyce reiterates his hope for its commercial future (and living in Trieste, he would have seen how variegated cultures could be given hospitality in a context of economic and commercial growth):

The old decaying city would rise once more. Wealth and vital energy from the New World would run through this new artery into blood-drained Ireland. Once again, after ten centuries or so, the mirage that dazzled the poor fisherman of Aran, St Brendan's follower and emulator, appears in the distance, vague and tremulous on the mirror of the ocean (OCPW 203).

This reference to "the mirage" seems to echo Burke writing of the phantom "Isle of O'Brazil":<sup>18</sup>

Speaking of the wonders by which the native of Aran is surrounded, what wonder can be greater than that of the mirage, an island that is said to rise after sunset from

the Atlantic? A phantom island which the people call 'O'Brazil, the Isle of the Blest,' upon which a city like the New Jerusalem is built, and the old men say that that city hath no need of the sun nor of the moon to shine in it, neither does it need the light of the lamp any more at all. That island with that city has, they say, over and over again appeared far away on the Atlantic.<sup>19</sup>

Burke also makes reference to another source, Gerald Griffin's *O'Brazil, the Isle of the Blest*, which refers to "the island of the blessed," and references "A spectre island, said to be sometimes visible on the verge of the Western horizon, in the Atlantic, from the Isles of Arran."<sup>20</sup> Belief in the existence of this island mirage is evident in fourteenth-century maps and endured down through the centuries, notable in Abraham Ortelius' sixteenth century maps of Europe. It is just one of a number of phantom islands in the North Atlantic in Ortelius's 1570 *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*.

Describing Aran and its monasteries as "the home of the learned and the pious," Burke lists many of the saints that lived there including Brendan:

Amongst the remarkable men that there clustered, were St. Kieran, founder of Clonmacnoise, who died in 549, and St. Brendan. The history of the latter abounds with fable, but it is admitted that a thousand years before Christopher Columbus, he crossed the Atlantic and landed on the coast of Florida.<sup>21</sup>

Joyce's tongue-in-cheek version is quite similar and there seems little doubt that he would have enjoyed provoking his Triestine Irredentist readers by insisting on Columbus's belatedness in discovering America:

Christopher Columbus, as everyone knows, is venerated by posterity because he was the last to discover America. A thousand years before the Genoese navigator was laughed at in Salamanca, St Brendan set sail for the New World from the barren strand towards which our boat is headed, and, crossing the ocean, landed on the Florida coast (OCPW 203).<sup>22</sup>

Burke also draws attention to the fact that Saint Fursa (or Fursey) spent time on Aran, writing: "Amongst the other ecclesiastical notabilities that frequented Aran in the sixth century was St. Fursa. [. . .] The visions of Fursa were, we are informed by the Rev. J. Carey, in his admirable translation of Dante, the groundwork of the *Inferno*."<sup>23</sup> Joyce's version is succinct but also identifies Fursa as a precursor of Dante: "Here lived and dreamed the visionary Saint Fursa, described in the hagiographic calendar of Ireland as the precursor of Dante Alighieri." Joyce's closing here also echoes the title of Charles Stuart Boswell's book about Fursa entitled *An Irish Precursor of Dante* (1908). It also gives a definite nod to the Very Rev. John Canon O'Hanlon's *Lives of the Irish Saints Compiled from Manuscript and other Sources, With the Commemorations and Festivals of Holy Persons noted in Calendars, Martyrologies, and*



*Various Works, Domestic or Foreign, relating to The Ancient Church History of Ireland.* Joyce provides further details about Fursa that appear to be drawn from O'Hanlon, who would later be mentioned in the "Nausicaa" episode of *Ulysses* where he appears as chief celebrant in exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at the St. Mary's Star of the Sea church as a counterpoint to Leopold Bloom's observations of Gerty McDowell. He returns later in the even less appropriate setting of "Circe." The real O'Hanlon writes about Fursa (or Fursay, as he calls him) as follows:

THE celebrated saint, whose festival is commemorated on this day, attained great celebrity, not only in his own country, but even among people living in more distant regions. Imbued with a true missionary spirit, and inflamed with the zeal of an apostle, the island of his birth was found too circumscribed as a field for his great labours. Whilst Ireland had the benefit of his apostleship for many years, England and France were afterwards destined to participate in the blessings of his ministry. Furseay had angelic apparitions during his lifetime. The sublime Dante has even borrowed the plot of his *Divina Commedia* from the celebrated vision of this saint.<sup>24</sup>

O'Hanlon was far from unique in making this claim. Sarah Atkinson, in *Saint Fursey's Life and Visions*, notes that "his [Fursa's] name is now more frequently heard amongst us than it was for generations past" and says that this "is due to the extension in these our days of the study of Dante. After a laborious and

**Commentato [A5]:** We were looking to add a page number to this reference, but cannot find the passage in ebooks of O'Hanlon online. Could you perhaps help us with this?

reverential study of the great Florentine, extending over six hundred years, Dantean scholars have reached the poetic sources of the *Divine Comedy*; and at the fountainhead they find the Celtic spring—the *Vision of St. Fursey*.<sup>25</sup> She also references Sir Francis Palgrave in his *History of Normandy and England* as writing: "We have no difficulty in deducing the poetic genealogy of the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* to the Milesian Fursaeus.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, in Palgrave's words, Fursey "kindled the spark which, transmitted to the inharmonious Dante of a barbarous age, occasioned the first of the metrical compositions from which the *Divina Commedia* arose."<sup>27</sup> Atkinson also references the Venerable Bede's writings about Fursey and also those of the aforementioned Canon O'Hanlon:

A long catalogue of codices, in which various versions of St. Fursey's acts are preserved in the chief public libraries of Europe, is given by the Rev. John O'Hanlon in his exhaustive life of the saint, and a comprehensive list is added of the more modern authors who have, in various languages, treated of the same subject.<sup>28</sup>

What this suggests is that in writing about these Irish saints and about Fursey in particular, Joyce was engaging with many recent and contemporary commentaries, most of which were firmly in the Catholic tradition. Far from being packed with original or rarely seen insights, Joyce's saints, like his Aran islands, were mined secondhand from such literature.<sup>29</sup> He provides common details about Fursey and once more enjoys poking fun at his

patriotic pro-Italian audience by mockingly undermining Dante's originality:

A medieval copy of the visions of St Fursa depicts the journey of the saint from Hell to Heaven, from the grim valleys of the four fires amidst the ranks of diabolic, up through the universe to the divine light reflected by countless angelic wings. These visions might have served as a model for the poet of *The Divine Comedy*, who (like Columbus) is venerated by posterity because he was the last to visit and describe the three kingdoms of the souls (OCPW, 203).

A reference to Joseph of Arimathæa suggests that Joyce took further material from Burke, who, having noted that the "Hawthorn and Blackthorn grow freely in the islands" despite "the antipathy between these shrubs", then describes "our astonishment [. . .] when we learn that the walking-stick of Joseph of Arimathæa was of hawthorn, that in Glastonbury he stuck it accidentally in the ground, and that ever since it and its descendants bud, blossom, and fade on Christmas Day!"<sup>30</sup> Joyce's version reads as follows:

Around the shrubs growing with difficulty on the hillocks of the island, his imagination has woven legends and fables that reveal the hereditary taint of his psyche. Under his apparent simplicity there is something sceptical, humorous, spectral. He looks away when he has spoken and lets the enthusiastic scholar note down in his pocket-book the

amazing fact that it was from yonder whitethorn bush that Joseph of Arimathea cut his walking stick (OCPW 204).

Joyce's article concludes by evoking images of mist which falls like a "slow smoky veil" causing the island to gradually disappear. With it, "The three Danish sailors, seated impassively on the hill top, also disappear. They were out summer-fishing on the ocean, and stopped off at Aran" (OCPW 2015). Far from drawing a conclusion with an evocation of a timeless moment, Joyce once more is careful to insert history into the image (which also, by its allusion to Danish sailors, shatters any lingering idea of island purity or isolation suggesting instead the "miscegenation" that would later feature in *Ulysses*):

Silent and melancholic, they look as if they are thinking of the Danish hordes that burned the city of Galway in the eighth century and of the Irish lands which, as legend has it, are included in the dowries of the Danish girls; they look as if they are dreaming of reconquering them. The rain is falling on the islands and on the sea. It is raining as it can rain only in Ireland (OCPW 205).

The idea of racial purity and closure is countered by Joyce's image of a local girl "noisily flirting with a deckhand, holding him on her knees" and by the picture of Joyce and his fellow travellers as they "open up our map once more" (OCPW 205). Joyce concludes on an optimistic note, recalling the motto placed near the crest of **f the city of Galway** by a mystic and perhaps even prophetic head of a monastery: "*Quasi liliū germinans germinabit,*

*et quasi terebinthus extendans ramos suos* ("It will flourish like a lily growing and like a terebinth tree spreading its branches," OCPW 205; 344). The hope is that Galway will experience a rebirth and a flourishing. But as the Spanish city comes back into focus, the island that Joyce has visited retreats into being little more than a mirage and, given the second-hand nature of the descriptions of it, the reader might well ask if Joyce ever actually succeeded in visiting it. What has been presented is a simulacrum, a mirage as faint and fleeting as if it had been Hy-Brazil. This sets out the template for many of the islands that Joyce will evoke in his fiction and thus an important point of continuity between his nonfictional and fictional writings.

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Joyce's non-islands

Joyce's writings seem to confirm John Donne's affirmation that "No man is an island, / Entire of itself" but equally that no language and no nation (and, indeed, no work of fiction) is "entire of itself". This is an idea he begins to set out in his Italian writings but one which he would only fully illustrate in his fiction. In a very real sense, his early Italian journalism, much of it clearly gleaned from other sources, is, in its camouflaged intertextuality, remarkably at one with the compositional methods of borrowing, cutting and pasting, allusion, that became ever more marked over the arc of his long writing career. Investigating Joyce's fictional islands, we see that far from being timeless,

**Commentato [A6]:** We have slightly changed around the order of some of your points in this last section. We really loved this direct reflection on islands and intertextuality from late in the essay and thought it offered an excellent framework for what follows on fictional islands. Let us know what you think. We're not wedded to this change if you don't like it, but we felt it improved the flow (so to speak!) of the final section. Yes, you are probably right. We can keep this changed version.

**Spostato (inserimento) [1]**

changeless, and permanent pieces of isolated land, Joyce's islands fall into two categories. They are either "false," artificial, temporary or recent islands, or they are little more than mirages or optical illusions of island-hood.

In "The Dead," which is, among other things, both Joyce's very poignant homage to the West and also an interrogation of how the West has been perceived in Irish culture, the Misses Morkan's annual dance takes place in the dark, gaunt house situated on Usher's Island, the upper part of which they had rented from Mr. Fulham, the corn-factor on the ground floor. What is notable about the address is that it is so misleading: Usher's island is famously not an island but the side of a river. Elsewhere in the same story, Gretta makes reference to "Nuns' Island":

"Then the night before I left, I was in my grandmother's house in Nuns' Island, packing up, and I heard gravel thrown up against the window. The window was so wet I couldn't see, so I ran downstairs as I was and slipped out the back into the garden and there was the poor fellow at the end of the garden, shivering" (D 221)

Nuns' island in Galway is, in fact, a street and a strip of land partially surrounded by the waters of Lough Corrib but it is not technically an island. Marjorie Howes sees it as a "Catholic alternative to the supposedly pagan, primitive Aran" and it surely signals an alternative to the more vaunted Western Isles of Aran.<sup>31</sup>

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce continues to interrogate the idea of unchangeability and permanence that is often attributed to the islands. To do so he furnishes an image of islands that come and go and even coins the term "islanding" which shows the transitory nature of sand islands:

He climbed to the crest of the sandhill and gazed about him. Evening had fallen. A rim of the young moon cleft the pale waste of skyline, the rim of a silver hoop embedded in grey sand; and the tide was flowing in fast to the land with a low whisper of her waves, islanding a few last figures in distant pools (*P* 177).

The central island of *A Portrait* is the Bull Island, visited by Stephen and his classmates. Significantly, it is an artificial island set in Dublin Bay, which is accessible by the wooden bridge connecting it with the mainland. The island was relatively new in Joyce's time having been brought into existence as the result of an engineering project to remove silt from the mouth of the River Liffey. In 1825 a wall was completed, behind which silt removed from the entrance of the river was deposited. Over time the silt built up until it formed the island that became such a popular spot for Dubliners to visit and to enjoy as a bathing place.

References to islands abound within the geographical inclusivity practiced in the global text that is *Ulysses*. The pages of *Ulysses*, like the cocklepicker's blood in "Calypso" are "myriadisland." Some of them are real islands—"Spice islands" ("Nausicaa"), "Mona island," "Madagascar", Lambay island" (all in

"Oxen of the Sun"), and the "Channel islands" ("Eumaeus")—but many more are not and seem to be chosen in order to problematise the idea of the island as something isolated or cut off. Buck Mulligan exposes the supposed impermeability of the island of Ireland to outside influence by suggesting: "God, Kinch, if you and I could only work together we might do something for the island. Hellenise it" (*U*<sub>1</sub>.157-8). What is extraordinary about many of the so-called islands in *Ulysses* is that they are not islanded at all but are rather vitally connected. We think of "Corpuscle islands," and the rather oddly named "Island street," located Near Watling street in the Liberties or "John Gray's pavement island," "Coney island," "Dirty Dan the dodger's son off Island bridge." Island Bridge is a road bridge that traverses the River Liffey, joining the South Circular Road to Conyngham Road at the Phoenix Park. It is so named because of the island formed by the creation of a mill race towards the right bank while the main current of the river flows to the left. Bloom also lists "the Queen's Island shipyard in Belfast" and here Joyce is referring to another artificial island, dating back to 1839, the year in which the Ballast Board appointed William Dargan to carry out the first 'cut' of the river Lagan. Eventually the depositing of this excavation created the formation of the so-called Dargan's Island (all 17 acres of it). Subsequently it was renamed Queen's Island to mark Victoria's Belfast visit in 1849.

Even more interesting is "Mud Island" which Father Conmee passes by tram "for he disliked to traverse on foot the dingy way



past" (U 10.113-4). As can be learned (and as Joyce may well have known) from Weston St. John Joyce's 1912 *The Neighbourhoods of Dublin*, Mud Island on the north side of Dublin Bay "was a locality of evil repute in former times [. . .] inhabited by a gang of smugglers, highwaymen, and desperadoes of every description, and ruled by a hereditary robber chief rejoicing in the title of "King of Mud Island."<sup>32</sup> In addition, the history of Mud Island, suggests colonization, and dispossession, and far from representing an image of impermeability, it incarnates the vulnerability of islands to outside influence and indeed to the long-term effects of climate change:

The settlement of Mud Island is said to have originated at the time of the Plantation of Ulster, when three brothers, driven out of their ancestral patrimony, came southwards and settled in the neighbourhood of Dublin, one of them taking up his abode by the sea here on what was then a waste tract of land, to which his descendants by virtue of long occupation, in time acquired a squatter's title. Then and for long afterwards, open country intervened between this place and the city, the North Strand was under water, and a rough bridle track extended along the shore some distance eastward of Ballybough Road, which was, until the building of Annesley Bridge in the highway to Malahide, Howth, and Clontarf. A hundred years ago, it was so usual an occurrence to find a dead body in one of the lanes or alleys of "The Island," that it occasioned little or no

comment, and if any of the "islanders" had the bad taste to mention the matter, he would be told significantly - "'Tis a wise man that never saw a dead one." The murdered persons were usually excisemen, bailiffs, or other limbs of the law, but be the victim who he might, the murderers were rarely brought to justice.<sup>33</sup>

Small wonder Fr Conmee seeks to avoid the area. Mud Island's changing status—once an island and then part of the mainland—makes it another exemplary instance of Joyce's non-island islands: "At the time of its colonisation, Mud Island was no doubt, as its name indicates, an island off the slob lands along the estuary of the Liffey, and probably accessible on foot at low water from the shore."<sup>34</sup>

In *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom is depicted as a lover of water as an element that is always a source of change. Among the qualities of water that "Bloom, waterlover, drawer of water, watercarrier" (*U* 17. 183-4), admires is "its slow erosions of peninsulas and islands, its persistent formation of homothetic islands, peninsulas and downwardtending promontories: its alluvial deposits ..." (*U* 17.198-200). This passage alludes to the constant formation of islands, thus locating them in time, seeing them as being subject to the forces around them, part of a bigger structure, at risk of disappearance as much as of appearance.

In the end, islands function much like individuals, languages, nations, and indeed textual bodies and works of art in Joyce, not in a state of splendid isolation but in a necessary condition of

connection. For all the claims made as to their being singular and separate, they are shown to be intimately and inevitably joined.

Joyce's Italian writings might seem like dislocated islands of text in the Joyce canon but reveal themselves to be thematically and technically connected and in tune with all of the other writings that would follow them. The following passage from *Finnegans Wake* seems to illustrate how Ireland never could remain impermeable to the outside world but was invaded by foreign colonial powers, conquered, inhabited, infiltrated. And far more banally it was routinely part of the world's trading nexus, importing cargoes from throughout the world.

They came to our island from triangular Toucheaterre beyond the wet prairie rared up in the midst of the cargon of prohibitive pomefructs but along landed Paddy Wippingham and the his garbagecans cotched the creeps of them pricker than our whosethere outofman could quick up her whats thats. Somedivide and sumthelot but the tally turns round the same balifuson. Racketeers and bottloggers (*FW* 19.13-19).

Isolation of the artist or of the nation, however much it be desired, is simply not possible. The great Revival text of isolation, Yeats's "Lake Isle of Innisfree" with its pastoral myth of a secluded and self-contained island-life is, in Joyce's writings (as in Yeats's, to be fair), shown to be a mirage. Connectivity is inevitable. Similarly, the "islands" that are Joyce's individual works of fiction can be seen, on closer

**Spostato in su [1]:** Joyce's writings seem to confirm John Donne's affirmation that "No man is an island, / Entire of itself" but equally that no language and no nation (and, indeed, no work of fiction) is "entire of itself". This is an idea he begins to set out in his Italian writings but one which he would only fully illustrate in his fiction. In a very real sense, his early Italian journalism, much of it clearly gleaned from other sources, is, in its camouflaged intertextuality, remarkably at one with the compositional methods of borrowing, cutting and pasting, allusion, that became ever more marked over the arc of his long writing career.

inspection, to be interconnected, minutely and intricately, not only with each other but also with the neighboring literatures (and languages) from (at the very least), "all the ends of Europe" (U 18.1589) from which they derive and which they seamlessly spin into something new.

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<sup>1</sup>Derek Gladwin, "Joyce the Travel Writer: Space, Place and the Environment in James Joyce's Nonfiction," in *Eco-Joyce: The Environmental Imagination of James Joyce*, ed. Robert Joseph Brazeau and Derek Gladwin, Cork: Cork University Press, 2014, 176-194, (176).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in entry for 6 April 1907 in Stanislaus Joyce, *Triestine Book of Days*, an unpublished diary. A copy of this document is held at the McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa.

<sup>3</sup>George Moore, *Hail and Farewell*, ed. Richard Cave, Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1976, 75.

<sup>4</sup>Gladwin, "Joyce the Travel Writer", 187.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Royle, 'From marginality to resurgence: the case of the Irish Islands', *Shima*, 2008, Vol. 2.2, 45.

<sup>6</sup> Michael MacDonagh, 'Life in Achill and Aran', *Westminster Review*, 1890, 134.2, 166.

<sup>7</sup>W. B. Yeats, *The Poems*, ed. Daniel Albright, rev. edn, London: J. M. Dent, 1994, 62.

<sup>8</sup>W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, ed. William H. O'Donnell et al., New York: Scribner, 1999, 63-64.

<sup>9</sup>Yeats, *Poems*, 182.

<sup>10</sup>Yeats, *Poems*, 294.

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<sup>11</sup> Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations*, London: Faber & Faber, 1980, 135.

<sup>12</sup> Heaney, *Preoccupations*, 135.

<sup>13</sup> Heaney, "A Tale of Two Islands: Reflections on the Irish Literary Revival", in P.J. Drury, ed. *Irish Studies*, I, Cambridge University Press, 1980, 1-20, (9-10).

<sup>14</sup> Stanislaus Joyce, *Book of Days*, 5 May 1907.

<sup>15</sup> Stanislaus Joyce, *Book of Days*, 28 April 1907

<sup>16</sup> Stanislaus Joyce, *Book of Days*, 28 April 1907.

<sup>17</sup> Oliver J Burke, *The South Isles of Aran*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1887, 2.

<sup>18</sup> For an exhaustive guide to literary treatments of the island of O'Brazil see Barbara Freitag, *Hy Brasil: The Metamorphosis of an Island: From Cartographic Error to Celtic Elysium* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Oliver J Burke, *The South Isles of Aran*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1887, 62-3.

<sup>20</sup> Griffin cited in Burke, *The South Isles*, 64.

<sup>21</sup> Burke, *The South Isles*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> Joyce's interest in O'Brazil and in Saint Brendan would later resurface in *Finnegans Wake* where he would also compare Brendan with Christopher Columbus as he also does in "Scribbledehobble" [VI.A.301]).

<sup>23</sup> Burke, *The South Isles*, 23)

<sup>24</sup> Very Rev. John Canon O'Hanlon, *Lives of the Irish Saints Compiled from Manuscript and other Sources, With the Commemorations and Festivals of Holy Persons noted in Calendars, Martyrologies, and*

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Various Works, Domestic or Foreign, relating to The Ancient Church History of Ireland, Dublin: James Duffy and Sons, 1887 Vol.1 p222-3.).

<sup>25</sup> Sarah Atkinson, *Saint Fursey's Life and Visions and other essays*. Dublin: M.H. Gill & Son, Ltd., 1907, 280.

<sup>26</sup> Palgrave, quoted in Atkinson, *Saint Fursey's Life*, 241.

<sup>27</sup> Palgrave, quoted in Atkinson, *Saint Fursey's Life*, 263.

<sup>28</sup> Atkinson, *Saint Fursey's Life*, 224.

<sup>29</sup> For more on this subject see John McCourt, "Joyce's Well of the Saints", *Joyce Studies Annual*, 2007, 109-133.

<sup>30</sup> Burke, *The South Isles*, 97)

<sup>31</sup> Marjorie Howes, "'Goodbye Ireland I'm going to Gort': Geography, Scale, and Narrating the Nation," in *Semicolonial Joyce*, ed. Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 68.

<sup>32</sup> Weston St. John Joyce, *The Neighbourhood of Dublin, its Topography, Antiquities and Historical Associations*. With an introduction by P.W. Joyce Dublin: M.H. Gill & Son, 1921 [1912]], 244.

<sup>33</sup> St. John Joyce, *The Neighbourhood of Dublin*, 244.

<sup>34</sup> St. John Joyce, *The Neighbourhood of Dublin*, 245.