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James Joyce and the Middlebrow

Wim Van Mierlo

If we read all of the best English prose, we may know how English prose has developed; but we shall find it very difficult to make any generalisations about it.

— T. S. Eliot, “Contemporary English Prose” (1923).¹

James Joyce was a keen reader, catholic in his tastes. As a young man in Trieste, he needed “to ease his intellectual heart by occasional visits to a theatre or a bookshop” (*Letters II*, 94), even when circumstances left him with little spare cash. The art he liked was predominantly traditional in kind. The walls of his Paris flat were graced, not with Picasso or Braque, but a reproduction of *View of Delft* by Vermeer (*JJII* 592). When the painter Patrick Tuohy admonished him to sit still when painting his portrait so he could capture his soul, Joyce retorted that he should not bother about his soul, but rather make sure that he got his tie right (*JJII* 565-66). In music too he preferred the inoffensive: traditional Irish ballads or Elizabethan lyrical songs.² These facts tell us something, I think, about Joyce’s predilection for a kind of decent, realistic, inoffensive art. The same goes for books.

In this essay, I plan to look at what sort of books Joyce was reading. I confine myself however to the broad outlines of English *belles-lettres*, using the books that were present in his Trieste and Paris libraries and the authors casually mentioned in notebooks or letters.³ Notwithstanding the fact that Joyce did not explicitly express

¹ T. S. Eliot, “Contemporary English Prose: A Discussion of the Development of English Prose from Hobbes and Sir Thomas Browne to Joyce and D. H. Lawrence” [1923], in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*. Vol. 2: The Perfect Critic, 1919-1926. Ed. Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 448.

² When invited, with Sylvia Beach, Adrienne Monnier, and Elliot Paul, to a private recital of George Antheil’s *Ballet mécanique* on 16 September 1925 at the Maison Pleyel, Joyce had liked the second part because it sounded like Mozart; as Bravig Imbs recalled, Antheil’s music in this part showed a certain “sweetness”: “without restraining the impetuosity of the first rapture, the music became richer, less strident and there was a succession of passages, poignant and all but lyrical”. Bravig Imbs, *Confessions of Another Young Man* (New York: The Henkle-Yewdale House, 1936), 57; see *JJII* 557.

³ For Joyce’s extant libraries, see the standard sources, *Library* and Thomas E. Connolly, *The Personal Library of James Joyce: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Buffalo, NY: University of Buffalo, 1955); rev. ed. in Connolly, *James Joyce’s Books, Portraits, James Joyce’s Books, Portraits, Manuscripts, Notebooks, Typescripts, Page Proofs: Together with Critical Essays about Some of his Works* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), as

his views on what he read, I want to speculate on what drew him to these books. As such, I am not concerned with tracing his reading back to his writing; the point in fact is to look at those books that did not leave a trace at all. To make this essay about Joyce's taste in literature, I have avoided sources almost completely. Yet the link between his reading and his writing remains important, for an examination of Joyce's tastes must teach us something about Joyce's mind and his work.

As a young man in Dublin, Stanislaus tells us, Joyce was a voracious reader.⁴ Although his consumption of *belles-lettres* may have slowed down somewhat in later life, his reading habits never substantially changed: he read widely and eclectically. Despite this, I cannot claim to see any specific strategy in his book collecting habits. What is certain is that he did not always acquire books with a view of using them for his writing. Like most of us, he purchased books on impulse simply because they spoke to him in one way or another.⁵ Owing to this eclecticism, my narrative does not seek out specific connections between the writers I deal with. Indeed, it is difficult to know whether Joyce's reading of, say, George Meredith as a student in Dublin and Paris had any bearing at all on his reading of Liam O'Flaherty in later life. In covering a wide sample of writers from different stages in Joyce's life, however, one does get a sense that the books he singled out for attention answered to a need for human affirmation that may have been, albeit not directly, inspirational for his own writing. The writers we encounter in his libraries and notebooks, many of whom enjoyed wide popularity, produced for the most part unchallenging, realistic prose; the sort of writing that can be classed as middlebrow.

Middlebrow Literature

As a mode of writing, middlebrow literature is by definition hybrid. The term 'middlebrow' came into use some time in the early decades of the twentieth century by virtue of what it is not: neither lowbrow or popular writing – writing that has no literary pretence at all, such as detective novels or mysteries – nor highbrow writing – writing that is cultured and difficult, enjoyed only by small audiences. Middlebrow writing "laid claim to respectable status" but did not necessarily set out – or achieve – "any lasting literary value".⁶

well as the cumulative "Legacy Library: James Joyce" on LibraryThing, accessed 7 August 2015, www.librarything.com/profile/JamesJoyceLibrary. Where more information is available, I cite the online catalogue of the holding repository.

⁴ Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper: James Joyce's Early Years*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking Press, 1958), 73, 79.

⁵ It is necessary to discount to some extent the books by Joyce's contemporaries from the extant libraries, for these were mostly presentation copies and thus were not acquired by choice.

⁶ Nicola Humble dates the emergence of the term middlebrow to the late 1920s, citing examples from the *Daily Express* and the *Observer* from May and July 1927;

The qualifications for what makes a work middlebrow are to all intents and purposes vague. Scholars therefore find it difficult to agree as to whether one or another author is middlebrow or not, which makes it all very confusing indeed.⁷ Since the boundaries between the brows are “far from impermeable”, defining what is low- or highbrow is just as difficult.⁸ To say that a good detective novel by Agatha Christie or P. D. James has no literary aspirations whatsoever is just as untrue as to say that D. H. Lawrence, E. M. Forster or Ford Madox Ford exist completely outside of traditional novelistic conventions. A writer like Forster for example, who was initially heralded as highbrow, became to later readers “irredeemably middlebrow” as his reputation and popularity grew.⁹ In this respect, Kate Macdonald and Christopher Singer speak of “an interdependent antagonism” between middle- and highbrow in particular, the antagonism resulting from the tension between middlebrow’s aspirations to be serious and highbrow’s dismissal of the other as pandering to popular taste.¹⁰ Rather than displaying formal, hard-and-fast characteristics, the most one can say about writers ranked as middlebrow is that they are so by association with middleclass taste. The brows are, as Nicola Humble writes, not formal generic categories but “cultural constructs”.¹¹ Despite efforts by scholars of the middlebrow to identify its special characteristics, the only workable criterion is the sociology of the reader: the reception of the work determines the brow. The concept of the middlebrow makes most sense in terms of the sociology of the book when we look at it in terms of when and how these works were published. Irrespective of the author’s self-image and ambitions and of later reputations, the market has a levelling effect on writers as they vie to appeal to “readers’ intangible wants”.¹²

As a business, literary publishing is about balancing the supplying of good literature to the reading public and turning a (hopefully decent) profit. The publisher carries the sole risk, and with the up-front cost per book being reasonably high,

Kate Macdonald and Christopher Singer give 1923 as a precise date on the basis of a citation given in the *OED*. Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 10; Kate Macdonald and Christopher Singer, “Introduction: Transitions and Cultural Formations” in *Transitions in Middlebrow Writing, 1880-1930*, ed. Macdonald and Singer (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 5. Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1969* (Providence, RI; Oxford: Berg, 1993), 11.

⁷ Bracco, *Merchants of Hope*, 7.

⁸ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 24.

⁹ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 20.

¹⁰ Macdonald and Singer, “Introduction”, 30.

¹¹ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 28.

¹² Simon Frost, “Public Gains and Literary Goods: A Coeval Tale of Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling, and Francis Marian Crawford”, in *Transitions in Middlebrow Writing, 1880-1930*, 40. See also 53 and Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 10, 13.

literary publishers have tended to act conservatively. Wanting good quality writing that also sells, they eschew popular and sensational writing, and of course anything mildly pornographic, while also shunning anything too experimental or demanding. Catherine Turner has amply demonstrated how a new group of publishers who set up business in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century – B. W. Huebsch, Alfred Knopf, Boni & Liveright – with the ambition of building a modern, highbrow list of authors, limited themselves to publishing only the more mainstream works by the likes of Sherwood Anderson and Gertrude Stein.¹³ Essentially they were selling highbrow literature to a middlebrow audience, which meant that they had to devise innovative and carefully considered advertising strategies to appeal to the discerning reader without causing offence.¹⁴

In my analysis of Joyce's reading I am extending the conception of middlebrow to the period before 1920, and even before 1880. My justification for this is that the middlebrow is explicitly positioned as continuing the tradition of the eighteenth-century novel.¹⁵ Often mentioned are the affinities between the middlebrow and the writing of Jane Austen, Charlotte M. Yonge, and the Brontës in terms of their themes and social concerns.¹⁶ Furthermore, there was already an awareness that the middlebrow novel had a long genealogy. In 1928 Henry-D. Davray, the French scholar of English literature and occasional correspondent of Joyce, advocated in his "Lettres anglaises" for the *Mercure de France* that there was ample space for a type of novel that had something to say about present-day issues: if the young novelists of the day (those under forty) had so far failed to attain "une position de premier plan", then this was due to the fact that they were not offering readers what they wanted; the novel of ideas, he contended, constitutes the true novelistic tradition, which ran from Richardson and Fielding all the way to George Meredith and Thomas Hardy, and which served to explain and order the chaos of the world through what they had to say.¹⁷ The example he gave of a novelist who

¹³ See Catherine Turner, *Marketing Modernism between the Two World Wars* (Amherst; Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

¹⁴ An example of this is the advertisement for *Ulysses* that Bennett Cerf of Random House placed in *The Saturday Review of Literature* on 10 February 1934 under the heading "How to Enjoy James Joyce's Great Novel *Ulysses*". The advert is discussed and reproduced in Turner, *Marketing Modernism*, 206.

¹⁵ The 1880 date is suggested by the collection edited by Macdonald and Singer, *Transitions in Middlebrow Writing, 1880-1930*, to draw attention to the gradual development of the middlebrow out of related concerns with quality and taste at the end of the previous century. Macdonald and Singer, "Introduction", 1-3.

¹⁶ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 11, 14.

¹⁷ Henry-D. Davray, "Lettres anglaises", *Mercure de France*, 15 October 1928, 473-75. Davray's article is discussed in Birgit Van Puymbroeck, "Cross-Channel Mediations: Henry-D. Davray and British Popular Fiction in the *Mercure de France*", in *Transitions in Middlebrow Writing, 1880-1930*, 183-202.

had something to say was H. G. Wells, a writer of whom Joyce had four titles in his Trieste Library (*Library*, 254-57).

The Scrupulous Meanness of the Middlebrow

According to Simon Frost, the ingredients that made middlebrow writing attractive to the reading public was its insightful, exciting, and exotic nature; the publishers of middlebrow literature “sold nothing less than a philosophy of life”.¹⁸ Two novelists from the mid to late nineteenth century who were important to Joyce and who fit this description are Meredith and George Moore. Meredith and Moore are indicative of Joyce’s appreciation of a novelistic tradition that stays within the bounds of realism and the well-told story; their writing offers an anatomising treatment of character and psychological motivation. But above all they excel in the novel of ideas.

Moore and Meredith probably would have been considered middlebrow if they had not fallen foul of convention. Meredith’s problem was that he was considered too difficult, finding “himself more or less permanently cut off from the general reading public”.¹⁹ He consistently suffered poor sales and made bitter statements about his work being neglected, which in the end led him to scorn his readers. Moore noted he was “untainted with commercialism”.²⁰ But J. M. Robertson (in *The Yellow Book* of all places) accused him of burying himself in elitism:

The prompt appreciation of the few good readers did not teach him to look on the reading-public as what it is, a loose mass of ever-varying units in which even the dullards have no solidarity; he rather entrenched himself in the Carlylean and Browningsque manner, personifying the multitude as one lumpish hostile unity.²¹

Even Joyce, although generally appreciative of Meredith, criticised the author for his “exhaustive elaborations” (OCPW 46). Yet the middlebrow does not always make concessions to the general reading public.²² Nor is middle class taste homogeneous, always safe and decent, not too difficult and not too trashy. Challenging writing, even writing that flirts with indecency, is not automatically anathema. Hence, by the mid 1890s, Meredith’s reputation was undergoing something of a rehabilitation when his publisher, Constable & Co., repackaged his work for a new audience.²³

¹⁸ Frost, “Public Gains and Literary Goods”, 40.

¹⁹ L. T. Hergenhan, “The Reception of George Meredith’s Early Novels”, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 19.3 (December 1964): 214.

²⁰ George Moore, *The Confessions of a Young Man* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey & Co., 1888), 264.

²¹ Robertson quoted in Ioan M. Williams, *George Meredith: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 455.

²² Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 26.

²³ See Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 28-29, on middlebrow

Moore, on the other hand, whom Joyce at one time called a “traditionalist”,²⁴ was enamoured with Bohemia. Showing Zola’s influence in his early work, he flaunted descriptions of sexual behaviour that led to *A Modern Lover* (1883), *A Mummer’s Wife* (1884/85), and *A Drama in Muslin* (1886) being banned by Mudie’s Circulating Library. Moore retorted with an article in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, “A New Censorship of Literature” (1884), and a pamphlet, *Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals* (1885), attacking Mudie’s prudery and hypocrisy and accusing him of using his virtual monopoly over the book trade to curtail the development of a modern literary tradition.²⁵

Joyce’s early opinion of Moore in “The Day of the Rabblement”, calling him a writer “not [...] of much originality” (OCPW 51), is interesting in comparison to his later admiration. In fact, his dismissal of Moore in that essay shows how uninformed he was about his work and about the Irish Literary Theatre.²⁶ Situating Moore within the literary tradition, Joyce writes:

Mr Moore, however, has wonderful mimetic ability, and some years ago his books might have entitled him to the place of honour among English novelists. But though *Vain Fortune* (perhaps one should add some of *Esther Waters*) is fine, original work. Mr Moore is really struggling in the backwash of that tide which has advanced from Flaubert through Jakobsen to D’aununzio [*sic*]: for two entire eras lie between Madame Bovary and *Il Fuoco*. It is plain from *Celebrates* [*sic*] and the latter novels that Mr Moore is beginning to draw upon his literary account, and the quest of a new impulse may explain his recent startling conversion. Converts are in the movement now, and Mr Moore and his island have been fitly admired. But however frankly Mr Moore may misquote Pater and Turgeuieff [*sic*] to defend himself, his new impulse has no kind of relation to the future of art. (OCPW 51)

The reference to Moore’s conversion is an ironic comment on his recent return to Ireland in support of the Revival. Insofar as Joyce was lambasting the decision of the Irish Literary Theatre Company not to stage European plays, Joyce made Moore guilty by association: if the Irish Literary Theatre was not sufficiently *avant-garde*, then neither was Moore. Joyce’s use of the present tense (“Mr Moore is really struggling in the backwash”) is telling, for the accusation that Moore was still

commodification and “its endless flexibility in the face of the changing demands of the market”, and Macdonald and Singer, “Introduction”, 3, 5.

²⁴ Arthur Power, *Conversations with James Joyce*, ed. Clive Hart (London: Millington, 1974), 59.

²⁵ Adrian Frazier, *George Moore, 1852-1933* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000), 93-94, 114-15, 127-28.

²⁶ I have made the point elsewhere that Joyce’s tirade against the ILT was somewhat misguided. See Wim Van Mierlo, “‘I have met you too late’: James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, and the Making of *Chamber Music*”, *South Carolina Review* 43.1 Writing Modern Ireland, ed. Catherine Paul (Fall 2010): 50-73.

adhering to his naturalist forebears shows that Joyce was not completely familiar with Moore's development as a writer.

It is not apparent how much of Moore he had read, since he not only fails to mention Moore's first six books (*A Modern Lover* [1883], *A Mummer's Wife* [1884/5], *A Drama in Muslin* [1886], *A Mere Accident* [1887], *Spring Days* [1888] and *Mike Fletcher* [1889]), but neither does he mention the more recent *Evelyn Innes* (1898) or *Sister Teresa*, published on or around 30 June 1901.²⁷ Nor does he mention *Diarmuid and Grania*, co-written by Moore and W. B. Yeats. Although the play opened on 21 October 1901 at the Gaiety Theatre exactly a week after Joyce had composed his obstreperous pamphlet, Moore had been vocal about his aspirations to write an Irish Wagnerian tragedy.²⁸ Even more crucial is the mentioning of the misquotations from Turgenev and Walter Pater, which obfuscates the fact that Moore had already distanced himself from his earlier fascination with French naturalism. He had done so in the only two texts prior to 1901 in which Moore had written about the Russian and English writer – an article on “Turgunueff” commissioned by the *Fortnightly Review* (February 1888, reprinted in *Impressions and Opinions* [1891]) and the *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888). In the *Confessions*, Moore turns his back on Gautier, Zola, Flaubert, and Goncourt and, putting Balzac in their stead, he disowned the “shoaling waters of new aestheticism, the putrid mud of naturalism, and the faint and sickly surf of the symbolists”, because he had come to accept that “it is a vain and fruitless task to narrate any fact unless it has been tempered and purified in thought and stamped by thought with a specific value”.²⁹ The application of thought, filtering life's observations through feeling and intellect, is what in Moore's middle career creates novelistic truth.

I wonder if Joyce had thought of eating his words when he later came across *Evelyn Innes*, *Sister Teresa* and, especially, *The Untilled Field* (1903). Initiating Moore's post-naturalist period, *Evelyn Innes* (a novel about an opera singer's confrontation with religious feeling) and *Sister Teresa* (a sequel in which Evelyn suffers from doubt and joins a convent), explore the complex personality of the artist as she leaves her home to train with her lover in Paris to become the ideal interpreter of Wagner's

²⁷ The Trieste Library has two copies of *Evelyn Innes* that came into Joyce's possession after 1901. The first is the original English edition published by T. Fisher Unwin in 1898, which Joyce acquired second hand; it has three previous ownership inscriptions by “WH [?]”, “Kirshan | June, 1901”, and “Jos. G. [?] Piper”, none of whom can be identified. The second is the second and final volume of the Tauchnitz copyright edition published in Leipzig in 1898 and inscribed “M. Slataper”, presumably the Triestine writer Scipio Slataper (*Library*, 169-70).

²⁸ In September the *Freeman's Journal* had attacked him for inviting an English composer, Edward Elgar, to write music for the play; Moore's defence was that Elgar was a Wagnerian. Frazier, *George Moore*, 303.

²⁹ Moore, *The Confessions of a Young Man*, 127; Moore, *Impressions and Opinions* (London: David Nutt, 1891), 68; see also Frazier, *George Moore*, 162-63.

female characters. In Trieste, however, Joyce owned the revised version of *Sister Teresa* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1909 [*Library*, 172]) in which Evelyn at the end of the story flees the convent to undertake social work.

The Untilled Field in particular must have struck a chord. In its treatment of life in contemporary rural Ireland, the stories in their scrupulous meanness are very similar to Joyce's own agenda in his depiction of urban Dublin. Moore described his stories thus in a letter to Virginia Crawford from 1902:

I think I have painted the portrait of my country. You will like some of the stories and you are wide-minded enough, fervid Catholic as you are, to understand the idea which animates the book. It is this, that Catholicism and nationhood are incompatible. [...] My feeling is that people have to make their own religion as they have to make their arts and their parishes, and that they seek must find their own salvation; and the salvation mongers are of not much avail.³⁰

Like Joyce who held up his "nicely polished looking-glass" (*Letters I*, 64) to his countrymen, Moore saw his collection as part of "a new plan for the regeneration of the Irish race", as he put it in *Hail and Farewell*.³¹ More explicitly so than *Dubliners*, this was a revivalist project that nonetheless went against the conservative strain in the Irish movement.

Despite the widespread acceptance among critics that Joyce was influenced by *The Untilled Field*, we know he read it only after arriving in Pola in November 1904 (*Letters II*, 71) when the first couple of stories for *Dubliners* had already been completed; the edition he possessed was the 1903 Tauchnitz which would not have been available to him prior to leaving Dublin.³² Still, by the time he came to define his "style of scrupulous meanness" in 5 May 1906 (*Letters II*, 134) sufficient time had lapsed for him to have absorbed Moore. What must have struck Joyce was Moore's brutal depiction of "the obedience of these people to their priest" and his frank treatment of exile and emigration.³³ It may be why he acquired in his Trieste days no less than nine books by Moore, showing a sustained interest in that writer's work: *The Lake* (1905), *Memoirs of my Dead Life* (1906), *Sister Teresa* (1909), *Spring Days* (1912), the three volumes of *Hail and Farewell!* (1911, 1912, 1914), *A Drama in Muslin* (1915), and *Lewis Seymour and Some Women* (1917) (*Library*, 169-173).³⁴ Most of these titles he

³⁰ Moore, *George Moore on Parnassus: Letters (1900-1933) to Secretaries, Publishers, Printers, Agents, Literati, Friends, and Acquaintances*, ed. Helmut E. Gerber and O. M. Brack, Jr (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses. 1988), 105.

³¹ Moore, *Hail and Farewell!* 3 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1911, 1912, 1914), II, 147.

³² Bernhard Tauchnitz cornered the traveller and expat market by publishing cheap, paper-covered editions of English language titles; so as not to interfere with home markets, the books were not to be imported into Britain, the British Empire or the US.

³³ Moore, *The Untilled Field* (Leipzig: B. Tauchnitz, 1903), 48.

³⁴ There are only three of Moore's works published during this period that Joyce

had again in Tauchnitz editions. Of *Sister Teresa* however and *A Drama in Muslin* he had the English editions published by T. Fisher Unwin and Heinemann, respectively; the first he may have picked up during his trip back to Ireland in the autumn of 1909; the second he must have ordered especially from England. There was no Tauchnitz edition of *A Drama in Muslin*.

The period in which Joyce became fascinated with Moore is also the period in which Moore himself enjoyed a wider readership. Like Meredith, Moore had not been immune to “scorning all facile success”, but while his spat with Mudie’s had brought him “to the notice of those who are genuinely interested in art and new artistic developments”, his work appeared with mainstream publishers.³⁵ Leaving T. Fisher Unwin in 1905 for Heinemann was a decidedly good move.³⁶ Unlike the more conventional Fisher Unwin, Heinemann was not averse to accepting titles that other firms would not touch.³⁷ In the end, Heinemann could command better access to the middlebrow readership than any of Moore’s previous publishers.

While Joyce remained interested in Moore, meeting him in London in September 1929 and paying his respects on the author’s death in 1933, his fascination with George Meredith was more specific and short-lived. Primarily it was *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel: A History of Father and Son* (1859; revised 1878) that attracted him. An unconventional Bildungsroman, the novel is the portrait of Richard, a boy with aspirations to be a poet, who grows up subjected to “the System”, a strict, practical moral philosophy for the education of young men imposed by his father, Sir Austin Feverel.³⁸ The System demands complete honesty, uprightness, and denial of frivolous emotion in order to bring long-term “beneficial action”.³⁹ Sir Austin is rigorous in its application (forcing Richard, for instance, to burn his poetry when he is yet of a tender age) which leaves the youth “pollarded with despotism”.⁴⁰

did not obtain: the play *The Apostle* (1906), *Elizabeth Cooper* (1911), and *The Brook Kerith* (1916). Of the last, Moore would present him with a copy of the 1927 Heinemann edition (now in the Paris library), which he inscribed: “To James Joyce, whose great book ‘Ulysses’ I am reading in French with much admiration. September 16th 1929. George Moore”. Connolly, *James Joyce’s Books*, 41.

³⁵ Moore, *The Confessions of a Young Man*, iv.

³⁶ Frazier, *George Moore*, 357.

³⁷ See q.v. ‘William Heinemann’ in the ODNB.

³⁸ What edition of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* Joyce read is not known. Originally published by Chapman and Hall in three volumes, the novel was reprinted in London by Constable & Co. in 1896 as part of the “Edition de Luxe” *The Works of George Meredith*, followed in 1897 by *The New Popular Edition of George Meredith’s Works*, and then as a cheap edition in one volume by George Newnes in 1899 and Constable in 1900, 1901, 1902, with other reprints appearing regularly until 1922.

³⁹ George Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel: A History of a Father and Son*. Rev. ed. (Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co., 1900), 72.

⁴⁰ Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, 167, 184.

Philosophically, the System is however far from perfect, and riddled with vagaries and paradoxes about self-determination:

Man is a self-acting machine. He cannot cease to be a machine; but, though self-acting, he may lose the powers of self-guidance, and in a wrong course his very vitalities hurry him to perdition.⁴¹

Both denying and requiring an independent will, the System demands not obedience but responsibility, in which precept lies its very weakness. Intended to forestall sentimentality, the System opens itself up to a classic act of Romantic rebellion: after Sir Austin had demanded he end the relationship, Richard elopes with Lucy, his beloved.

Initially, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* was slated for success. Mudie's Circulating Library had ordered 300 copies, thereby ensuring that Meredith's novel would enter the middle-class canon, but when Mudie received complaints about the novel's sexual frankness he withdrew it from circulation: "I fear I have offended Mudie and the British Matron", Meredith wrote in a letter of 3 October 1859.⁴² The first reviewers were not entirely positive either, noting the sexual themes, its morbidity, the convoluted and confused ideas, and questionable ethics.⁴³ As a result Chapman and Hall did not reprint *The Ordeal* for nearly 30 years, damning Meredith's first book to obscurity and leaving his reputation pretty much in tatters.

While Joyce was yet to experience his own confrontation, though in entirely different circumstances, with the "British Matron" over *Dubliners*, his encounter with Meredith happened through Walter Jerrold's *George Meredith: An Essay towards Appreciation*, which Joyce reviewed for the *Daily Express* on 11 December 1902, a book that he did not find "remarkable" (OCPW 62). The review shows Joyce was familiar with Meredith's writings, but apart from *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, alluded to in *Ulysses*, it is not clear what other works Joyce had read.⁴⁴ Calling Meredith "a true man of letters", Joyce finds fault with him for being neither a lyric nor an epic artist, yet he praises his novels "as philosophical essays"; they are the work of "a philosopher at work with much cheerfulness upon a very stubborn problem" (OCPW 62). Possibly alluding to Sir Austin's System, this last remark is

⁴¹ Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, 134.

⁴² Meredith, *The Letters of George Meredith*, ed. C. L. Cline (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 39, 42-43.

⁴³ See, for example, Williams, *George Meredith*, 61-62, 67, 71, 74.

⁴⁴ Ellmann states that Joyce "particularly enjoyed" *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* and *The Tragic Comedians* (1891) (JJII 53, 285n). Stanislaus Joyce recalls a discussion with his brother, probably during his Belvedere or University College days, about the aphorism from *The Ordeal* that Joyce later used (slightly misquoted) in *Ulysses*: "Sentimentalists [...] are they who seek to enjoy without incurring the Immense Debtorship for a thing done". Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, 178. See Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper*, 80; U 9.550-51.

poignant, pointing as it does to his own later efforts at doggedly exposing the faults of Dublin society. The “stubborn problem” is that of criticising – seeking to eradicate – a stagnant world with great precision of the pen. Joyce’s scrupulous meanness has its parallel in what Jerrold called Meredith’s limning of society in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*.⁴⁵

The differences between Meredith and Moore also become apparent in that Meredith’s realism did not serve him to *épater le bourgeois* as was the case with Moore. The characters in Moore’s novels exist at the permeable boundary where the respectable ever so easily crosses over into the decadent. Meredith’s intent by comparison is much more cynical, if not satirical. *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* does not play on hypocrisy lurking behind respectability, but offers a pertinacious investigation of modern morality.

By the time Joyce encountered him, Meredith had developed a reputation for being very much a writer’s writer. In fact, C. P. Curran speaks of him as a beacon for the young men with whom Joyce associated in Ireland: “Meredith stood to us in those days as the wholly novel example of the intellectual novelist into whose introspective and riddling storytelling one had to mine for treasure”.⁴⁶ Curran was no doubt right when he saw something of Meredith in *Stephen Hero*. Very likely he recognized an aesthetic egoism reminiscent of Meredith as well as certain narrative techniques that alternate precise, keenly-observed descriptions with lyrical moments.⁴⁷ Ironically, these men experienced Meredith only when his works had been standardised for consumption by the middle classes, first through a De Luxe edition of the *Collected Works* (1896), numbered and signed by the author’s son William and printed on watermarked paper bearing the author’s initials, then through a cheaper ‘Popular Edition’ of the collected works (1897), and finally in a standard ‘Library’ edition.⁴⁸

Eighteenth-Century Middlebrow Moralities

Moore and Meredith were relevant to Joyce as creators of modern prose, and as such they occupy a place in his personal pantheon alongside D’Annunzio, Flaubert, Jens Peter Jakobsen, and Tolstoy. Yet ultimately Moore and Meredith did not exist

⁴⁵ Walter Jerrold, *George Meredith: An Essay Towards Appreciation* (London: Greening & Co., 1902), 105.

⁴⁶ C. P. Curran, *James Joyce Remembered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 52.

⁴⁷ Curran, *James Joyce Remembered*, 52. See also Brian G. Caraher, “A Question of Genre: Generic Experimentation, Self-Composition, and the Problem of Egoism in *Ulysses*”, *ELH* 54.1 (Spring 1987): 187-88, 212.

⁴⁸ Maura Ives, “A Bibliographical Approach to Victorian Publishing”, in *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, ed. John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 182-83, 288.

outside of middleclass taste, a taste in part created by their publishers. But what about those authors who by no stretch of the imagination did for the novel what Moore and Meredith did? What about those authors moreover who appear to search political, moral or aesthetic truth? Despite what critics see as Joyce's strategy of decentring in his work, he was attracted by the traditional aesthetics and values in the English literary tradition of the eighteenth century in particular.⁴⁹

In the Subject Notebook from late 1917, under the heading "Books" Joyce noted down a long list of authors and their works that confirms just this. The list, which does not only cover *belles-lettres*, includes the following:

Headlong Hall and *Nightmare Abbey*, by Thomas Love Peacock
Annals of the Parish, or, The Chronicle of Dalmailing; during the ministry of the Rev. Micah Balwhidder, written by himself, by John Galt
Frankenstein, by Mary Shelley
Marriage: A Novel in Three Volumes, by Susan Ferrier
Discipline: A Novel, by Mary Brunton
Self-Control: A Novel, by Mary Brunton
View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages, by Henry Hallam
The Borough, by George Crabbe
The Fudge Family in Paris, by Thomas Moore
Evelina; or, the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World, by Fanny Burney
Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress, by Fanny Burney
A Letter from E.B. to a Noble Lord, by Edmund Burke
Tristram Shandy, by Laurence Sterne.⁵⁰

This list continues with two works by Berkeley, Pope's *Essays on Criticism*, and a number of mediaeval and early modern authors like Langland, Mandeville, Thomas Southern, William Wycherly, John Donne, Richard Crashaw, Philip Sidney, and others.⁵¹

To determine a single purpose behind the list is, especially when considered against the variety of subjects covered, probably impossible. Nonetheless, given that the Subject Notebook was intended as a preparatory document for the composition of *Ulysses* at a significant moment in its development when Joyce gave his novel a new impetus and direction while he was preparing for serialisation in *The Egoist* and *The Little Review*, he must have had a specific plan in mind. This plan

⁴⁹ This section thus answers Patrick Parrinder's query about the eighteenth century remaining elusive in Joyce. See Patrick Parrinder, "The English Literary Tradition", in *James Joyce in Context*, ed. John McCourt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 213.

⁵⁰ See NLI MS 36,639/3, [3r].

⁵¹ The full list and a discussion of it can be found in Wim Van Mierlo, "The Subject Notebook: A Nexus in the Composition History of *Ulysses* – A Preliminary Analysis", *Genetic Joyce Studies* 7 (Spring 2007), accessed 31 July 2015, www.geneticjoycestudies.org.

notwithstanding, even of the complete list few names have left any traces in the work or the archive.

These seem to be the common denominators behind the list: first, by today's standards, and with the exception of *Frankenstein*, most of the works listed are non-canonical; second, stylistically they all aim for a realistic portrayal of their social setting. The other thing they have in common is that the majority of them were published between 1810 and 1821, with only the last four published a few decades earlier in the late eighteenth century. Taken together, this would suggest a specific interest in the narrative of the Enlightenment and the Romantic period, and may indicate that the titles were taken from a single source.

Among the female novelists notably absent are Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth.⁵² The Scottish writers Ferrier and Brunton are often compared to Austen who was their contemporary; coming from the Celtic fringe, they furnish an additional interest for Joyce. In terms of their status, although they were popular in their own time, the reputation of all of these writers had waned by the end of the nineteenth century. In Joyce's time however they enjoyed something of a rehabilitation. Arnold Bennett recommended Ferrier's *Marriage* and Galt's *Annals of the Parish* in his canon-defining *Literary Taste: How to Form it* (1909) as well as George Crabbe.⁵³ Several of their books were being reprinted in cheap editions, in particular in J. M. Dent's popular, stylish and low-cost Everyman's Library whose aim was to print the best works in the English language.⁵⁴ Joyce, I would therefore suggest, was responding to a change in the literary tradition.

However, there is a broader precept as well that goes back to Joyce's treatment of Defoe. Undertaking his own rehabilitation of the father of the English

⁵² Joyce did have copies of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* in his Paris library. Connolly, *James Joyce's Books*, 12. A copy inscribed by Joyce of Edgeworth's *Stories of Ireland; Castle Rackrent; The Absentee* (1886) in Morley's Universal Library reprint series is now at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

⁵³ Arnold Bennett, *Literary Taste: How to Form it, with Detailed Instructions for Collecting a Complete Library of English Literature* (London: Frank Palmer, 1911), 99, 103.

⁵⁴ In 1906, J. M. Dent and Ernest Rhys planned an ambitious and essentially middlebrow publishing programme to issue a library of 1,000 classic and modern titles that would "appeal to every kind of reader: the worker, the student, the cultured man, the child, the man and the woman" so that "for a few shillings the reader may have a whole bookshelf of the immortals; for five pounds (which will procure him a hundred volumes) a man may be intellectually rich for life". The text appeared on the dust jacket of the first Everyman series (1906-11); see Jeffrey S. Anderson, *Collecting Everyman's Library* 2014, accessed 3 August 2015, www.everymanslibrarycollecting.com/jackets.html. Peacock's "*Headlong Hall*" and "*Nightmare Abbey*" appeared as number 327 in the series in 1908; Burney's *Evelina* as number 352 in 1909. Ferrier, Shelley, and Sterne were included later.

novel, he called him a writer “of much greater importance than is commonly supposed”, ranking him above Dickens (OCPW 184). In “Realism and Idealism in English Literature”, he subjects Defoe to a detailed stylistic analysis which proves insightful also for Joyce’s own aesthetics. He praises Defoe for his brutal, naked, unsentimental realism, appreciating Defoe’s obsession with detail. His characters – Robinson Crusoe in particular – classify, order, make lists in a manner that makes “the modern reader” grumble with tedium, but it is, Joyce contends, the “aim of the chronicler” to record. Its hyperrealistic cumulative effect – no doubt foreshadowing Joyce’s own accumulation of detail in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* – enhances the narrative’s emotional effect and helps in *The Storm* (1704) and *The Journey of the Plague Year* (1722), which Joyce gives as examples, to put into relief the enormity of the destruction (OCPW 169), even to give the narrative something “majestic” and “orchestral” (170). According to Joyce these hyperreal aspects set Defoe apart from the great French realistic tradition. French realism may be intense, but it has none of the visceral quality of Defoe, the “angry fervour of corruption”, the “lacerating yet soothing indignation and protest” that mark Defoe’s writings (OCPW 173). Two hundred years before Gorki and Dostoyevsky, Defoe introduced characters from the lowest strata of society, in whom – the women having at once the “indecent and self-restraint of beasts”, the men being “strong and silent like trees” – “English feminism and English imperialism are already lurking in these souls which have but recently emerged from the animal kingdom”. Casting Defoe as a former-day Ibsen, Joyce ultimately defines realism as inherently political: “Perhaps modern realism is a reaction” (OCPW 173).

This last statement may very well explain his fascination with Meredith and Moore as well as his own “conviction” that the writer “who dares to alter in the presentment, still more to deform, whatever he has seen and observed” is a “very bold man” indeed (*Letters II*, 134). Such realism represents, as he famously admonished Grant Richards, his style of scrupulous meanness in which fidelity and truthfulness go hand in hand.⁵⁵ No doubt the writers on Joyce’s list do not reveal the same aesthetic politics; most would, I guess, incline too much towards the sentimental, but they can nonetheless belong to that same tradition of observing and depicting the social conditions of the time. In Mary Brunton, Fanny Burney and Susan Ferrier it is the social life of young women, the exigencies of gender and the predicament of marriage that are depicted and to a greater or lesser degree treated satirically, though often with a didactic purpose.

George Crabbe and Thomas Moore’s *The Fudge Family in Paris* (1818) are exponents of the same realistic tradition, but one that is applied with a new degree of perfection to narrative poetry. Moore’s poem is a satire in epistolary verse on the social and political conditions in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars. Crabbe’s *The*

⁵⁵ Joyce takes Moore’s *The Untilled Field* to task because having a character look up the train times for the Bray to Dublin line, which operates a frequent service, is not a faithful depiction of life (*Letters II*, 71).

Borough (1810) is an account of life in an isolated fishing village written as a series of twenty-four poetic letters in heroic couplets. It was highly successful at the time of its appearance. With the name of the main character, Peter Grimes, now proverbially synonymous with the hard life of poverty, the poem's reputation rests on Crabbe's realistic, unsentimental treatment of working- and middle-class lives. When on 15 October 1903 Joyce reviewed *Crabbe*, a book of criticism by Alfred Ainger under the title "A Neglected Poet", he called Crabbe "an example of sane judgment and sober skill" whose depiction of the inhabitants of rural Suffolk are set down "with appreciation and fidelity" in a way reminiscent of the "occasional splendour" of the Dutch landscape painters from the seventeenth century (OCPW 90). Thomas Peacock's *Headlong Hall* (1816) and *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) are also long narrative poems. As pastiches on the gothic novel, their satire relies on the presence of realistic detail.

Peacock and the other poets show that realism and verisimilitude are not the same. Certain passages in Mary Brunton and Fanny Burney in particular sound rather hackneyed. Indeed Jane Austen complained about Brunton – whom as her more successful contemporary she was watching rather jealously – that her novels weren't always credible. *Self-Control* (1811) for example contains a scene in which Brunton's heroine, Laura Montreville, escapes from her libertine suitor, Colonel Hargrave, in a canoe down a river and across a waterfall in America, which Austen found rather improbable.⁵⁶ At the same time, what makes the unnatural credible in *Frankenstein* (1818) is just the right amount of realistic ingredients to make the whole believable. What seems to matter to Joyce, then, is not realism per se, as a movement or as a style, but as a way of ordering and interpreting the world. As an aesthetic economy, realism is a way for the writer not to lose touch with the world and with history; it is that which makes literature political. Ultimately, this is why even in *Finnegans Wake* Joyce attempted to put as much of the world into it as possible.⁵⁷ From *Ulysses* onwards – and this is one way of explaining Joyce's reading list and the Subject Notebook as a whole – Joyce's work becomes syncretic.

Middlebrow at the Wake

The working notes that Joyce compiled in preparation for *Finnegans Wake* provide ample evidence of his reading. Not only did he collect huge amounts of notes for later use, including some from belletristic works such as O. Henry's *The Four Million* (1916) and famously Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1864), but he also scattered names of writers and books that he was interested in but did not use. Without

⁵⁶ Katie Halsey, *Jane Austen and her Readers, 1786-1945* (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 10.

⁵⁷ Geert Lernout, "The *Finnegans Wake* Notebooks and Radical Philology", in *Probes: Genetic Studies in Joyce*, ed. David Hayman and Sam Slote (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995), 45.

attempting a complete list, these scattered mentions include the Bulgarian-born English writer Michael Arlen, the Welsh story-writer Caradoc Evans, and the Irish author Liam O'Flaherty, writers which, apart from being in varying degrees middlebrow, are of particular interest because their stories compare to Joyce's own in *Dubliners*.

What unites these writers is that they represent different 'Englishes'. Insofar as the *Wake* is an exploration of foundation myths, it stages the diversity and hybridity of roots and origins as opposed to the singular foundation narratives in nationalist historiography. That English was not coterminous with the King's English had of course been a theme for Joyce since at least *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but it is in the *Wake* that he stages the displacement of English, not just through deconstructing language into international puns and portmanteaus, but also (and most importantly) through inserting good 'English' words and phrases from the different regions of the British Isles and beyond. (The number of words in *Finnegans Wake* that are either Scottish or Northern English in origin is remarkable.) O. Henry and Twain provided him with Americanisms; Evans with a flavour of Western Wales in the same way that previously Bret Harte, Thomas Burke and others supplied contemporary British and American slang for the final section of "Oxen of the Sun".⁵⁸ It is no coincidence that those writers who furnished him with vocabulary are again mostly middlebrow (O. Henry and Bret Harte quintessentially so); their stories and sketches were enjoyable, popular, romantic in the broad sense of the word, and driven by plot.

⁵⁸ For the Americanisms, see Vincent Deane, "Introduction to VI.B.3", in Joyce, *The "Finnegans Wake" Notebooks at Buffalo*. VI.B.3, ed. Vincent Deane, Daniel Ferrer, and Geert Lernout (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2001), 8-9 and Daniel Ferrer, "Introduction to VI.B.47", in *The "Finnegans Wake" Notebooks at Buffalo*. VI.B.47, ed. Deane et al. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2004), 8-9. The notes from Evans appear in VI.B.3.101-21; those from *Huckleberry Finn* in VI.B.46.16-20, and from *Tom Sawyer* in VI.B.47.82-83. For Joyce's gleanings from Evans, see Wim Van Mierlo, "James Joyce and Caradoc Evans", *Genetic Joyce Studies* 7 (Spring 2007), accessed 14 September 2015. www.geneticjoycestudies.org. For Harte's *Tales of the West* [n. d.] and Burke's *Limehouse Nights* (1917), see Chrissie Van Mierlo, "'Oxen of the Sun' Notesheet 17: Commentary and Annotations with a New List of Sources, and Transcriptions or Oxtail Soup: The Ingredients", *Genetic Joyce Studies* 14 (Spring 2014), accessed 27 August 2015, www.geneticjoycestudies.org. Sarah Davison has made a similar point about Joyce's inclusion of the regional dialects of East Anglia and Wales (the latter via John Oswald Francis' *Change: A Glamorgan Play in Three Acts* [1914]) in "Oxen"; the idea was to assert "the vitality of the linguistic formations that are generated on the cultural margins" and disrupt the idea of a "'pure' English". See Davison, "Oxtail Soup: Dialects of English in the Tailpiece of the 'Oxen of the Sun' Episode of *Ulysses*", *Genetic Joyce Studies* 14 (Spring 2014), accessed 3 August 2015, www.geneticjoycestudies.org.

As a psychological romance, Michael Arlen's *'Piracy': A Romantic Chronicle of These Days* (1923), mentioned in VI.B.10.64, is more light-hearted than Evans and O'Flaherty. The novel contains the fictionalised account of his love affair with Nancy Cunard that is full of his trademark snappy, clever comments, observations and epigrams on "modern life" of the sort that Joyce in late 1922 was collecting in his first notebook for "Work in Progress". Often compared to O. Henry, Arlen is nonetheless less gritty than his American counterpart. This is where Joyce as 'lexicographer' is apparent: his method did not only consist of picking up words, but also clever turns of phrase of the kind that he took from Dublin parlance.⁵⁹ But where *Ulysses* thrives on phrases he might have actually overheard, *Finnegans Wake* imitates the expressions of a far wider class of people. The potential voices that Arlen, who as an émigré in London aspired to be more English than the English, could have supplied were the sardonic voices of the upper classes.

Arlen, Evans, and O'Flaherty thus also signal a broader concern with language and identity. Without a doubt Arlen and O'Flaherty could have yielded more vocabulary: Arlen, a notable socialite, captures the world of the London *beau monde* as well as their tone; O'Flaherty, a native of the Aran Islands, portrayed the primitivism of rural Ireland with a dry, acerbic sharpness that was closer to Hemingway than to Synge, Yeats or Lady Gregory. The worlds they depict are rich, imaginary, and full of great expressions. That Evans was taken to task for inventing a form of speech that sounded like Welsh-English may have piqued Joyce.⁶⁰

As Celtic writers, Evans and O'Flaherty were creating alternative Revivalist voices at a time when Joyce himself in *Finnegans Wake* was exploring what it meant to be Irish in a manner radically different from the romantic ideologies of contemporary Irish nationalism.⁶¹ What brings these writers together is their concern with place and identity, presented without romance or nationalist intent. What O'Flaherty did in *Thy Neighbour's Wife* (1923), his first novel, is similar to what Evans did in the stories of *My People* (1918).⁶² *Thy Neighbour's Wife* narrates the bitter conflict

⁵⁹ Deane, "Introduction to VI.B.3", 8.

⁶⁰ See Chris Hopkins, "Translating Caradoc Evans's Welsh English", *Style* 30.3 (Fall 1996): 434. Similar criticisms were levied against the Anglo-Irish writers of the Revival. Hopkins's point that Evans's use of pseudo-Welsh to heighten the characters' identification – and that of his readers – with the land is also important for the linguistic politics of *Finnegans Wake*. The use of a construct like "Nice Big Man" for *God* and "How voice you" for *what do you say* are examples that left their mark on the text: "How voice you that, nice Sandy man? Not large goodman is he, Sandy nice?" Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, ed. Danis Rose and John O'Hanlon. Mousehole: Houyhnhnm, 2010, 382-83 (cf. FW 492.1); see Van Mierlo, "James Joyce and Caradoc Evans".

⁶¹ See Van Mierlo, "James Joyce and Caradoc Evans".

⁶² Joyce lists the title twice in the spring/summer of 1924, in VI.B.5.47 and VI.B.16.92, but appears not to have read it.

between Lily McSherry and her young husband and the local priest, Father Hugh McMahon who was Lily's first love; Evans' stories often relate the struggle with church elders and, in some cases such as "The Talent Thou Gavest", of the protagonist's unbelief. This anti-clericalism in O'Flaherty and Evans, no doubt appealing to Joyce, forms the backdrop for their own brand of scrupulous meanness. Their characters are almost without exception intransigent, naturally inclined to reject the race and class to which they belong, but often paying the high price for the consequences of doing so.

Conscious of what they are reacting against, Evans and O'Flaherty thrive on a heightened melodrama, which is what qualifies them as middlebrow. Most importantly for Joyce's tastes, the writers that captured his attention in the 1920s were realists and naturalists of a kind. If O. Henry and Arlen were mentioned in one breath, so were Evans and O'Flaherty, and also Thomas Burke who was a close friend of Evans. Burke called Evans the "English Gorki" and dedicated his *Limehouse Lights* (a title Joyce had in his Trieste library [*Library*, 60]) to him; Evans returned the favour in *My Neighbours* (1919).⁶³ Tellingly, a defence of O'Flaherty's method by Austin Clarke and F. R. Higgins in *The Irish Statesman* for 1 November 1924 calls for readers to "take cognisance of the primal emotions of our time", by which they meant recent conflicts like the Irish Civil War. Recognizing the historical trauma made it "necessary" for writers "to be objective, elemental, to rejoice in primary colour and in the hard sun. Is not this intensity a reverberation of the present world emotion?"⁶⁴ This politicizing of realist aesthetics matches Joyce's own position. Indeed, Joyce's name was often not far behind. An anonymous, outspokenly negative review of *A Portrait in Everyman*, opined: "Mr James Joyce is an Irish edition of Mr Caradoc Evans"; not finding anything but an "extraordinarily dirty study of the upbringing of a young man by Jesuits", the reviewer thought it was the business of Evans and Joyce "to portray the least estimable features of their countrymen".⁶⁵ A year earlier H. G. Wells had compared *A Portrait* to the "new method of grimness" adumbrated by, among others, Evans.⁶⁶ More positively, AE in 1926 praised Joyce, together with Sean O'Casey and O'Flaherty, for "winning for Ireland the repute of a realism more intimate, intense and daring than any other realism in contemporary

⁶³ Hopkins, "Self-Portrait of the Middlebrow as Artist: Oliver Sandys on/in Caradoc Evans (1945)", unpublished paper presented at Middlebrow Cultures, University of Strathclyde, 14-15 July 2009. Accessed 3 August 2015, www.middlebrow-network.com/portals/22/files/chris_hopkins.doc.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Frank Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical, 1923-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 24.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Robert H. Deming, *James Joyce: The Critical Heritage, 1907-1927* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1997), 85; see also Hopkins, "'James Joyce is an Irish Edition of Mr Caradoc Evans': Two Celtic Naturalists", *Irish Studies Review* 3.12 (Autumn 1995): 23.

⁶⁶ H. G. Wells, "James Joyce", *The Nation*, 24 February 1917, 710.

literature".⁶⁷ And in 1933, a feature in *The New Age* claims that Joyce was "excited and enthusiastic" about Evans.⁶⁸ I have not been able to trace the source of this claim, but I certainly wish it was true.

Conclusion

Perhaps worth noting is the absence largely of Irish writers in this essay. In Joyce's libraries there is certainly no lack of Irish writers, including Maria Edgeworth and many of Joyce's Revivalist contemporaries (St John G. Ervine, Edward Martyn, and Brinsley MacNamara are all present, to name just a few). Crucially, in 1903 he copied out a list of 162 authors from an article on "A Rural Library" in the *United Irishman* and a shorter one of 21 works in Irish from a later issue in his Commonplace Notebook, a list which happily sits alongside notes and quotations from Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle, Bosanquet, Edmund Gosse, Ben Jonson, Percy's *Reliques*, Herbert Spencer, Theodore Watts and others.⁶⁹ What my essay has shown, however, is that Joyce's reading should not just be seen as being in opposition to something, an act of defiance or resistance putting Irish against English writing or the other way around. As Richard Brown and Patrick Parrinder have suggested, Joyce did not necessarily treat English literature as the objectionable product of British Imperialism.⁷⁰ This is especially so because Joyce's every-day reading habits did not particularly drive him towards the canon of English literature. Statements of Joyce's like "[w]ithout boasting I think I have little or nothing to learn from English novelists" (*Letters II*, 186) are, well, rather boastful and in light of what I have presented should probably be taken with a grain of salt.

Thinking counter-historically for a moment, one might argue that Joyce himself could have been a middlebrow writer if it hadn't been for *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. After all, before his work was recognized as modernist, he was published by Grant Richards, a publisher of middlebrow writers such as Grant Allen and Thomas Burke (both represented in the Trieste library [*Library*, 30-31, 60]), Vera Brittain, M. L. Eyles, Vernon Lee, and the World's Classics series. By the same token, the authors to whom Joyce's early works were being compared by contemporary critics included not a few middlebrow writers as well, most of them now forgotten: George Birmingham, George Douglas Brown, Gilbert Cannan, Cunningham Graham, John Masefield, and, of course, Evans and Moore. Such comparisons and

⁶⁷ Quoted in Shovlin, *The Irish Literary Periodical, 1923-1958*, 25.

⁶⁸ "A Welsh Author", *The New Age*, 20 May 1933, 4.

⁶⁹ NLI MS 36,639/2A, [8v-9r], [15v]; see also Frank Callanan, "James Joyce and the *United Irishman*, Paris 1902-3", *Dublin James Joyce Journal* 3 (2010): 51-103.

⁷⁰ Richard Brown, "Joyce's Englishman: 'That Het'rogeneous Thing' from Stephen's Blake and Downland to Defoe's 'True-Born Englishman'", in *Joyce, Ireland, Britain*, ed. Andrew Gibson and Len Platt (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), 36, 47; Parrinder, "The English Literary Tradition", 206.

early perceptions of Joyce do not make him an *avant garde* writer at all. At an important junction in Joyce's development as a writer, even Ezra Pound noted privately that "Joyce is evidently beginning to be 'the common man' (commercially even)"; this was in 1915, just after Joyce had placed his affairs with the literary agent J. B. Pinker.⁷¹ Pound was heavily ironic of course, and yet his sneer was directed at what he perceived as Joyce courting the middlebrow market.

But literary history took the course that we know it did: though Joyce was often published by trade publishers, his reputation and legacy almost entirely rest on the workings of private presses. Like Eliot, Joyce had modernised himself, but I would contend that this did not happen simply because he rejected the traditional novel, but rather because he embraced and interiorised a tradition that included both experimental and middlebrow prose. In 1922/23, T. S. Eliot had this to say about the origins of Joyce's style: he discerned in *A Portrait* the influence of Walter Pater and Cardinal Newman, but "In *Ulysses*", he wrote, "this current disappears. In *Ulysses* this influence [...] is reduced to zero". In having "no style at all", Joyce's book "is not so distinctly a precursor of a new epoch as it is a gigantic culmination of an old".⁷² This zero degree of writing that Eliot has identified in Joyce's works is, in a sense, the result of Joyce's having read and absorbed so many different literary styles, so many different books.

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⁷¹ Ezra Pound to H. L. Mencken, 17 March 1915, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: New Directions, 1971), 56.

⁷² Eliot, "Contemporary English Prose", 450.