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Work in Progress: James Joyce and Photographic Images

In *Dubliners* (1914),¹ James Joyce's intention to 'betray the soul of that hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city' is complicated by his explicit references to photography and photographic devices. Like hemiplegia, the paralysis of just one side of the body, the photographs in Joyce's work perform a dual function, both reinforcing the domestic and emotional stasis that his characters face whilst inviting the possibilities of innovation and escape. Commenting on the nature of aesthetics in his 1903 Parisian notebooks, Joyce suggested that 'Art is the human disposition of sensible or intelligible matter for aesthetic end'.² Although Joyce accepted that a photographic image could be 'disposed for an aesthetic end', he decided that the photograph was 'not a human disposition of sensible matter. Therefore it is not a work of art'.³ Joyce commissioned the artist Patrick Tuohy to paint a portrait of his father John Stanislaus Joyce in 1923 and in 1938 asked the photographer Gisèle Freund to take a photograph of him sitting beneath the painting with his son Giorgio and his grandson Stephen. The intriguing relationship between portraiture and photography in the 1938 image speaks to the complexity of Joyce's relationship with photography, and his growing interest in the aesthetic and ideological potential of the form.

Joyce's fascination with cinema and proto-cinematic devices has been well documented but so far there has been no comprehensive study on the influence of photography on his work. Joycean critics such as R. Brandon Kershner, Garry M. Leonard, Sean Latham and Louise E. J. Hornby have begun to address the interdisciplinary relationship between photography and literature in Joyce's work.

However, their work investigates individual texts rather than Joyce's canon as a whole, which my study seeks to do. As Latham rightly argues, as Joycean scholars, we are only just beginning to understand the ways in which the 'narrative and temporal structures' of photography 'intersect with Joyce's writing'.⁴ Just as the interplay between Joyce's writing and photography has been neglected by critics, so too has the history of Irish photography. My PhD thesis 'James Joyce and Photographic Images' builds on recent work by Justin Carville and Kevin and Emer Rockett on the history of Irish photography and, by merging the fields of literature and photography, provides an in-depth, cross-disciplinary approach to Joycean study.



Figure 1: Carr's Naval Portraits, 38 Arundel St., Portsmouth, 'Kind Regards To Greet You', c. 1900

Joyce's brother Stanislaus recalls their excitement when, whilst walking in Dublin as children, they 'caught the eye of a photographer on the Esplanade who asked to be allowed to take the group'.⁵ Commercial portrait photography was available in Dublin from the early 1840s and became increasingly popular after over one hundred and seventy photographers exhibited their work at Dublin's 1865 International Exhibition of Arts and Manufacturers.⁶ Before the exhibition fewer than twenty professional

photographers appeared in Dublin's street directories but 'by the end of 1865 the number had risen to over thirty'.⁷ The photographs that Joyce depicts in his writing would have been professionally produced in photographic studios, such as Lawrence's Great Bazaar and Photographic Galleries or the Lafayette Photographic Studio. By the late nineteenth century Lawrence's Photographic Galleries was one of Dublin's most successful photographic studios, only rivalled by the Lafayette Company, who in 1897 were commissioned to produce photographs commemorating Queen Victoria's Jubilee.⁸ As Justin Carville has noted, the proliferation of photographic studios along 'the main commercial thoroughfares' in Dublin was such that it led to the area being referred to as 'the photographer's mile'.⁹ This was perhaps where the photographs of Joyce's father's former sweethearts were taken, which stood on the family's piano until Mrs Conway persuaded Joyce's mother that 'it was downright improper to keep the photographs in the drawing-room where the children [...] could see them'.¹⁰



Figure 2: Victorian woman, c. 1890-1900

Joyce would have been familiar with his wife Nora Barnacle's penchant for being photographed in her youth. The Barnacle family were photographed by R. W. Simmons, 'Galway's most fashionable photographer, a man who justified his high

prices with the slogan ‘a bad photograph is dear at any price’.¹¹ Joyce shared a similar affection for photographic images, and after seeing the Italian actress Eleonora Duse in *La Gioconda* and *La Citta Morta* he procured a photograph of her which ‘for a long time stood on his desk’.¹² It is likely that the image of Eleonora Duse would have been a photographic postcard or carte de visite. By the end of the nineteenth century cartes de visite could be purchased in Dublin for half a guinea per dozen. Had half a guinea proved too expensive, cartes de visite could be purchased in sets of three for the cheaper price of three shillings and six pence at Lawrence’s Photographic Galleries. Despite competition from amateur photographers, professional photography remained a viable career option during the early twentieth century, with the number of Irish residents listing their occupation as within the photographic industry increasing from 767 to 971 between 1901 and 1911.¹³ The replacement of the collodion process with the gelatin dry plate in the 1880s enabled professional photographers to move outside of the photographic studio or portable darkroom. Joyce would have encountered these technological innovations by the time that his first major work was published in 1914, as he was photographed outdoors in 1904 by one of his closest friends, Constantine P. Curran.¹⁴



Figure 3: J. P. Blair of the Crystal Palace Studio, Peersfield, ‘Untitled’, c. 1902

Joyce's short stories and novels are set during a period of social and political uncertainty, in which the camera offered a means of capturing and preserving the stability of family life. As photography moved outside of the darkroom and cameras became smaller photographic devices were increasingly used as a means of surveillance, with Walter Benjamin noting that early twentieth-century photographic devices were becoming 'ever readier to capture fleeting and secret images'.¹⁵ The Ticka camera, a photographic device designed to look like a pocket watch, was one of the most popular watch-form cameras ever made and was sold in Britain from 1906 by the photographic manufacturer Houghtons Ltd.¹⁶ Joyce does not explicitly refer to these devices but they were known to other writers of the period, with Arthur Conan Doyle writing in 'The Adventure of Six Napoleons' in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* of a snap-shot taken with 'a small camera' representing 'an alert, sharp-featured simian man with thick eyebrows'.¹⁷ In Joyce's work his protagonists adopt similar forms of surveillance and their voyeuristic snapshot-style viewing attests to these photographic developments. The references to photography in Joyce's work are numerous, from the 'the priest whose yellowing photograph hung on the wall' in *Dubliners* (*D* 30), to the 'Tulloch-Turnbull girl with her coldblood kodak [who] shotted the as yet unremunerated national apostate' in *Finnegans Wake* (*FW*.I.7.171). With Joyce's characters frequently having their photograph taken or purchasing picture postcards, it is possible to see how the invention of photography might have revolutionised the way in which they perceived themselves and their surroundings.

There exists a wealth of photographic material relating to James Joyce and the history of Irish photography at various institutions. In carrying out archival research at the National Media Museum in Bradford, I have been able to access their photography and cinematography collections, as well as their stereoscopic and Kodak material. The National Library of Ireland also houses a vast array of photographs, with the JJ Clarke and Lawrence Collections containing images of Dublin from the time at which Joyce was writing. Tracing Joyce's voyage from Dublin and beyond it is possible to seek out relevant photographic material at various European institutions, such as the Triestine Biblioteca Civica Attilio Hortis and the Zürich James Joyce Foundation, amongst other institutions. As the focus on genetic criticism within Joycean study becomes ever more important the genesis of Joyce's photographic references becomes equally significant. The details of Joyce's Dublin are meticulous in their accuracy and so too in his depiction of Irish photographic culture. In a discussion on religion and photography in *Dubliners*, Joyce records his protagonist saying, '-Well, you know, [...] isn't the photograph wonderful when you come to think of it? (*D* 167). Though Joyce satirises the men in this discussion, for his protagonists the photograph represents an object of wonder in the monotony of their daily lives. Juxtaposed with the stasis of the photograph is the vibrancy of this new form of visual modernity, with the dichotomy between the two informing Joyce's vision of the complexities of early-twentieth-century Irish life.

Illustrations

Fig. 1: Carr's Naval Portraits, 38 Arundel St., Portsmouth, 'Kind Regards To Greet You', c. 1900, carte de visite, 6.3 cm x 10.5 cm, Private Collection.

Fig. 2: Victorian woman, c. 1890-1900, carte de visite, 6.3 cm x 10.5 cm, Private Collection.

Fig. 3: J. P. Blair of the Crystal Palace Studio, Petersfield, 'Untitled', c. 1902, carte de visite, 6.3 cm x 10.5 cm, Private Collection.

¹ James Joyce, *Dubliners* (London: Penguin Books, 2000).

² James Joyce quoted in Scarlett Baron, 'Flaubert, Joyce: Vision, Photography, Cinema', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 4 (2008), 689-714 (p.689).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Sean Latham, 'Twenty-first-century critical contexts', in *James Joyce in Context*, ed. by John McCourt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.148-160 (151).

⁵ Stanislaus Joyce, p.37.

⁶ '1865, Dublin, International Exhibition', *Photographic Exhibitions in 1839-1865: Records from Victorian Exhibition Catalogues* <<http://peib.dmu.ac.uk/index.php>> [accessed 8 March 2013].

⁷ Justin Carville, *Photography and Ireland* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), p.24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.27.

⁹ Justin Carville, 'Mr. Lawrence's Great Photographic Bazaar', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 5 (2007), 263-283 (p.264).

¹⁰ Stanislaus Joyce, p.39.

¹¹ Brenda Maddox, *Nora: A Biography of Nora* (London: Penguin Group, 1988), p.24.

¹² Stanislaus Joyce, p.186.

¹³ 'National Archives, Census of Ireland 1901 and 1911' <<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>> [accessed 16 November 2012].

¹⁴ Photograph in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, rev. edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.VIII.

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2: 1931-1934*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and Others (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999) pp.507-530 (p.527).

¹⁶ 'Ticka watch camera', *Christie's Lot Notes* <<http://www.christies.com/lotfinder>> [accessed 29 January 2012].

¹⁷ Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of Six Napoleons', in *The Original Illustrated 'Strand' Sherlock Holmes* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Special Editions, 2001), pp.657-670 (p.661).