

CHAPTER NINE

A “THIRD” READING:

JAMES JOYCE AND PAUL HOWARD AND THE MONSTROUS APORIA

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The title of the conference from which this publication derives is thematically interesting in the context of this chapter. It stems from Old French *passage* and denotes an “action of passing”. Originally “a road, passage,” the sense of its referring to a “corridor in a building” was first recorded in 1611, while the reference to “a portion of writing” is also from 1611, and the added sense of referring to a piece of music, is from 1674. So the term is both a verb and a noun, implying an act of moving between two different places, or two parts of a building, as well as denoting a structure through which such movement or passing can take place. That there should then accrue culturally symbolic meanings, as the term applies both to a piece of writing and also to a piece of music, is significant because it indicates how meanings, both at the level of the text and context, are fluid and in constant negotiation.

One can cite two axioms of Jacques Derrida which are pertinent here. One of these is his famous dictum: “*Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*” (there is nothing outside the text) (Derrida 1976, 158). This has been taken to mean that all communication is confined to textuality, that there is no outside reality or that the connection between text and the real world is non-existent. In fact, what he was suggesting was that knowledge is a social and linguistic construct and that all such knowledge could be interpreted as a form of textuality. Six years after this phrase had appeared in *Of Grammatology*, and after much discussion and argument, Derrida reconceptualised this dictum in the following phrase: “*Il n’y a pas de hors contexte*” (there is nothing outside of context) (Derrida 1988a, 136). This more developed position suggests that all meaning is socially created, and that every utterance, in every discourse, needs to be located within a specific context. In other words: meaning is never simple or pure but is

haunted by an interaction of text and context . Everything, in cultural terms, is a process of negotiation, and the attribution of value, culturally speaking, is just another aspect of this process.

Derrida traces the etymology of “negotiation” to the Latin *neg-otium*: “not-ease, not-quiet... no leisure.” He sees this “[no]-leisure” as the “impossibility of stopping or settling in a position... establishing oneself anywhere.” This process is typified by the image of a shuttle, going back and forth between different positions (Derrida 2002a, 11-12). I would argue that this process of negotiation is an accurate paradigm of cultural valuation. I would further argue that one of the significant indices of whether a work is high or popular culture has to do with this very interaction between text and context , on a number of levels, and I will illustrate this thesis through an articulation of the works of James Joyce and Paul Howard .

This chapter is concerned with a passage or a corridor which I see as connecting two fictional representations of Dublin—that of James Joyce’s Dublin from 1904 to 1914 and Paul Howard ’s Dublin from 2000 to 2008. Joyce provides a narrator and character of Stephen Dedalus , while Howard looks at Dublin through the eyes of his narrator, Ross O’Carroll-Kelly . One is a paradigm of high culture ; the other of popular culture . Stephen Dedalus is an aesthete, a paradigm of the tortured writer, and someone who agonises about art and its role in representing life accurately. He is obsessed with language , and indeed with the creative power of language, and his world is one of significant issues—language, religion , nationality, identity, the human soul. Thus he speaks of “a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being” (Joyce 1993, 186); he is concerned with the object of the artist which is “the creation of the beautiful” (Joyce 1993, 204); he ponders the nature of “that beauty which the artist struggles to express from lumps of earth” (Joyce 1993, 208). He is very much the synecdoche of high culture and of the artist as a privileged and uniquely sensitive being who is distant from both his art and his or her audience.

Formally, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is a classic *Bildungsroman* and more specifically a *Künstlerroman* where we see the self-conscious coming of age of an artist, and this level of introspection and metawriting is a synecdoche of modernism and high art. Indeed, some of the most quoted passages in literature dealing with the role and function of the artist come from this book.

The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination. The mystery of esthetic, like that of material creation, is accomplished. The artist, like the God of creation, remains

within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails (Joyce 1993, 241).

And possibly the most ringing lines that describe the artistic vocation are to be found at the end of that book.

April 26. Mother is putting my new secondhand clothes in order. She prays now, she says, that I may learn in my own life and away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels. Amen. So be it. Welcome, O life, I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race (Joyce 1993, 290).

The amount and number of books on Joyce in academic life has led to the term “The Joyce Industry” being coined. And in terms of cultural capital, there is not an academic who specialises in modern English who could admit that he or she had not read Joyce without attracting a high degree of professional opprobrium.

Paul Howard , on the other hand, has written eight highly popular novels about an imaginary character, Ross O’Carroll-Kelly . These books are hugely popular and deal with issues connected with aspects of the Celtic Tiger in upper middle class Dublin Four. Dealing with Ross and his friends, Oisin, Christian, J.P. and Fionn, and their various relationships with women, his world depicts a very materialistic Ireland where the old nets by which Stephen wished to avoid—“nationality, language , religion . I shall try to fly by those nets” (Joyce 1993, 227)—are well and truly avoided: indeed they have been packed away in cultural mothballs.

There are eight books in the series. *The Miseducation Years* describes Ross’s last two years at Castlerock College and his Leinster Senior Cup victory. *The Teenage Dirtbag Years* sees Ross in his first year in a sports management course in UCD. *The Orange Mocha-Chip Frappuccino Years* shows us Ross leaving home and working for his friend J.P.’s father as an estate agent. *PS*,

I Scored The Bridesmaids deals with his marriage to his long-term “portner” Sorcha. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nightdress* tells of Ross’s discovery that he has an eight year old son called Ronan, living in the North side; *Should Have Got Off at Sydney Parade* deals with the birth of Ross and Sorcha’s daughter Honor, and Ross’s participation in his new nightclub, Lillie’s Bordello; *This Champagne Mojito is the Last Thing I Own*, deals with his fall from grace as his father goes to prison and Ross is forced to take up paid work, while Sorcha finally leaves him. There are strings of intertextual references throughout the books, including the titles, with reference *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, *Teenage Dirtbag*, *Adrian Mole: The Cappuccino Years*, *PS, I Love You* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* respectively. The title of *Should Have Got Off at Sydney Parade* refers to getting off the DART before the last stop at Sandymount and is part of the specific idiolect used in the books, alluding in this context to the withdrawal method of contraception. The latest book in the series is called *Mr S and the Secrets of Andorra’s Box*, and deals with his new job as the rugby coach of the Andorran national team and also with his attempts to cope with separation from Sorcha and Honor.

The humour is classic and works on a number of levels, with some stock comic characters. Rugby dominates the books, with Ross’s full name being Ross Kyle Gibson McBride O’Carroll-Kelly, a name encompassing some of the greatest Irish rugby players (Jackie Kyle, Mike Gibson and Willie John McBride). The style of writing is a little like reading Chaucer or Shakespeare –it takes a little time to get used to the unusual register. The writing is phonetic, as the spelling attempts to mirror the Southside accent that is spoken by practically all of the main characters. Thus the vowel changes stress the pronunciation so we get “orm” for “arm” and “hort” for “heart” as well as the rhyming slang: “jo” is a taxi (“jo maxi”); “chicken’s neck” is a cheque; “jack” is the story (jackanory) and we have already seen that “portner” stands for “partner”. Allied to this is the punctuation of almost every fourth sentence with “roysh”, and acronyms like “TMI” (too much information) and you begin to get the feel of the discourse of these books. Ross is sexist, a snob, politically incorrect, extremely vain, insensitive to the feelings of others, easily duped and self-obsessed—but Paul Howard makes us actually like him by taking the reader into Ross’s confidence. Generically, the style is that of the first person fallible narrator, and the technique of all of the books is to use the voice of the narrator to undercut himself.

So one book is seen as high culture and deals with a sensitive and introspective individual, while the other is seen as popular culture and deals with a character that is extrovert and actively un- or even anti-intellectual. One book deals with culture, art, politics and religion while the other one deals with a very materialistic contemporary middle-class culture. One book is avowedly serious while the other is a comedy. One book is a staple part of most literature syllabi at second and third level courses in English while the other is most unlikely to figure on such syllabi. Indeed one could ask the question as to what business we have studying the works of Paul Howard in an academic institution in the first place?

However, one could well ask about the nature of these discriminations? The passage between these two branches of culture is one fraught with

relative negotiations. The gap between high and popular culture is one of the most ill-defined and mobile, yet at the same time tyrannically-fixed, distinctions in the academic world. To write a thesis on James Joyce is laudable and seen to have cultural value whereas to write one on Paul Howard is to court all sorts of questions, where terms such as “standards” and “taste” and “suitability” are used as shibboleths whereby to call into question the value of studying such writings. The same is true of many theoretical explorations. Theorists, who espouse the egalitarian as a right, often confine their work to the study of well-defined works of high art. In this chapter, the passage from and between high and popular culture, as exemplified synecdochically by Joyce and Howard, will be seen to be a two-way route—with multi-lane access from each side of the passage which will allow free and unrestricted passage for the different passages of writing about Dublin—one from the early 20th and the other from the early 21st century.

Each text stands in metonymic relationship to an enfolding cultural context. Joyce stands for “literature” or for “high” culture, whereas Howard stands for “low” or “popular” culture. It is the passage and negotiation between these texts as metonymic of the passages and negotiations between their contexts that is of interest. In terms of literature as a canonical system, as an institution wherein works of defined value are collected and passed on to the next cohort as a form of Althusserian cultural interpellation, Joyce would certainly be part of this institutional structure. However, I would argue that there are passages from this level of high culture to a counter-culture, one which in turn, destabilises the seemingly hypostasised core of high culture. In this sense, the passage of negotiation in question between Joyce and Howard, between Stephen and Ross, is metonymic of a broader one between the system of canonical literature itself and its other. In this sense, there is a deconstruction involved, as Derrida has made the point that “deconstruction, without being anti-systematic, is on the contrary, and nevertheless, not only a search for, but itself a consequence of the fact that the system is impossible” (Derrida 2001, 4).

In terms of our passage, it is not my aim to discuss the intrinsic value of Joyce at the expense of Howard—I would suggest that the value of these texts is to be found as much in their mode of reception as in their mode of production. Mainly, Joyce is read by academics while a broad cross-section of the public read Howard. This is indeed a question that is worthy of study as there is often a perception that the realms of high culture and popular culture are very clearly delineated. However it is important to note that these delineations of value are not *dei ex machinis*, they do not fall

from the sky but rather are crested through the interactions and negotiations of class, power and various agendas. There is always a choice to be made and as Derrida has noted it is “always a *determinate* oscillation between possibilities” (Derrida 1988a, 148). As Pierre Bourdieu has noted “taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier” (Bourdieu 1984, 6). In other words, the choices that we make in terms of our cultural artefacts are both reflective of, and reflexive of, the social class and societal and cultural power of us as classifiers. Thus when I say that I am currently reading *Ulysses*, that reflects a certain sense of social class and of cultural class (or what Bourdieu would term “cultural capital”). The selection of cultural objects is a series of negotiations in terms of high and popular culture, but it is also a series of negotiations in terms of my own sense of identity.

I would argue that the whole idea of high culture is one in need of interrogation. In the first place, any system or structure is not monadic in that it exists and operates differentially—for there to be a system of high culture there must be one of low culture (and the adjective “low” is the technically correct term in this context as it is the binary opposite of “high” but it has been attenuated for the purposes of political correctness into “popular”). As Bourdieu has noted, each position in the field of high culture, or in a particular canonical system

receives its distinctive *value* from its negative relationship with the co-existent position—takings to which it is objectively related and which determine it by delimiting it (Bourdieu 1993, 30).

So what is interesting in this context is not to decide whether, and how, Joyce is better, or more valuable than Howard, but rather to examine the system and instructional structure that causes us to ask this question in the first place. And the negotiations involved between these two institutional systemic terms mean that we need some form of mediation, a passage of negotiation, which will allow for a questioning of the institutional structures of both high and popular cultures, and in this case I would look to Derrida’s book *A Taste for the Secret*, where he talks about what he terms “the third”: Derrida goes on immediately to generalise this as an interest in the “third” as something that both participates and does not participate, both at once, in any system:

[a]nd in the end everything we have said about the system comes down to a question of the “third”. This third term, can be taken as the mediator that permits synthesis, reconciliation, participation; in which case that which is neither this nor that permits the synthesis of this and that... [t]he third of

neither-this-nor-that and this-and-that can indeed also be interpreted as that whose absolute heterogeneity resists all integration, participation and system, thus designating the place where the system does not close (Derrida 2001, 5).

As Hillis Miller perceptively notes, the third is a “dialectical *Aufhebung* that does not sublimate, but rather prohibits sublation” (Miller 2007, 280). This sense of the third is one which allows Derrida to interrogate the systemacity of systems as well as the institutionality of institutions. His work generally involves probing such institutions to test their structures for stress fractures. All too aware of the dehumanising and hypostasising power of systems and structures, and yet also aware of their necessity to any form of human interaction, Derrida has spent a lot of his career probing them and that probing is of some value to this discussion.

So what does Derrida mean when he says the system is impossible? Well, the first thing to do in the building of this passage is to clear away any blockages and deposits of solidified material that have stood in the way of clear modes of connection between the respective edifices of high and popular culture . And the first of these is to be found in the “given” that high culture , or in our specific case “literature” is somehow autotelic and that its distinctions and qualities transcend materiality and ideology . It is a cultural tendency which is often operative through synecdoche with the term “Joyce” connoting all of the trappings of high culture, and this is true of the proper names of many authors. So, if I set out the list as follows: Flaubert , Tolstoy Dickens , Joyce, then I am talking about “literature” and there is a legitimate canon upon which I can draw.

However, the formation of this canon is in need of some unpacking. Both of the writers in question in this chapter are novelists, so genre is clearly not a current issue in terms of discriminating between the institutions of high and popular culture . Interestingly, when the novel emerged as a genre in the eighteenth century, critics censured it as a “low” form. Thus when Flaubert began writing in the novel genre, he was not participating in high culture .

Although the French novel was to assume in the nineteenth century an unprecedented prestige, usurping as it were the traditional preeminence of dramatic and epic poetry, [...] fictional literature was on the whole not taken seriously (Brombert 1966, 16).

Due to the efforts of writers like Flaubert , Balzac, Henry James and Dickens , the novel has gradually attained the status of high culture , but even in this list, there are some negotiations to be done. One of the core areas of difference between high and popular culture is to be found in the

areas of the audience and their levels of involvement in the work in question.

Bourdieu argues that one of the key differences between middle- and working-class tastes is that between “distance” and “participation”: middle-class “distance” refers to both the distance of the reader from the text, the notion of aesthetic distance, and at another level, the distance of the work of art from everyday life (Bourdieu 1984, 488-489). I would add a further level of distance—namely the distance from the canon to its inception or formation. By having a canon that is not modern, the choice of books can seem almost transhumant in that it seems an organic list of books that occurs almost naturally, through a process of osmosis. The general term for selection is that these works have stood the test of time, but this, of course, is a suasive formulation which has no rational basis. In fact, as Bourdieu and others have pointed out, the canon is often chosen by political, social, cultural and gender power-criteria and the aesthetic is very much a camouflaging agency for these more overt agencies. Through the seeming impersonality of the canon, the class-based ideas of distance, particular to middle-class tastes, become hegemonic of the aesthetic in general. Working class tastes, on the other hand “tend toward participation, that is, reader participation in the experience of the work of art, and the participation of the work of art in the culture of everyday life” (Fiske 1991, 138). Bourgeois aesthetics of high culture locate the work of art in the timeless and universal areas, where the idea of contextual relevance is not really valued. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen makes this very point.

Beauty expressed by the artist cannot awaken in us an emotion which is kinetic or a sensation which is purely physical. It awakens, or ought to awaken, or induces, or ought to induce, an esthetic stasis, an ideal pity or an ideal terror, a stasis called forth, prolonged, and at last dissolved by what I call the rhythm of beauty (Joyce 1993, 231).

Hence it is no surprise that a middle-class aesthetic would value a work with such an overt definition of middle-class aesthetics. In terms of value, it is the context that is the ascriber of value, namely the audience. In this sense, the institution of high culture is not really some sort of ineffable canon of works which have an intrinsic value or worth; rather it is a self-perpetuating system which sets out values and then rewards those works which enunciate those values. It is very much a closed system in a synchronic sense, though diachronically as the values change, so does the canon change, as witnessed by the generic enculturation of the novel in French, and indeed, world, literature.

In the negotiations between text and context, high culture values separation while popular culture values relevance. And the immediate context of a work of art is of course the audience. Thus, comedy is generally not considered high culture because of the imperative of audience reaction and participation while ballet is because audience participation is confined to applause at the end of the performance.

The aesthetics of the bourgeoisie demand that their art should be valued to the degree of its appeal to human and aesthetic universals rather than to the specifics of the here and now: even though some art may be 'realistic' and refer explicitly to the details of the everyday, the middle-class 'appreciation' must be able to look through these to the 'universals' underlying them. Relevance to one's immediate social context is not a middle-class criterion for the evaluation and enjoyment of art (Fiske 1991, 138).

And if we turn to Stephen Dedalus's theory of artistic creation we find an uncanny echoing of this very point:

I thought he might mean that *claritas* is the artistic discovery and representation of the divine purpose in anything or a force of generalization which would make the esthetic image a universal one, make it outshine its proper conditions (Joyce 1993, 239).

So it would seem that literature has a divine association, and a universal one—both terms that have been validated by that notion of distance that we already spoke about. Interestingly, Bourdieu notes that the Kantian idea of aesthetic disinterest is in fact a marker of social class in itself:

it should not be thought that the relationship of distinction (which may or may not imply the conscious intention of distinguishing oneself from common people) is only an incidental component in the aesthetic disposition. The pure gaze implies a break with the ordinary attitude towards the world which, as such, is a social break (Bourdieu 1984, 31).

In the light of the criteria that we have seen as central to the institution of literature, and the idea of the canon, the gap between this distanced persona and that of Ross would seem like one that could not be connected by any passage.

The world of Ross O'Carroll-Kelly is a parallel universe in terms of the qualities of literature outlined above. It has connections with the real south Dublin but these are largely tangential. Howard has created a place where references to contemporary Ireland are made in order to deconstruct

some of the pretensions of that place. His books poke fun at all sorts of conventions. The initials of the family spell out “ROCK”, “COCK” and “FOCK”, respectively, and these “in” jokes abound in the series. Thus when Ross is told that his mother’s chic-lit book is to be published by Penguin (the publishers of the last four of his own books), he scoffs that he has never heard of them, and on the back of the current tome he includes reviews from the *Irish Times* (“Hilarious”) and *In Dublin* (“Un-focking-missable”) and himself (“Like John Banville—but with riding”). It is this level of satire that makes the books so funny. He takes upper-middle class types and turns them into caricatures. Thus Ross is the spoiled son who just looks to his parents for money and treats them with total contempt, as he drives off in his “old BMW Z4” (Howard 2006, 30) paid for by his parents, taxed by his parents and insured by his “old pair”! Sorcha is the classic rich liberal, concerned with all good causes; his mother is into other sorts of causes such as banning poor children from attending the National Gallery and taking Funderland to the Northside of Dublin. One friend, Oisín, dreams of creating perfumes that will be worn all over the world and the other, Christian, dreams of scripting new Star Wars movies. All of the girls are obsessed with appearance and dieting, and every new girl in the book is equated with a star of film, TV or music in order to express how desirable she is.

In *This Champagne Mojito is the Last Thing I Own*, the trust-fund runs out as his father has his assets confiscated by the Criminal Assets Bureau; his mother, having become a major star of the chick-lit scene, begins an affair with an anal-obsessive (in every sense of that word) literary agent, and his baby, Honor, refuses to bond with him. As ever, Ross sails through most situations with a calm confidence that he is God’s gift to almost everything. The following passage gives a flavour of what the style of the books is like.

You’d have to be up pretty early in the morning to put one over on me. Actually, that’s not strictly true, especially since I’m hardly out of the scratcher before *Home and Away* starts. Anytime before midday would probably do you. My point is that it’s pretty much impossible to get anything past me (Howard 2006, 175).

This is very different from the sense of taste that validates and valorises the writings of Joyce. To valorise this type of writing would not seem to be part of the institution of literature. And as we have already noted, part of the social function of literature is to allow us to accrue some form of cultural capital. To extend the earlier quote from Bourdieu :

[t]aste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed (Bourdieu 1984, 6).

For Bourdieu utterances or texts are not just signs to be deciphered, they are also “*signs of wealth*, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and *signs of authority*, intended to be believed and obeyed” (Bourdieu 1991, 66). The notions of wealth and authority do not just come from the text, but as Derrida has indicated earlier, from the context and from the negotiation between text and context . It is their part in the institution of literature that makes these texts and utterances valuable.

It is in the area of the institution that the writing of Joyce and Howard is differentiated. The binary “Joyce/Howard ”, like all binaries, is hierarchical, and the criteria of that hierarchy are institutional. Aesthetic distance, aesthetic disinterest, a sense of the universal , these are all the qualities prized by one social group, and these are also the seemingly disinterested aesthetic criteria of quality (it is interesting that there is an almost psychoanalytic process of denial going on here with the personal agencies of the qualities being overtly denied in their names). The notion of minority and popularity are others that add to this debate, with high culture being seen as that of the minority while popular culture is by definition “popular”. In this context, it is interesting to look at points of similarity in the early publishing careers of the two writers.

Joyce wrote “The Sisters” for the *Irish Homestead* in 1904 and went on to write the rest of the stories of *Dubliners* , which he submitted to the publisher Grant Richards in the same year. Richards accepted them but in April of that year, he informed Joyce that a new story “Two Gallants” had produced problems with the printer who objected to certain passages . Joyce’s response was that he had written the book

in accordance with what I understand to be the classical tradition of my art. You must therefore allow me to say that your printer’s opinion of it does not interest me in the least (Gilbert 1957, 160).

In 1907, he completed the last of the stories “The Dead”, which has come to be regarded as one of the finest short stories of the 20th century, but in the same year, Richards decided not to publish *Dubliners* . In 1909, George Roberts, of the Dublin firm Maunsell, accepted *Dubliners* and in August Joyce signed a publication contract, but Roberts then had second thoughts about publishing it because of the risk of libel due to various references to

actual people in the stories. Roberts wrote to Joyce informing him that his legal advisors recommended that he sue Joyce to recover all costs, charges and expenses so far incurred by handling the volume of stories. It was in June 1914, that Grant Richards finally published *Dubliners*.

The difficulties of the publication process here are often seen as an index of how problematic it is for high art to attain a place in the public consciousness. Indeed, the travails of writing and publishing become part of the cultural capital that accrues from the work: a difficult birth equating with a quality finished product. However, Paul Howard's experiences with the early books in the Ross O'Carroll-Kelly series traces a broadly similar trajectory. In an interview with Paula Murphy, Paul Howard discussed the early problems associated with the Ross O'Carroll-Kelly series:

I couldn't get a publisher, and it had already been running as a column in the Tribune for a couple of years and I couldn't get a publisher. I wanted to put together a book, and they kept saying—no, I can't really see it; it doesn't fit in with any genre—it's not chick-lit, it's not exactly lad-lit, it's not a sports book; nobody could see who would buy it. So I went ahead and published the book myself. You kind of think it'll be easier because you're thinking—I won't have to give it to the publisher and everything will be mine. And then 5000 books arrive, and I don't know if you've ever seen what 5000 books look like but it's five pallets; big wooden pallets piled high. So these arrived at the door of the Tribune, and I'm thinking—what am I going to do with them? Christmas week, I was literally driving around to bookshops and warehouses like Eason's warehouse and the Argosy warehouse with these books weighing down the back axle of this Nissan Micra, saying—will you take some books? And they'd say—well, maybe 50, or—might take a hundred (Murphy 2007, 9).

If Howard was part of the institution of literature, this narrative would be one of wealth and authority and cultural capital, in Bourdieu's terms, and would be renarrated as an index of how difficult it is to have new styles of writing accepted by an innovative artist. However, as Howard is not high culture, the narrative is seen in different terms.

So at this point, what is the passage that I wish to negotiate? I would suggest that this passage is in fact an aporia, a passage that is impassable unless we look to Derrida's notion of the "third": the third of

neither-this-nor-that and this-and-that can indeed also be interpreted as that whose absolute heterogeneity resists all integration, participation and system, thus designating the place where the system does not close (Derrida 2001, 5).

In this sense, I think that our contrastive and comparative reading of Joyce and Howard as metonymic and synecdochic representations of aspects of the institution of literature and high culture is a monstrous act, and I use the adjective in a very specific sense. I am using it in the sense that Derrida uses it in an interview very appropriately called “Passages”, where he speaks about the “monster” as hybrid and aporetic. The monster, to quote Derrida, is

a composite figure of heterogeneous organisms that are grafted onto each other. This graft, the hybridization, this composition that puts heterogeneous bodies together may be called a monster (Derrida 1992, 385).

For Derrida, however the “monster” is also that which appears for the first time and, consequently, is not yet recognised. A monster is a species for which we do not yet have a name” (Derrida 1992, 386). It is this aspect of the monstrous that I want to concentrate on. According to Derrida, the monster “shows itself” (emphasis in original, Derrida 1992, 386), which is the etymological meaning of monster “it frightens precisely because no anticipation had prepared one to identify this figure” (Derrida 1992, 386). However,

as soon as one perceives a monster in a monster, one begins to domesticate it, one begins... to compare it to the norms, to analyze it, consequently to master whatever could be terrifying in this figure of the monster (Derrida 1992, 386).

I would suggest that the passage between Joyce and Howard is the third of which Derrida speaks because it is a space for the monster of the new and the counter institutional to reveal itself. Etymologically the signifier “monster” derives from the Latin from L. “*monstrum*” “monster, monstrosity, omen, portent, sign,” from root of *monere* “to warn”, and the questions we are asking in our passage are monstrous in that they ask the institution of literature and the canon to answer for their own constructions and exclusionary practices through a reading of a work that is counter-institutional.

The passage of negotiations through which we have been travelling is monstrous in that it refuses to grant the closure of the system and the institution and instead stretches the binary opposition to its limit—in other words, to the third. As Margaret Shildrick, has explained in her book, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*, the monster cannot be “fully containable within the binary structure of the western logos” (Shildrick 2002, 1). Instead, the monstrous “signal[s] a

transformation of the relation between self and other such that the encounter with the strange is not a discrete event but the constant condition of becoming” (Shildrick 2002, 1). In her work, Shildrick interrogates the “binary that opposes the monstrous to the normal” (Shildrick 2002, 3) and proposes a “new form of ethics that answers more fully to the multiplicity of embodied difference” (Shildrick 2002, 3). In broadly similar terms, Rosi Braidotti sees the monster as “neither a total stranger nor completely familiar” (Braidotti 1996, 141). It “exists in an in-between zone”, solely as “paradox” or “aporia” (Braidotti 1996, 141). And it is here that all of our explorations and different negotiations of text and context and the micrological and macrological cohere.

The concept of the “aporia” is a central one in the writing of Derrida . As Richard Beardsworth has pointed out, “*aporia* comes from the Greek *aporos* which means “without passage”, or “without issue”; it is: a route which is impracticable and a route which is impracticable is “one that cannot be traversed, it is an uncrossable path. Without Passage. Not treadable” (Beardsworth 1996, 32). It is a passage which is not a passage. To get across or through an aporia without having to stand in reflective doubt is one of those problems that has been raised by deconstruction from the beginning, and in this case, if our passage from Howard to Joyce, and by extension from popular culture to high culture is to be traversed, then we need to look for something monstrous to lead us to Derrida ’s “third”—that sense of being part and not part, at the same time, of an institution.

The purely monstrous is thus, for Derrida , an impossibility. Instead, the monster exists as aporia, crouching in the shadows between the radically other and the wholly same. It “shows itself” (Derrida 1992, 386) only through the repetition of the “traumatism that is the perception of the monster” (Derrida 1992, 386) and it is in this repetition that the negotiated passage I have been traversing lies. It is not enough to see these two synecdochic writers as parts of a flat binary of canon versus non-canon, or high culture versus popular culture . Instead it is the process of reading, of careful reading, of attempting to see the cultural value in each work through a close reading of the text, and through negotiations between text and context . The ethics of such a reading are perhaps the most important aspect of the work done in academic institutions—as each text is itself a passage and an aporia, each one is individual, has the ability to show its monstrosity, its deconstructive function with respect to the existing institutions of literature and culture of which it is a part. The creation of the “third” in this case is the mutual interrogation of the two texts, and the questions this interrogation poses about issues of value and systematicity and social class and the independence of the aesthetic as a given in

academic discourse. The negotiation of text and context is crucial in any sort of a reading which looks to negotiate a passage, and it is this negotiation, this shuttling back and forth between the texts and their contexts, and indeed each other, that is of value here. The attribution of cultural capital to works, and the classification of works into the two elements of the high and popular binary is actually questioned by such a negotiation, and I would argue that this leads us, through the passage, the Derridean “third” of which we have been speaking.

So the type of reading that we have been doing in this chapter is a “third” reading—looking at the imbrication of text and context and showing how each individual reading can help to put stress on what seems like a fixed system and which urges, suggests and at times forces that system into a series of negotiations in order to liberate new meanings. At times it might seem that all we have done here is to replace the certainties of the canon with the reflexiveness of the non-canon, but this is not the case. It is not a question of deciding whether Joyce is “better” than Howard and by extension whether high culture is “better” than popular culture. Instead it is a question of using these texts, and a micrological reading of these texts, in order to negotiate between values and more importantly, the methods through which such values are attributed, and to set up those negotiated passages which lead us to the “third”—towards a “third” reading which stretches the system to its limit and forces it to account for itself, and its decisions, and its values.

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