General Essays
Joyce’s AquaCities

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If you were to ask me how the second word of my title should be pronounced—Aqua Cities? A quay cities? Aquassities?—I should have to reply either that I don’t know, or any one you like, or all three. But that should not trouble aficionados of *Finnegans Wake*, who know that words polysemous to the eye are often not so to the ear. And it is no good asking me why I didn’t take the trouble to consult the dictionary, because I did, and discovered, to my mild astonishment (which no doubt you will share) that the word is not to be found—not in any of the various standard unabridged English dictionaries, not even in the latest edition, with supplements, of the great *Oxford English Dictionary*, whose harmless drudges pride themselves on picking up unconsidered trifles, nor yet in the standard French dictionaries of Robert and Harrap, nor the latest multivolume Italian *Vocabolario*. The word appears to be a coinage of the master, and therefore all the more appropriate to what I am going to talk about. But it evidently means waterinesses, so there we are. But stay! What are waterinesses? Transparencies, clarities, pellucidities, as in the mineral waters to which all card-carrying intellectuals are now addicted? Or are they more-diluted-than-they-should-bes, as in the third cup of watery tea that Stephen, in *Portrait*, drains to the dregs before attacking his fried bread (P64 174)? Or are they sogginesses, as in the prose of postmodernists and the linens of damp places like Dublin? And why do I say that Joyce must

Since the following discourse was intended to be delivered before a large audience, “on a semifestive occasion,” and was designed almost as much to amuse as to instruct, it seemed to me that little would be gained and a good deal lost if the facetious tone were removed by eliminating the asides to the audience. I therefore decided that it would be best to present my readers with what the audience heard and to rely on their indulgence. The talk was dedicated, when given, to the memory of Maria Jolas.
have invented the word? Where is it found? It's used in *Ulysses*, and if you
don't know where, I'll tell you—but not yet. A discourse of some length aimed
at a large audience on a semifestive occasion ought not to be very technical;
and since we are gathered here to celebrate Joyce and Dublin or Joyce in
Dublin—moreover, since I am one of the few present over the age of thirty
who has not written a doctor's thesis on Joyce—it behooves this Joycean au­
todidact to say something simple. So I am going to undertake a meditation on
Joyce and water and cities, among them Dublin, concerning which I am also
no expert. Modernist authors are apt to be rather watery—think of Eliot,
think of Pound and Hart Crane—and water is indeed very simple—H₂O—
but if we consider water in Joyce, its existence, its qualities and attributes, its
power as presence and metaphor, we may be able to make out that Joyce out­
does them all in his imbricated relations with the element.

John Keats, we remember, wanted his epitaph to read, “Here lies one whose
name was writ in water,” alluding not only to his fear that he would cease to
be but that he would soon be forgotten. Joyce left no instructions about his
epitaph, and if he had, he might well have said that his name had been writ­
ten in Fendant de Sion, the white Swiss wine that he called the urine of an
archduchess (Budgen 168) and that so nobly stimulated both his Muse and
the stomach ulcer that finished him off. But, be that as it may, once when he
was asked if he had any plans for further writing, now that *Finnegans Wake*
was finally achieved, he replied that he wanted to write a short book about the sea
(Potts 202). And we remember that, whatever the *Wake's* circularity (if we
should wish, after 628 pages, to go back to the “riverrun” at the beginning)
the book ends with Anna Liffey losing her individuality as her waters and her
words are diffused into the sea.

Speaking in praise of water, to be sure, is not a very original or uncommon
thing to do. The very first line of Pindar's first Olympian ode reads, “Best of
all things is water,” and the pre-Socratic philosopher Thales maintained that
all things were but water in different forms. Even those of us who have never
struggled through Xenophon’s *Anabasis* will have heard of the weary, parched
soldiers' glad shout, “*Thalassa!* *Thalassa!*” (*The sea! The sea!*) as they came
in sight of water. Buck Mulligan certainly remembers it, for the benefit (or a
mild put-down) of Greekless Stephen (LJ-GP 1:80). Anyone who has been to
Greece, especially during the hotter months, will understand why the Greeks
set such store by water; but Dubliners, habituated to fog, mist, rain, mizzle,
lakes, rivers, pools, and bogs, and seldom visited by the sun, might be inclined
to take water for granted and place a higher value on what they used to call
the craythur, as dispensed by the brothers Guinness and by John Jameson. But
even *uisge beatha* means “water of life,” Dublin means “black pool,” *Baile atha
*Inish* means “ford of the hurdles,” and Eire would not be the Emerald Isle if
it did not have lots of water as well as lots of chlorophyll. Water, if not the best
of things, is, next to air, the most necessary to personkind.
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But not necessarily necessary to literature. How much water do you find in Flaubert or Balzac or Thackeray or Dreiser? Joyce, though, spent a lifetime close to water, and most of it in cities bisected by rivers: Dublin, by the Liffey; Rome, by the Tiber; Paris, by the Seine; Zurich, by the Limmat; and Trieste, washed by the Adriatic, whose “dark streets down by the river” he evoked in Giacomo Joyce (3). He might well have echoed the medieval monk (well thought of, if not authentic) who observed how benevolently thoughtful it was of God to have made rivers run by cities. Joyce’s infancy was passed in Bray, with its “cold seawall”; his adolescence and young manhood were spent not far from the Grand Canal, the Royal Canal, the Poddle, with its “tongue of liquid sewage” (U-GP 10:1197), the Dodder, the trees along whose banks were more sinned against than sinning (by Joyce and Nora, among others [Delaney 157]), the quays along the Liffey, Dalkey, the Bull, the North Wall, Sandymount Strand—a decidedly aqueous existence. And even when he turned to the haunts of men, Mooney’s en ville was balanced by Mooney’s sur mer—one frequently had to step to the rear of the premises to pump ship—and in between pubs there were the greenhouses, over one of which Tom Moore’s roguishly pointing finger indicated the meeting of the waters (U-GP 8:414).

There is yet further testimony to the aqueous influences on Joyce’s youth. The Liffey flows near Clongowes, and among the Joyce memorabilia is a little volume bound in blue paper, which Joyce almost certainly was obliged to read there, containing a tribute to that stream. It is T. J. Lyster’s anthology, Poems for the Young Student, and it contains “Mesgedra,” a poem about Ireland’s heroic past, by Sir Samuel Ferguson. Ferguson was partial to the Liffey; he observed,

Not all inglorious in thy elder day
Art thou, Moy-Liffey. . . .

He wanted

To fling my votive garland on thy wave. . . .

He rhapsodized,

Delicious Liffey! From thy bosoming hills
What man who sees thee issuing strong and pure,
But with some wistful, fresh, emotion fills,
Akin to Nature’s own clear temperature?

But at the beginning of the poem Ferguson pulled out all the stops:

When glades were green where Dublin stands today
And limpid Liffey, fresh from wood and wold,
Bridgeless and fordless, in the lonely Bay
Sunk to her rest on sands of stainless gold. . . .

(Poems 42, 40, 33)
Bloom remembers this “schoolpoem” in the Burton restaurant (U-GP 8:664), and Peter Costello, in a recently published biographical work, is quite sure that reminiscences of “Mesgedra” must have influenced the closing paragraphs of Finnegans Wake (83–84). If he is correct, that is proof positive that sometimes, at least, you can make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear.

And when it came time for the exile to sing, it is no wonder that super flu­mina Babylonis seemed to be his motto, from his first anthologized poem, which is about the waves like an army advancing on the shore, to the stitch­ing of eight hundred or more river names into “Anna Livia Plurabelle.” Joyce never got very far from the waters of Babble-on; and though it may be pure coincidence, it does not surprise me at all that Thomas Wolfe, a mountain boy who was infatuated with Joyce, chose to call his immense autobiographical omnium gatherum, which largely takes place on dry land, Of Time and the River. “A wind is rising, and the rivers flow,” said he, as though they hadn’t been doing it before.

William York Tindall, dead some years now (and I fear little regarded in these days of grand theory except by the oldest of Joyceans) was, along with Edmund Wilson and Harry Levin, a founder of such Joycean scholarship as was not initiated by the master himself among his Paris circle. And I think it was Tindall who first drew our attention to the importance of water and water imagery in Joyce. Indeed, he went so far as to call it Joyce’s principal symbol. In his Reader’s Guide, the fruit of many years of seminars explicating Joyce, Tindall speaks of baby Stephen wetting the bed on the first page of Portrait, and says, among other things, “From this infantile beginning the great image proceeds, becoming the sea at last and Anna Livia Plurabelle, the ‘riverrun’ of life and time in Finnegans Wake. . . . by itself water carries the meanings of life and death, for it is our origin and our goal. . . . In the first half of A Portrait water is commonly disagreeable, agreeable in the second. . . . the image of water changes and expands” (88–89). And in his edition of Chamber Music, Tindall wrote at great length, though dispersedly, of the waters in those lyrics, ranging from the sea and its advancing waves to the waters deposited in chamberpots by gentle ladies.

Some later students of Joyce have waxed indignant about Tindall’s preoc­cupation with tinkling ladies and with urine as a mode of water in Joyce’s thought. But even if we argue that the “shell of night” in Chamber Music 26 is a seashell rather than a vase de nuit, such shells do bring to our ears the roar of waters, as they do to the barmaids in “Sirens”; and only yesterday, so to speak, John Bishop contended, in Joyce’s Book of the Dark, that Finnegans Wake, a book of sleep, arises in many ways, literal and figurative, from the rush of waters that the sleeping ear hears in the tides of its own blood (336–46), or, as Joyce put it: “Tides, myriadislanded, within her, blood not mine, oinopa ponton, a wine-dark sea. . . . In sleep the wet sign calls her hour, bids her rise” (U-GP 3:394–97), neatly equating the Virgin Mary, Stephen Dedalus’s mother, Molly
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Bloom, and perhaps even the leaning lady of *Chamber Music*. Tindall may have been slightly cranky in pursuing images, but he was dead right regarding the importance of water in Joyce’s life and thought (which are, after all, inseparable). Yeats too, after reading *Chamber Music*, wondered, borrowing the terms of his wonderment from Blake, whether Joyce was a fountain or a cistern (quoted in CM 78), and more recently Dennis Brown, characterizing the “men of 1914,” chose to compare Eliot to fire, Joyce to water (Trotter 11). The idea of water, being an infinity of things, doing an infinity of things, dominated Joyce’s creation; and the idea of a “great image” beginning in tentative dribbles and expanding to infinity throughout the chronological sequence of Joyce’s work, is the theme I have chosen.

But how to deal with this tasteless, soundless, odorless, solid, liquid, or gaseous element? Water takes on color, odor, sound, and tactile presence from its circumstances, as we see when contemplating an ice cube or the ocean; and Joyce’s narrative utterance is the water that sustains and interpenetrates his creation. If you are writing a realistic story set in Dublin, you are bound to come to water, and had better not make too much of it. (I remember being tartly cautioned, as a symbol-hunting graduate student, by a professor who reminded us that a mutton chop in Trollope is probably not intended to evoke the Lamb of God.) But when Joyce says in his notes to Exiles (not written for publication) that the dead lover’s symbols “are music and the sea” (118), we are bound to sit up and take notice.

The mature Joyce had a unique and unrivaled creation machine in his head; he did not, like Little Chandler, consider anxiously that he must put in allusions (*D69* 74); they arose as needed when preconsciously summoned and flowed out of his pen. But clearly he saw the advantage of starting from somewhere important, and his notebooks are guideposts or collections of gnomons, or perhaps beacons amid the sea of images and stories. However, until we get to *Finnegans Wake*, concerning which none of the conventional tools of fictional criticism work very well, we can proceed on the assumption that protean water, or water as multivalent image, takes on its colors and shapes from being perceived through the sensibilities of relatively conventional characters. Joycean characters characterize water as they think about it, and it tests and judges them through their reactions to it. Perhaps the most general and traditional meanings of water by itself are life and death, and I think that we may trace a consistent pattern through Joyce’s aquacities and his aqua cities as his characters interact with them. Some choose life, some elect death by water; *Finnegans Wake* embraces and dissolves both, holding them in solution. But, as everything in Joyce can seemingly be taken in two ways, I think that here we shall discover a paradox. Those who fear water fear death by drowning or, if the water is figurative, fear the abandonment of their integrity and shape for fluidity and mutation. But by remaining timidly landlocked they enter a living death. Eliot’s mummified Prufrock is not the only character in a
modernist fiction who walks fruitlessly (or peachlessly?) on the beach dreaming vaguely of being a lobster, or alternatively of being entertained by sea girls. Joycean characters who are hydrophile, on the other hand, risk losing life; but the saying "he that loseth his life shall find it" was not deprived of its validity by the death of Jesus.

Joyceans are all too prone to fancy that the mind of Joyce was like the mind of God, existing in an eternal present and containing all that is and may be. We must be careful and remember that the hand that wrote Ulysses did a lot of other things, too (Ellmann 190). But it is tantalizing to reflect that, like Finnegans Wake, Chamber Music begins with a river and ends with the sea. Water figures in only seven of its thirty-odd lyrics, but unless we choose to claim that its connotations in these are pure happenstance, we have to conclude that the youthful lutanist already knew what he meant to do with water and waters. In the first poem Love wanders aimlessly by the river, pallidly Pre-Raphaelite in costume, with his fingers straying upon an instrument (which phrase only the perverse could see, surely, as alluding to onanism?). In poem 9 the May breezes play merrily with the seafoam, but love is unhappy when love is away. The timorous lady in 26, unwilling to abandon herself to the lover, is filled with fear at what she hears as she leans to the shell of night: rushing rivers scare her. Rain in 32 has fallen all the day, and separation is foretold. And in the last two poems many waters flow to and fro, making moan as cold winds accompany lonely exile, or resembling a cruel invading army as the abandoned lover wails in despair. Clearly, for the youthful lyricist, when he sings of undirected, absent, frustrated, desiring, unfulfilled, or in short, pre-Nora love, rain and rivers and seas are bad medicine. The poems of happy union, physical or not, take place in unwetted woodlands and vales. May we speculate that Chamber Music, exquisite though it is, is about a fictive lover who never wet the tea?

As good modernists we have been taught by The Waste Land, if we hadn't thought of it before, to see water and dryness as life and suspended animation or living death, respectively, and so we will not be surprised to find Dubliners a pretty arid collection of scenes; but water figures significantly in at least four of the fifteen tales. We are not likely to forget the image of the "dark mutinous Shannon waves" (D69 223) into which the snowflakes disappear, an image of the metamorphosis of water in the magniloquent last paragraph of "The Dead," but the yacht on which Jimmy Doyle loses his shirt in "After the Race" might just as well be a landlocked hotel room. Much more significant are the quayside scenes in "An Encounter" and "Eveline"; and here we might again, if inclined to speculate, continue to see the outlines of an emerging pattern. Water can bring life to deadness and dryness; it can be a road to adventure and freedom; but it can kill by drowning. The boy in "An Encounter" crosses the Liffey, looks at sailors, and thinks vaguely of escape and textbook geography made real; but it is Mahony, whom he had "always despised . . . a little," who
proposes that “it would be right skit to run away to sea on one of those ships” (D69 28, 23). Do we have an anticipation here of Stephen versus Mulligan, W. B. Murphy, and Bloom? Eveline desires and fears a sailor; she lives amid dust and dusty cretonne, but she has been shown fear in a handful of dust—“she wondered where on earth all the dust came from” (D69 37); like Stephen she might say, “Dead breaths I living breathe, tread dead dust” (U-GP 3:479). Alas, at the final moment, at the dock, “All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart. He was drawing her into them; he would drown her” (D69 41). In Dubliners, the promise of life and freedom is just that: a promise. The boy’s romantic longings are stifled and end, as the old man’s mind “circled slowly round and round” (D69 26), in disgust at sordid old age and at onanism; Eveline, paralyzed by timidity, retreats forever to her dusty cretonne and alcoholic father. And even if she had eloped with Frank, she might have ended her days in Liverpool, seduced and abandoned, as Hugh Kenner thinks (quoted in Feshbach 223), or as I think, amid the dusty cretonne of a Buenos Aires brothel, as a commodity in the then flourishing transatlantic white slave trade. The water of Dubliners cannot redeem the city; it is only a deceptive mirage.

But just before writing the first Dubliners stories Joyce’s talent had taken a new and promising, though temporarily abortive, direction. In January 1904 he dashed off the sketch “A Portrait of the Artist,” which was rejected by Dana as being incomprehensible; but a month later, on his Dedalian twenty-second birthday, he decided that it would be the germ of Stephen Hero, on which he immediately set to work. “Germ” is an appropriate word to use, for not only is the sketch packed with images that recur transformed in the later work, but it marks the birth of Stephen Fitzjames, or rather of the Joycean persona that generations of critics have endlessly dissected, trying to find out which trait is autobiographical, which is not, and why. It also marks, far more than the relatively objective Dubliners stories, Joyce’s fateful decision to use what I like to call his “personal myth” as a matrix for his work—the disguised saga of James Joyce as Everyman, to say nothing of God the Father, William Blake, and the quintessence of Ireland.

I have said nothing so far about the real James Joyce—rather than his narrative voice—in his fictions, nor yet about Joyce in water rather than merely living near it; but at this point those of us who have not recently read My Brother’s Keeper with attention may be in for a surprise. Whatever his thoughts about thunder and dogs, Joyce did not fear water. The half-blind, sedentary Joyce of the Finnegans Wake years was far in the future; young Jim not only won track trophies at Clongowes, but, Stanislaus tells us, he was “very fond of swimming, too. He was a splashy swimmer, but fast. Over a short distance he could beat his burly friend Gogarty, who was, of course, a far stronger swimmer” (42). A water baby, in short; and so it is no surprise to find that the artist-figure in his first avatar is hydrophile. “An impulse led him forth . . . where the
mists hung streamerwise... amid the fragrant rain... In summer it had led him seaward... as evening deepened the grey glow above the sea, he had gone out, out among the shallow waters... singing passionately to the tide" (Scholes and Kain 64-65). Nor is it surprising that this passage also contains material that would become the celebrated "wading girl" episode. Stephen as persona would seem to be firmly set as a lover of water and the sea.

But another surprise awaits us. It is always unwise to extrapolate the Joycean artist from Stephen Hero, because it represents only a fragment of the whole that eventually was epiphanized into Portrait; but for what it is worth we can say that that work is almost wholly free from water. Almost, that is: for a few pages from the end of that fragment we hear that "Stephen spent the great part of the summer on the rocks of the North Bull." On the rocks, we note, while his brother Maurice "stretched idly on the rocks or plunged into the water" (230). Stephen remains high and dry, and while on the next page he responds affirmatively to his father's question, "Had a dip?" he is perhaps merely being soothingly mendacious, for drunken Mr. Dedalus says, "Well, there is some sense in that. I like to see that" (231). And at the very end of the fragment we have, Stephen is seen staring in fascinated revulsion at the body of a woman, escaped from the asylum, who had drowned in the canal. Insignificant, perhaps; but maybe a pattern is beginning to take shape.

When the great metamorphosis takes place in Joyce's mind, and he passes from scrupulous meanness to gorgeous polyphony, or, in C. S. Lewis' phrase, from the drab to the golden style, the fictions become, as we are all aware, decidedly more aqueous. Everyone knows about the significant use of water and watery images in Portrait—I count at least twenty-one appearances, large and small, literal and metaphorical—and most Joyceans if you asked them would doubtless concur with the received doctrine that water has negative connotations in the first half of Portrait, positive in the second. They think of Stephen's abhorrence, several times repeated, of the cold slimy water in the square ditch at Clongowes, and, in Tindall's phrase, of "wading with the wading girl that brings renewal" (89). But if one examines all the watery images in Portrait, it becomes clear that Stephen's affirmative contacts with the element are oddly tentative. When he is not flinching with revulsion from real or figurative water, he is merely getting his feet wet.

Stephen is not seen bathing at Clongowes, he only remembers "with a vague fear the warm turfcolored bogwater" (P64 22), and when he does wade, it is not in the sea but in "a long rivulet in the strand" full of seaweed (P64 170). The wading girl's thighs, which he sees from a considerable distance, are bare almost to the hips, but Stephen, like Prufrock, does not even roll up his trousers; and he soon begins striding over the strand and then turns landward. Most Joyceans are apt to transfer their admiration of Joyce to his persona, and to hope that Stephen will shortly write Ulysses; and so they tend to forget that nearly everything in Joyce can be taken in two ways. Stephen may be a genius,
but he is also an insufferable prig; and moreover, unlike his fastidious creator, he is dirty. "—Well, it's a poor case," says Mrs. Dedalus,

when a university student is so dirty that his mother has to wash him.
—But it gives you pleasure, said Stephen calmly. (P64 175)

We might sympathize with Stephen as he turns away from the porcine Christian brothers, come from bathing at the Bull, or when his flesh "dreaded the cold infrahuman odour of the sea" (P64 167), or when the "corpsewhite" "medley of wet nakedness" of his fellow students "chilled him to the bone" (P64 168), but the possibility of joining them in the purifying water for a splash and a shout does not enter his thoughts; no, "he, apart from them and in silence, remembered in what dread he stood of the mystery of his own body" (P64 168). Stephen is high and dry, and remains so.

It is true that chapters 2 and 3 of Portrait are entirely dry, and that Stephen's vision of Hell is of a field of dry weeds, but when he thinks of water in a favorable way, as with his concluding visions of the sea, he is never in it, but on or over it. Icarus, as he well knows, died by drowning. Much more often Stephen uses imagery of the sea as an insidious but all-powerful threat. "He had tried to build a breakwater of order and elegance against the sordid tide of life without him and to dam up . . . the powerful recurrence of the tides within him . . . . The water had flowed over his barriers: their tides began once more to jostle fiercely above the crumbled mole" (P64 98). For Stephen the waters, if you are not well inland or able to fly or sail over them, mean destruction. During one of his spasms of piety, "He seemed to feel a flood slowly advancing towards his naked feet and to be waiting for the first faint timid noiseless wavelet to touch his fevered skin. Then . . . . he found himself standing far away from the flood upon a dry shore, saved by a sudden act of the will or a sudden ejaculation: . . . seeing the silver line of the flood far away and beginning again its slow advance towards his feet" (P64 152). The waves that talk among themselves in young Stephen's dreamy imagination, as he snoozes in the Clongowes infirmary, might seem to speak of hope, but they herald the death of Parnell (P64 26-27). In short, if water fascinates Stephen it is with the terror of its depths, and if some might argue that the scene of composing the villanelle is pretty watery, it is Stephen's soul that is "dewy wet," and it is bathed in waves of light (P64 217). He may scorn the dean of studies; but as regards the use of sea images, they are as one. The dean says of Stephen's tentatives at an esthetic theory: "—These questions are very profound, Mr. Dedalus. It is like looking down from the cliffs of Moher into the depths. Many go down into the depths and never come up. Only the trained diver can go down into those depths and explore them and come to the surface again" (P64 187). Stephen, at the end of Portrait, is no trained diver.

Nor is he as Ulysses opens. The central action of Joyce's model, the Odyssey, you may remember, begins with wily Odysseus at sea, not on or over it, but in
it. The man of many shifts, however, will not drown; he is afloat on a wimple, donated by a goddess known as fair-ankled Ino in the words of the Victorian abridgment that I, and perhaps Joyce, read in school. Daughter of Cadmus, she was driven mad by Hera for having nursed Dionysus; she leaped into the sea and became alternatively a seagull or the goddess Leucothea, whichever you like. The sea has no terrors for Odysseus and his ilk, even if Poseidon is irritated with him on account of Polyphemus: the aquatic goddess has an eye for an all-round gentleman. Telemachus, like Stephen, is of course a landlubber; and I do not think it is accidental that the first personage we see in *Ulysses* is Buck Mulligan, who right after breakfast plunges boldly into the sea: "You saved men from drowning. I'm not a hero, however," says Stephen (U-GP 1:62).

Joyce disliked Gogarty, and Stephen disloves Mulligan; but we are not compelled to agree with them. Stephen, as I observed before, is a gloomy, insufferable prig, and dirty to boot; Mulligan, and a fortiori Bloom, are physically if not mentally clean, they like people, and they have an earthy sense of humor, very much like the artist who created them.


As regards water, *Ulysses* is in a state of saturation. Water figures in every episode, and if I were to discuss all of its manifestations in the significant detail they deserve we should be here until tomorrow—or rather I should, bombinating in a void. As I said before, a realistic fiction about Dublin is bound to have rivers and canals in it; and so I prefer to consider what characters think about water, in water, or near water as an index of their ultimate Joycean merit. And first, for Stephen.

The sea, which Mulligan bids him behold, is "a dull green mass of liquid" (U-GP 1:108). Haines, not Stephen, is the "seas' ruler" (U-GP 1:574). The "unclean bard makes a point of washing once a month" (U-GP 1:475). Although "Lycidas ... is not dead, / sunk though he be beneath the watery floor, / . . . Through the dear might of him that walked the waves," the point is lost on Stephen, who says in the schoolroom, "I don't see anything" (U-GP 2:80). The bay is "empty." Stephen in "Proteus," walking on the "unwholesome sandflats" (U-GP 3:150), fears falling over a cliff that "beetles o'er his base into the sea," into "Elsinore's tempting flood," a suggestion of suicide (U-GP 3:281; italics mine). "The flood is following me," he thinks in a terror-stricken moment reminiscent of *Portrait*, and decides to go inland, where "I can watch it flow past from here" (U-GP 3:282). Watching it flow is supremely tempting; flowing with it is abhorrent.

And Stephen's vampire poem, as I once pointed out, is partly inspired by a picture in a book of woodcuts he had bought, introduced by Yeats, showing an agonized bat-winged figure, like drowned Icarus, about to disappear beneath huge threatening waves (Day, "How Stephen Wrote").

But, as we have begun to see, if Stephen fears annihilation by drowning whenever he thinks of the depths or the encroaching tide, he has another fear, equally strong but more obscurely voiced. He fears flow, change, dissolution, metamorphosis. "I want his life still to be his, mine to be mine" (U-GP 3:327–28). He fears that his ashplant—solid prop, phallic symbol if you will, or magic wand—"will float away" (U-GP 3:454). Images of flux swirl through his head as he contemplates the sluggish tide: "It flows purling, widely flowing, floating foampool, flower unfurling . . . To no end gathered; vainly then released, forthflowing, wending back . . . Full fathom five thy father lies . . . Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor . . . God becomes man becomes fish becomes barnacle goose becomes featherbed mountain . . . A seachange this" (U-GP 3:459–482). But Stephen does not take the hints that his store of images extends to him. The drowned man does not change into something rich and strange; he remains a "bag of corpsegas, sopping in foul brine" (U-GP 3:476).

High and dry again, Stephen breathes dead breaths, treads dead dust (U-GP 3:479), even though the great sweet mother of "Telemachus" has become "Old Father Ocean" (U-GP 3:483). This old father, old artificer, will not stand forgetful Stephen in good stead. He relies rather on his "salteaten stick"; all that dust has had its natural effect, and amid all that water Stephen becomes a parched, weeping Jesus on the cross: "I thirst" (U-GP 3:485). A pilgrim with Hamlet hat and staff and Mulligan's sandal shoon, he turns resolutely away from the temptations of dissolving water to seek solace in another kind of foam, at "The Ship. Half twelve" (U-GP 1:733), though he does not manage to get there after all.

No one is going to pin down "Proteus" and his images to the satisfaction of all; but it is clear enough that Stephen's meditations are sterile, self-regarding, limited to the perceptions and to the past, present, and future of toothless Kinch, the superman. He wants to gain love ("Touch, touch me"; U-GP 3:486), not offer it; he will not leave his self-enclosed identity or enter the lives of others for more than a moment. He is of the company of Joycean figures who hover at the verge of the water, safely dry, but who will not float, perhaps drown, in any case be changed. The case is similar in the metaphorical seas of "Scylla and Charybdis," the cave-bound monster and the whirlpool: Stephanos
**contra mundum.** He fools the company of wits to the top of their bent but re­
mains fixed, parrying every thrust, as they swirl around him. True, he reflects
on “the sea’s voice, a voice heard only in the heart of him who is the substance
of his shadow, the son consubstantial with the father” (U-GP 9:479–81), but,
as a recent critic has noted, “he misses his own cue” (Cope 237), and, when
he fades temporarily out of sight in “Wandering Rocks” with his sister Dilly,
he is still singing the old song: “She is drowning. . . . She will drown me with
her, eyes and hair. Lank coils of seaweed around me, my heart, my soul. Salt
green death” (U-GP 10:875–77), although he has his wages in his pocket and
Dilly could use a few shillings. Stephen is entirely preoccupied with the future
of toothless Kinch—to be “seabedabbled, fallen, weltering” (U-GP 9:954).

Curiously, though, Stephen drunk may be wiser than Stephen sober. When
he comes onstage in “Circe” he is chanting: “Vidi aquam egredientem de tem­
plo a latere dextro. Alleluia. Et omnes ad quos pervenit aqua ista / Salvi facti
sunt” (U-GP 15:77–98). “And I saw the waters coming forth from the right side
of the temple. And all to whom those waters come / shall be saved.” Stephen
knows, or should know, that these waters come from Ezekiel’s prophecies, that
they become “waters to swim in,” that when they come to the sea they “shall
be healed,” and that “every thing shall live whither the river cometh” (Ezekiel
47:1–9). But although Joyce makes Stephen utter the last words “Triumphaliter”
(U-GP 15:98), he also disjoins the quotation into three parts, suggesting dis­
traction; and Stephen’s thoughts immediately veer toward Georgina Johnson,
“the goddess who rejoices my youth” (U-GP 15:122–23), as he disappears from
view, in search of her. Stephen will need a good deal of psychotherapy, or hy­
derotherapy, before he can come to terms with water and understand how much
he needs it.

If Buck Mulligan, at home both in water and in Dublin society, *bon viveur*
and obscene jester, will not fill the bill as a plausible antithesis to Stephen,
Leopold Bloom, of whom we see a great deal more in *Ulysses*, will do very well.
*His* head has no objection to simply swirling when he thinks of seaside girls;
but unlike them (if we remember all the lyrics of the song), his daughter Milly
did not suffer from *mal de mer* when he took her around the Kish in *Erín’s King.*
“Not a bit funky,” he remembers with pleasure, in his second evocation of water
in “Calypso.” The lively waters that “made the damned old tub pitch about”
produced no fear (U-GP 4:434–35). It is true that Bloom’s first watery
thoughts, of the Dead Sea, sear his flesh with “grey horror,” but those waters
are stagnant: “no fish, weedless . . . no wind would lift those waves” (U-GP
4:230, 220). The Dead Sea does not flow.

As we all know, Mr. Bloom, who has no bathroom, nevertheless does not
use the washstand like Molly but makes a visit to the public baths one of the
first tasks of his day; no unwashed bard he. And as if to point up the parallel,
Joyce as “the arranger” allows Bloom a soupçon of Stephen’s “Proteus” imagery:
“a huge dull flood leaked out, flowing together, winding through mudflats all
over the level land, a lazy pooling swirl of liquor bearing along wideleaved flowers of its froth" (U-GP 5:315-17). Both men reflect on drowning; but for Stephen it is the "mildest" death (U-GP 3:482-83); "Drowning they say is the pleasantest," ruminates Bloom in "Hades" (U-GP 6:988). Although he is by no means ready to die ("They are not going to get me this innings" [U-GP 6:1004]), the idea of dissolution does not appall him. "How can you own water really? It's always flowing in a stream, never the same, which in the stream of life we trace. Because life is a stream" (U-GP 8:93-95).

Accordingly, we ought not be surprised to find that in "Circe," where battered and bruised Stephen stubbornly clings to his identity, Bloom turns into so many things (including a woman) that I am not going to list them, because my space is limited. Bloom is a cultured allround man, the new womanly man; and I think that when Joyce told Frank Budgen that he was tired of Stephen because he had a shape that couldn't be changed (Budgen 105) he was making a much less petulant and a much profounder statement about Stephen, and himself as artist and thinker about life, than we have been giving him credit for. In any case, he next went on to *Finnegans Wake*, where the characters have no recognizable shape at all—drowned, dissolved, and metamorphosed in a rich linguistic Irish stew.

It may be, though, if you believe, as I do, that symbolic or fantastic events in *Ulysses* are just as "real" as making cocoa or restoring Parnell's hat, that it is Bloom after all who saves Stephen from drowning. For at the end of "Circe," after Stephen has murmured "white breast . . . dim sea," and curled up in a fetal position, Bloom, holding hat and ashplant, stands guard over the pros­trate bard "in the attitude of secret master," and curiously enough, murmurs "in the rough sands of the sea . . . a cabletow's length from the shore . . . where the tide ebbs . . . and flows" (U-GP 15:4942-54). Whereupon the vision of Rudy appears. One can drown just as well in the stream of life as in the sea, after all, unless a helping hand is ready.

But it is time to return to aquacities (which you may have wondered if I was going to mention again). As I noted before, Joyce seems to have invented the word; and if you look at the Gabler edition (U-GP 1472) and the British Mu­seum notes (Herring 445), you find that at first he wasn't sure how to spell it, making two tries. It occurs, for the first and only time, in "Ithaca." And it also occurs, significantly or not, just after one of those curious "ruptures" in the text of which the deconstructionists are so enamored. To illustrate: On en­ter­ing the basement kitchen, Bloom draws water, which gets by far the longest description, apart from the inventories, in the entire chapter. He then, hav­ing put the filled saucepan on the hob, washes his hands, in fresh, cold, ne­ver­changing, everchanging water, appropriately for a Joycean priest who is about to celebrate a parody communion with the creature cocoa. The very next line reads: "What reason did Stephen give for declining Bloom's offer?" (U-GP 17:263). But oddly, in this fanatically detailed chapter, no offer or declination
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has been made. Was Joyce so intoxicated with the implications of his imagery that he left out a needful link? Being no deconstructionist, and disliking aporia, I shall simply say flatly that we shall never know and get on with it. Nevertheless, this enchanting rupture is surrounded by fascinating matter, which I do want to explore.

The silent oration of Bloom, water lover, drawer of water, water carrier, in admiration of that element, is too long to quote (it was expanded from the first manuscript to the final version by a factor of five), but I want to cite a few significant phrases: universality, unplumbed profundity, hydrostatic quiescence, hydrokinetic turgidity, preponderance of three to one over the dry land, indisputable hegemony, capacity to dissolve and hold in solution all soluble substances including millions of tons of the most precious metals, seaquakes, waterspouts (and sixteen other violent manifestations), persevering penetrativeness, properties for cleansing, quenching thirst and fire, nourishing vegetation, infallibility as paradigm and paragon, metamorphoses, variety of forms, ubiquity as constituting ninety percent of the human body (U-GP 17:185–227). Now the language of this aria is not Bloom’s; it is, of course, that of the arranger, as usual in “Ithaca,” and the notes are full of hydrostatistics, about eighty of them (Herring 417–93). But however we may feel about it, clearly Joyce wants us to feel the impact of this torrent of watery qualities and to apprehend what water can do, through Bloom.

Stephen, on the other hand, is curtly handled: “he was hydrophobe [is it going too far to think of hydrophobia?], hating partial contact by immersion or total by submersion in cold water, (his last bath having taken place [ugh!] in the month of October of the preceding year [is the interval of eight months intended to be significant?], disliking the aqueous substances of glass and crystal [no wonder he broke his spectacles!], distrusting aquacities of thought and language” (U-GP 17:237–40). Bloom then keeps quiet, stifling his good intentions by thinking of “the incompatibility of aquacity with the erratic originality of genius” (U-GP 17:147) and struck by Stephen’s seemingly “predominant qualities”: “Confidence in himself, an equal and opposite power of abandonment and recuperation” (U-GP 17:253–54). But is aquacity incompatible with genius? Perhaps, if it merely means see-throughability; but certainly, in view of the Rabelaisian hodgepodge of watery qualities and powers with which we have just been deluged, it is not incompatible with the genius of such as James Joyce. Stephen, like unwary Oedipus, or like Hamlet before he learns to relax and trust in God,² is leaning on a weak reed (or ashplant) if he is only confident in himself. He needs to find a father, or Old Father Ocean, or perhaps a Molly or Nora, if his genius is to be sustained and fertilized. When he exits he is still very much of the company of those who shun water only to find a living death.

Molly, of course, as we immediately see, is full of liquid and of life. She urinates and menstruates; more, her discourse, with no beginning and no end, is
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verbal water, in which shapeless thoughts flow, eddy, and are transformed. Her symbols, like those of the dead lover in the notes to Exiles, might very well be music and the sea. As with Anna Livia, in her thoughts the "awful deep-down torrent" (U-GP 18:1598) has the penultimate word.

Neither space nor my knowledge in progress allows me to make more than a few random observations about Finnegans Wake with respect to water, cities, and aquacities. Transparency it certainly has not got; and anyone can see that half or more of the words in it are dissolved, like the digested peas that at one point turn into eaps (FW 456.22); or else they are solvents like the word "peatrick" (FW 1.10), which simultaneously holds Saint Peter, Irish Patrick, the Irish peat rick, and the quasi-Irish shell game or pea trick, in its tiny but capacious depths. Words in Finnegans Wake can do everything that Andrew Marvell's marvelous drop of dew can do, only better. It is a sea of stories in which people and things, like the city of Dublin, are often submerged but always glimmer through the depths or bob up like corks in the Liffey, or like throwaways. We all know that Joyce brocaded about eight hundred river names into "Anna Livia Plurabelle," and that the river, like the mountain, is never far away; but consider also that of the 124 songs from Moore's Irish Melodies, all woven into the Wake, no less than 40 contain water in one way or another, from the title or first line, like "Silent, O Moyle," or "As a Beam o'er the Face of the Waters may Glow," "The Meeting of the Waters," "By that Lake Whose Gloomy Shore," "Come o'er the Sea," "I Saw from the Beach," "As Slow Our Ship," "Sail On, Sail On," "The Boyne's Ill-fated River," "I Wish I was by that Dim Lake," to the waters of Babylon evoked in "The Parallel," to the seas, rivers, dews, mists, and rain that share Moore's imagery with tears and "balmy drops" of wine. Even to enumerate the ways in which water and bodies of water penetrate the Wake would take a very long time. But I cannot forget what Brendan O'Hehir tells us about the word "Liffey": it has several possible etymologies, but, he says, we should always expect to find a play on "leaf" and, most significantly, "life" (392). Bloom was not alone in remembering that life is a stream. Nor can I forget what we are also told about the completion of the Wake. "Joyce finally, with agonizing effort, brought himself to terminate his task by composing 'Soft morning city.' We may say that he had hung up his harp. And thereupon he went down to the river and wept. By the waters of" (Rose 964). I have quoted a secondary source, and one may be skeptical about its reliability; but we have confirmation of the state of Joyce's emotions and thoughts as he brought his task to an end in his own words. Joyce, you remember, had ceased to correspond with his benefactress Harriet Weaver, and was using Paul Léon as an epistolary go-between. Some time in December 1938 he wrote a memorandum for Léon (Fahy 31); Léon was to say that Nora had told him that Joyce was in a state of exhaustion over the final pages of the Wake, written in the most extreme emotional tension. "It deals with the merging of the fresh waters of the Liffey and the salt waters of the Irish Sea at the
Dublin Estuary!!! Ha! Ha! Ha!” What we are to make of the ha-has (sarcasm, hysteria, triumph) I cannot tell; but exhaustion, tension, closure, and the meeting of the waters are there, and they are vouched for by unimpeachable authority.3

All this may sound somewhat airy and theoretical to those who, like older Joyceans, have not learned to reject the idea of authorial intention. All this water could be just adventitious; but we have testimonies from life about Joyce’s views concerning water and watery cities. Paul Léon tells us that “Joyce’s feeling for all bodies of water amounted almost to nostalgia, and he was drawn to the seashore by an irresistible attraction. Wherever he went on holiday, he immediately looked for a river, a stream, or even a brook, and his first walks led him along its banks. How many hours we passed together, watching the calm flow of the Seine” (Potts 289–90). And he extravagantly admired Pare Lorentz’s The River, calling its script “the most beautiful I have heard in ten years” (Obituary). Carola Giedion-Welcker is even more explicit: “‘What a city!’ he would exclaim [of Zurich]. ‘A lake, a mountain, and two rivers are its treasures. . . . [Ireland]’ he said, ‘has two voices, one comes from the mountains and the other from the sea’” (Potts 261). And again, “He observed the life of waters, the ocean and above all the rivers, as he observed the life of people. River-nature, river-myth merged with that ‘river-civilization’ which to him seemed fundamental. Repeatedly he sought out regions with rivers” (Potts 265). Joyce begged the Giedions never to give up their house in Zurich, because it had a little creek rushing past the garden (Potts 265). “To him the confluence of the Limmat and Sihl was an elemental and dramatic meeting, and when I once wanted to take a picture of him in Zurich, it had to be at exactly this spot and with this river background” (Potts 265). Joyce, in Zurich, it seems, “took frequent boat trips on the lake . . . to serve his art . . . From the water, the fish smell, the blue-green color, the misty haze . . . he hoped one word would be born” (Potts 265), but he refused to say whether he had found this quarry, which surely would have had to be a thunderword to include all that.

But the last and most poignant of these testimonies comes again from Paul Léon. Finnegans Wake had appeared, but such acclaim as it had received had been drowned out by the outbreak of war. The exhausted Joyce had moved to La Baule to be near Lucia in her nursing home, but he could visit her only a few minutes a day. Léon remembered:

The rest of the day wore away in walks on the beach. They reminded him of the time when on the seashore of Ireland he had spoken about matters of heaven and earth . . . and where the waves had brought him the smile of Nausicaa. He remembered also the quays of Trieste and the sails on Ulysses’ sea. Now his work was done. . . . But the waves roared as ever . . . the Ocean continued beating the shore and chafing on its edges. And in his mind was rising the idea of a new poem whose fundamental theme would be the murmure of the sea. (Potts 203)
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Clearly, as had not been the case with callow Stephen Dedalus, only half of Joyce at best, "the seas' voice" persisted in being still heard "in the heart of him who is the substance of his shadow, the son consubstantial with the father," and still wanted to be given expression in a new way, in spite of all that had been accomplished in the exhaustive and exhausting *Finnegans Wake*. And if the artist could have lived, yet another book about the sea would have been created. How could this be? Such an effort might seem impossible, but Joyce's mind, even if wretched and fatigued, remained limitless, and, to finish my meditation on aquacity and answer that last question, I can find no better phrase than the beautiful dying fall that Eleanor Clark uses to end her essay on Hadrian's Villa: "After all, all that water had to come from somewhere" (194).

NOTES

1. I discuss the implications of this mysterious sentence at length in my "Joyce, Stoom, King Mark."

2. This view of Hamlet's character is forcefully argued in Johnson's "The Regeneration of Hamlet."

3. Léon wrote the letter to Weaver; it is dated 16 December 1938, and it contains the words precisely as quoted above, but omitting the exclamation points and the ha-has. We are told that Harriet Weaver was much moved by its contents (Lidderdale and Nicholson 373).

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