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# The Book About Everything

Eighteen Artists,  
Writers and Thinkers on  
James Joyce's *Ulysses*

Edited by  
Declan Kiberd, Enrico Terrinoni  
and Catherine Wilsdon



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## Introduction

A university classmate of Joyce’s, Con Curran, once joked that he made the little he knew go a long way. He was often a lazy student; but whenever he felt frustrated by his ignorance about a given topic, he knew exactly the person whom he should consult to put him right – whether the subject was the dimensions of a house in Eccles Street, the divisions of the police in Sandymount or the passages of Dublin’s underwater system. In *Ulysses* he devoted each episode to a particular subject or profession – education; philosophy; shopkeeping; undertaking; drama; music; obstetrics; bartending; and so on.

Joyce became one of the most celebrated authors in the world, and his book influenced writers (and other kinds of artists) on every continent. Commentators have written valuable studies of his style, his pulverizing of the English language and his structuring of *Ulysses* according to scenes from *The Odyssey* of Homer. He raised banal, ordinary events on a single day, 16 June 1904, to the intensity of poetry.

It struck us that the centenary of the publication of *Ulysses* in 1922 could be a good moment at which to invite distinguished professionals and authors, whose expertise often lies elsewhere, to write a short essay on the ways in which



# Proteus

RICHARD KEARNEY

Richard Kearney is Professor of Philosophy at Boston College, having taught for many years at University College Dublin. Among his books are *Anatheism*, *Touch* and *The Wake of Imagination*. He has also published two novels.

I've often thought that if Joyce wanted to be a singer more than a writer, it might be also said that he wanted to be a philosopher. His studies of Aristotle and Aquinas in particular – during his Jesuit education in Dublin and his scholastic readings in Paris – led to some of the most philosophically rich ruminations of any novelist in the twentieth century. Up there with Sartre, de Beauvoir, Musil, Mann and Borges. But unlike most other philosophical fiction writers, Joyce's point, I believe, was not to use fiction to communicate metaphysics but rather to show how our speculative ideas ultimately bow to carnal human experience. Having just completed a book on the philosophy of 'touch' when I received the invitation to write for this volume in spring 2021, I was intrigued to review what Joyce might have to say on the subject. Writing during the Covid pandemic, when we were all aware of the importance of touch (because deprived of it), the topic seemed especially vital. Proteus beckoned.

'Proteus' is without doubt the most philosophical episode in *Ulysses*; which is why, I presume, my old friend Declan Kiberd asked me to write about it for this centenary volume. I confess it is a very difficult piece for me or any philosopher to make sense of; and probably even more so for non-philosophers. But at least the non-philosopher may be more easily inclined to abandon the search for coherent argument (which may not be there), opting to flow with the music of Stephen's words.

In Joyce's parodic version, Proteus is not a Greek god with a clear message for his supplicant. Nor a personification of some Platonic idea. Nor a Delphic oracle. Proteus is a deity of the sea whose meaning or identity cannot be grasped as he shifts from one form to another as Stephen strolls along Sandymount

Strand. Stephen encounters no one who articulates the original wise counsel of Homer's Proteus to Menelaus – namely, to offer sacrifice to the gods so he can continue on his way. If anything, in keeping with his name, Joyce portrays Proteus as a flux of multiple phenomena registered by Stephen as he trudges through the sandflats of Dublin Bay. Stephen's so-called interior monologue is in fact a polylogue of voices and sensations. Among the many personae that traverse Stephen's stream of consciousness – which I prefer to call a panconscious – we encounter many of his contemporaries, living and dead: his mother, father, brother, uncle and aunt, friend Kevin Egan, teacher Deasy, flatmates Mulligan and Hynes, erotic ladies of the night, and various local Dubliners who happen to be walking their dogs or harvesting mussels in the mud at 11 a.m. in the morning of 16 June 1904. And we also meet countless Irish ancestors like Columbanus, Scotus and Malachi along with invading Danes and Anglo-Normans, great writers like Shakespeare and Swift, and (most relevant for our purposes) Stephen's favourite philosophers – Aristotle, Berkeley and Aquinas. The list seems endless, and the Protean shape-shifting does not stop with human persons; it extends to all kinds of living things – horses, dogs, molluscs, gulls and algae. Not to mention the elements themselves – wind, waves, silt and mountains – all making up the 'signatures of things' which Stephen, the aspiring writer, struggles to read as he tramps through the flooding sands. He resolves to 'understand with his eyes'. But, it seems, to little avail. The quest for meaning yields not answers but a flux of puzzles and perplexities. What is going on?

Let me begin by trying to read the Protean 'signatures' as a philosopher. The chapter starts with epistemology straight up. Aristotle on the senses. Stephen invokes a basic claim for the primacy of sensory perception – the ineluctable modality of the visible and the audible (U 45). He is operating here on Aristotle's argument that there is nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses (or as Aquinas rendered it, *nihil in intellectu quod non fuerit primus in sensu*). And while Stephen is brimming with abstract ideas from his studies in the *quartier latin* and his visits to Dublin's Marsh's Library, his theories are constantly tested by what lies beneath his feet – the oddities he encounters as he treads the sandbanks of Sandymount Strand. His attempt to give fixed forms to the scattered perceptions of his lived body yields each time to the carnal contingencies of time and space, to the singular events of his finite human corporality. What he calls his 'dogbody' (U 58) (which stumbles on silt, suffers poor sight and rotting teeth, urinates and deposits nose-mucus on a rock). The whole 'Proteus' passage moves gradually from the upper senses of sight and sound – visibility and audibility – to what Aristotle calls the 'primal sense of touch'. Only the felt body can make sense of Protean change. The sense of tactility is the royal road to lived experience – the only real kind that can serve the art which Stephens seeks.

Who but a philosopher would begin a rumination with a phrase like 'Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes' (U 45)? But from the word go we realize this thoughtful seeing is special. The 'signatures of all things' (U 45) (a phrase from the mystic Jacob Böhme, whose book Joyce kept in his library in Trieste)

that Stephen is 'here to read' (U 45), are not celestial signs in the sky but the quotidian flotsam scattered at his feet. '[S] easpaw and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot' (U 45). In short, it is ordinary tactile things before him here and now. Coloured things. Green, blue and red. 'In bodies', as Aristotle adds, arguing that things can only be visible through the medium of the actual colour which embodies them. These are the 'limits of the diaphane' (U 45) which Stephen rightly attributes to the Aristotelian model of perception. One can really see things by seeing through (*dia*) them, that is, through their given material medium (*metaxu*) as coloured bodies. Visible things are not projections of our subjective mind, as Berkeley and the idealists held, but tactile carnal phenomena. Touch is the primary sensation of flesh – the medium which enables us to touch and be touched. It is the experience of double sensation upon which all other senses are founded. And touch is the most universal of the senses, for Aristotle, in that it connects us to all living beings – including the rusty fungus on a throwaway boot. 'The primary form of sense is touch which belongs to all animals' (*De Anima*, Book II, p. 11). Or, as Stephen riffs: 'He was aware of them bodies [...] How? By knocking his sponce against them' (U 45). If you want to know something exists, knock your skull against it. That's why Aristotle was, in Dante's laudatory words, '*maestro di color che sanno*' (U 45). Stephen cites the master with approval, suggesting that we ultimately see through touch: 'If you can put your five fingers through it, it is a gate, if not a door. Shut your eyes and see' (U 45).

\* \* \*

I have dwelt long on this opening paragraph of 'Proteus' where Joyce provides a map of Stephen's *itinerarium mentis* from the time he sets foot on Sandymount Strand – stepping through 'snotgreen' (U 45) seaweed, rusty boots and the remains of a dead dog's body – to the time he finally departs one hour later. The ultimate message being that there's nothing in our head that wasn't felt by our feet. Thinking begins and ends with touch. Stephen may have the right theory from the outset but he has to walk a littered Dublin beach to feel it in his bones.

'Shut your eyes and see' (U 45). Stephen heeds Aristotle's advice. He closes his eyes in order to experience his surroundings 'nicely in the dark'. He hears and feels 'his boots crush crackling wrack and shells' (U 45). His walking stick ('ash sword') hangs by his side as he taps his way like a blind man along the strand (his weak eyes are failing him). Minutes later he will be ready to abandon his Prospero's wand altogether and embrace the 'thing of darkness' – the carnal Caliban of mortality ('five fathoms down thy father lies').

Opening his eyes again Stephen confirms that the world did not disappear because he stopped seeing it – disproving Berkeley's idealist thesis that 'to be is to be perceived' (*esse est percipi*). It was 'here all the time without you; and ever shall be, world without end' (U 46). But what does he see? First up, Mrs Florence MacCabe, a midwife with 'splayed feet sinking in the silted sand' (U 46) who reminds him of his own earthly birth; 'lugged [...] squealing into life' (U 46). Unlike his first parents in Eden, created out of nothing with no navel, and unlike the god-man Christ who was begotten not made, Stephen acknowledges he was '[w]ombed in sin darkness' (U 46) by 'them', namely, his



own parents, who 'clasped and sundered, did the coupler's will' (U 46) in order to conceive him. Unlike Christ, who was 'begotten not made' by God (and a virgin mother), Stephen is decidedly 'made not begotten' (U 46). And here he thinks of the heretic Arius, 'illstarred heresiarch' (U 47), who denied the divinity of Christ and the attendant doctrine that he was 'consubstantial' with the Father who created him. Mortals and gods are not of the same substance. And this basic truth of finitude triggers Stephen's memory of a visit to his aunt Sally and bedridden uncle Richie, where he is offered a bite of herring and told to abandon his haughty ways – 'none of your damned lawdeedaw air here' (U 48). The world is a text full of mortal signatures. Recalling his uncle's home he sighs: 'Houses of decay, mine, his and all' (U 49).

The mixing of the conceptual and the banal in Stephen's thoughts is Joyce's way of reminding us, readers, that this is how we actually think. Not clearly and distinctly, as Descartes speculated, but with fluid involuntary memories and layered carnal associations. No matter how high-flying our ideas, we are radically embodied creatures. Deeply tactile and tangible beings like the many sentient creatures – right down to sea fungi and molluscs – that teem and shimmer through the Sandymount flux.

As he proceeds across the strand 'footpace' (U 49), Stephen rehearses a list of ecclesiastical notions that impressed him when he was an 'awfully holy' (U 49) youth obsessed with saintly things – praying to the 'Blessed Virgin that [he] might not have a red nose' (U 49), reading theology in Marsh's Library and serving Mass for Jesuit 'Jackpriests' (U 49). He recalls the altar bell at the consecration of the Host. 'Dringdring

[...] Dringadring [...] twang in diphthong' (U 49). But where, wonders Stephen, did holiness get Dean Swift of Dublin Cathedral? Running to the wild woods 'horsenostrilled' (U 49) like his fictive Houyhnhnms, 'his mane foaming in the moon' (U 49). Would Stephen, the aspirant writer, do any better than his literary forebear? Such musings on sanctity are followed by ironic thoughts about his literary ambitions. A key moment in Stephen's self-reckoning. 'Books you were going to write with letters for titles. [...] Remember your epiphanies on green oval leaves, deeply deep, copies to be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world, including Alexandria? Someone was to read them there after a few thousand years' (U 50). Great sacred epics. Mahamanvantara. Renaissance humanist masterpieces like those of Pico della Mirandola. But no. Stephen is called back to his humble carnality on this earth. The soft silt of Sandymount has gone from 'under his feet' as he trudges through the rotting wreckage of grandiose Armadas. 'Unwholesome sandflats waited to suck his treading soles' (U 50). And no matter how warily he walks, the 'cakey sand dough' (U 50) clogs his steps. He cannot escape. All around him, empty '[h]uman shells' (U 50). Signatures of finitude surround him.

Pursuing his self-scrutiny, Stephen recalls his student visit to the Latin Quarter in Paris, where he had highfalutin fantasies of following in the wake of the wild geese (exiled Gaelic gentry) and serving as a 'missionary to Europe' (U 52) like his 'loudlatinlaughing' (U 52) medieval compatriots – Columbanus, Scotus and Fiacre. But reality turned out differently. Instead of great evangelical masterpieces, Stephen

settled for cheap Parisian porn mags before receiving a blue telegram bidding him to return: 'Mother dying come home father' (U 52). Once more he was tolled back to his mortality. Reminded that he was his father's son, from his mother's womb. Flesh of their flesh. Mud of their mud. Dust of their dust.

After more idle musings about his pals in Parisian cafes and licentious erotica, new sensations of finitude return as Stephen's feet get further clogged in flooding tidal debris. Joyce repeats his tactile images of material footprints and footfalls. The muddy waters are resisting him, prompting him to renounce his fancied walk to the Kish lightship. The language is elemental, viscous, terrestrial, aquatic. 'He stood suddenly, his feet beginning to sink slowly in the quaking soil. Turn back. Turning [...] his feet sinking again slowly in new sockets [...] slowly ever as my feet are sinking' (U 55). The shift in this passage between third and first person is telling, marking Stephen's firm resolve to leave the literary shenanigans of Mulligan and Hynes in the Martello Tower. 'I will not sleep there when this night comes [...] He lifted his feet up from the suck and turned back by the mole of boulders' (U 55). He will live and write differently from now on, he vows, as he sits on a stool of rock, 'resting his ashplant in a grike'.

And then come the dogs. One dead, one alive. Here we find what I consider to be the most vibrant and sustained passage of the entire Protean chapter. As Stephen ruminates on his writing career, he encounters the 'bloated carcass of a dog' (U 55), lolling on bladderwrack beside the remains of a boat sunk in the sand. He recognizes 'signatures' he must read.

'These heavy sands are language tide and wind have silted here' (U 55). He has no illusions. 'Sands and stones. Heavy of the past' (U 56). The very same past Stephen had sought to flee when he left Ireland for Paris at the end of *A Portrait*, going forth to 'forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race'. Such youthful Promethean promises are now shattered on the shifting tides of Protean reality. He smells the blood of his ancestors. Feefawfum. 'Bones for [his] steppingstones.' Grounded once again.

Then the 'live dog' appears, running across the strand, filling Stephen with fear and triggering ancient flashbacks. Celtic ancestors fighting invading Vikings over a thousand years ago. Transgenerational traumas. A flood of shame and longing. 'Famine, plague and slaughters. Their blood is in me, their lusts my waves. I moved among them on the frozen Liffey, that I, a changeling, among the spluttering resin fires' (U 56). The weasel word in this surge of ancestral association is, I think, 'changeling'. Why? Because it reminds Stephen of his Protean vocation as shape-shifter. But how to combine this with his Prospero vocation as artist? We will see what 'seachange' (U 63) is in store once the dog has run its course – 'sniffing on all sides [...] Looking for something lost in a past life' (U 57). Once the man's body, drowned ten days ago off Maiden's rock, has been assimilated into Stephen's consciousness. But for now, fear still lingers as Stephen imagines himself being called to save the drowning man and refusing. Until he follows the dog's carry-on once again, as it patrols the lace fringe of the waves and yelps at cockle pickers. Then the moment of truth. The dog sniffs

a carcass in the sand. Not the man drowned off Maiden's rock nor anybody's grandmother but another dog. 'Poor dogsbody's body' (U 58). Given that Stephen has been called a dogsbody by Buck Mulligan earlier in the book, the phrase hits home. Touché.

And something strange happens. A shift in space and time. A moment opens to a future image of Leopold Bloom, in the persona of Haroun al-Raschid, eighth-century Caliph of Baghdad, praising Molly's melon-like buttocks. The moment where past-present-future meet in an unconscious epiphany of what is still to come, what must come, if Stephen is ever to embrace the 'mother of memory' he has fled and become a writer of flesh and blood reality. But he is not yet there. Instead he relapses to more 'medieval abstrusities' (U 57) of 'morose delectation'. Wearing his Hamlet hat he vacillates and ruminates, still prey to that 'craven scruple of thinking too precisely on the event'. Elsinore guilt at the unmourned parent, the ambiguous mother, the father's voice speaking through him, 'remember me'. But he does try. A stray verse. A quick scribble on the back of Deasy's letter in his pocket. Still sitting on the rock, as the tide mounts, he pens a quick poem. 'Signs on a white field' (U 60) he is not sure anyone will read. A poem about a kiss of death and a kiss of life. A memory of his mother's deathbed as a child bed and bride bed anticipating the love bed of a future lover – 'a woman to her lover clinging' (U 61). But who? The virgin at Hodges Figgis's window? The lady of letters in Leeson Park? Or Molly Bloom herself, 'welcome as the flowers in May' (U 61)? Hat tilted over his eyes, Stephen loses his wits as the poem haltingly emerges.

Stammering. Connecting at last. Words of touch beyond sight. The double sensation of primal tactility. Of hand and mouth. 'Mouth to her mouth's kiss [...] mouth to her womb [...] manshape ineluctable [...] Touch me. Soft eyes. Soft soft soft hand. I am lonely here. O, touch me soon, now. What is that word known to all men? I am quiet here alone. Sad too. Touch, touch me' (U 60).

*'And no more turn aside and brood'* (U 62).

This is the breakthrough. The carnal epiphany of touch which replaces the pseudo-epiphanies 'on green oval leaves' of Stephen's romantic youth. The moment of momentary truth.

\* \* \*

By my reading, the Protean episode ends here. Certainly the story of Aristotelian sensibility does, as Stephen's poem bookends the wandering passage from the ineluctable modality of sight and sound to the 'manshape ineluctable' of touch – the 'signature' par excellence of our mortal vulnerability. And love. We have passed through the open gate of double sensation which accompanies us from birth to death. Hand touching hand. Mouth touching mouth. The rest of 'Proteus' reads to me like an epilogue; but an important reminder nonetheless that the journey is not over. Stephen's three opening chapters are closing, but he is not yet an artist of the lived body, of real affect. He has learnt his epistemological lesson at the feet of Aristotle and Aquinas, but he is still a neophyte when it comes to real lived experience. For that he must await his encounter with Bloom, and eventually with Molly. For now still promissory notes. Work in progress.

So what, if anything, do we learn from the last pages of 'Proteus'? We learn, I suggest, what Stephen (after Shakespeare) calls 'seachange', what the Greeks call *metempsychosis* and what I call 'anacarnation'. Big words, one might say, for a basic notion that life continues through life, time after time, again and again, *nacheinander, nebeneinander*.

Let's return to the text one last time. Stephen, back to earth, surrounded by the upswelling tide, broods on his 'broadtoed boots' (U 62). He accepts that he is all or nothing. 'As I am. All or not at all' (U 62). Everywhere the waters are rising 'amid seasnakes, rearing horses, rocks' (U 62). The sounds and signatures of animals and sea, of fish and fungi. Wave speech, the four-worded tongue of the elements. 'Seesoo, hrss, rsseeiss, ooss' (U 62). This is the language of the 'Old father Ocean' – Proteus, Mananaan – who watches over 'seachange' and 'seadeath' (U 63). 'Five fathoms out there. Full fathoms five thy father lies' (U 63). And now returns again, 'released forth flowing, wending back' (U 62). Tidal loom of the moon. Like a 'naked woman shining in her courts, she draws a toil of waters' (U 63). The flooding tide slops and slaps through rocks and sandbelts; it brings back the dead. 'A corpse rising saltwhite from the undertow [...] Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor' (U 63). And as Stephen envisages this scene of the drowned rising, where bones become coral and eyes become pearls, he, like Prospero before him, is happy to embrace the artistic possibility of a 'seachange into something rich and precious'. The dringdring of the eucharistic bells, which Stephen rang as an altar boy, echoes the 'ding dong, bell' of Shakespeare's Ariel. And he shape-shifts from Prospero – dying

to his old magic before a new art of nature – to the dying and rising Christ. 'Come. I thirst' (U 63). He regards the 'crosstrees' of a three-master ship moving on the horizon. But if this be art, as Shakespeare reminds us, it must be an art as lawful as nature. An art that does not renounce flesh but embraces it. An art that celebrates the transformation of all things, through time and space, across species and generations, across all kinds of existence, human, animal and divine. Anacarnating. Soul-body to body-soul. World without end. Metempsychosis made flesh. Stephen gets it. 'God becomes man becomes fish becomes barnacle goose becomes featherbed mountain. Dead breaths I living breathe' (U 63). Accepting his mortal finitude, his carnal embodiment (Stephen's last action is to pick his nose!) is not to deny the endless cycle of anacarnation. The sacramental life of all sentient beings. What Joyce calls 'pantheism' in his account of John Scotus in his Trieste lectures. 'All days makes their end' (U 63), admits Stephen finally, before asking: 'By the way next when is it?' (U 63). *Nacheinander, nebeneinander*.

And sure enough, as we leave Stephen watching the silent ship 'homing, upstream' (U 64) and turn the page to the next chapter, who do we find? Leopold Bloom. The epitome of carnal embodiment preparing breakfast for Molly and frying his favourite kidneys. Stephen, who in the Linati listing for *Ulysses* has not yet acquired a body, yields to Bloom, the master of loving carnality par excellence. We have turned from 'toothless Kinch, the superman' (U 64) – who realizes he is anything but as he beholds the 'urinous offal of all dead' (U 63) – to the surrogate father who will teach us the ways of the body, from a relish for innards to the art of the kiss (with Molly on

Howth Head). We migrate from self-deconstructing superman (Stephen) to full-bodied down-to-earth man (Bloom). *Introibo ad altare dei* with a very carnal twist. Joyce makes no bones about it. The eucharist feasting of Bloom is a relief from the brooding of Stephen. Our mouths water. Here we have it: 'Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls. He liked thick giblet soup, nutty gizzards, a stuffed roast heart, liver slices fried with crustcrumbs, fried hencod's roes. Most of all he liked grilled mutton kidneys which gave to his palate a fine tang of faintly scented urine' (U 65).

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A few more thoughts, on a more personal note. Though I have tried to follow the 'Proteus' text closely I confess it is from a particular perspective. I have focused on touch because that is what I am thinking about at the moment, in my life and thought, in the middle of the 2021 Covid pandemic, and in my teaching and writing on 'carnal hermeneutics' over the last decade, culminating in the completion of a book called *Touch: Recovering our Most Vital Sense* in 2021. This is what I am reading into Stephen's thoughts on Sandymount Strand, surmising that it is all about going from high to low, from intellect to sensation, from heady ideas to the tactile experience of hands and feet and water and weeds. I have come across interpretations of this text that offer very different readings – focusing, for example, on Irish cultural history, psychoanalytic working through, Dante's theory of colour or the epistemology of vision (taking the first line about the 'ineluctable modality of the visible' at its word). Brilliant

readings have been advanced on these and other motifs in 'Proteus' by scholars ranging from Declan Kiberd and Fran O'Rourke to Emmanuel Alloa and Ernesto Livorni. And each has its place in the hermeneutic river of associations and citations filling Stephen's interior monologue. The 'Proteus' episode shows how consciousness, like life, is a palimpsest of many layers and horizons flowing backwards and forwards in time. A ceaseless interplay of 'intermisunderstanding minds' (FW 118.25 – one of my favourite Joycean terms, connoting the hermeneutic principle that 'all understanding is misunderstanding'). So every reading is invited. And none is original or exhaustive. For Joyce teaches us that we are all ventriloquists. Translators, copyists, impersonators, plagiarists. Magpies, as Joyce's great Paris friend, Maria Jolas, once described him to me. And this is as true of creative literature (as Joyce reminds us in the 'Oxen of the Sun' parody of the genealogy of English writing) as it is of critical and philosophical literature. Every text is a tissue of quotations from beginning to end. It is intertextual even as its reference is ultimately carnal: namely, our concrete lived experience. From life to text to life again. In Stephen's inner soliloquy we move from lived memory to literary citation to relived sensation. Writing and thinking are always, Joyce reminds us, in the service of life. Understanding through the eyes, ears and skin. Body and soul. Flesh and blood. The text as body and the body as text. 'Oh life I go forth...'

I believe that is the real lesson of 'Proteus'. How Stephen's odyssey on Sandymount Strand unfolds. A hermeneutic journey from head to toe – gradually descending from the visual

to the aural to the tactile. A promiscuous tumble through serial anacronisms. An eschatology of the everyday where the highest traverses the lowest and all things meet in a spot on a rock.

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So what of irony? Philosophers naturally tend to take 'Proteus' seriously qua philosophy. They love sleuthing the learned sources cited by Stephen as he bounces from one idea to the next. The chapter begins with Aristotle, after all, the master of all who know. And many other major thinkers are invoked by Stephen on the way. Aquinas. Bonaventure. Berkeley. Scotus. But as one reads it's hard not to sometimes ask: is Joyce taking this seriously? Or Stephen, his literary persona? Is not Aristotle referred to by Stephen as a 'bald millionaire' and Aquinas a tubbellied Jackpriest with 'marybeads jabbering on his girdle' (U 59)? Hardly the stuff of scholarly disquisition. Is it perhaps all one big game of random allusion? Free association without rhyme or reason? A ploy to trap philosophers in a game of Jacks and toy with readers avid for meaning? Is Joyce, via Stephen, really exploring philosophy, or parodying the 'loudlatin-laughing' (U 52) of his Irish predecessors – Columbanus, Fiacre and Scotus himself? I suggest Stephen's compound word may offer a comic answer.

The Irish scholars who emigrated to the court of Charles the Bald at Loon in the ninth century were known as 'scotists' (scotus being the Latin for a Gaelic person in the early Middle Ages). Foremost among them was John Scotus Eriugena, who translated major Patristic texts from Greek to Latin (he was

invited by the Carolingian court for this reason) and went on to pen one of the most extraordinary works of his time, *O the Division of Nature* (*De Divisione Naturae* or *Periphyseon* – a text which Joyce celebrates as a masterpiece of 'pantheism' (God incarnate in nature). Scotus talked of a *deus currens* which runs through all things – human, animal, vegetal and divine. The Irish scholars accompanying Eriugena to Loon who included Sedulius Scotus, Martin Hibernensis and Fergu of Loon – had their own special dwelling called the house of *Hilaritas*. This was not only because they laughed constantly and amused King Charles the Bald but also because their 'pantheist' philosophy spoke of a divine comedy combining opposed streams of creation and confounding metaphysical dualisms between spirit and matter, body and soul, created and uncreated, being and non-being, nature and supernature. Just think of the interlacing images of the Book of Kells or *The Midnight Court* or *Finnegans Wake*. You'll get some idea. Ezra Pound makes much of this Celtic 'hilarity' in his writing on Eriugena, something he may have passed on to Joyce. And Borges celebrates the same divine-human comedy at work in both Eriugena and Joyce in a conversation he conducted with Seamus Heaney and myself in Dublin – published in the 1982 issue of *The Crane Bag* celebrating the 100th anniversary of Joyce's birth. He observed: 'As an outsider looking on successive Irish thinkers I have been struck by unusual and remarkable repetitions [...] Wilde, Shaw, Joyce and John Scotus Eriugena [...] I loved reading his *De Divisione Naturae*, which taught that God creates himself through the creation of his creatures in nature [...] Joyce is remarkably akin to Eriugena's system

of things coming from the mind of God and returning to him.' I was really struck by Borges's observation and was inspired to go back and reread 'Proteus'.

There is no doubt that Joyce was a great admirer of both John Scotus Eriugena and his Scottish medieval namesake, Duns Scotus. In fact he sometimes mixed them up. While John Scotus spoke of a pantheist deity running through all things, Duns Scotus argued similarly for the univocity of all beings and for the existence of the divine in the singularity of creatures. Duns Scotus called this unique particularity of each being its 'haecceity' (*haecceitas* from *haec* meaning this or that, hence the term *ecce*, meaning behold this or that). Indeed I have long suspected that Joyce named the main character of *Finnegans Wake* HCE (Here Comes Everybody) after 'haec-ecce'. Moreover the Christic term 'Ecce Homo' is echoed in the title of Joyce's beautiful short poem 'Ecce Puer', about the relationship between father and son. And there is no doubt that a Scotist pantheism of haecceity runs throughout Stephen's river of sensations on the strand. So while I think it is true that Joyce displays ludic irony in his portrayal of Stephen's erudite musings – certainly mocking Stephen's pretension to be a superman (as in 'toothless Kinch the superman') – it is equally true, I suspect, that he is celebrating a culture of *hilaritas* in the mind and body of Stephen himself. If Stephen's internal monologue reeks of irony, it also provokes humour. The two go hand in hand. In fact I am convinced that the best way to read 'Proteus' is with a dictionary in one hand and a fool's cap in the other. If we as readers feel frustrated in our search for clear meanings, we also feel the festive hilarity of

it all. There is a logic to the apparent illogicality of semantic slide and slippage, to Stephen's free play of association; but it is a logic of dialectical contradiction, of a mystical coincidence of opposites, of humbling humanity and humour. It is, in fact, a metaphysics of fun – exposing Stephen's scholastic sobriety to the yea-saying playfulness of Molly and Bloom. When I follow Stephen's cerebral wading through the 'flop, slop, slap' (U 62) of rising waves I feel like saying *ecce homo*. Behold a man. Anacarnation. The word is made flesh. Again and again. I celebrate the protean topsy-turvy of life. And heed the Joycean message: I laugh therefore I am.