

Irish Rivers Nr. X, The Tolka

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Between the beginning of April and the middle of May 1924 Joyce filled his 9th or possibly 10th post-*Ulysses* notebook, VI.B.16, which I will call ‘Honestly’, after the first struck note, ‘I honestly believe’, 001(a). This notebook also happens to be the first that can be honestly called a *Work in Progress* one, for it was only in April 1924 that Ford Maddox Ford stamped this provisional name on the first fragment of Joyce’s new work, when he published an early version of Mamalujo in the *transatlantic review*. Joyce liked the name and so it remained *Work in Progress* for the next fifteen years, when overnight it miraculously became *Finnegans Wake*. What then should we call *Work in Progress* before it became *Work in Progress*, the work that was not the work in progress yet, is an open question. *Post-Ulysses? Words in Pregloss? Preliminaries? Sketches?* But I am digressing.

In these one-and-a-half months from April to mid-May, Joyce took down 1384 notes. *Honestly* has a remaining 140 pages, which means he wrote roughly 10 notes per page at an average of 3 pages a day. Is that a lot? Yes, *Honestly* B.16 ranks among Joyce’s fastest notebooks. It is a very purposeful notebook, with Joyce reading almost exclusively in the service of his portrait of Shaun the Post. The Shaun-oriented material Joyce read (apart from his usual bevy of newspaper articles, many more of which have now been identified by Mikio Fuse), were two histories of the postal service, a book in which the famous Irish tenor John McCormack is self-confidently expounding about his own life, and (as I recently discovered), a book called *Thinking Black* by the Scottish missionary Daniel Crawford, an account of his 22 year stay in the long grass of Africa. Three months earlier, Joyce had read its sequel and made notes from it in Gem Thief B.01. It seems that both Crawford books were initially intended for the sculpting of inkblack Shem, but when they arrived, Joyce had already moved on, via ALP, to what would become Book III of *Finnegans Wake*. Making ploughshears of his arms, Joyce then decided to read Crawford with Shaun in mind, see *James Joyce in Africa*, in *Genetic Joyce Studies* 8, Spring 2008. But I am digressing again.

What I wanted to say. When Joyce was halfway McCormack, happily reading this most amusing account, suddenly, on 115(i), the notes are interrupted by a cluster of some fifty notes that derive from a very different source, and this turns out to be an anonymous article about the Tolka river, installment number X in a series on Irish Rivers, pages 391-404 of the October 1853 issue of the *Dublin University Magazine*. Finding this source is

an almost incredible piece of serendipity, unless you have Google Book Search do it for you, which was the case here.

The *Dublin University Magazine*, now in ‘full view’ on the internet, was a (Protestant Unionist, anti-liberal) monthly journal, devoted to literature and things of general Irish interest. It existed from 1833 to 1877, and among the contributors and editors we find names that ring familiar to the reader of *Finnegans Wake*, like Isaac Butt, Charles Lever, Sheridan Le Fanu, James Clarence Mangan and William ‘Oscarsfather’ Wilde. Most of the articles in the magazine appeared anonymously. It was for example only in 1980 that a certain W.J. McCormack (there is no such thing as coincidence), discovered that an anonymous ghost story, *Spalatro*, published in 1843 in the magazine, was really vintage Le Fanu. About the authorship of the Irish Rivers series opinions differ. Charles Read, writing in 1884, attributed it to the barrister James Roderick O’Flanagan, who wrote several novels as well as a number of books on Irish historical subjects, such as *The History of Dundalk* (1861) and *The Lives of the Lord Chancellors of Ireland* (1870). But, in the Introduction to the Irish Rivers in the 1845 Volume of the *Dublin University Magazine*, the anonymous author cites “the well-written hand-book whose title we have given below, and to the pages of which we shall occasionally refer with pleasure in the course of our article”, and this ‘well-written hand-book’ referred to is, as the footnote states, O’Flanagan’s *The Blackwater in Munster* (1844). Now, would an author refer to his own work in such a fashion, unless it is tongue-in-cheek? Unlikely, but not impossible. Is the author of the series someone else, then? In a 2007 article for the Royal Irish Academy about its only archaeological excavation, Peter Harbison, in a footnote, makes this attribution: “R.H. Frith was a Co. Dublin surveyor or engineer, according to William Wilde, ‘Irish rivers. No. V. The Boyne third article—conclusion’, *The Dublin University Magazine* 30 (1847), 741.” William Wilde had in fact in 1849-1850 contributed a valuable series to the magazine, ‘Irish Popular Superstitions’, and he was apart from being a noted Dublin surgeon and ophthalmologist, also the author of various topographical and ethnographical writings such as *The Beauties of the Boyne and the Blackwater* (1849) and *Lough Corrib and Lough Mask* (1867). In *Dialogues in the Margin*, his 1999 study of the *Dublin University Magazine*, Wayne E. Hall writes that William Wilde made several contributions to the Irish Rivers series, so probably the series was written collaboratively by O’Flanagan and Wilde, each contributing installments about the rivers that they were most acquainted with. Chances are that William Wilde, as he was already an expert on the Boyne, also took on the trip along the banks and the history of the Tolka, although this is not certain. (All this by way of digression.)

But how did Joyce get hold of this article in the first place? He probably didn’t go looking for it, because if he had the choice, he would sooner have chosen the installment on the Liffey. We don’t picture him running off to the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale to order this special volume of the *Magazine*. It is more likely that somebody, knowing Joyce’s interest in matters fluvial and/or Irish, sent or gave him the October 1853 issue, or just the torn out pages with the article, or a pamphlet-like reprint. But who might this somebody be? Being busy all the time with source-hunting, as source-hunters are, it is sometimes hard to understand that writing notes in notebooks was not Joyce’s ultimate goal in life, nor his primary occupation. It was only something he was doing while

reading (and sometimes while listening or overhearing). In these months he was also doing such diverse things as living, writing, going out, overseeing the French translation of *Ulysses*, trying to get his *Ulysses* manuscript back from Rosenbach, being laid up with severe eye-trouble, receiving visitors, and—time-consuming too—flat-hunting. In April his ophthalmologist Dr. Borsch more or less ordered him to stop working his eyes off, or else he would be Seeing Black for the rest of his life. Obediently Joyce cut down his working hours, but he kept on reading, as this notebook eloquently shows, and on the 24th of May, having finished his Shaun the Post chapter, he packed his papers in the green suitcase he had bought in Bognor the previous July, and sent it to Sylvia Beach. But somewhere in the middle of the beginning of May, Joyce was visited by the 28-year old Irish painter Patrick Tuohy, asking permission to paint his portrait. He had to argue for some time with Joyce, who wasn't keen on having his likeness needlessly repeated, but in the end Tuohy was allowed a try. "He'll do, I knew his father," Joyce is said to have said, and admonishingly to the painter: "Never mind my soul. Just be sure you have my tie right." According to Ellmann (*II*, 564-5), Tuohy's visit took place around the 20th of May, at the time Joyce wrote his first poem in years, but perhaps it was earlier. As we are told on the online Irish Art Encyclopedia, Joyce sat for Tuohy every day for nearly a month, 28 times, and work on the portrait was suspended only because Joyce had to undergo an eye operation on the 10th of June – which means that counting back, a date of 7-10 May for Tuohy's first visit is not farfetched. The Tolka notes start exactly at the moment of this visit: the last newspaper location before the notes is from the *Irish Independent* of April 30, while the first one following the notes is from the *Irish Statesman* of May 3. Taking into account that the papers from Ireland always reached Joyce some time later, again a date of 7-10 May imposes itself. We have to conclude, conjecturally of course, that Patrick 'Rata' Tuohy (*FW* 342.25) received the commission to paint Joyce's portrait, not only because Joyce knew his father, but also because he came with a present that to Joyce was worth more than myrrh and gold and frankincense, being pure undiluted words directly springing from the ancient Irish well.

Now would be the appropriate moment, after the previous introduction full of digressions, to move on to an overview of the Tolka article, and follow the author (let's call him Roderick O'Wilde), who like a Neil Oliver in his BBC tv-series about the British coast, takes us achronologically along the river, telling stories and anecdotes while walking through Dunboyne and Mullahuddart, Clonsillaigh, Scribblestown, Cardiff's Bridge to Finglas and Glasnevin and further downstream. But as all relevant source passages have now been published in the B.16 Emendations list in this issue of *Genetic Joyce Studies*, I won't repeat them here. I will just conclude with a few remarks about Joyce's notetaking. Joyce read the article in one go, making 45 notes on the way, of which 10 were crossed out and used, and not the most revealing ones: bland words like 'convened', 'upwards of', 'fickle' and 'extramural' end up in various chapters of the *Wake*, without any connection to their origin. Somewhat more explicit or local are the Tolka relicts 'Dublin turns to the sea', 'hobbyhorsical', 'boxing bishop' and 'impetiginous disorders'. With the note '\$\wedge\$ literally' on 118(j) Joyce probably wanted to make Shaun say 'literally' when an emphatic 'really' was more than enough, which is a nice mannerism of speech that is still much heard these days, so much that you are

literally buried in it. The point of insertion is clear about this: “Well, I’m ⁺literally⁺ shot seeing myself in this trim!” Unfortunately, the word loses some of its original power of intent when it becomes ‘liberally’ on a missing draft in February 1928. Whether this is a transmissional departure or not is hard to decide.

The murdering biographer of FW 055.05-07, “(his biografiend, in fact, kills him verysoon, if yet not, after),” was always a mystery to me, but now I found what this killing bout originally was meant to mean: it was O’Wilde’s light ironical mentioning of the premature year of death accorded to the poet Thomas Parnell, who died at least a year later than the year his biographers ‘kill’ him.

Still, many interesting notes remained unharvested. I would like to have seen Earwicker fleeing from his pub, disguised as a woman (119f), as the King of Mud Island once did. But my favourite unexplored note with comical and hence Wakean implications is ‘if reader raises eyes’ on 117(i). O’Wilde apparently believed that if the reader of his article raised his eyes, he would see “on top of the hill a high roof, and four staring windows appearing over a dashed wall”, and not the interior of the reader’s own home. Well, maybe the reader would see the high roof in his mind’s eye, but how exactly, as he can’t read what he has to see, having raised his eyes, is far from clear in this athletic ocular exercise.