

Rub It Out:

(En)countering Rubbish in James Joyce's "An Encounter"

Rubbish, *n.* (15c) a. Worthless stuff, trash. Also, a worthless person.
b. Worthless, ridiculous, nonsensical ideas, discourse, writing.

—*Oxford English Dictionary*

. . . letter from litter

—James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*

Pluck . . .

. . . my eyes were fixed, as they are even now, on a certain *word* There is something obscene and lecherous in the very *look of the letters*. The sound of it too is like the act itself, brief, brutal, irresistible and devilish.

. . . Yes, dear, it is a nice name "My beautiful wild flower of the hedges! My dark-blue, rain-drenched flower!" . . . to fling you down under me on that soft belly of yours and *fuck* you up behind, like a hog riding a sow, glorying in the very stink and sweat that rises from your arse, glorying in the open shame of your up-turned dress and white girlish drawers and in the confusion of your flushed cheeks and tangled hair feeling your fingers fondling and tickling my ballocks or stuck up in me behind and your hot lips sucking off my cock while my head is wedged in between your fat thighs . . . my tongue licking ravenously up your rank red cunt. I have taught you . . . taught you to make filthy signs to me with your lips and tongue, to provoke me by obscene touches and noises, and even to do in my presence the most shameful and filthy act of the body. You remember the day you pulled up your clothes and let me lie under you looking up at you while you did it? . . . My prick is still hot and stiff and quivering from the last brutal drive

Nora, my faithful darling, my sweet-eyed blackguard schoolgirl . . . (my little frigging mistress! my little fucking whore!) you are always my beautiful wild flower of the hedges, my dark-blue rain-drenched flower.¹

The scholar who wanders into the archives and encounters one of these (private? personal?) letters to Nora signed by James Joyce ("these filthy letters of mine" [L 183]) is perhaps not unlike the nameless, young narrator ("bookworm") of Joyce's "An Encounter" (1905), the second story in that assemblage called *Dubliners* (1914).² Both readers, hungry for something first-hand ("real adventures, I reflected, do not happen to people who remain at home" [D 21]), will have been exposed to—(s)educated by?—something, apparently, shocking ("Have I shocked you by the filthy things I wrote" [L 184]), if not thrilling ("You know how to give me a cockstand I could lie frigging all day looking at the *divine* word you wrote. I wish I could hear your lips spluttering those heavenly

1. Letter to Nora Barnacle Joyce, 2 December 1909, in *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellman (New York: Viking, 1966), 180-181. Emphasis added. All further references appear in the text as L.

2. James Joyce, "An Encounter" [1905], in *Dubliners* [1914], eds. Robert Scholes and A. Walton Litz (New York: Penguin, 1996), 19-28. All further references appear in the text as D.

exciting filthy words [first-hand—C.H.] . . . and *fuck fuck fuck fuck* my naughty little hot fuckbird's cunt for ever" [L 186]). Yet, to read "An Encounter"—as a scholar—is perhaps also to find oneself (one's second self? more than one?) in a classroom standing up before students (a minority before minors?) mouthing the words of the headmaster, Father Butler: "What is this rubbish?" (D 20).

"An Encounter," however, does not open with a literal scene of pedagogical instruction (the perhaps familiar figure of the pedagogue, "The No of the Father," is not first here), but rather with the lit(t)eral: "a little library made up of old numbers of *The Union Jack*, *Pluck*, and *The Halfpenny Marvel*" (D 19). Here, let me read it to you, so you can hear for yourself, first-hand, the lit(t)eral beginning of "An Encounter":

It was Joe Dillon who introduced the Wild West to us. He had a little library made up of old numbers of *The Union Jack*, *Pluck*, and *The Halfpenny Marvel*. Every evening after school we met in his back garden and arranged Indian battles. He and his fat younger brother Leo the idler held the loft of the stable while we tried to carry it by storm; or we fought a pitched battle on the grass. But, however well we fought, we never won a siege or battle and all our bouts ended with Joe Dillon's war dance of victory [H]e played too fiercely for us who were younger and more timid. He looked like some kind of an Indian when he capered round the garden, an old tea-cosy on his head, beating a tin with his fist and yelling:

—Ya! yaka, yaka, yaka! (D 19)

"An Encounter," then, lit(t)erally starts out with copies of "old numbers": an older one ("It was Joe Dillon") introduces a few younger ones (*pedo*-)³ to a certain "mimic warfare" (D 21) ("We banded ourselves together, some boldly, some in jest and some almost in fear: and of the number of these latter, the reluctant Indians . . . I was one" [D 20]), exposing them first-hand ("an old tea-cosy on his head, beating a tin with his fist") to the secret promise of the second-hand ("The adventures related in the literature of the Wild West were remote from my nature but, at least, they opened doors of escape. I liked better some American detective stories [Yank mags—C.H.] Though there was nothing wrong in these stories and though their intention was sometimes literary they were circulated secretly at school" [D 20]).⁴ Or is it vice versa? the exposing of some younger ones

3. The *OED* links "Pedo-" [British form *paed-*] to the Gk. *pedo-*, comb. form of *pais* "boy, child," from the base *pew-* "small, little, few, young." Hence the constellation of English words including: "Pedagogue" (1387) from O.Fr. *pedagogue* "teacher of children," from L. *paedagogus* "slave who escorted children to school and generally supervised them," later "a teacher," from Gk. *paidagogos*, from *pais* (gen. *paidos*) "child" + *agogos* "leader," from *agein* "to lead"; "Pederasty" (1609), "sodomy with a boy," from Mod.L. *paederastia*, from Gk. *paiderastia* "love of boys," from *paiderastes* "pederast," from *pais* (gen. *paidos*) "child, boy" + *erastes* "lover" [the English term "Pederast" is 1730s]; and "Pedophilia" (1905) from Gk. *pais* (gen. *paidos*) "child" + *philos* "loving." First attested in Havelock Ellis. [Derivative noun "Pedophile" is first recorded in 1951.]

4. In his exposé of "the extraordinary amount of tautology" (464) in mass-produced "Yank mags" (476)—"Boy's Weeklies" (1939)—George Orwell holds up for ridicule a style that is "easily imitated—an extraordinary, artificial, repetitive style [such that] various facetious expressions are repeated over and over again 'Ooogh!', 'Grooo!' and 'Yaroo!' (stylised cries of pain) recur constantly In addition, various nicknames are rubbed in on every possible occasion" (463-464). See George Orwell, "Boy's Weeklies" [1939], in *Collected Essays*, Vol. 1, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968), 460-485.

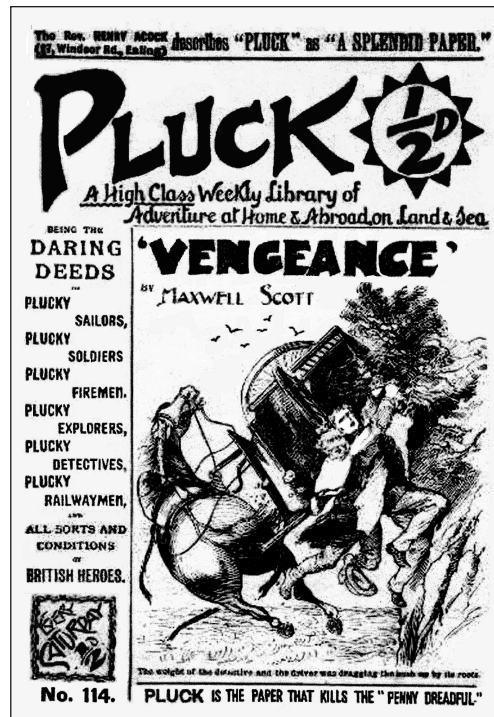


Fig. 1: *Pluck* magazine no. 114 (ca. 1897).

via the second-hand to what we might call the (s)eduction of the first-hand (“I began to hunger . . . for wild sensations, for the escape which these chronicles of disorder alone seemed to offer me. The mimic warfare of the evening became at last as wearisome [as pedestrian—C.H.] to me as the routine of school [pedagogy—C.H.] in the morning because I wanted real adventures to happen to myself” [D 21])? But will there have ever been a *first*-(hand) (“ . . . beating a tin with his fist . . .”)?

. . . it was you yourself, you hot little girl, who *first* wrote to me saying that you were longing to be fucked by me It was you yourself, you naughty shameless girl, who *first* led the way. It was not I who *first* touched you It was you who slid your hand down down inside my trousers and pulled my shirt softly aside and touched my prick with your long tickling fingers and gradually took it all, fat and stiff as it was, into your hand and friggged me slowly until I came off through your fingers It was your lips too which *first* uttered an obscene word Perhaps the horn I had was not big enough for you for I remember that you bent down to my face and murmured tenderly “Fuck up, love! fuck up, love!” (Letter to Nora, 3 December 1909, 182-183)

One of the things Joyce pulls off with “An Encounter”—which is to say, *plucks*, which is to say, simultaneously *exposes* (like plucking the feathers off a bird) and *shelters* (like plucking a child out of an icy current)—is precisely a disordering (of) chronology (a “chronicle of disorder”) when it comes to the first- and second-hand. This, I want to suggest, is what Joyce lit(t)erally *dis-covers* through “An Encounter” with a certain “queer” (D 26) configuration of “rubbish” (“old numbers”)—

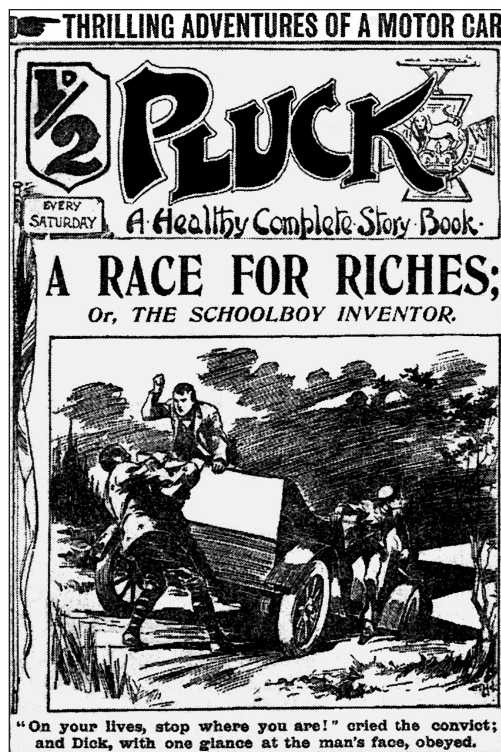


Fig. 2: *Pluck* magazine no. 441 (ca. 1905).

what Hélène Cixous might call “the figure of an entirely different relationship”⁵ when it comes to the series of (s)kid-marks called biblio-erotics⁶ (“... so old and so new, *new secondhand*, this is our culture and its writing Everything begins with this prosthesis” [Cixous 153]) (“a little library”).

. . . I did as you told me, you dirty little girl, and pulled myself off twice when I read your letter There is *one lovely word*, darling, you have underlined to make me pull myself off better. Write me more about that and yourself, sweetly, *dirtyier*, dirtyier. (Letter to Nora, 8 December 1909, 184-185)

. . . I imagine things so *very* dirty that I will not write them [first—C.H.] until I see how you write yourself. The smallest things give me a great cockstand—a whorish movement of your mouth, a little brown stain on the seat of your white drawers (Letter to Nora, 6 December 1909, 184)

. . . I am going to lie down and pull at myself till I come. Write more and dirtier,

5. See Hélène Cixous, “‘Mamae, Disse Ele,’ or Joyce’s Second Hand,” [1996], trans. Eric Prenowitz, in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 150. All further references appear in the text.

6. On biblio-erotics, or “the auto-erotic techniques of book sex” (xi), Ian Hunter writes: “the ability to achieve [pull off—C.H.] sexual pleasure through books and a certain practice of reading is neither incidental to—nor a regressive [second-hand—C.H.] surrogate for—the real thing. Pornography is not so much a representation of sexuality as a specific practice of it. We can, therefore, quite properly speak of pornography as emerging at that point where [in the late-eighteenth century—C.H.] the ethical and literary techniques of conscience-formation were re-deployed as *biblio-erotics* or book sex [i.e.] the eroticising machinery of the confession of the flesh was re-deployed through the technique of the book as a biblio-erotics” (40-43). See Ian Hunter, et al., *On Pornography: Literature, Sexuality and Obscenity Law* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993).

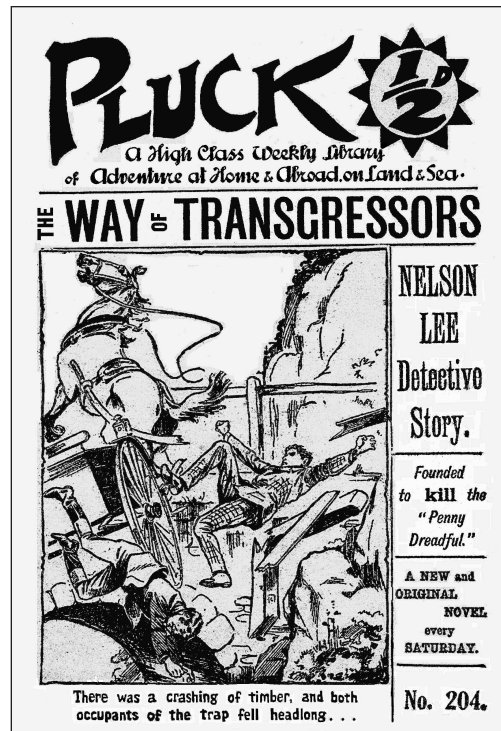


Fig. 3: *Pluck* magazine no. 204 (ca. 1899).

darling. Tickle your little cockey while you write to make you say worse and worse. Write the dirty words big and underline them and kiss them and hold them for a moment to your sweet hot cunt, darling, and also pull up your dress a moment and hold them in under your dear little farting bum. Do *more* if you wish and send the letter then to me, my darling brown-arsed fuckbird. (Letter to Nora, 9 December 1909, 186)

You should be careful here with these “old numbers” (copies) as some of this (“mimic warfare”) is bound to rub off on you.

“What have you there in your pocket?” (D 20) It is with these words, i.e., with the start of this pointed question aimed at a younger one (Leo Dillon) from an older one (the headmaster, Father Butler), that the nameless narrator (“bookworm”) of “An Encounter,” looking on with the rest of his class, experiences—first- or second-hand?—something of an awakening, with beating heart:

One day when Father Butler was hearing the four pages of Roman History clumsy Leo Dillon was discovered with a copy of *The Halfpenny Marvel*.

— . . . Now, Dillon, up! . . . What have you there in your pocket?

Everyone’s heart palpitated as Leo Dillon handed up the paper and everyone assumed an innocent face. Father Butler turned over the pages, frowning.

—What is this rubbish? he said . . .

[. . .] This rebuke during the sober hours of school paled much of the glory of the Wild West for me and the confused puffy face of Leo Dillon awakened one of my consciences [more than one?—C.H.]. (D 20)

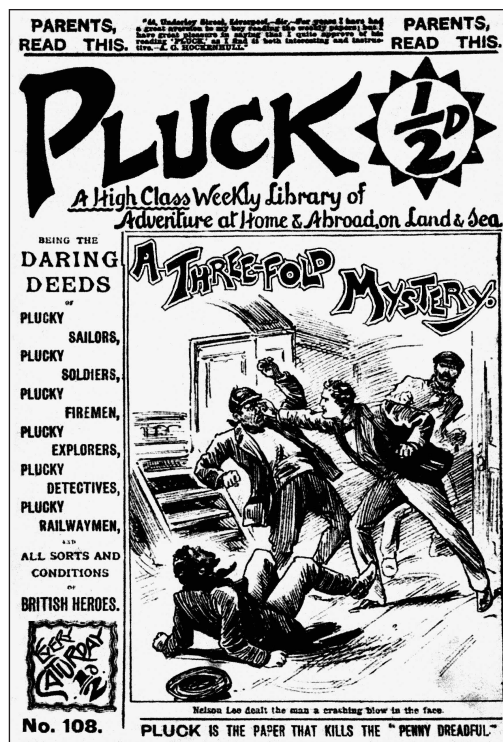


Fig. 4: *Pluck* magazine
no. 108 (ca. 1897).

But what to make of this initial heart-pounding public exposure of “rubbish” in a seminar of Father Butler’s⁷ (“Leo Dillon was discovered with a copy”) when its shameful discovery corresponds to the awakening of a “conscience” (“one of my consciences”), as if merely one in a series of “old numbers” (“chronicles of disorder”)? Everything begins with this prosthesis: you raise a hand and stand up when you hear your “own” name called and answer “here” or “present” (“Now, Dillon, up!”). The (*s*)*education* of the first-hand: what is being *aroused* here (ex-posed)?⁸ The secretive reader, Leo Dillon, with a “confused puffy face”—as if engorged with blood (“What have you there in your pocket?”)—rises up as if some autonomous erection: “Everyone’s heart palpitated as Leo Dillon handed up the papers and everyone assumed an innocent face.” Everyone assumed one.

There is much to say here about the (heart-)beating response to one’s inner “conscience” (“mimic warfare”) as if a call from the outside, as if a mere prosthetic supplement (“old number”):

. . . I wired you *Be careful*. I meant be careful to keep my letters secret, be careful not to let anyone see your excitement, and be careful not to (I am half ashamed

7. Avital Ronell has noted a certain “hidden phantasm of sodomy . . . as the groundless ground of the transmission of knowledge, and how its ghostly echoes still sit in on sem(e/i)nars—the etymological roots of seminar, seminal works, and other offshoots of the seed of knowledge . . .” (276-278). See “Confessions of an Anacoluthon: Avital Ronell on Writing, Technology, Pedagogy, and Politics,” *jac* 20. 2 (2000): 243-281.

8. According to the *OED*, the word “Educe” (1432), from L. *educere*, to draw or bring out [“bring out,” from *ex-* “out” + *ducere* “to lead”] is linked to “Educate” (1447), from L. *educare*, “to bring up, rear.”

to write it now). I was afraid, Nora, you might get so hot [i.e., just reading about it, second-hand?—C.H.] that you would give yourself to somebody [i.e., seek it out, first-hand?—C.H.] (Letter to Nora, 10 December 1909, 187)

(“I wanted real adventures to happen to myself” [D 21]). Isn’t this the trap that the nameless, young narrator (“bookworm”) of “An Encounter” falls into: a certain trap of emancipation?⁹

. . . when the restraining influence [impediment—C.H.] of the school [pedagogue—C.H.] was at a distance I began to hunger again for the wild sensations, for the escape which these chronicles of disorder alone seemed to offer me

The summer holidays were near at hand when I made up my mind to break out of the [pedestrian—C.H.] weariness of school-life [pedagogy—C.H.] for one day at least. With Leo Dillon and a boy named Mahony I planned a day’s miching [expedition—C.H.]. (D 20-21)

Setting off on foot, the young ones (*pedo-*) never make it to the literal “Pigeon House” (D 21)¹⁰ (the real destination of their expedition), but do encounter a “queer old josser” (D 26) in a field. This “old number” with an “ashen-grey” moustache (D 24), who circles slowly back and forth “with one hand upon his hip and in the other hand . . . a stick with which he tapped the turf lightly” (D 24), as if to the beat of a secret tune, suddenly starts to talk:

. . . he began to talk of school and of books. He asked us whether we had read

9. At the heart of “emancipation,” as Jean-Francois Lyotard reminds us, is the *mancipium*, a word which designates “the gesture of taking in hand. But it also designates—it’s a neuter word—that which is taken in hand by the *manceps*, namely, the slave . . .” (419). Lyotard continues: “we know that adults, or those claiming to be adults, have believed that they could define the child in these terms: one who is held by the hand. In contrast to this, I would like to think about the following reversal: held in the grip of others during our childhood, infancy continues to exert its *mancipium* even when we imagine ourselves to be emancipated, or independent” (419). Lyotard admits that this thought of the *mancipium* will be a “scandal” to humanism (“Humanism, whether Christian or secular, is summed up in the maxim: that man is something to be freed” [420]), yet he maintains that “this scandal, as a *wound* (that Freud will call seduction), is inherent to infancy insofar as the infant is subject to the *mancipium* of adults. *Mancipium* here must be taken two ways: as that which adults exercise over infants, and as that which their own infancies exercise over them even while they are exercising their *mancipium* over their infants” (423). The uncertainty here over “what is bound and unbound,” as Lyotard notes, is “an uncertainty about the core itself that governs emancipation. This uncertainty bears at one and the same time on the status of the appeal, of that which calls; let’s say it bears on the status of the father” (423). See Jean-Francois Lyotard, “Mainmise (The Grip),” trans. Elizabeth Constable, *Philosophy Today* 36. 4 (Winter 1992): 419-427.

The *OED*, we might also note here, defines the word “Pluck” as *both* “the act of plucking” and “that which is plucked . . . handful.” As a verb, “to pluck” designates (1) a sudden sharp pull, a tug, a jerk, a twitch, a snatch; (2) to pull off the feathers, hair, fruit, petals, etc. from (to strip or make bare); (3) to shape or thin (the eyebrows) by removing hairs; (4) to snatch or take by force, to steal; (5) to snatch; rescue *from* danger; (6) to pull up; to pull (something) out of the ground or place in which it is planted or set; to eradicate, raze, demolish; (7) *printing*, of ink: to detach and remove the surface of paper during printing; (8) to give a pull at; to pull abruptly or with a jerk; also pull (a person or animal) by some part of body; (9) to rob; to plunder; to swindle, to fleece [*to pluck a pigeon*]. As a noun, “pluck” designates: the inward part, essence (viscera of beast, as used for food; animal intestines); in reference to human beings: the heart as seat of courage; determination not to yield in face of danger or difficulty. [*Cf.* to “pluck up”: to summon up courage; to rouse one’s spirits.]

10. Formerly a fort, the Pigeon House became an electricity and drainage station, and later a hotel. It was razed in 1897. At the time of Joyce’s writing, the Pigeon House was a municipal waste tip (because the site minimized the stench for Dubliners).

the poetry of Thomas Moore or the works of Sir Walter Scott and Lord Lytton. I pretended that I had read every book he mentioned so that in the end he said:
—Ah, I can see you are a bookworm like myself. (D 25)

Of course, in *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932), the scholar Q. D. Leavis holds up Lord Lytton, in particular, for ridicule as “the first of modern best-sellers” (164), i.e., as an example of one whose works—“largely masturbatory” (165)—constitute an early symptom of the widespread circulation of mass-produced “popular novels” into the environment which, because of their lowering of the “level of appeal” (164), actually “get in the way of genuine feeling and responsible thinking by creating cheap [second-hand?—C.H.] mechanical responses . . .” (74).¹¹

And indeed, what happens next in “An Encounter,” at least according to some scholars, is nothing less than a scene of public masturbation in a field by an “old number,” the “queer old jossler.” Here, let me read it to you, so you can hear it, first-hand:

He began to speak to us about girls, saying what nice soft hair they had and how their hands were and how all girls were not so good as they seemed to be if one only knew. There was nothing he liked, he said, so much as looking at a nice young girl, at her nice white hands and her beautiful soft hair. He gave me the impression that he was repeating something which he had learned by heart or that, magnetised by some words of his own speech, his mind was slowly circling round and round in the same orbit . . . He repeated his phrases over and over again, varying them and surrounding them with his monotonous voice. I continued to gaze toward the slope, listening to him.

After a long while his monologue paused. He stood up slowly, saying that he had to leave us for a minute or so, a few minutes, and, without changing the direction of my gaze, I saw him walking slowly away from us towards the near end of the field. We remained silent when he had gone. After a silence of a few minutes I heard Mahony exclaim:

—I say! Look what he’s doing!

As I neither answered nor raised my eyes Mahony exclaimed again [more than once, a second time—C.H.]:

—I say . . . He’s a queer old jossler!

—In case he asks us for our names, I said, let you be Murphy and I’ll be Smith. (D 26)

11. Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* [1932] (London: Plimlico, 2000). The following is a more extensive citation from Leavis’ critique of Lytton and his “lowering of the level of appeal”:

. . . this lowering of the level of appeal makes Lytton the first of modern best-sellers . . . his pseudo-philosophic nonsense and preposterous rhetoric carry with them inevitably a debasing of the novelist’s currency. But they were taken seriously by the general public . . . To make a useful generalization: best-sellers before Lytton are at worst dull, but ever since they have almost always been vulgar. The direction Lytton gave to popular fiction caused it to set its face away from literature . . . the voluptuous day-dream instead of the dispassionate narration of the complicated plot. It was Lytton who taught the novelist to use what is now called uplift . . . a device for rendering acceptable to the reader a fable which his instincts urge him to enjoy but his acquired social conscience would otherwise oblige him to take exception to . . . entertainment in which uplift now figures are largely masturbatory. (164-165).

What happens in this encounter? All we get here is an ellipsis (“I say . . . He’s a queer old josser!”), nothing but the beat of three dots (“. . .”), a lit(t)eral series of three (s)kid-marks (“old numbers”), second-hand. (“I neither answered nor raised my eyes.”) And yet, for the scholar Fritz Senn, there seems to be no doubt about what this “pervert” (31) is doing: “the man is really masturbating” (31).¹¹ Similarly, the scholar Gerald Doherty writes: “the verbal auto-arousal, which initially gives him his kicks, incites the real masturbation” (43).¹² Joyce, however, never uses the words “masturbation” or “pervert” in “An Encounter.” Perhaps both of these younger scholars have fallen under the influence (“mimic warfare”) of an older one, Stanislaus Joyce, whose own first-hand account of the event has somehow rubbed off on them. Thus as Senn notes: “Its autobiographical basis is found in a real event in the lives of Joyce and his brother Stanislaus which occurred in about 1895 when Joyce was thirteen” (29). Here, then, is what Stanislaus writes: “In ‘An Encounter’, my brother describes a day’s miching which he and I planned and carried out while we were living in North Richmond Street, and our encounter with an elderly pederast” (62).¹³ But, once again, the word “pederast” never literally occurs in “An Encounter.” (“What is this rubbish?”)

A series of three (s)kid-marks (“. . .”). A “dirty little secret”? What is being ex-posed here? And how does the (shameful?) public exposure of a “queer old josser” (“bookworm”) relate to the heart-pounding (arousing?) discovery of “rubbish” (“old numbers”) in Father Butler’s seminar? According to the scholar, D. H. Lawrence, writing in 1929:

This “dirty little secret” has become infinitely precious to the mob of people today. It is a kind of hidden sore or inflammation which, when *rubbed* or scratched, gives off sharp thrills that seem delicious. So the dirty little secret is *rubbed* and scratched more and more, till it becomes more and more secretly inflamed, and the nervous and psychic health of the individual is more and more impaired. One might easily say that half the love-novels and half the love-films today depend entirely for their success on the secret *rubbing* of the dirty little secret. You can call this sex-excitement if you like, but it is sex-excitement of a secretive, furtive sort, quite special. The plain and simple [first-hand?—C.H.] excitement, quite open and wholesome . . . is not for a minute to be confused with the furtive [second-hand?—C.H.] excitement aroused by *rubbing* the dirty little secret in all secrecy in modern best-sellers. This furtive, sneaking, cunning *rubbing* of an inflamed spot in the imagination is the very quick of modern pornography, and it is a beastly and very dangerous thing. You can’t so easily expose it So the cheap and popular modern love-novel and love-film flourishes (77-78; emphasis added)¹⁴

11. Fritz Senn, “An Encounter,” in *James Joyce’s Dubliners: Critical Essays*, ed. Clive Hart (New York: Viking Press, 1969), 26-38. All further references appear in the text.

12. Gerald Doherty, “‘An Encounter’: The Jouissance Trip,” in *Dubliners’ Dozen: The Games Narrators Play* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickenson UP, 2004), 36-45.

13. Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother’s Keeper* (New York: Viking Press, 1958), 62.

14. D. H. Lawrence, “Pornography and Obscenity” [1929], in *Sex, Literature and Censorship*, ed. Harry T. Moore (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1953), 69-88. All further references appear in the text.

Lawrence is quite emphatic about the need to *counter* this “mob-reaction” (72):

Why? . . . The mass is forever vulgar, because it can't distinguish between its own original feelings and feelings which are diddled into existence by the exploiter. The public is always profane, because it is controlled from the outside, by the trickster, and never from the inside, by its own sincerity. The mob is always obscene, because it is always second-hand. (71-72)

Because it is “always second-hand,” the mob is easy prey to the (s)eductions of the mass-produced environment (“the outside”), which acts on it as “an invariable stimulant”:

. . . whether it be the pornography of the rubber-goods shop or the pornography of the popular novel, film and play, [it] is an invariable stimulant to the vice of self-abuse, onanism, masturbation, call it what you will. In young or old, man or woman, boy or girl, modern pornography is a direct provocative of masturbation. It cannot be otherwise Sex must go somewhere, especially in young people. So, in our glorious civilization, it goes to masturbation. Masturbation is the one thoroughly secret act of the human being, more secret even than excrementation and it is stimulated and provoked by our glorious popular literature of pretty pornography, which rubs on the dirty secret without letting you know what is happening. (Lawrence 78)

The problem for Lawrence (like the problem for *Pluck* magazine, which claimed to be “the paper that kills the ‘penny dreadful’”)¹⁵ is thus: How to rub out this “rubbish”?

For whenever the dirty little secret exists, it exists as the centre of the vicious circle of masturbation self-enclosure And the most high-flown sex-emanipated young people today are perhaps the most fatally and nervously enclosed within the masturbation self-enclosure. Nor do they want to get out of it (Lawrence 85)

And indeed, for F. R. Leavis, a scholar who also argued that “a modern education worthy of the name must be largely an education *against* the environment” (106),¹⁶ the task of modern “teachers of English” appears to be entirely bound up in this paradox:

Many teachers of English who have become interested in the possibilities of training taste and sensibility must have been troubled by accompanying doubts. What effects can such training have *against* the multitudinous counter-influence—films, newspapers, advertising—indeed, the whole world *outside* the class-room?

15. On this question (of what we might also call *the problem of modern serial killers*), note the following editorial from *Pluck*, no. 1 (1894) entitled “Why This Paper is Published and What It Is Going To Do”:

Young people devour . . . trash ravenously, not because they really like it, but because they must read something in these reading days. A bitter cry for healthy literature comes every day from the police courts. Each week dozens of boys and lads have to pay the penalty of offences and crimes they would never have committed but for the reading of penny dreadfuls. (qtd. in Mullin, 39)

See Katherine Mullin, “‘Works which boys couldn't read': Reading and Regulation in 'An Encounter,'” in *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 28-55.

16. F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment* [1933] (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948). Emphasis added. All further references appear in the text.



Fig. 5: Joyce, on a pedestal, plucks a guitar string (1915).

. . . But literary education, we must not forget, is to a great extent a [second-hand?—C.H.] substitute. What we have lost is the [first-hand?—C.H.] organic community with the living culture it embodied . . . Those who in school are offered (perhaps) the beginnings of education in taste are *exposed*, out of school, to the competing exploitation of the cheapest emotional responses . . . immediate pleasures, got with the least effort. (Leavis 1-2; emphasis added)

For the nameless, young narrator (“bookworm”) of “An Encounter,” the exposure to the “world outside the class-room” ends with another repetition (copy) of Leo Dillon’s heart-pounding response to being caught red-handed in Father Butler’s seminar—exposed—(with) an “old number”:

. . . I stood up abruptly. Lest I should betray my agitation I delayed a few moments pretending to fix my shoe properly and then, saying that I was obliged to go, I bade him good-day. I went up the slope calmly but my heart was beating with fear that he would seize me by the ankles. (D 28)¹⁷

If anyone can rub out “rubbish,” perhaps Joyce’s work of “litteringture” pulls it off.

17. “Seize me by the ankles,” here, recalls a number of “ped-” words (from L. *pedes* “one who goes on foot,” from *pedis* “foot”) that haunt “An Encounter.” This final scene of potentially losing one’s footing, in particular, recalls an earlier scene of anticipation: after ditching school and hiding his books near an ashpit, the young narrator waits for his companions to show up: “I sat up on the coping of the bridge admiring my frail canvas shoes which I had diligently pipe-clayed overnight . . . The granite stone of the bridge was beginning to be warm and I began to pat it with my hands in time to an air in my head” (D 12). “Pipe clay,” here, refers to a white shoe dressing that is mixed and rubbed on shoes (“to whiten with pipe clay”), and yet one also hears echoes of the Old Testament phrase “feet of clay” (an unexpected flaw in the character of one admired). In *Ulysses* (1922), for example, Joyce writes: “They discovered to their vast discomfiture that their idol had feet of clay, after placing him upon a pedestal” (654). Sitting up on the warm coping, patting it to the beat of a tune in his head, the young narrator here anticipates and repeats the tapping stick of the “queer old josser” and suggests how “An Encounter” revolves around several “beating fantasies,” to use a term of Sigmund Freud’s. The question here, however, is perhaps less one of “A Child Is Being Beaten” than of . . . “Beating-off.”