

Abstract

The thesis, entitled “The Avant-Postman: James Joyce, the Avant-Garde and Postmodernism,” attempts to construct a post-Joycean literary genealogy centred around the notions of a Joycean avant-garde and literary experimentation written in its wake. It considers the last two works by Joyce, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, as points of departure for the post-war literary avant-gardes in Great Britain, the USA, and France, in a period generally called “postmodern.”

The introduction bases the notion of a Joycean avant-garde upon Joyce’s sustained exploration of the materiality of language and upon the appropriation of his last work, his “Work in Progress,” for the cause of the “Revolution of the word” conducted by Eugene Jolas in his *transition* magazine. The Joycean exploration of the materiality of language is considered as comprising three stimuli: the conception of writing as concrete trace, susceptible to distortion or effacement; the understanding of literary language as a forgery of the words of others; and the project of creating a personal idiom as an “autonomous” language for a truly modern literature.

The material is divided into eight chapters, two for Great Britain (from Johnson via Brooke-Rose to Sinclair), two for the U.S. (from Burroughs and Gass to Acker and Sorrentino) and three for France (the *nouveau roman*, Oulipo, and the *Tel Quel* group). Chapter Eight traces the Joycean heritage within the literature after 2000 of the three national literary spaces. The conclusion contextualises the theme of the Joycean post-war avant-garde as a challenge to the notion of “postmodernism.”