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## James Joyce, Bruce Springsteen and the Notion of Exile: It's a Town Full of Losers, and I'm Pulling Out of Here to Win

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James Augustine Joyce was born, towards the end of the nineteenth century, in Dublin, Ireland, on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1882. He spent most of his life writing about Dublin, whilst living in exile. Born on the edge of Dublin in Brighton Square Rathgar, James Joyce lived in fourteen houses in, and on, the edge of Dublin with his parents and siblings before he left Ireland for the continent of Europe in December 1902, returning briefly due to the illness and the subsequent death of his mother. In October 1904, at the age of 22, he left Ireland permanently for the continent of Europe, with his future wife Nora Barnacle.

Grab your ticket and your suitcase  
Thunder's rollin' down this track  
You don't know where you're goin'  
But you know you won't be back  
Darlin' if you're weary  
Lay your head upon my chest  
We'll take what we can carry  
And we'll leave the rest

Bruce Springsteen (2001) *Land of Hope and Dreams*, Track 12 of *Live in New York City* [CD], Columbia.

Written by Bruce Springsteen, these lyrics could reflect the words of James Joyce to Nora Barnacle as they stood on the North Wall, Dublin in 1904. They were to embark on a journey out of Ireland, only to return for a few brief periods in the coming years.

Everyone in Ireland knew the thunder that was coming down the tracks, as Ireland struggled to free itself from Britain. Joyce was well aware of the thunder which was to manifest itself so powerfully in the 1916 Rising. Joyce was famously afraid of thunder and includes his hundred letter thunder word on the first page of *Finnegans Wake*, “Bababadalgharaghtakamminarronkonnbronntonneronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawnto ohoohoordenenthurnuk!” James Joyce (1975) *Finnegans Wake*, p.3.

Spending most of his life writing about Dublin, whilst living in exile, Joyce wrote the early short stories of *Dubliners* in Dublin in July 1904, continuing to write whilst in Trieste, Pola, and Rome. He started *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in Dublin in 1904, the year he left Ireland permanently, and finished the novel in Trieste in 1914. He wrote *Ulysses* in Trieste, Zurich and Paris between 1914 and 1921 and wrote *Finnegans Wake* in Paris between 1922 and 1939. Although *Finnegans Wake* was largely written in one city, Joyce continued to move around Europe for long periods as well as moving in and around Paris,

staying in numerous different addresses as he wrote his final novel. He never visited the United States.

Born in the United States in the Long Branch Hospital, New Jersey, U.S.A. on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1949, in the middle of the twentieth century, Bruce Frederick Springsteen has spent a career writing and singing about leaving somewhere. With small exceptions and excursions, he stays in New Jersey, living in the state of his birth. He celebrated his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2019.

Bruce Springsteen released his first album, *Greetings from Asbury Park, N. J.*, in 1972. His career is noted for writing about cars and the highway as a means of escape. This began with his first album,

He said "Take a right at the light,  
keep goin' straight until night,  
and then boy you're on your own"  
Bruce Springsteen (1972) *Blinded by the Light*, Track 1 of *Greetings from Asbury Park N. J.* [CD], Columbia.

He continues in his second album, *The Wild, The Innocent & The E Street Shuffle*, where the protagonist is stuck in the swamps of Jersey,

My machine she's a dud  
I'm stuck in the mud  
somewhere in the swamps of Jersey  
Bruce Springsteen (1973) *Rosalita (Come Out Tonight)*, Track 6 of *The Wild, The Innocent & The E Street Shuffle*. [CD], Columbia.

In his third album, it's all there in the title, *Born to Run*,

And we'll walk in the sun, but till then tramps like us  
Baby we were born to run  
Bruce Springsteen (1975) *Born To Run*, Track 5 of *Born to Run* [CD], Columbia.

Springsteen doesn't stop at *Born to Run* and progresses the idea of leaving with each album. In the album *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, the journey is still an optimistic one, with the highway acting as a beacon,

Tonight, tonight the highway's bright  
Out of our way mister you best keep  
Bruce Springsteen (1978) *Racing in the Street*, Track 5 of *Darkness on the Edge of Town* [CD], Columbia.

Things are not so optimistic in the next album, *the River*, the highway containing, amongst other things, some wrong directions.

Like a river that don't know where it's flowing  
I took a wrong turn and I just kept going  
Bruce Springsteen (1980) *Hungry Heart*, Track 6, Disc 1 of *The River* [CD], Columbia.

He is still in the process of leaving New Jersey in the song *State Trooper* from the album *Nebraska*, recorded in 1982,

Hey somebody out there, listen to my last prayer  
Hi ho silver-o, deliver me from nowhere  
Bruce Springsteen (1982) *State Trooper*, Track 6 of *Nebraska* [CD], Columbia.

It is in the song *Born in the U.S.A.*, the title track from his most commercially successful album, where Springsteen starts to question where the highway is really taking him, the nowhere that he seeks to escape in *State Trooper*, turning into a nowhere to go,

I'm ten years burning down the road  
Nowhere to run, ain't got nowhere to go  
Bruce Springsteen (1984) *Born in the U.S.A.*, Track 1 of *Born in the U.S.A.* [CD], Columbia.

In *Tunnel of Love*, from 1987, he starts to find that the highway, may not be a destination in itself, the protagonist of the song Bill Horton, being a "cautious man of the road."

He got dressed in the moonlight and down to the highway he strode  
When he got there he didn't find nothing but road  
Bruce Springsteen (1987) *Cautious Man*, Track 5 of *Tunnel of Love* [CD], Columbia.

Springsteen does leave New Jersey for periods, he is after all, a touring musician. He had no Grand European tour to use as a precedent, so he did what many had done before him, he headed to the American West Coast following in their footsteps. He lived there for a time but returned to New Jersey after a short spell living in Los Angeles. The experience was largely fruitless as described in the song *57 Channels (And Nothin' On)*,

I bought a bourgeois house in the Hollywood hills  
With a trunkload of hundred thousand dollar bills  
Man came by to hook up my cable TV  
We settled in for the night my baby and me  
We switched 'round and 'round till half-past dawn  
There was 57 channels and nothin'on  
Bruce Springsteen (1992) *57 Channels (And Nothin' On)*, Track 3 of *Human Touch* [CD], Columbia.

In the *Long Goodbye* from the same album *Human Touch*, released twenty years after his first album, *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.* Springsteen looks back at the inertia of leaving, with him ultimately staying in New Jersey,

Well I went to leave twenty years ago  
Since then I guess I been packin' kinda slow  
Bruce Springsteen (1992) *The Long Goodbye*, Track 3 of *Human Touch* [CD],  
Columbia.

and in *The Ghost of Tom Joad* from the album of the same name, he reflects again on where the highway can actually take you. The song is based on the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck and influenced by the John Ford film of the book. Springsteen writes of the disappointment of where the highway might actually take you.

Well the highway is alive tonight  
But nobody's kiddin' nobody about where it goes  
Bruce Springsteen (1995) *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, Track 1 of *The Ghost of Tom Joad*  
[CD], Columbia.

In his latest album, *Western Stars*, released in 2019, not only is the highway not taking him anywhere more promising, he has turned around to visit previous destinations.

Onto a road so black as I backtracked  
To the Moonlight Motel  
Bruce Springsteen (2019) *Moonlight Motel*, Track 13 of *Western Stars* [CD],  
Columbia.

Turning around and reflecting is obviously something that older people do and his work reflects this. As for leaving, he says in the trailer to his 2018 documentary, *Springsteen on Broadway*,

Everybody has a love hate relationship with their hometown. If you take me, I'm Mr.  
Born to Run, I currently live 10 minutes from my hometown.  
*Springsteen on Broadway. Trailer* (2018) Netflix, 1:57

The work of James Joyce is popular in the United States, "Ulysses is so permeated with Dublin lore that natives look with a wild surmise at the manic enthusiasm of Americans." Kain, R.M. (1972) *Dublin in the Age of William Butler Yeats and James Joyce*, p.87.

Appreciating the feeling of manic enthusiasm is one thing, measuring it is another. ProQuest, the library research service, does just that. Research shows that James Joyce is one of the most studied authors in the United States. ProQuest, lists 12,624 Doctoral Dissertations on the subject, James Joyce, undertaken in the United States. There is at least one listing for each of the 50 United States, with the most being in New York with 1,765, and the next most populous state being California with 1,294. They list 34 in Ireland, which ranks it just behind Alabama at 41, and 1 ahead of Mississippi at 33.

Bruce Springsteen first played in Ireland on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1985 in Slane Castle. The audience was estimated at 93,000 people. His largest concert to date. There was heat and there was alcohol. Springsteen had to stop the concert several times as he worried about the mayhem in front of the stage. He writes about it in his recent book *Born to Run*,

In the end, Slane joined a rising number of our performances to attain “legendary” status and, despite my distraction, turned out to be a solid show. On the streets of Dublin, it is often mentioned to me. If you were there, you were *there*. I was certainly there.

Bruce Springsteen (2016) *Born to Run*, p.335.

I was there.

Springsteen has toured Ireland regularly since Slane Castle. It is arguable that Springsteen is currently more popular in Ireland than he is in his home state of New Jersey. On the *Wrecking Ball Tour* of 2012 and 2013 he played in the USA 48 Times, of which he played in New Jersey 5 times. He played in Ireland 7 Times, in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Belfast and Kilkenny.

On the *River Tour 2016*, Springsteen played 74 shows in America playing in 23 States as well as Washington DC. He played twice in Croke Park in Dublin. When you compare the relative populations, his popularity in Ireland is evident. At each concert he played, and the crowd sang along to, *Born to Run*. But in the intervening quarter century, from Slane Castle in 1985, to Croke Park in 2016, how many of the crowd actually went anywhere? If they did, and were there in Croke Park, as I was, then they came back.

Joyce and his writings are widely appreciated by people who have never been to Dublin, many in America. Springsteen and his music are loved and appreciated by people in Ireland

many of whom have never been to New Jersey, but enthusiastically sing along about leaving it. Place is central to the writings of Joyce and Springsteen. But what place exactly?

James Joyce famously said to his friend Arthur Power, that he wrote about Dublin because in the particular is contained the Universal.

For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal.

Arthur Power, cited in Richard Ellmann (1983) *James Joyce: New and Revised Edition*, p.505.

It is this universality that is also commented on in the work of Springsteen, seen as being central to his appeal. Cohen and Skinner Sawyers write,

Running through this collection is the often-unstated understanding that Springsteen has the unique gift to write music that is universal in scope.

Jonathan D. Cohen and June Skinner Sawyers (2019) *Long Walk Home: Reflections on Bruce Springsteen*, p.6.

Springsteen uses the particular somewhat universal objects of cars, the highway, and movement as metaphor. The quote from his first album is telling,

And I swear I found the key to the Universe in the engine of an old parked car  
Bruce Springsteen (1972) *Growin' Up*, Track 2 of *Greetings from Asbury Park N. J.* [CD], Columbia

Here he uses the engine of the old parked car not just to open the universe to his narrator, but uses it for himself, his career, and of course his audience.

In his book from 2002, *The Art of Travel*, the philosopher Alain de Botton writes of his experiences of holidaying in Barbados. “Nothing was as I had imagined – surprising only if one considers what I had imagined.” (2002, p.12) His anticipation was of a beach, a villa and an azure blue sky. But on arrival he noted amongst other uninspiring objects “a large petrol storage facility, decorated with the yellow and green logo of British Petroleum.” (2002, p.13).

If we are inclined to forget how much there is in the world besides what we anticipate, then works of art are perhaps a little to blame, for in them we find the same process of simplification or selection at work as in the imagination.

De Botton (2002), *The Art of Travel*, p. 14.

Joyce and Springsteen's artistic worlds are carefully and deliberately curated. James Joyce is not Stephen Dedalus, even if they share numerous biographic details. His Dublin is not my Dublin. It has been argued by Bruce Springsteen that the Bruce Springsteen we see and listen to, is not Bruce Springsteen but is partly a construct,

"I come from a boardwalk town where everything is tinged with just a bit of fraud. So am I." *Springsteen on Broadway* (2018) Netflix, 1:22.

Joyce's Dublin is not a real Dublin, nor is Springsteen's New Jersey, rather they are edited, designed to suit their author's intentions. As De Botton concludes "In another paradox... it seems that we may best be able to inhabit a place when we are not faced with the additional challenge of having to be there." (2002, p.23). Joyce certainly avoided the challenge of living in Dublin, and Springsteen ultimately stayed in New Jersey, whilst still writing of leaving. "...what the reborn Springsteen of 1972 did was sing about a shared nothing in the context of a highly personal nowhere." Marc Dolan (2103) *Bruce Springsteen and the Promise of Rock 'n' Roll*, p.65.

Unlike Springsteen's, Joyce's work it's not about a highly personal nowhere, it is a highly personal somewhere. It is his Dublin, abstracted and taken to the Continent of Europe with him. In Europe he repurposed Dublin, without having to live in it.

There is authenticity in these creations. Imagine you are listening to a reading of *Ulysses* whilst walking through Dublin. Is it more authentic than listening to it whilst walking in New York? Likewise, does listening to *Born to Run*, seem more authentic if you listen to it in New York, rather than Dublin? Is there a difference? I think that there is, and that both Springsteen and Joyce express it in their works.

One of the things that James Joyce and Bruce Springsteen were trying to escape from was the Catholic Church. They were both born into the Catholic tradition, with Joyce being particularly noted for his attendance at the Jesuit Schools of Clongowes Wood and Belvedere College before studying at the Catholic University. But as young men they both went away from strict Catholic doctrine. When Springsteen writes,

It's so hard to be a saint  
when you're just a boy out on the street



Bruce Springsteen (1972) *It's Hard to be a Saint in the City*, Track 9 of *Greetings from Asbury Park N. J.* [CD], Columbia.

it is very easy to think of the young James Joyce, newly moved from Blackrock on the edge of Dublin, to the centre of the city in Hardwicke Street and shortly thereafter to Fitzgibbon Street, just around the corner from the temptations of Dublin's Nighttown. Joyce is not a saint in the city but is still strongly influenced by his Catholic and in particular, his Jesuit schooling. As Buck Mulligan describes him in *Ulysses*, "...you have the cursed jesuit strain in you, only it's injected the wrong way." James Joyce (1998) *Ulysses*, p.7. There is no escaping Catholicism, and as put by Springsteen, you're always on the team,

I came to ruefully and bemusedly understand that once you're a Catholic, you're always a Catholic. So I stopped kidding myself. I don't often participate in my religion but I know somewhere...deep inside...I'm still on the team.  
Bruce Springsteen (2016) *Born to Run*, p.17.

As well as the influence of the church, Springsteen and Joyce were strongly influenced by their fathers. Originally from Cork, Joyce's father John Stanislaus flitted about the north inner city of Dublin until his death in 1931. James didn't return to see him, but he didn't forget him, "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead." James Joyce (2007) *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p.224, instead immortalising him with some of the best quotes as Simon Dedalus in *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*. "—Agonising Christ, wouldn't it give you a heartburn on your arse?" James Joyce (1998) *Ulysses*, p.102.

In some ways the fathers of Joyce and Springsteen were similar, with a long succession of jobs,

Stephen began to enumerate glibly his father's attributes.  
—A medical student, an oarsman, a tenor, an amateur actor, a shouting politician, a small landlord, a small investor, a drinker, a good fellow, a storyteller, somebody's secretary, something in a distillery, a taxgatherer, a bankrupt and at present a praiser of his own past.  
James Joyce (2007) *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p.213.

My father worked as a sixteen year old floorboy in that rugmill, then he went off to war, when he came home he got married. They shut the rugmill down and so he went to work on the Ford Motor plant line in New Brunswick, then he worked at the Nescafé plant in Freehold, worked in a plastics factory in town. He was a truck driver, a bus driver, drove a taxi. He lived mostly at home except for his second home which was a little local bar in the centre of town.  
*Springsteen on Broadway* (2018) Netflix, 25:36.

And these fathers left a mark,

In the Bible Cain slew Abel  
and East of Eden he was cast  
You're born into this life paying  
For the sins of somebody else's past  
Bruce Springsteen (1978) *Adam Raised a Cain*, Track 2 of *Darkness on the Edge of Town* [CD], Columbia.

There was just no way this house could hold the two of us  
I guess we were just too much of the same kind  
Bruce Springsteen (1980) *Hungry Heart*, Track 5, Disc 1 of *The River* [CD], Columbia.

James Joyce left Dublin and John Stanislaus behind. Springsteen didn't have to escape his father, because his father left him, leaving for California with his wife Adele, when Springsteen was nineteen.

At home, my father finally decided he'd had enough. The town and his illness had beaten him. He decided he was going to go to California to start a new life. ...  
Six months later, in 1969, at nineteen, I stood in our driveway, waving as my parents and little sister Pam pulled away. They had all of their belongings packed on top of their 1960's Rambler.  
Bruce Springsteen (2016) *Born to Run*, p.108.

Borders real and imagined were important to Joyce and Springsteen. But what do these borders mean? What if like Joyce you ignore that they exist? You bring your Dublin with you to the Continent of Europe, with Nora and your siblings Stanislaus, Eileen and Eva. At least bringing them for long enough to replace them with your own children and your multi layered versions of Dublin created in your works, with your paybacks from afar.

Or what if like Springsteen after 30 years burning down the road you end up right back where you started? With nowhere to run to and nowhere to go? Perhaps we are stationary, and the world is moving around us.

Every life is many days, day after day. We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love, but always meeting ourselves.  
James Joyce (1998) *Ulysses*, p.175.

We are always meeting ourselves. You can't cross every border,

Well I chased him through them county roads till a sign said  
"Canadian border 5 miles from here"

I pulled over the side of the highway and watched his taillights disappear  
Bruce Springsteen (1982) *Highway Patrolman*, Track 5 of *Nebraska* [CD], Columbia.

Knowing the thunder coming in early twentieth century Ireland, Joyce's contemporaries and friends, Thomas Kettle, Francis Sheehy Skeffington and George Clancy were to try different ways to create a new Ireland. Thomas Kettle decided the best route was to support Britain in the First World War, George Clancy chose the path of resistance to the British and Francis Sheehy Skeffington chose pacifism and peaceful resistance.

For Joyce it was via exile to the continent of Europe where he tried to create the new Ireland through literature. "Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race." James Joyce (2007) *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p.224,

Kettle, Sheehy Skeffington and Clancy were all to die violently. Sheehy Skeffington was murdered by a British Army Officer in the Rising, Kettle died in the first World War and George Clancy was shot dead by the Auxiliaries in the War of Independence in Limerick in 1921. Joyce survived all three in exile.

Joyce ignored the border between where he lived and what he wrote about. He tic tacked across Europe seeking refuge from two world wars in Zürich, Switzerland, where he died of natural causes on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1941. This was something denied his friend and assistant Paul Leon, being arrested by the Gestapo and subsequently killed, probably on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 1942. For many, borders can't be easily reimagined or repurposed. They are real and they can have tragic consequences.

In viconian fashion, let's return to the beginning.

In the story *Eveline*, the second story in *Dubliners*, the central character does not get on the boat on the North Wall with Frank, and travel to a new life in Argentina, instead Eveline turns her back on Frank and returns home. Nora Barnacle was not Eveline. The story was first published in September 1904, a month before Nora Barnacle and James Joyce were to depart from the same quay. But it must have been in Joyce's thoughts that Nora may ultimately not get on the boat to the continent of Europe with him. Imagine we are back on

the North Wall in Dublin, with Nora Barnacle looking to join step aboard, and Joyce's thoughts as written by Springsteen,

So Mary climb in

It's a town full of losers

And I'm pulling out of here to win

Bruce Springsteen (1975) *Thunder Road*, Track 1 of *Born to Run* [CD], Columbia.

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