

Henrik Ibsen's Influence on James Joyce

Naoki Kobayashi

1 Introduction

To the readers of James Joyce (1882-1941), Irish novelist, it is well known that Joyce, in his early days, worshiped Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), Norwegian dramatist. At the age of 18 Joyce wrote the review on one of Ibsen's plays, which was published on a literary magazine and caught Ibsen's eye. To Joyce's pleasure, the Norwegian sent a letter to the young Irish by way of the English translator of his plays. In the next year, Joyce sent the old dramatist a letter to celebrate his birthday. There are more episodes that indicate his enthusiasm for the dramatist.

To Ibsen's influence on Joyce, no full-scale investigation has been devoted, since B. J. Tysdahl published *Joyce and Ibsen* in 1968¹. Tysdahl's book is a laborious work and highly suggestive still now. Furthermore, the book is so all-inclusive as to cover Joyce's references to Ibsen in texts of his very early days and to contain list of reference to Ibsen in *Finnegans Wake*. The complete nature of the book and Norwegian to which most of English speakers are not acquainted much, might hush the Joyceans.

I am not a scholar of Ibsen, nor understand Norwegian. But, in the process of surveying the transition of Joyce's literature, I found that Joyce's early days and his texts of this period are significant for the interpretation of his later controversial works, for Stephen Dedalus who appears in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* is exceedingly autobiographical character that reflects Joyce as a young man. It is memorable that Joyce was under Ibsen's overwhelming influence in those days.

More than thirty years has passed since the publication of *Joyce and Ibsen*. To reconsider Ibsen's influence on Joyce seems to put novel light on Joyce's

literature. In this paper I intend firstly to trace the transition of Joyce's estimation of Ibsen, referring to Joyce's biography and letters. Secondly, I intend to search Ibsen's influence on Joyce's works. As to *Finnegans Wake*, I only point out some conspicuous points, for my study does not proceed there.

2 The vicissitude of the affection

The general recognition of Joyce's attachment to Ibsen is that it was extremely intense when Joyce was young, but fell into decay gradually. Such recognition was inspected by the biographic facts and available texts. The intensity of his enthusiasm is recognized by some facts. Joyce's younger brother, Stanislaus, registered in his memoirs thus:

One afternoon comes back to me distinctly, the afternoon when Ibsen's *Master Builder* arrived from Heinemann's—It was an event; and my brother stayed up that night to read the play. In the morning I must have been the first to come down—The whole room bore witness that he had read late into the night. My brother had been keeping vigil to hear the message from Norway of the younger generation that sooner or later comes knocking at the door².

And his speech entitled 'Drama and Life' which was carried out in a society of University College, Dublin in 1900, was the objection to a friend who had accused Ibsen before as much as a year. The president of the society opposed Joyce's speech, so Joyce wrote a letter to an English magazine, which inquired if the magazine would publish a thesis on Ibsen. The magazine wrote to Joyce

that they don't need, but would consider a review on Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken* whose English translation would be published. Joyce made speech without allowance in the university and inflicted some reproach. Then, Joyce wrote and sent the review, 'Ibsen's New Drama', which was published and caught the Norwegian's eye³, as stated above. The process that 'Drama and Life' and 'Ibsen's New Drama' came into being reveals decidedly his passion for the Norwegian. And it is reported that Joyce created two plays entitled *A Brilliant Career* and *Dream Stuff* in the same year⁴. They do not exist now, but Stanislaus remembered the plot of the former. According to it, Ibsen's influence on the play was obvious to the brother: as much as I recall of it was a rehash of ingredients borrowed, unconsciously I am sure, from *When We Dead Awaken*, *A Doll's House* and *The League of Youth*⁵. Joyce began to study Norwegian in those days. In 1901 Joyce wrote Ibsen a letter to celebrate the dramatist's birthday in Norwegian⁶. In the same year Joyce made a pamphlet to accuse regionalism and narrow-mindedness of Irish literary revival together with a friend. Joyce's sentence entitled 'The Day of Rabblement,' ends with his will to succeed Ibsen and Hauptman: Elsewhere there are men who are worthy to carry on the tradition of the old master who is dying in Christiania. He has already found his successor in the writer of "Michael Kramer," and the third minister will not be wanting when his hour comes. Even now that hour may be standing by the door⁷. It is said to be in the same year that he translated Hauptmann's *Before Sunrise*, which he would hand W. B. Yeats to be presented, but would be rejected in 1904⁸.

In 1903 Joyce wrote a review on *Catilina*, Ibsen's first play. In the review Joyce gave limitative estimation to the play, but he asserted that indication of Ibsen's later works is observed⁹. And 'Epiphanies', the collection of short sketches, which Joyce wrote in those days, includes two pieces in which Ibsen appears¹⁰.

Furthermore, *Stephen Hero*, Joyce's first attempt to portrait himself as a young man, tells his affection for the playwright to some extent. Joyce started creating this novel in 1904, but stopped in the next year. And in 1907 he tried to throw the draught away, but his wife, Nola, secured the most of them. So, *Stephen Hero* exists in form that it lacks its first half and some chapters to its end. In the sixteenth chapter of the unfinished novel Joyce, or the narrator describes thus: He had all but decided to consider the two worlds as alien to one another—however disguised or expressed the most utter of pessimism—when he encountered through the medium of hardly procured translations the spirit of Henrik Ibsen¹¹. In the nineteenth chapter Stephen Daedalus, the protagonist, who is highly autobiographical character, makes speech named

'Drama and Life' in the university in which he study. But the episode about 'Ibsen's New Drama' and the correspondence with Ibsen is not described nor is implied. In the same chapter the hero urges his mother to read the Norwegian's dramas, which makes her interested and sympathized. The incompleteness of the book makes readers hesitate on conclusive speech, but it can be said that *Stephen Hero* reflects Joyce's passion for Ibsen to large extent, though it should be remembered that biographic facts that must have made the author rapturous are not described.

The year 1904 was one of turning points for Joyce, for he met Nola, and went to the Continent with her to be a voluntary exile. After they settled in Trieste, Joyce often corresponded with acquaintances in Dublin. The references to Ibsen appear frequently in those letters, especially in the letters to Stanislaus¹². Furthermore, Ellmann describes one day in 1908 or 1909 when Joyce saw Ibsen's *Ghosts* played in Trieste. When Oswald in the play went mad, Joyce also writhed in pain in his seat and made wild gesture¹³. It is memorable that the young Irish man empathized in the hero of the play intensely, for *Ghosts* had been known to the world, but its meaning is difficult to understand still now.

As stated above, Joyce dismissed *Stephen Hero*, but never lost his intention to portrait himself as a young man. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* which would be serialized from 1914 and published in 1917, was thought to be started in not so far day from the dismissal of *Stephen Hero*. In this definitive version of self-portrait, Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist, does not make the speech, 'Drama and Life.' The episode of 'Ibsen's New Drama' and the correspondences with the Norwegian are not described. The only reference to Ibsen is thus: as he went by Baird's stonecuttings works in Talbot Place the spirit of Ibsen would blow through him like a keen wind, a spirit of wayward boyish beauty...¹⁴. In this scene Stephen mentions some literary person whom he adores, in which Ibsen is just one of them. Some writers are given more respect. For instance, Stephen praises Lord Byron's verses against the violent reproach of friends. Between *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* numerous changes can be recognized: their styles, naturalism of the former and emphasis on the episode of the latter, and so forth. The elimination of the references to Ibsen should be considered in such context. But it seems to reflect the shift of Joyce's estimation for the playwright, for the references to him in Joyce's letter decreased in number in these days. Such facts and decreasing tendency of the reference in texts caused the general recognition that Joyce's estimation of Ibsen fell into decay gradually. But Joyce wrote *Exiles*, a play, simultaneously with *Portrait*. As mentioned later, this play reflects Ibsen's

influence to large extent. Furthermore, some episodes tell us that Joyce's estimation, or enthusiasm for the Norwegian was still considerable. For instance, Ellmann reported as an episode in 1914 or 1915 that Joyce estimated the Norwegian dramatist above Shakespeare¹⁵, which is the same opinion with that of 'Drama and Life.'

After *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Exiles* are published, Joyce's reference to Ibsen disappeared. *Ulysses*, created from 1917 to 1922 includes some implication for the Norwegian. But they seem trivial, for *Ulysses* is the massive system of symbols, and some artists are given more references. But, as mentioned later, a work of Ibsen's contributed to the masterpiece in peculiar way. Furthermore, in *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce's final full-scale creation, numerous references to Ibsen and his works are observed, as Tysdahl and Clive Hart made them into a list. The episode of 'Norwegian Captain' contains numerous Norwegian words, as Tysdahl shows with a list. In 1936, before the publication of the work, Joyce wrote a pejorative poem on Ibsen's *Ghosts*¹⁶. It sounds malicious, and seems to reflect decayed Joyce's estimation for Ibsen. But in the same year he wrote a letter to James Stephens, an Irish author, to whom Joyce felt specific attachment, which recommend him Ibsen's *Little Eyolf*¹⁷.

As we have seen, to Joyce as a young man Ibsen was the object of intense worship. Joyce's enthusiasm for the Norwegian did not last so long, but high estimation of him had never changed. Ibsen continued to inspire Joyce even in Joyce's latest years.

3 Influence on Joyce's works

As stated above, to Joyce as a young man, Ibsen was the great object of worship. When Joyce began to write his first novel was not so far away from the time when he had written the letters to Ibsen. As early as in 1904 he began to create pieces of *Dubliners* and finished whole collection except 'The Dead' till the end of 1905. It is rational to think that the method that Joyce employed for *Dubliners* is not derived from Ibsen, but from French naturalists. Tysdahl recognises only one implication for Ibsen in *Dubliners*, that is, Norwegian sailors in 'An Encounter'¹⁸. But Joyce, I think, implied astonishingly a play of Ibsen's in one piece of *Dubliners*. When 'Eveline' is compared with *The Lady from the Sea*, subtle correspondence between them seems to be revealed.

The heroin of Joyce's story is a girl, Eveline Hill, who has been ill-used by her father in her home and has got a cold reception in the department store for which she worked. She was acquainted with a sailor, named Frank, and got intimate with him. She promised to run away with him for Buenos Ayres where they would dwell in. In the closing they are going to leave Dublin. But

when they are about to embark on the ship, Eveline is haunted by sudden hesitation and let Frank go alone.

The heroin of the play of Ibsen's is a young woman, named Ellida Wangel who was born and grown up in seaside and married with Doctor Wangel. Doctor Wangel have two daughters between his late wife. Ellida gave a birth to a boy several years before, but he lived only some months. Now she suffers mentally, so her husband takes his family to a seaside town considering wife's health. In the first act a friend of the couples tells Ellida an episode which he experienced in his travel. The episode is that he saw an American crew of a ship suddenly alighted and shredded a newspaper which the crew was reading. The American muttered in Norwegian, which means "Married.....with another man.....during my absence....." In the night the ship wrecked and the crew disappeared. The episode frightens Ellida intensely, for she had experiences as follows. When she was young, she was acquainted with a crew of an American ship, named Johnston, and got intimate with him. He told her many stories about sea and foreign countries, which made him look the incarnation of the sea and fascinated her. On one day Johnston killed the captain of the ship occasionally, appeared before her. He threw their rings into the sea as the token of their marriage. Then he ran away, and his trace has been lost since then. Ellida suspects that Johnston is the American whom the friend tells about. In the last act Johnston appears before her and claims her to be his wife and to leave there by ship. Grasping the whole situation Doctor Wangel lets her decide. Ellida decides to stay with Doctor by her own will.

Both works end with heroines' resignation, or abandonment of disappearance from home. Both men who try to remove the heroines are sailors. Johnston is described as if he were the incarnation of the sea. Frank talks about Allan Line, the Straits of Magellan and Patagonians, which makes him resemble the mysterious crew of *The Lady from the Sea*. It is hard to consider that Joyce created the short story insensible of the play, for he was much acquainted with Ibsen's later works. Furthermore, Buenos Ayres where Eveline would emigrate is suggestive. The city was not so common as the destination of Irish emigrant. "Buenos Ayres" represents good air in Spanish, which remind us the closing of 'Drama and Life,' that ends with the citation from Ibsen's *Pillars of Society*: '...what will you do in our Society, Miss Hessel?' asked Rörlund—'I will let in fresh air, Pastor.'—answered Lona.¹⁹

In this short story Joyce described an aspect of Ireland with establishing ironical correspondence with *The Lady of the Sea*. The family name of the heroin is Hill, which makes contrast with the heroin of the Ibsen's play

who was born and grown up in seaside and is called "the lady from the sea." Eveline feels that "he would drown her"²⁰ and pray for herself when she is about to embark on the ship. What makes her stay in native land is sudden anonymous impulse, while Ellida makes her decision by her own will. Joyce expressed his motive for *Dubliners* explicitly in the letter to a publisher: My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the center of paralysis. I have tried to present it to the indifferent public under four of its aspects: childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life.²¹

To understand the meaning of "paralysis of Ireland" requires another argument, so I do not discuss it. But it can be said that an aspect of it can be inspected by the contrast between 'Eveline' and *The Lady from the Sea*.

As to *Exiles*, Joyce's sole surviving play, Tysdahl does not appoint the analogy with Ibsen's particular play, though he recognizes many similarities between *Exiles* and Ibsen's plays²². Its minute stage directions and scenes in parlors remind us Ibsen's later plays. Some reviewers point out analogy with *When We Dead Awaken*²³. But Richard Rowan's background or circumstance—an academic person who has recently finished writing a book inspired by the community with a woman, and seeks for the post of professor at a university—coincides surprisingly with that of Ejler Löberg of *Hedda Gabler*. Moreover, the setting that such academic person, the other man, and a woman form an eternal triangle (dual triangles, if the women who inspired the academic is considered) is also shared by the two plays, though the academic is not the husband of the women, but the man who wedges in the couple in *Hedda Gabler*. The ending of *Exiles*, that the husband gives his wife entire freedom to decide if she remains with him or run away with the other man, coincides with that of *The Lady from the Sea*.

Of course Joyce did not intend to combine Ibsen's two plays. In this thesis I do not refer to the theme of *Exiles*, but according to critics, it is limitation of freedom, demand of love, and complicated dilemma²⁴, which seems to be relevant. Or backward country and man of knowledge should be added, considering its title and Joyce's attitude to Ireland. And it should be remembered that the setting and theme reflects Joyce's history. In 1909 he came back to Dublin, where he was presented the teaching job at university, his old school. A friend of Joyce's deceived Joyce, implying that he had had intimate intercourse with Joyce's wife, Nola, before the couple married. Believing it, Joyce sent letters whose contents were much distracted to Nola in Trieste²⁵. Since then the theme of adultery seems to have occupied Joyce's mind,

which would be dealt with in *Exiles* and *Ulysses*. The note for *Exiles* which Joyce wrote, shows that he had intention to give the characters of the play various symbolic meanings²⁶. So, the motive and material of *Exiles* can be regarded as Joyce's original. But the setting and ending of it, seems to be borrowings from Ibsen's two dramas.

Before minute biography of Joyce was accomplished, some critics argued the correspondence between *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Brand*. Stephen's humourless attitude to his family and home country reminded them of resoluteness of the pastor of *Brand*. But the biography by Ellmann certified that most of Stephen's deeds corresponds with Joyce's. To be sure Joyce praises *Brand* and *When We Dead Awaken* comparing them each other in 'Ibsen's New Drama.' But in 'Drama and Life' and 'Ibsen's New Drama' Joyce's adoration is chiefly devoted to Ibsen's later works which deal with the contemporaries. As mentioned later, another verse drama of Ibsen's urged Joyce to create *Ulysses*, but the contribution of *Brand* to *A Portrait* cannot be inspected, as Tysdahl argues. But according to Tysdahl, there are some citations from Ibsen's poems and lines of his verse dramas in Joyce's sentences to accuse his home country. Considering that Stephen is highly autobiographical figure, it can be said that Ibsen is Stephen=Joyce's mentor.

Don Gifford's annotation for *Ulysses*, all-inclusive one, acknowledges only three implications for Ibsen and his works²⁷. Joyce devoted one episode out of eighteen to Shakespeare whom he gave limitative estimation in his youth. Homer whom Joyce did not adore so, was given the parallel between *Ulysses* and *Odyssey*. Compared with them, the scantiness of reference to Norwegian whom he adored in his youth is surprising. But tracing the process that *Ulysses* came into being, that a drama of Ibsen's played an important role is recognized. The material of *Ulysses* is biographical fact as follows. In one day in 1904, Joyce spoke to a young woman without knowing if she was accompanied. Her companion came to Joyce and knocked him down. Joyce's friends who observed it ran away. But a middle-aged man helped him. The middle-aged man was named Alfred H. Hunter, and said to be a Jew and to have unfaithful wife²⁸. In 1906 Joyce wrote to his brother that he intended to create a short story entitled 'Ulysses at Dublin,' which would deal with middle-aged Jew's wandering and be included in *Dubliners*. In the same year Joyce wrote his brother a letter that told the creation of the story did not get along well²⁹. Stanislaus wrote down in his diary of 1907 thus: Jim told me that he is going to expand his story of Ulysses into a short book and make a Dublin 'Peer Gynt' of it³⁰. It is memorable that the story of Jewish man's wandering

that would be short piece became massive masterpiece, *Ulysses*, through the medium of *Peer Gynt*. As stated above, Joyce acknowledged the parallel between *Ulysses* and some works of art explicitly and implicitly. Its title, the names of every episode and the schemas that the author rendered some friends imply the correspondence with Homer's *Odyssey*. The ninth episode 'Scylla and Charybdis' is dedicated to introduce Stephen Dedalus's thesis on *Hamlet*, which signifies conspicuous relationship between the work of Joyce's and Shakespearean tragedy. Stephen's surname gives the reader more wedges for the interpretation of the novel, that is Daedalian myth. To be sure, Joyce did not imply special relationship between his massive novel and Ibsen's verse drama. But Bloom's wandering seems closer to Peer's than to Odysseus's. Both works share with each other anti-heroic tone, hero's irresponsibility, emphasis on salvation by women and so forth. Furthermore, the room for the recognitions of correspondences lies between them, as Tysdahl strives to find the similarity between them. For instance, bottom maker and one-eyed nationalist, troll and Bella Cohen, and so forth. In any way, it is *Peer Gynt* that inspired Joyce when his 'story of Ulysses' did not proceed. Ibsen's contribution to *Ulysses* cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the greatest mystery in *Ulysses* man in M'intosh, or thirteenth mourner of 'Hades' implies Gregers Werle in *The Wild Duck*, as Gilbert appoints³¹. It certifies that Joyce took Ibsen's plays in *Ulysses* as symbols. There is possibility that more implication for Ibsen's work is found.

As widely known, *Finnegans Wake* is full of symbols and images, many of which Joyceans have not resolved meaning of it yet. But referring to Tysdahl's study, the implications for Ibsen, seems much abundant. Moreover, the structure of *Finnegans Wake* seems to have correspondences with Ibsen's plays. For instance, H. C. E. who fell from a ladder and died corresponds with Solnes of *Master Builder* who falls from the top of the tower and dies in the closing of the play. The setting of the novel, dead man's wake (the word which have multiplicity in meaning), reminds us the title of Ibsen's play, *When We Dead Awaken*.

4 Conclusion

As we have seen, Ibsen consistently inspired Joyce even in Joyce's latest years, though intense worship did not last so. In 'Eveline' the paralysis of Ireland was described in the contrast with *The Lady from the Sea*. When Joyce chose drama, the same genre with Ibsen, the result, *Exiles*, seems to be borrowings from Ibsen's plays, or composition of them. In the creation of *Ulysses*, *Peer Gynt* made the short story massive work of various sym-

bols and styles. *Finnegans Wake* contains implications for Ibsen's plays abundantly. Moreover, the structure of this work is partly consisted of Ibsen's dramas.

Notes

- 1 B. J. Tysdahl, *Joyce and Ibsen: A Study in Literary Influence*, Oslo: Norwegian Universities Press, 1968.
- 2 Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper*, edited and with an introduction by Richard Ellmann with a preface by T. S. Eliot, London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1982, pp.98-99.
- 3 Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce: new and revised edition*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, pp.69-74.
- 4 Ellmann, pp.78-80.
- 5 Stanislaus Joyce, p.126 l.20-23.
- 6 Ellmann, pp.85-87.
- 7 *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, ed. by Richard Ellmann and Ellsworth Mason, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989, p.72 l. 5-9.
- 8 Ellmann, pp.87-88.
- 9 *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, pp.98-101.
- 10 *The Workshop of Daedalus: James Joyce and raw material for A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, collected and edited by Robert E. Scholes and Richard M. Kain, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965, p.21, p.46.
- 11 *Stephen Hero*, edited with introduction by Theodore Spencer, London: J. Cape, 1944, p.32 ll. 25-29.
- 12 *The Letters of James Joyce vol.II*, ed. by Richard Ellmann, pp.83-84, p.86, p.91, p.105, p.146, p.157, pp.166-167, pp.182-183, p.187, p.191, p.196, p.201, p.205.
- 13 Ellmann, p.266.
- 14 *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1917), edited by Hans Walter Gabler with Walter Hettche, New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1993, p. 82 ll.80-83.
- 15 Ellmann, p.398.
- 16 *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, pp.271-273.
- 17 *The Letters of James Joyce vol.III*, ed. by Richard Ellmann, p.389.
- 18 Tysdahl, p.56.
- 19 *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, p.46 ll. 2-4.
- 20 *Dubliners* (1914), London: Penguin, 2000, p.34 l. 8.
- 21 *The Letters of James Joyce, vol.II*, p.134. ll. 13-17.
- 22 see ‡*Exiles* of Tysdahl, pp.87-102.
- 23 Marvin Magalaner and Richard M. Kain, *Joyce The man the Work, the Reputation*, New York: Collier Books, 1956, p.142.
- 24 See chapter 6 of Magalaner and Kain.
- 25 Ellmann, pp.279-282.
- 26 *Poems and Exiles*, London: Penguin, 1992, pp.342-354.
- 27 see the article of "Ibsen" of index of *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses*, by Don Gifford with Robert J. Seidman, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

28 Ellmann, pp.161-162.

29 *The Letters of James Joyce vol.II*, p.168, p.190, p.209.

30 Ellmann, p.276.

31 Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce's Ulysses: A Study* (1930),
New York: Vintage Book, 1955, p.170, footnote.