

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for expressing interest my NEH Summer Seminar for school teachers, "Introducing James Joyce," to be taught at Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut. This letter seeks to cover three main topics – why the subject is worth studying, who the director is and why he is qualified to lead it, and what you can expect, academically and otherwise, if you become a participant.

First, the subject. Over sixty years after his death, James Joyce remains, for students of literature, a difficult figure to approach and an awkward one to ignore. On the one hand, he is arguably the most important, and probably the most influential, English-language writer of the last hundred-plus years. In English literature over all, only Shakespeare has received more critical attention. With the proliferation of web sites and e-mail discussion groups added to the journals, symposia, reading circles, and clubs already devoted to his writing, this interest has only become more widespread, reaching out to a worldwide audience. That fact was most recently brought home to me, in Dublin, on June 16, 2004, during the hundredth anniversary of the date on which Joyce's Ulysses is set. Making my way to one of the pubs prominent in that book, I found myself among young people from Italy, Germany, Holland, and Norway, each with a copy of Ulysses translated into his or her native language, joining in a serially multilingual read-through. Nothing (including the location) could have been more Joycean in spirit.

That spirit continues to grow. There is an annual Joyce conference held in Croatia. There is a Joyce journal published in Japan. Next year's International Joyce Symposium will be in Budapest – the first to be held beyond the old Iron Curtain. A Joycean e-mail group to which I belong includes members from New Zealand, Egypt, Turkey, Russia, Brazil, and Singapore. No author, in this age of globalization, is more global. For a student or teacher of literature, to miss out on all this is to miss out on something big.

On the other hand, many do. Joyce may well be the most guiltily un-read writer in English. Ulysses is the classic example of the bookcase book with the uncracked spine, the book that people buy, put on their shelves, and mean to get to some day. That is understandable. Joyce is difficult. The good news is that he is difficult in a way that, with some help, the order of the material itself makes manageable. The complexity is generally progressive, as in a course in mathematics or a foreign language. Joyce was fascinated with the phenomenon of organic growth, and one consequence of that fascination was that all of his books come in segments each of which incorporates and extends elements of the segments preceding it, and one consequence of that fact is that the latter segments, having more material to coordinate, tend to get busier, for approximately the same reason that a sixty year-old's life will probably be harder to sort out than a twenty year-old's. The same principle applies from one book to the next.

It therefore makes even more sense than usual to go through the texts in their chronological order. It also makes sense to do it as a common enterprise, in a reading

group - a class, or in our case, a seminar - in the company of someone who has some previous familiarity with the material, both primary and critical.

Which leads to the second major topic: the director, a.k.a. myself. I read my first Joyce book, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, when I was about the age of your students. Like many others, I was struck by its uncanny accuracy, by the way its author remembered what the sensations he was describing were really like, sensations I could confirm because through him I remembered them too. He remembered what it was like to be the kid with glasses. He remembered – no other writer I'd read had – that boys in grade school called one another by their last, not their first, names. He caught, and re-created from the inside out, what injustice felt like to a six-year-old, and how rumors from the world at large – political turmoil, changes in family fortune – filtered into a growing child's consciousness. No one but Dickens had done it as well, and Joyce was freer than Dickens had been to write about, for instance, adolescent lust and religious angst.

A good deal of water has passed under the bridge since then, during which I have pursued different interests, but Joyce continues to preoccupy me, for the same reasons (among some others) that attracted me when I was a teen-ager. My most recent book is called Joyce and Reality (subtitle: The Empirical Strikes Back), and the name is a good indicator of the main line I have pursued through it and through two other books published on Joyce, as well as through many monographs, articles, notes, and conference papers I have published and presented on the same subject. There are all kinds of angles to this author, and we will certainly want to explore a number of them, but, for sure, one continuous goal will be to spot and track each book's engagement with reality, both external (cityscape) and internal (mindscape). A knowledge of Dublin topography will be important - we have plenty of maps and pictures for that - but so will be the capacity to introspect and remember. Joyce is famous for his puzzles, and we will certainly do our best to unpuzzle some of them. But he is also the creator of Leopold Bloom, a human figure about whom readers come to know more than they do about anyone else in fiction, and about whom the hardest single thing to remember is that he never existed.

We will also be tracking the closely related subject of what might be called the developmental side of Joyce's work – that fascination with organic growth mentioned earlier. Almost every section of a given Joyce work is in a sense older than the one before, with a style and voice designed to register the change. As a result, the differences between one age and another are a constant theme. Ulysses, for instance, is, among many other things, about what in the sixties we used to call the generation gap – about a young character meeting and coming to terms with a middle-aged character. Given their backgrounds, I would expect the seminar's participants to be especially knowledgeable about this issue - to have something important to say about it. Although I have certainly enjoyed teaching the nineteen-to-twenty-one year-olds taking my Joyce classes over the years, the fact is that they are nineteen-to-twenty-one year-olds, with the irritating habit of not getting older, while I do. There are certain things about what they are reading that they just have to imagine or take on faith - for instance, what it's like to be thirty-eight, the age of the book's protagonist. It will, I expect, be a different, educational experience

to teach people whose ages range, like those of Joyce's characters, across the spectrum of life's stages, if only because their greater fund of experience – having jobs, having families, etc. – should help them to connect with literature in general and with Joyce in particular.

The seminar is scheduled for six weeks, from June 25 to August 5. The plan is to spend the first week on Dubliners, the second on A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, the next three on Ulysses, and the last wrapping up Ulysses and taking a look at excerpts from what is certainly Joyce's most demanding work, Finnegans Wake. I expect to ask each participant to read Richard Ellmann's biography of Joyce before arriving. The seminar will meet for approximately two hours a day, Monday through Friday, with a break in the middle. The classes will primarily consist of discussions between myself and the fifteen enrolled participants. I expect to ask each member to present one oral report on some feature of Joyce's life, time, or work. There will be individual conferences, a course website, and an e-mail discussion list.

Participants will receive a stipend of \$4,200. The first installment, between a third and half of the total, will be distributed on arrival, the remainder at about the mid-point of the course. Campus housing will be available at \$ 30 per day. Rooms are air-conditioned and reported to be excellent - roomy and comfortable. A meal plan, at \$ 27.25 for three meals per day, will also be available. Participants who bring cars - encouraged - will be able to reach any number of good restaurants in the area. Campus parking is free and quite convenient: you can always or almost always expect to find a space near your room.

If you come, I predict that you will find the campus and the region much to your liking. Connecticut College is a small liberal-arts college located on 424 rural acres at the edge of New London, Connecticut. It is a very attractive place - beautifully landscaped, with handsome buildings overlooking views of the Thames River and Long Island Sound. Facilities include an Olympic-sized pool, tennis, squash, and basketball courts, an arboretum, and a boathouse. Campus and area are eminently jogger-friendly. The whole region is, for good reason, a favorite summer vacation spot. Bordering the Atlantic, it has beaches and opportunities for fishing, boating, and ocean-going sailing trips within easy reach. Mystic, ten miles away, has Mystic Aquarium and Mystic Seaport. The two local casinos, Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun, are among the largest and glitziest in the world. Besides spectacle, both are known for their restaurants and shops, and the Mohegan Sun has an outstanding museum of Native American culture. There are open-air concerts and theatrical performances. Providence and New Haven are each about an hour's drive away, Boston and New York about two hours away. They can also all be reached easily from New London's Amtrak station. The Connecticut College library, to which all members of the seminar will be granted full privileges, is excellent, but for those who would like to try the resources of a world-class university library, access to Yale's, about forty miles away, will be available to for twenty-five dollars a month.

What else? Not wanting to sound fanatical, I should probably add that I have done work in other areas besides Joyce. I have published a book on literature and medicine, entitled Physiology and the Literary Imagination, as well as many articles and reviews on other modern and contemporary authors, and am currently at work on a book about Dickens. If you'd like to know more about either myself or the institution, you can find the college web page at conncoll.edu/, with my own entry accessible through that page's links to "People," then "Faculty Profiles." If you'd like to see either my c.v. or a sample of my writing on Joyce, please ask and I'll be happy to e-mail it or them along. A seminar web page will be available shortly.

Finally, a word about procedures for applying. Application information is included with this letter. Your completed application should be postmarked no later than March 1, 2006, and should be addressed to:

John Gordon
NEH Summer Seminar
Box 5413
Connecticut College
New London, CT. 06320
USA

Perhaps the most important part of the application is the essay that must be submitted as part of the complete application. This essay should include any personal and academic information that is relevant; reasons for applying to the particular project; your interest, both intellectual and personal, in the topic; qualifications to do the work of the project and make a contribution to it; what you hope to accomplish by participation, including any individual research and writing projects, and the relation of the study to your teaching.

Once again, thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

John Gordon