

Human Characteristics of an Object

Women's garments James Joyce seemed to find as exciting as their bodies. 'Material On The Head' and 'My Love Wears Light Attire' are self-portraits. I wear a kitchen mop head on my head and an old reclaimed bedroom lampshade like a hat or garment. Why do you wear these cursed things? Joyce would ask Nora when she went to bed in her corset. Please take off that breastplate as I do not like embracing a letterbox¹. The wearing of domestic objects is playful. The wearing of a corset was compulsory. Different rules for different times. The objects morph into my head taking over my identity. They inhabit the position of my face. I am living in them it seems. Like Nora's corset, the domestic sphere restricts the body. The corset was of her time. The domestic is mine. The kitchen mop and the lampshade now an identity in their own right are cursed things. Functional. Forever there.

Joyce found many ordinary things extraordinary. Joyce was extraordinary you see. Nora was ordinary². As a young girl Nora was well on her way to becoming the typical Galway woman of the nineteenth century as described by the Galway-born writer, Eilís Dillon 'tall, muscular and resourceful, deserted by disease and emigration, with a better sense of humour than the men.' A tall young girl, with heavy black eyebrows, a generous but firm mouth, including her voice- it was remarked upon by almost everyone who met her in later life; low, resonant, strong and rich with the tones of the Irish West³, and shoulders held squarely back.⁴ She wore big bows in her wild west of Ireland wavy hair that hung girlishly loose⁵. There are half a dozen of her in every small town – girls with looks and manner to make heads turn and tongues wag.⁶ Growing up in Galway and Cork in the early 1990s I was one of those girls. Popular with the boys as they say. A beautiful girl ripe for the picking. Looking to be picked. Wanting to be picked. Once he became besotted Joyce scarcely took a step without Nora. A simple chance encounter on the streets of Dublin that led to a life long love affair and passion. People write books and make films about it. He became obsessed. Her character infiltrated every female character he ever wrote about. He paraphrases Nora. Nora was ordinary.

One evening he stole her gloves and took them to bed with him when he couldn't take Nora. The glove sculpture '*It Lay Beside Me All Night-Unbuttoned*' made from found pink polyester wool gloves suggest pink for the girl. The pearls symbolise the sixties housewife or growth on an object.

1 JJ to NB July 12th 1904 II, 43-44

2 Brenda Maddox, Nora, p.g 46

3 Ulysses. 41

4 JJ to NB, June 15, 904, II,42

5 Brenda Maddox, Nora, pg. 24

6 Norman Mailer wrote of Marilyn Monroe (BM, Nora, p.g 24)

Clasped together like Joyce holding onto and embracing the gloves in bed. He wrote coyly 'it lay beside me all night- unbuttoned- but otherwise conducted itself properly- like Nora'⁷. The gloves take on a human form. I remember being passionate about anything belonging to a boyfriend, the tee-shirt containing their smell, the love notes took on their personality in their absence. It filled the aching gap. The gloves are being morphed by the pearls. Almost becoming one. The young pink girl is now succumbing to the domestic sphere, far from the glamorous Hollywood life Grace Kelly lived, in her mind. At the same time he gave Nora her first instruction on the use of letters as erotic objects when he asked her to take his letter to bed with her.⁸ He gave her a glove to compensate for the glove he had stolen, how expensive small luxuries were. He picked Nora from a crowded street, the woman that became essential to his art. She had a sexual magnetism and he modelled the sexually frank character of Molly Bloom after Nora. Some of the excuses made would fit well into a feminine tract. She is from Connacht, isn't she?⁹

7 JJ to NB, (July 12, 1904),II, 43

8 Brenda Maddox, Nora, p.g 46

9 'The Dead' JJ