

The James Joyce Piggly- Wiggly

by Con Chapman

VERSAILLES, Mo. Lemoyne Green's family has been in the grocery business in this town in south central Missouri, pronounced “ver-SALES”, going back four generations. “I guess you could say food is in our blood,” Lemoyne says with a barely-detectible trace of irony. “I know when I give blood they always give me a couple of fig newtons to eat, and that's something we sell over in Aisle 6, Cookies, Snacks and Syrups.”



Green's Piggly Wiggly

Lemoyne had hoped to break away from his small town roots, earning bachelors and masters degrees in English at the University of Iowa before “hitting a wall” when it came time to write the required dissertation for his Ph. D. “You go into the library every morning and look at all the little 3 by 5 note cards you’ve filled out, and you just get a pit in your stomach,” he recalls with apparent anxiety.



Storm clouds a brewin'

So Lemoyne returned to his home town with more education than he needed to run a grocery store, but less time to ponder the deep subject he'd specialized in: the difficult “stream-of-consciousness” prose of James Joyce, author of “Finnegans Wake,” the work ranked #1 on the Modern Language Association's list of “Books People Lie About Having Read.”



Royal Theatre, downtown Versailles

“It wasn't easy making the adjustment at first,” Lemoyne says, “then I decided to incorporate what I'd learned into our customer's shopping experience.” His first step in splicing the two strands of his existence was to change the motto of the business—“Quality, Value, Selection”—which had been printed on the store's bags since the 1880's. “That's fine, but very superficial and not at all subversive, which is the hallmark of Joyce's writing,” Green notes. He changed the logo to read “Silence, Exile and Cunning,” the tools used by Stephen Dedalus in “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man” to express himself as wholly and freely as he can.



James Joyce: "In Aisle 3 would you brighthearted find Count the Chocula."

Customers didn't complain about the change, emboldening Green to go further. Promotional announcements over the store's public address system began to take on a meandering, modernist aspect reminiscent of Joyce's "Ulysses":

"In Aisle 4 the hungry come that man eft seeking yogurt fruit with on bottom, ywimpled to Delores the express lane clerk that her have a nice day levin leaping lightens his load."

Townspeople slowly detected the shift from the mundane to the highbrow, and began to ask about it at the store's checkout lanes. "It's about James Joyce," Mona Morton, a gum-chewing twenty-something with a Harley Davidson tattoo on her bicep says in reply to a question from Bob Visbeck, a farm implements dealer.

Jim Joyce, umpire: "A way a lone at last to the showers you commodius vicus bum!"

"Jim Joyce, the major league baseball umpire?" Visbeck asks.

"Naw, he wrote a book or sumpin'. Do you have any coupons to redeem?"



"Bleep it says if food she scans blonk it honks if need to price check Aisle 5."

By the end of June Green hopes to have his entire workforce trained in the nuances of Joyce's peculiar tongue, even down to his teenaged baggers. "I've been workin' overtime with Duane Merken here," Green says to this reporter. "Go ahead and show him your stuff," he says to the boy, who takes a deep breath before speaking to a woman whose purchases crowd the conveyor belt and are held back by only a slim, plastic baton.

"Paper plastic plastic paper," the boy begins. *"By minivan along State Fair Road or on South Limit is it parked. You have chicken livers, Wet Ones and a pack of fags, good no good for you remember no tip no tipping yes I have girlfriend yes know your daughter not in Old Testament way she has eczema right?"*

Available in Kindle format on amazon.com as part of the collection "Dead Writers Make More Money."

