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THE JOYS OF EXILE**

*Edited by  
Franca Ruggieri*

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EXISLE. THE ANGST OF RETURN

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To set out on the journey of *Ulysses* – a journey, to be sure, at the end of which readers should also ‘recover’ themselves, provided they agree with Burgess, who said that the title should have the accent falling on the first syllable “*U > you*” (*RJ* 18) – means to revisit the turning point on the path along which Joyce tried to come out of literature into the very heart of the protracted twentieth-century trauma. Joyce, stateless by necessity, exiled by vocation – and even banished, as he liked to remark, just as the venerable Dante had been – could indeed pretend (and he liked to do so) that he was not interested in politics, after boasting for some time of his anarchosocialism. And yet, the traumatic birth of his monumental works during the long on-going conflict – which was certainly also a medial conflict – (*Ulysses* being written during the First World War, and *Finnegans Wake* in the *entre deux guerres* period) might perhaps have forced him to perceive what was actually running along the lines of the ““electricrery” (FW 579.6) agitating every “Demoncracy” (FW 167.25). The issue was surely a crucial one for him, as well as for some other keen artificers of his generation; not just for the aggressiveness of the narrative techniques of the electric media, which were gaining ground in those very years – and we know how enthusiastic Joyce was about them. Joyce had been compelled, in his own country, just like Stephen Dedalus, to feel the yoke of three masters (English political power, Catholic religious power, and the power of the conventions of Irish society) and, once in exile he was doomed by his own realistic compulsion to refound, and repopulate spectrally if you

like, that very strip of land he had lost. As a result, his entire discourse could not but involve the statute of the imaginary itself, taken to be a type of social bond. And, this had to involve literature, which indeed makes the imaginary concrete: a literature never ceasing to call itself “national”, as if this was its original sin.

“For all the good that frequent departures out of Ireland had done him, he might just as well have stayed there” (*W* 249). This sarcastic comment was made by Beckett during the Second World War. It is taken from the extra writings which finally found their place in the *Ad-denda* of his last great novel in English, *Watt*; and we don’t know whether Beckett, during the troubled editorial history of this work, between his involvement in the French Resistance and his *rocambolesque* escape from the Gestapo, might have thought of that with reference to his eponymous hero, to himself, or even to ... . What a tempting thought, especially if we take into account the esteem and affection he had for his older fellow countryman. Or even if we think of the fact that such a strange novel – whose plot revolves around an apostolic succession in the service of that ultimate Nothing with which language uselessly claims the real – was begun in occupied Paris on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1941. This was less than a month after the death of the man who had taught him (according to a letter written in 1954), “ce que peut signifier: être artiste” (*SBL* 461). An artist, to be precise, not a writer; which helps us understand that without a radical questioning of language (as Beckett did at the end of the war), expatriation amounts to little or nothing. Of course, in rereading Joyce the two questions (that of a literature which is *always* national, and that of language seen as an escape) appear perfectly balanced and consistent. If, as a matter of fact, it might seem that a sort of “permanent Dublin” imposed itself on him at each and every distracted attempt at confronting the white page – as if the novel and the nation were concepts too inextricably linked for one to exist without the other – it is also true that to position the stories of *Ulysses* in their Homeric background meant for Joyce, among other things, to learn how to inhabit a vanishing point in time. It was a perspective to escape the nation once and for all, yet remain in the same place, just as a good realist should always do. The proof is *Finnegans Wake* which, by

keying such a temporal expatriation in the language itself, and therefore on a much more radical level, takes off like a rocket into the same orbit ... only to come back. It is social bond; and this is no trifle.

However, if this social bond cannot but proceed from the three patriarchal discourses born out of the persecution of the mother – objective and subjective genitive, naturally – seen as motherland, the holy Mother Church and the mother tongue, with Joyce we should get used to the idea that a subtle suturing thread keeps these three “veils” together, and renders them thin and stinging like a jellyfish. However thin, it is a thread that binds, a bondage, which chokes and charms at the same time. An episode as intensely opiate as “Lotus Eaters” should teach us something of this, at least due to the very fact that it is set at 10am, a time of day when our vigilant faculties are at their best. Since it flows, from the perspective of perception, along with Bloom and his *stream of consciousness*, the chapter, which is indeed an olfactory symphony, should alert us to be aware of the few characters who appear affected by some sort of consciousness. Bloom is, it cannot be denied, occasionally half asleep in his waking life, hypnotized as he is by his own thoughts which expand with the inconsistency of odours. It is a fact: there is a vegetable life in us (botanic and chemical, along with their medium, pharmacopoeia, the sciences according to the schemata) which breathes life into the plant living within us for an entire existence; and perhaps the only things we really do need are roots and air.

Besides, many narcotic smells are actually perceived in the episodes, in the spice shops, pharmacies and churches. However, the drugs on which Bloom reflects the most are already at our bodies’ disposal: they are endogenous, in the body of the flesh as well as in the social body. As reasserted by the first post-traumatic Ulysses after Joyce’s, that is, that summoned by Horkheimer and Adorno in order to illustrate the universal fungibility of the legacy of the Enlightenment, we appear to be addicted, on such an imaginary level, to everything that pays off on the value of variables: uniforms, routine gestures, rituals, commonplaces, stock phrases. More than anything, though, on the very primordial vegetable level according to which “we are flowers” (*U* 731) – not just Leopold Bloom, not just Henry Flower – narcotized as we are by



sexual drives, according to our so-called "... homme moyen sensual ..." (as a disgusted Pound remarked), we all repopulate the world as if in a state of trance. Father Conmee reinforces this thought in "Wandering Rocks" in his resigned Jesuitical mood; and both Bloom and Stephen, as we will see, will establish in "Ithaca" their "duumvirate" (*U* 619) on this very assertion. Going back to "Lotus Eaters", let us recall what Bloom thinks in the middle of the Eucharistic ritual: "Eunuch. One way out of it" (*U* 79). Quite a nice way to hightail it: to emasculate oneself at the right moment, so keeping our own voice from turning into the loud voice of our father. Is this also a way to cope with the generative imperative according to which we *have* to find an escape? And what about Bloom who, accepting conjugal joys in their extreme consequences, did not pursue that path, and yet now cherishes it and keeps it at hand? But the real question is, for whom is this done? "Hamlet, I am thy father's spirit" (*U* 181).

Exile then (here is Bloom's teaching), at least when it is voluntary and "on site", contrary to the ambivalent decisive gesture aimed at avoiding the possibility of being seized – as was the case of Joyce's modernist expatriation (a gesture Stephen wishes to make his own, and one against which the older man who's now back is perhaps warning him) – is rather a condition of the mind and is capable of emancipating us. No more, then, "silence, exile, and cunning" (*P* 208), which is at most a defensive strategy to allow for an exercise of style, but "brainpower" (*U* 588), as will be reasserted by Bloom in "Eumeus". Besides, there are too many somnambulists in *Ulysses*: the fact that the characters produced by the narrative machine just speak out (and think out) commonplaces, fashionable novels, headlines and women's magazines, well known songs, conformist refrains and political proclamations *à la page*, seems intended to avert the suspicion that Joyce's overt Flaubertism (already glorified in the epiphanic and epicletic method of *Dubliners*) might hide something more than a simple exposition. If one re-reads the three somnambulist episodes of *Ulysses* ("Sirens", "Cyclops" and "Nausicaa") all in a row – episodes in which Bloom is not surprisingly always aslant, or quite contrary, or "the gentleman opposite looking" to use Gerty McDowell's hyper-romantic words (*U* 340) – one

will surely grasp the charmed universe he has under his nose; and such a sight, contrary or aslant as it might be, is exactly what Joyce wishes to see fixed in the mind of his readers.

This also means that we don't have to wait for Joyce's last masterpiece to end up in a world that is half-asleep: there is a force which does not seem to belong to the individual characters of *Ulysses*, and yet it encompasses them all and shakes those self-moving statues: it carries them around the city, it has them visit cemeteries, newspaper offices, libraries, clinics, brothels and pubs of course, many pubs, so they can talk, think, sing. It's a force which takes over their lives, it dispossesses them of their own existence, and it is nothing but a theory of mistakes, or rather, of transparencies which already were cinematic: "a phantom city, phaked of philm pholk" (*FW* 264.15-20). This is also what the episode, which is the most deprived of thought, the tenth, "Wandering Rocks", teaches us. It is notably a crucial chapter, for besides being the exact point in which the work surpasses its model by adding the very adventure it lacks (Odysseus following Circe's advice, will set sail for Scylla and Charybdis without crossing the Wandering Rocks), and even given that the fact that it represents precisely, as rightly noted by Burgess, a sort of synthesis ("without plots") of *Dubliners* (*RJ* 133-134), it presents a sort of *Ulysses* within *Ulysses* (follow its paragraph structure and you'll see this), inviting for the umpteenth time the "doubling" spectre of *Hamlet* to enter the work (as if there was a need for this).

Thus, in what seems to be the most choral and simultaneous episode in the whole novel, it is indeed an ineludible oneiric force, capable of generating collective mirages (like Jason and the moving rocks about to crash against the vessel), the one that guides the meanderings of a plethora of characters, who are actually entranced, caught between the wandering rocks of political and religious power. It is an oneiric force which, on the other hand, has undoubtedly demonstrated its power in the twentieth century: it managed to line up, on a number of occasions, statues that were even more solid, in uniform, in harmony, for a parade, a march, a replacement of troops at the front, or a changing the guard in a death camp. This happened in real life, as we are often told, not in a representation of life, however stubbornly trustworthy. Bloom, though,

almost leaning over the pages and describing the world that was about to come, seems to be aware of this in "Ithaca", when listening to the anti-Semitic song ungracefully sung by Stephen: there he reflects on the "mitigating circumstances" which prompt people to commit crimes against humanity, these being "fanaticism, hypnotic suggestion and somnambulism" (*U* 645). This force, which blows through the small keyhole of the real, has been labelled in many ways: it has received the most conceptual justifications at those times when the wind changes, and the subsequent gusts have blown trumpets claiming it was defunct. On this, however, we should no longer have any doubts: there is no worse ideology than the one which sanctions the death of ideology, thus setting up a world based on the ineluctable. As I was saying, a thousand names were given to this ineludible oneiric force: a subtle thread linking everything ("ideology" is just one of them); many names, but the one that would fit perfectly (Joyce might have thought) is literature. This is the subtle thread, which from the eighteenth century onwards, has held together the imaginary, extending its boundaries to generously include anything that might be willing to take it on, as if it was a new dress, a new name abreast of those that were at hand. You the nameless ones, you who are "without yourselves": "you who are youlesses": nothing in your free existences keeps you together, you the anonymous and industrious ones, come and receive the title which is your due: Robinson Crusoe, Moll Flanders, and why not, Tristram Shandy.

Undoubtedly, such a distrust for a popular art, literature, is rooted in one of Stephen's expressions, reported by the usurper Mulligan, and so loved by Oxonian Haines, unsurprisingly a hunter of Dantean panthers. The symbol of Irish Art, Stephen says, after seeing himself reflected there, and finding out that he is faceless, can only be "the cracked lookingglass of a servant" (*U* 7). It cannot be otherwise, we commentators usually explain, for Irish people are compelled to express themselves in a language not their own, whose shades, given the way it gets distorted in the local speech, can only derive from a slow and estranging bookish exercise; therefore, it can only emerge from the dominators' culture. And to be sure, one's own language does not seem to exist, if the only one who speaks it, and who speaks it to the wind (even

the old milkwoman is not capable of grasping it), is a colourless representative of the oppressors, of the same colonizers who literally eradicated it in the nineteenth century. The Anglo-Saxon Haines, boasting about the Gaelic he learned in his studies, seems to be a demonstration of this (which is also Gabriel Conroy's hidden thought in the last story of *Dubliners*): every expropriated language is expropriated twice whenever it comes back as revival, a curiosity, folklore. And there's a corollary to this: every mother tongue, when one's *own* mother tongue has gone missing, is always the stuttering of an adulteress caught in the act.

But, are we sure that this is the exclusive condition of Irish writers (from time immemorial, we could add, since the whole of Celtic culture is predominantly oral) as well as of all those writers forced to write in a language not their own? Or is it also the condition of those who deliberately went for it (like those two excellent post-Joyceans, Beckett and Nabokov?) Is this not a question of perennially contrasting everyday language and written language, oral culture and the civilization of the written text, or even worse? Are there writers, even the keenest collectors of spoken language, who do not express themselves in a foreign language? Is it really possible for one to have one's own language without cracking its servile mirror? A dialect, a local variety? The family lexicon, perhaps that of a small family of the diaspora which manages to blend several languages? The idiolect unintelligible to others, if not previously interpreted? The question is a lot more complex, as Lacan has duly explained, given that language, before estranging (or finding) itself in writing, is nothing but the very expropriation which turns us into subjects at the exact moment in which it condemns us to look into a mirror that reflects us as servants.

We all have a first exile: our compulsion to meander for our entire life as foreigners in language. But there's also a second one, which dooms us to move about as if drugged, as refugees constantly searching for an image belonging to the other, to which we can conform and get away with it. Finally, although from a logical point of view this last stage precedes the previous two, there is the great generative diversion by which we try to escape, in vain, that very return which is our due: the sad Telemachiad that takes us back once and for all to our own

Calvary, our own eventual passion. And, if we ever were in need of an image to sum up the whole of *Ulysses*, it would be easy to find it (still in “Lotus Eaters”) in the scene that Bloom conjures up in his mind while walking on Lime Street, when the little boy appears with his bucket of offal, smoking a chewed fagbutt, and a little girl, tattered and dirty, is looking at him. Is he not too young to smoke? This is the question our pitying, paternal and (non) ordinary man asks himself. Will this do him harm? What does it matter, though, his life is going to be hell anyway. And then, according to his usual habit of dedicating to unknown people he meets in the street his thoughts and fragments of life (this being the method of his sympathetic machine), Bloom begins imagining that little worn-out figure, day after day in front of a pub door waiting for the emergence of his father. He even dedicates a scrap of direct speech to him, which explodes as if it was the monosyllabic motto of the whole work: “Come home to ma, da” (*U* 68). One is tempted to repeat: “No, mother. Let me be and let me live” (10) when one remains for the entire life subject to the “*Amor matris*: subjective and objective genitive” (28) until one is reduced to nothing but a “lovely mummer” (5).

The young Beckett was right, then, when he defined in *Dante... Bruno. Vico... Joyce* (1929) the work of his older countryman as “purgatorial”, in that it was characterized by an “absolute absence of the Absolute” (*DBVJ* 33). The Absolute is an escape with no return. It allows for repetitions, but never for returns; and it instantly takes one to the unredeemed stasis of damnation, or to the blessed quietude of the “glory of him who everything moves”. Purgatory, which already in Dante, if we are to credit Beckett’s story, appeared as “a flood of movement and vitality”, takes on a spherical shape in Joyce, a “non-directional – or multi-directional” one, in which every step forward is inevitably a step back. From Ireland or Ithaca, which is always the point of departure – and one returns only in order to leave – there is just one route: that of the purgatory where every father returns (“our Father who art in Purgatory”, *U* 180). And if this is true for the “reversion” (*river-run?*) of *Finnegans Wake*, it is all the more so for the ultimate conversion that *Ulysses* stages in the desperate attempt to disrupt time. The joys of exile are the angst of return: this is the grievous core of the

vertiginous and shining *joyicity* (*FW* 414.23). And, this is why the key to *Ulysses* is not the one Bloom forgets to bring with him, which is what will drive him to enter his own house as if he was an intruder. On the contrary, the key is the only one capable of opening the mysterious drawers waiting for us in the penultimate chapter, “Ithaca”.

It might seem odd, or just the ultimate extravagance of an author used to surprising, even maliciously at times, his first enthusiastic readers and mentors; but if James Joyce had to point them to just one chapter of his work capable of summarizing it all, he wouldn’t have hesitated: as he confessed to Frank Budgen, this would have been “Ithaca”, his favourite episode, though he spoke about it as “the ugly duckling of the book” (*JMU* 264). An ugly duckling, no doubt about it, among episodes which are more symphonic and magnificent! There’s a little mystery in this chapter. Again, as Joyce told Budgen, he was writing it in February 1921 “in the form of mathematical catechism” for the sole purpose of solving its events in their cosmic, physical and psychic equivalents, so as to let readers grasp the facts more crudely and coldly (“in the baldest and coldest way”) at the exact moment in which Bloom and Stephen would be transformed into celestial bodies, “wanderers like the stars at which they gaze” (*JL* 159-160). It is a hidden path undeniably leading to *Ulysses*, to its sidereal back alleys, before sinking in its own matrix.

This became clearer and clearer for Joyce, in the excitement of the year preceding the publication of the work, at least because the last two chapters, although he had begun them in their preordained succession, ended up being written in parallel, so as to disavow the actual order of the book. This was no accident. The crude and cold catechetical method, whose duty is to put a full stop in advance to the vicissitudes of an ordinary day (given the overt a-temporality of “Penelope”) had to take Bloom to his bed where, after assuming a foetal position (“the childman weary, the manchild in the womb”, *U* 688), he would be ready to encounter a new incarnation, fully taking on himself his own Ulyssean destiny: “Womb? Weary? / He rests. He has travelled” (*U* 689). And indeed, weary after the long journey as he is, and thinking of the famous pantomime of the day (just as, a couple of years later, a pub song would trigger Joyce’s ultimate masterpiece), Bloom will meet

“Sinbad the Sailor” and his various transmutations based on puns and on the autonomy of the signifier (“Tinbad the Tailor and Jinbad the Jailer and Whinbad the Whaler...”), until confronting the very last of them, which is also the first: (“Darkinbad the Brightdayler”), a transmutation capable of projecting a ray of darkness (as if we were in the world of San Juan de la Cruz) into the light of day. We are far beyond Molly’s monologue here; we are in the word that flees in every direction to create worlds, as happens in the eve of every dream: we are already in the “meandertale” (*FW* 18.22) of *Finnegans Wake*.

In that bed, as we know, what awaits Bloom is a mix of doors and “a human form, female” of the sleeping wife. And Bloom enters reverently, because that is Odysseus’s nuptial bed, but also “the bed of conception and of birth, of consummation of marriage and of breach of marriage, of sleep and of death”. But, before slaying with the arrows of self-denial and fairness his own personal Proci, that is, his most intimate thoughts which surface by virtue of envy (if one still means to give pleasure to women) and jealousy (which can’t hide some sort of malignant pleasure), our (non) ordinary man will have to confront first of all “the imprint of a human form, male, not his”. He will do so by mocking the illusion that one is the first to get access to that tepid bed, and not “the last term of a preceding series even if the first term of a succeeding one”. To get into that bed, as Bloom knows only too well, means to become at the same time the first and the last “in a series originating in and repeated to infinity” (*U* 683). Here readers are compelled to come face to face with a crucial question: Joyce is involving them in the question of the difference between the sexes: well before the lesson of Jacques Lacan, Joyce is pronouncing the woman impossible, except as an entity “out of count”, and man identifiable only in a series (counting all for one).

In fact, what was the aim of those “parallel courses” (*U* 617) of the two male protagonists along the paths of the work, if not to create, in Bloom’s desires, a “duumvirate”? It is useless to add that there isn’t a more efficient way than to *evirate* (an archaic usage for “to emasculate...”) a man than “duumvirating” him, and so have him literally out of the patriarchal line which inevitably includes and weakens him. What

was Bloom's occasional proposal to the young artist, who cannot but turn down such an offer? Was it perhaps the eternal triangle, something for which the English, as the Romans did with the Greeks, were used to, putting the blame on their neighbours across the English Channel? No: what Bloom is displaying in front of Stephen and his still dreaming eyes is no less than ... the Real. If the grown-up man has indeed come back from the future to his own young self at least in order to accept the *Hamlet* theory which is "proved by algebra" (*U* 18) and has been "explicated" by Stephen in "Scylla and Charybdis", only on the surface did he do so in order to warn his young friend against what a man really has to offer his woman, that is, always some form of adultery. His task seems to be a lot subtler, and more ambitious too. It is the great converging diversion embodied in *Ulysses*: Bloom is trying to keep Stephen busy, on that day of days, to ensure that, unlike his author, he would *not* meet a woman. As a mission, it was brilliantly accomplished. What has happened to the fateful meeting of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1904? A day so meaningful for Joyce that by his own admission he was made "a man" then (and a hand was the only thing what he really needed for that). It was a day in which Bloom bloomed from a still dreaming Stephen – as the young man was then and as he would forever remain. That very day has been turned into a collapse, the waning of an artist knocked down at the end of "Circe" – a collapse Bloom publicly ascribed, when talking to a friend, to a mix of "gastric inanition" and overconsumption of alcohol (if not to some mysterious drugs given him by Mulligan). Stephen will account for the same breakdown by blaming the reappearance of a cloud they both had seen in the morning, but from two different places: a cloud which was "at first no bigger than a woman's hand" (*U* 620). That very hand, which one day would make him a man, is reduced to a cloud, whose passage, as always happens when the weight of reality suddenly reveals itself in diaphanous literary images, is capable of crushing the characters to the ground.

And now that we are finally into the early hours of 17<sup>th</sup> June, a Friday (an unlucky day for both Christians and Jews); now that the danger has been avoided, Bloom offers Stephen a woman who is in reality his own, and a woman one should lose in the imaginary. There, reduced



as she is to a phantom limb, she is aiming at the sky, as in the attempt to induce the man she was able to “duumvirate” to look in the same direction. Before parting, once they are out in the shadow of the garden, they both look at the stars; and Bloom, the amateur astronomer we have got to know well, begins his wide meditation on the universe. This is because to use our rational faculties, for that very matter which is our mind – here’s the whatness of the stream of consciousness – means first of all to desire, and to (*sidereally*) *consider*. The stars remain where they are: they let us see them; and in the meantime, it is as if they were transhumanizing the duumvirate which is about to split. In fact, if the stars’ appearance is indeed nothing more than “a past which possibly had ceased to exist as a present before its spectators had entered actual present existence” (*U* 654), we can still accept the view according to which the spectators framed in the “actual present existence”, while looking into a past which has now ceased to exist, can only be those very readers who make the story relevant every time they open the book. And this, to be sure, is quite a nice purgatory.

Finally, something happens in that garden under the canopy of heaven. It happens just a moment before they start peeing together, on Stephen’s initiative, just like the two stray dogs we saw at the beginning of the book – though not simultaneously – on Sandymount strand. Besides, there we had two dogs in the metaphor of it all: one was alive and the other was dead, the former sniffing the latter. What about here? We spot a source of light, the oil lamp suddenly appearing on the second floor of the house in Eccles Street, which immediately attracts Bloom’s attention, and Stephen’s too soon after. “A visible person” is revealed through “a visible splendid sign”. It’s Molly. A woman, *their* woman, fleetingly passing like a light cloud, veiled by light; and she is ideally repeating the work’s refrain (why need a woman, or even a man? what is needed is a duumvirate ...). Accordingly, the two men stop chatting, cloaked in the void as they are. They remain “silent, each contemplating the other in both mirrors of the reciprocal flesh of theirhisnothis fellowfaces” (*U* 655). Are they *consubstantiating*? Are they the father and son of a gnostic trinity, in the luminous sign of Haghia Sophia? No, they are just acknowledging each other in the light of an invisible woman,

and they necessarily strive to discern their own faces made imprecise by years, past years and years to come. It is but a fleeting moment: the time they need to shake hands while the bells of St George's Church are ringing. Then Stephen will reach the night again. Nothing will be heard of him anymore.

"Hamlet, I am thy father's spirit". There's the rub: who is the spirit of whom, if it is young Dedalus who disappears like a ghost? He was offered a woman, or rather, he was offered the Real, promptly, as inexplicably, rejected by him while making his way to an unidentified celestial land of origin. Bloom is back home: he was shocked by that, he's not the same anymore. He knocks his scone against a piece of furniture which had been recently moved (his own house is so *unheimliche* now!). He looks at the musical score of "betrayal" ("*ad libitum, forte, pedal, animato, sustained, pedal, ritirando, close*", U 659), and he then pitifully regards the small little abominable things of bourgeois taste. One thing is for sure: Bloom will have the time to resort to his usual defensive strategies: he will allow himself to be ensnared by the little Narcissus figurine before moving on to calculations, fantasies about "Bloom Cottage", the usual *evagatio mentis*, and the dream of dreams for a man of his profession: creating the perfect ad. They are, to be sure, the same techniques he uses in ordinary life, but here their first aim is to relieve him from the strains of the day, and obtain as a result a "sound repose and renovated vitality" (U 672). However, for this to happen he has to accept his own fate first; for, if he is able to lose himself in a dreamy world whose protagonist is no longer "Darkinbad the Brightdayler", there will be one more test: the worst one. Let us remember that there are still two drawers waiting for him. A curse upon the day preceding the shabbath!

It is mandatory for him to open the first. This is where he keeps Martha Clifford's letters (alongside a lot of other trash), and he has a new one to hide now. But why open, albeit mentally, the second drawer? It should have stayed closed: it is the patriarchal Ark of the Covenant, and Bloom has never really been at ease with that stuff, during the day as well as in his entire life. What comes out of it is a failed sexual identity. First of all, we have his birth certificate in which, like a

James *Augusta* Joyce (what's in a mistake?) our (non) ordinary man has been registered, as is well known, as Leopold *Paula* Bloom, a "new womanly man" (*U* 465). Then we get the following items: the insurance policy for his daughter, receipts for the acquisition of a burial space in Glasnevin, a paper clipping stating Rudolph Virag's change of surname, an 1852 daguerreotype featuring Rudolph in Hungary in the company of his father Lipoti, a haggadah book with an old pair of spectacles, a pic of the hotel managed by his father where he would have committed suicide, and finally an envelope addressed to "*My Dear Son Leopold*" (*U* 675). Here, even he who gives the chapter its voice, the catechist Burgess called "inhuman" (*RJ* 170), gets confused, allowing his cold style to warm up in the few farewell sentences indelibly stamped on Bloom's memory.

His father had already received the doctor's verdict ("tomorrow will be a week that I received ...") concerning some illness we know not of, but one which, judging from the dementia symptoms surfacing here and there in the scanty memories his son provides us with, we can't help connecting to some kind of inflammation of the trigeminal nerve (given the use of aconite), but also to the nosography defined for the first time in 1907 at a congress in Tübingen by Alois Alzheimer. Whatever the case, why would a man who had been diligent and industrious, and already a widower after the departure of his beloved wife, choose to fight against an incredibly painful senility just to end up depending on somebody else, his very son, to be sure? It doesn't make sense: "... all for me is out ...", is what Bloom remembers of how his father's letter went on. He then remembers his prayer to take care of his old dog, Athos, but this is just a prelude to the three fragments in German which explode like missiles: "...*Das Herz... Gott... dein...*" (*U* 676). The patriarchal succession (the blood line, the old religion of the fathers, the handing in of an interchangeable possession such as a pronoun) becomes a verdict, when one is off the track of *pietas*. On his last day, Rudolph Virag (changed into Bloom) had bought a straw hat after having acquired the necessary dose of aconite, because when one is about to encounter death (as Beckett remembered at the end of *Happy Days*) one has to be "dressed to kill". But who was going to look at this father

who “dressed up to die”, with his lovely hat deserving to be worn at a meeting with a lady perhaps (as Boylan had done that very day)? Who will be in charge of the identification of a suicidal father, and one dressed like that – as if death wasn’t enough for him? His son, as we know, couldn’t go and look at the corpse, it was too much for him. Poor Bloom, abandoning the idea of the drawer, in that very drawer meets his own destiny (“... all for me is out ...”); a destiny he has saved Stephen from, perhaps, provided he had not come back from the past, in fact, in order to show him an escape route. This is the point: is it possible to shun all this, the eternal senescence that a father dooms himself to for the sake of his own son’s Calvary?

There are two ways to avoid it: “by decease (change of state), by departure (change of place)” (*U* 678). Bloom, perhaps with the straw hat still in mind, without hesitation wishes to abandon his wife. He wants to escape, to disappear, though there is no journey (as Tristram Shandy duly taught us) that is not tailed after by death. It is in him (“l’homme moyen sensuel”) that the correlative perception of sex as an insult is beginning to show in the form of the sudden disavowal of one’s own spouse. Such a perception seems to proceed from an unconscious decision (once one has run out of time) to pull out of the reproductive cycle. Once “increased and multiplied”, Bloom wonders, and after having led one’s children to reproductive age, what is a further “reunion” for (*U* 678)? The fact that he still desires Molly (having already desired her as an adulterer in the whole of *Ulysses*) and the fact that he still yearns for her, are all too obvious; but such desires are not as compelling as to turn carnal anymore. Let’s be straight: there is a quite overt gnostic thread in the whole work which makes our “homme moyen sensuel” a little puckish, though he could well find the whole thing disgusting after having had a taste of it. It is a thread leading one to pull out of the world, with its insatiable digestive apparatus, and its voracious sexual organs. Even Stephen, who is forever lacking appetite – and this is no accident – seems to do so, though now and then he still wonders when it would finally be his turn to meet *a* woman (“And my turn? When?”, *U* 183): when the first real occasion turns up, he heads for sidereal back alleys, leaving Bloom alone to cope with the question.

And, Bloom is a man, to be sure, who would have gladly “duumvirated” himself once and for all! One thing is for sure: poor Poldy will not accomplish his dream of escape. Conquered as he is at the end of the episode by Ulyssean compulsions – a constant for Odysseus in the post-Homeric cycle, exemplarily epitomized in Dantean rereadings – at most he might be faced by a transindividual world on a dreamy night: a world well beyond Molly’s Gibraltar. He will be heading for the purgatory of the fathers.

Let’s go back then for one last time to the beginning of “Ithaca”, when Bloom and Stephen, moving in parallel, and therefore in a conjugal way, so to speak, are about to reach the house (Bloom’s home). We hear them blather, especially about their mutual obsessions; and the “in-human catechist” lists their affinities and differences. There are a lot of things in which they differ, but they do agree on fundamentals. They are both sensitive to the arts, particularly music (how could it be otherwise, since this is the stuff they are made of in the hands of their author); the two (both being in their own ways foreigners, by choice or by origin) prefer a “cisatlantic” way of life, and profess themselves sceptics “in many orthodox religions”. Then, as happens in all male company, albeit only occasionally, they start talking about sex. And even there, they perfectly agree: “both admitted the alternately stimulating and obtunding influence of heterosexual magnetism” (*U* 619). Here though, whatever their harmony, there’s something wrong, at least from the reader’s point of view. Nothing wrong with the stimulating magnetism of sexual drives: it is impossible to escape it, even though it is at times just sublimated. But what is exactly the “obtunding” presence there? And more than that, why would such a dual (or rather alternating) characteristic be appropriate to heterosexual choices?

Of course, it might be that Stephen with apparent nonchalance has alluded to the effects on men of women’s charm, just to make sure that he shouldn’t get a “breechpad”, as Buck Mulligan suggested, in case he ended up being actually acquainted with the “wandering jew” (*U* 209). In fact, that Bloom stated that he was sensitive to the same type of magnetism would have reassured him. And yet, too many people in *Ulysses* are both stimulated and obtunded for us to avoid the

suspicion that what's at work is that very force, coated with an imaginary narcosis which is all the same perfectly perceivable in the two consecutive episodes "Sirens" and "Cyclops" (where Dubliners sing of love and boast of their own nationalism). That very force has surfaced in the work as the inertial principle against which art builds its sand castles, and which vainly occupies thought. It is to free themselves from all this that Bloom and Dedalus have duumvirated themselves, without managing to grasp, however, in the few hours they talked, which one of them was beating the time, and pointing to the other from an unthinkable present the escape route from his own past, or his own future. That force, on the other hand, is what makes the world turn, and by acknowledging it in this way, that is, at the same time stimulating and obtunding, the two are just replicating – as I already said – Father Conmee's resigned reflection which the day before, on that day of days, had marked the walk that actually inaugurated the "Wandering Rocks" episode.

As we know, the Jesuit, prefect of studies at Belvedere College had on that occasion been cheating time, as well as on his own prayers, making out stories and reflections from billboards and street names. He has just got off at the Howth Road stop (sheer chance?), and has begun walking along Malahide Road, which prompts him to go back to the long-gone times of the barony and the glorious admirals of that bend of bay; he has then started reflecting on the name of the college itself, thinking of a dark event that occurred in the eighteenth century. The first count of Belvedere had managed to have a verdict of adultery given against his own brother and his own wife, Mary Rochfort, and had her confined to his own landed properties till the day of her death. The spirit haunting Hamlet, then, does not seem to have been confined, one would believe, to the walls of the National Library in Kildare Street, given that we again have before us a similar family triangle. But did Mary Rochfort really commit adultery, Father Conmee wonders, with her husband's brother? Has all this, I would add, perhaps something to do with a strange annotation of December 1922 ("incest made crime 1908") in one of Joyce's notebooks? It is hard to say: "only God knew and she and he, her husband's brother". What we can all do, though, is to confine ourselves to thinking, just as Father Conmee did, "of that tyrannous

incontinence, needed however for men's race on earth" (*U* 214). A tyrannous incontinence which stimulates and obtunds us at the same time; it adulterates us, it even "*incests*" us (given that as sons of God we all cannot but be brothers). But this is a divine project, the very mechanism allowing our species to be: "copulation" > "population" (*U* 402). Is there a way of escaping all this without being more sinful than sin itself? Is this not at any rate the object of every story, as if they had to account, generation after generation, for the delivery of the same irritating principle? Of course, our Jesuit here won't hesitate to administer a comprehensive blessing to the ruffled couple (Punch Costello and his lover) he would soon see coming out from behind a bush.

When Bloom, finally cuddled up in *his* bed, almost lets "the imprint of a human form, male, not his" embrace him, on the one hand he is accepting his status as one in the series (a series which is itself adulterous and incestuous, in the name of the ineluctable "tyrannous incontinence"), while on the other he is making his way, with all the angst of return, towards the serial degeneration of that nonsensical low rumble of language we call dream. Within the layer of impersonal yet pressing consciousness into which he sinks, where Sin-bad is already he who bears the hallmark of "original sinse" (*FW* 239.2), there's only a small distance to cover. The inlet one sails from, only to return and then leave again, is, in patriarchal succession, always the same; and dreams reveal it for what it really is: a purgatory where every step forward is a step back, where every exile is an island. This is why *Ulysses* itself, as *Finnegans Wake* will testify, does not herald a return: perhaps, it might at best herald a general echoing of the same refrain, which is to be sure a little more than a sob: "Come home to ma, da".

*Works cited and abbreviations*

*DVBJ* = Samuel Beckett, *Dante... Vico. Bruno... Joyce*, in *Disjecta. Miscellaneous Writing and a Dramatic Fragment*, John Calder, London 1983.

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*P* = James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, edited by Jeri Johnson, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 2000.

*RJ* = Anthony Burgess, *Re Joyce*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York – London 1965.

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*W* = Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, John Calder, London 1976.