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THE JOYS OF EXILE**

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Franca Ruggieri*

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‘THE FRINGE OF HIS LINE’: METAPHORS  
OF EXILE IN JOYCE

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Such early acts of orthographic mischief as “‘y ‘ongue is hurt” (*D* 153) became the hallmark of Joyce’s subsequent plays on language. This cryptic utterance in “Grace” by an initially unidentified man (“No one knew who he was” *D* 150; “Who is the man? What’s his name and address?” *D* 151), doubles the effect of othering: the incomprehensible stranger. Mr. Kernan, for it is he, temporarily exiled from language by the missing piece of his tongue, can be read as a hilarious carrier for Joyce’s, shall we say, biting comment on the bankruptcy of the Irish cultural identity and the complexities of Ireland’s language politics of the day. If elsewhere in *Dubliners* Miss Ivors would have Gabriel keep in touch with his “own” language, “Irish”, her rebuke is met with Gabriel’s disavowal of a language that is not his (*D* 189). Joyce’s not-so-subtle criticism of Dublin’s cultural nationalists is aimed at the proponents of the political agenda that exploited Hiberno-English and Gaelic, and enabled the emergence of, for example, Lady Gregory’s crossbreed, “Kiltartan”. Ireland’s tongue was indeed hurt. Stephen Dedalus’s frustration with the dean of studies (“what did he come here for to teach us his own language or to learn it from us?” *P* 251) again speaks of these complexities.

Like Mr Kernan, many other characters in Joyce’s stories are exiled from language in one way or another: from Polly Mooney’s bad grammar (“*I seen* and *If I had’ve known*” *D* 66, emphases added) and

Eveline's catatonic "silent fervent prayer" and "cry of anguish" that reduces her to "a helpless animal" (*D* 41) to Little Chandler's staccato "It's nothing ... He... he... I couldn't... I didn't..." (*D* 85). In broader terms, many characters' discomfort, their sense of non-belonging, and their sense of inner exile, feeds their desire to get away, maybe to "a distant unknown country" (*D* 37) where "real adventures" are to be sought (*D* 21), where one can "keep in touch with the languages" (*D* 189), all captured in Stephen's pre-exilic "Welcome O life!" (*P* 252). It is tempting to draw on some of the conclusions of post-colonial studies regarding the subaltern identity of Dublin dwellers and the cultural/political determinism of place/space. Seamus Deane writes poignantly about the world of *Dubliners* in "Dead Ends: Joyce's Finest Moments", the opening chapter of *Semicolonial Joyce*: "The twilit, half-lit, street-lit, candle-lit, gas-lit, firelit settings are inhabited by shadows, and silhouettes that remind us both of the insubstantial nature of these lives and also of their latent and repressed possibilities" (Deane 2000: 21). He notes that, while Joyce's characters are "highly individuated", they move about as "shades who have never lived, vicarious inhabitants of a universe ruled by others", as "exemplary types of a general condition in which individuality is resolved" (21). Whatever identity they might possess is "second-hand", exemplified, Deane reminds us, by the crowds in "After the Race" whose cheers are those of "the gratefully oppressed" (21). Like Deane, a large number of scholars have tackled the subject of Dublin's and Ireland's "colonial condition" (26) and their insights have broadened our understanding not only of the singularity of the Irish experience and of Ireland's position in the post-Famine and early 20<sup>th</sup> century world,<sup>1</sup> but also the singularity of Joyce's exile. In a recent book on the theme of the exilic in Joyce, Michael P. Gillespie

<sup>1</sup> Among earlier in-depth studies on the subject are Enda Duffy's *The Subaltern Ulysses* (1994), Vincent Cheng's *Joyce, Race, and Empire* (1995), Derek Attridge's and Marjorie Howe's *Semicolonial Joyce* (2000) as well as other studies listed in the very useful list provided in their Introduction to the book. See also Leonard Orr's *Joyce, Imperialism, and Postcolonialism* (2008), and many essays in Richard Brown's *A Companion to James Joyce* (2011), especially in the "Contexts and Locations" section.

reads exile in biographical/narrative terms and proposes, among others, that “[b]y taking into consideration how being an exile shaped Joyce’s process of composition and how that affects a reader’s sense of Joyce’s writings in specific fashion, readers come away with a clearer sense of the range of attitudes embedded in the narratives” (32). Gillespie’s goal in offering “a new orientation to Joyce’s overall approach to writing [...] is to augment current readings and to enhance our sense of the imaginative world from which Joyce’s works emerged” (32). My own reading of the concept of exile in this essay, while skirting the political and the biographical, centers on exploring the instances of Joyce’s language effects and gnomic narrative strategies that, frequently lax on denotation, favour connotative, semantifying subtexts that chart a programmatic, ontological articulation of the exilic as the nascent state of the oppressed. To this effect, I will trace the trope of exile in its diverse textual, rhetorical, and aesthetic realizations.

### “the fringe”

In the first pages of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen is in the playground of Clongowes Wood College, keeping “*on the fringe of his line*, out of sight of his prefect, out of the reach of the rude feet, feigning to run now and then” (P 8; emphasis added). The phrase reappears on two occasions: when Stephen is, again “*on the fringe of his line*, making little runs now and then” (P 9) and when, asked by Wells not tell on him, he recalls “creeping from point to point *on the fringe of his line*” (P 22). We have come to appreciate figures of repetition in Joyce (whether presented *verbatim*, or through synonymic or chiasmic constructs) as one of the rhetorical strategies that carries narrative significance. The thrice-stressed *fringe* functions as a trope for Stephen’s developing sense of separateness, of “exile” from the happenings around him, and of the emerging sense of being “different from others” (P 65), as he begins “to taste the joy of his loneliness” (68). A more complex expression of his sense of exile can be gleaned from the after effects of Stephen’s fleeting brush with money that, having briefly purchased him the power “to build a break-water of order and elegance



against the *sordid tide of life*" (P 98; emphasis added)<sup>2</sup>, eventually only magnifies "his own futile isolation", his division "from mother and brother and sister" and his sense of being "hardly of the one blood with them": it leaves him standing "to them rather in the mystical kinship of fosterage, fosterchild and fosterbrother" (P 98). Stephen's rejection of the "awful power" (P 158) of priesthood further substantiates his sense of being destined to be "apart in every order" (P 161).

Indeed, "apart", like "away" and, particularly, "alone", amplify the meaning of "fringe" throughout *A Portrait*, and such words become markers of freedom. At the very end of Chapter 1, hoisted in the air by his Clongowes schoolmates, Steven reflects: "He was *alone*. He was happy and free" (P 59; my emphasis throughout this paragraph). Exiled from Clongowes due to his father's pecuniary troubles that sink the family into poverty, Stephen, brooding on Mercedes, "rove[s] *alone* in the evening along the quiet avenue" (P 64).<sup>3</sup> After the hellfire mass he seeks solitude in his room "to be *alone* with his soul", and the phrase reappears a few lines later as Stephen attempts in vain to face his sins ("He could not summon them [his sins] to his memory" P 136). Still later, when Stephen is on the beach, his soul "brood[s] *alone* upon" his boyhood and upon himself", and we read once again: "He was *alone*. He was unheeded, happy and near to the wild heart of life. He was *alone* and young and wilful and wildhearted, *alone* amid a waste of wild air [...] and veiled grey sunlight and [...] figures, of children [...] and voices [...] in the air" (P 171). Joyce echoes here the Clongowes' scene of children's voices and "grey light" where we saw Stephen hover "on

<sup>2</sup> This phrase is prefigured earlier when Stephen, during a visit to Cork with his father, recalls "battling against *the squalor of his life* against the riot of his mind" (P 91).

<sup>3</sup> The passage continues with Stephen wandering amidst "the kindly lights in the windows that poured a tender influence into his restless heart"; significant imagery, further intensified by the images of "gloomy foggy city (P 66) or "veiled autumnal evenings" (99). As my reading below suggests, muted light frequently accompanies the exilic imagery of separateness and aloneness. "Kindly" light is also echoed in "A Little Cloud" when Little Chandler is feeling out-of-sorts about his impending meeting with Gallaher: "The glow of the late sunset ... cast a shower of kindly golden dust" (D 71); as he walks in the sunset light, Chandler feels *apart from* and "superior to the people" he passes (73). Incidentally, another "kindly", in the title of "Lead Kindly Light", is evoked by Molly in "Penelope".

the fringe of his line” as the boys kick the football: “the greasy leather orb flew like a heavy bird through the *grey light*” (repeated as: “a heavy bird flying low through the *grey light*”). I will come back to these images later in my discussion to suggest conceptual correlations between diminished lights, birds, and fringe/exile.

**“real adventures...must be sought abroad”**

Like the opening of *A Portrait*, the first three stories in *Dubliners* – “The Sisters”, “An Encounter” and “Araby” – thematise an exile from childhood. If Stephen, “exiled” from home/parents and caught in the spokes of the institutional regimen of boarding school, navigates his days by dodging the perils posed by language and social interactions, the young protagonists of *Dubliners* are similarly untethered from parents and they experience epiphanic foretastes of the menacing world of adults. The boy in “The Sisters” expresses his exasperation (“Tiresome old red-nosed imbecile!” *D* 11) at Old Cotter’s “unfinished sentences” (11) that exile him from the import of Cotter’s cryptic quips. His aunt fares none the better as she wonders what Cotter means (10, 11). The narrator of “Araby” appears to be equally exiled from the meaning of the flirtatious exchanges he witnesses between the stall keeper at the bazaar and two Englishmen (35), as is Mahony from the old jossler’s gestures in “An Encounter” (*D* 26). These gnomonic structures can be read as Joyce’s acts of “sexile” that elide themes/references inappropriate for children: Joyce thus designs his young protagonists as glimpsing, but not comprehending, *that* which is beyond their experiential knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Margot Norris’s opening chapter of *Suspicious Readings* offers a complex re-reading of gnomon (2003: 19-20) and considers the psychoanalytical and political implications of Joyce’s gnomonic language as experienced by the young boy: the former is concerned with “an epistemological gap or a missing piece of knowledge” (language is “un-whole”), and the latter with textual censorship (19). With reference to books mentioned by the “queer old jossler”, Norris highlights the story’s “thematized perversion of bibliophilia” through the old man’s ‘abuse’ of the library to seduce and incriminate the young boy” (33). Norris’s argument in Chapter 2 of *Suspicious Readings* deepens my own surface reading of

Fritz Senn's term "lexile"<sup>5</sup> could be expanded from indicating exiled/displaced lexes to *also* mean exiled literature: a ban on *Halfpenny Marvel* novels and stories of the Wild West. Dismissed as "rubbish" by teachers, they were "circulated secretly as school" and opened "the door of escape" for the boys, though their teachers' disdain spoiled their reading and "paled much of the glory of the Wild West" (*D* 20). Here Joyce gives voice to any child's "hunger [...] for wild sensations, for the *escape* which those chronicles of disorder" offer the narrator: "I wanted real adventures to happen to myself. But real adventures, I reflected, do not happen to people who remain at home: they must be sought abroad" (*D* 21). This sentiment is shared not only by Ignatius Gallaher who roams Paris and London, but also by Gabriel Conroy whose cycling tours to Belgium, France and Germany help him keep up with languages and provide a respite from Ireland: he is emphatically sick of his own country, "sick of it" (*D* 189).

Lily is apparently sick of Dublin men: "The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you" (*D* 178). Margot Norris has discussed this and other female back answers in terms of Joyce's deployment of gender politics (2003: 217 *passim*), a reading that "internalizes the submerged socially critical influence of Ibsen" (217). And while we see the *effect* of Lily's experience – her back answer – one wonders, what happened to Lily? If she met up with a Corley-like character or had two young gentlemen with English accents lure her into some unseemly conduct, she would have been burned badly enough to lash out. An appointment with a "palaver" man must have given her enough insight into her own "date" and into Dublin's dating scene to make her streetwise double quick. A peculiar kind of "exile" is at work here: the disenfranchisement of women, exiled from their own decision-making with regard to the stakes in their encounters

the boys' exile from childhood. See also Kershner's discussion of "The Sisters", "An Encounter" and "Araby" in *Joyce, Bakhtin, and Popular Literature* (1989).

<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere in this volume, Fritz Senn describes "lexile" as "any kind of displacement or foreignness or salient oddity within a given context as exile, and flatly treat[s] it as a synonym to 'foreign' or 'alien', even 'unexpected', concentrating on the lexical aspect, therefore 'Lexile'."

with men (also at work in “A Mother”). As early as *Chamber Music*, there are intimations of Joyce’s acute awareness of various forms of *paterfamilias* that marginalize women and subordinate them to the rule of Law.

### “heavy bird through the grey light”

Little Stephen may have been onto something when he speculated that, while “you could not have a green rose [...] perhaps *somewhere in the world* you could” (P 12; emphasis added). That world, the earth that Stephen sees as “a big ball in the middle of clouds” (P 15), has him on its fringes (the World, Europe, Ireland, County Kildare, Sallins, Clongowes Wood College, Class of Elements), as Stephen ponders the world’s magnitude and people’s prayers to God in “all the different languages in the world” (P 15-16). In terms of geography and language, Joyce’s exilic home in plurilingual Trieste could not but underscore Ireland’s and the Irish language’s position on the fringe of Europe (and Europe’s on the fringe of the Eurasian continent). Significantly, the phrase “on the fringe of his line” is twice accompanied by the symbol-laden image of a bird-like flying orb (which, in my reading, prefigures “the big ball in the middle of clouds”): “after every charge and thud of the footballers the greasy leather orb flew like a *heavy bird* through the *grey light*,” repeated as “a *heavy bird* flying low through the *grey light*” (P 8).<sup>6</sup> So it is interesting to note that the grey light (“the veiled grey sunlight” P 171) appears in another scene, when, years later, Joyce has Stephen behold a bird-like figure on the beach: “A girl stood before him in midstream, *alone* and still, gazing out to sea” (P 171). In this often-discussed bird-girl scene, Joyce repeats the phrase: “She was *alone* and

<sup>6</sup> Later in the novel, Stephen on the steps of the library observes flying birds and wonders what kind of birds they were (P 224, 225). In this almost two-page long meditation on the birds’ flight and their shrill cries, Stephen sees them as somewhat ominous symbols “of a hawklike man whose name he bore” and, intuiting his future exile, vaguely concludes that the birds “must be swallows who had come back from the south. *Then he was to go away* for they were birds ever going and coming, building ever an *unlasting home* under the eaves of men’s houses and *ever leaving the homes* they had built *to wander*” (225; emphases added).

still, gazing out to sea”, suffering Stephen’s gaze for quite a while. I’m struck by complex parallels between these two images framed by the winter and summer light: first, Stephen at Clongowes, *alone* on the fringe, amidst the *heaviness of grey light* of the *winter evening* observing a ball flying like a *heavy bird*, and second, Stephen on the beach amidst the *lightness of grey sunlight* of the *summer* looking at a *lone, stationary* seabird girl with legs framed by the dawn-white *fringes* of her drawers. “Profane” as Stephen’s “joy” may be at the sight of her drawers, he can only stay, well, on the fringe and behold her. A mute and chaste forerunner of Gerty McDowell (also presented in a subdued “last glow” of the setting sun and “the grey air” at the climax of the fireworks, *U* 13. 2, 741), the girl is a cipher of solitude. Her solitude has always struck me as much more profound than the somewhat affected solitude of Stephen.<sup>7</sup> While the passage has been frequently interpreted in terms of Stephen’s aesthetic epiphany, I’d like to add that the scene may be epiphanic for very different and hitherto unstated reasons: Stephen, I think, is apprehending the enormous mystery of female solitude, separateness – indeed, exile – from the world that is man’s. Grey sunlight, on the fringe of its fullness, adds to that apprehension.

The girl’s attitude of profound detachment echoes that of Gretta on the staircase and “in the shadow also” (*D* 209), full of “grace and mystery” (*D* 210), transposed elsewhere by the air that is barely audible and meaningless to Gabriel (“he strained his ear”, but he could hear nothing save the piano and a man’s voice ...). Joyce wrote “The Dead” in 1907 at a crucial junction in his life that marked the birth of his daughter, followed, among many other things, by his work in earnest on *A Portrait*, by the publication of *Chamber Music* for Nora, and by working through their marital crisis. In the images of Gretta and the

<sup>7</sup> Throughout the novel, Stephen is frequently presented in the situations with others: boys at Clongowes, family members, peers at UCD etc. The girl’s solitude seen against the vast seascape will be echoed in Stephen’s similarly solitary state on Sandymount Stand in “Telemachus”, although, in contrast to Stephen, in motion and lost in thought, the girl is presented as a static “object”. One would give many a penny for her thoughts as she holds Stephen’s gaze.

bird-girl, I see Joyce's epiphanic representations of his slowly-evolving thinking about women/womanhood, fostered by his early readings of Ibsen, whose spirit he understood "instantaneously" (*SH* 40) and whose work he introduced to his mother (*SH* 83 *passim*). This thinking is reflected in the much more complex female characters of *Ulysses*; but although they are presented largely through the male gaze and gossip that exiles them into the realm of stereotype, cliché and abstraction (that parallels poets' and painters' processes of distilling/distancing them into art), this point of view is not Joyce's.<sup>8</sup> In Bloom, Joyce creates an equally complex male, given to othering and reductive thinking about women, despite being empathetic to and understanding of others: for instance, of Martin Cunningham's situation, of the nature of his marriage,<sup>9</sup> and of the female suffering endured by Mina Purefoy.

### **"islanding"**

The mystery of womanhood which, as I suggested, Joyce has Stephen glimpse in the bird-girl, also, in a manner of speaking, exiles him from language, but in a different way than in the examples I cited at the beginning of my discussion. As the image of the girl passes "into [Stephen's] soul for ever and no word [breaks] the holy silence of his ecstasy" (*P* 172), his soul's somewhat ineloquent "Heavenly God" (*P* 171) suggests that language failed Stephen the artist. We have seen

<sup>8</sup> Jeri Johnson, in her densely woven 1989 essay, "'Beyond the Veil': *Ulysses*, Feminism and the Figure of Woman", recaps some of the feminist critiques of Joyce's works as sexist in their representations of women. Like many other Joyce critics, she refutes these readings as reductive, arguing that the "text produces the illusion of presence" (208), and that "to fail to account for the disturbance of writing or for the rhetoricity of language is to fail to account for Joyce whose uniqueness consists largely of his flagrant violations of linguistic norms, his flaunting and exposing of the disturbances of mimesis by the rhetoricity of language" (205). She indicts both Julia Kristeva's understanding of Joyce's "woman" as "rhetorical trope functioning within a narrative economy" (207) and Sandra Gilbert's "woman in Joyce" as "too, too solid flesh" (207-08).

<sup>9</sup> See Wawrzycka, "Memory and Marital Dynamics in *Ulysses* (2014). See also Janine Utell's remarkable book, *James Joyce and the Revolt of Love: Marriage, Adultery, Desire*, especially Chapter 4.

Gabriel, another artist-writer, wonder a-grammatically, what was a woman “listening to distant music, a symbol of” (*D* 201; emphasis added).<sup>10</sup> In his ruminations on Mrs. Purefoy’s difficult childbirth, Bloom (“There’s a touch of the artist about old Bloom” *U* 10.582) arrives at the fringe of language when his empathetic concern becomes just “Sss. Dth, dth, dth!” (*U* 8.373). All these instances of inarticulation, prefigured in Mr. Kernan’s “y ‘ongue is hurt,” add to my understanding of *A Portrait’s fringe* as a trope for a broad variety of “exiles” in Joyce’s works, from little Stephen in the playground keeping away from the boys, boys being kept away from the nefarious secrets of the adults and being barred from “the door of escape” afforded by literature of adventure, to young girls stymied in various ways in their pursuit of agency. Further emphasized by the accompanying imagery of shadows or greyed and muted air, the *fringe* signals Joyce’s early and deliberate foregrounding of the exilic: aloneness, isolation, and a sense of being on the margins of things. That sense is captured at the close of Chapter 4 in *A Portrait*, where, once again, the evening light and isolation converge to form what I read as Joyce’s reflection on the artist’s solitude and creativity: “Evening has fallen. . . . and the tide was flowing in fast to the land with a low whisper of her waters, *islanding a few last figures in distant pools*” (*D* 173; emphasis added). Joyce’s nonce word, “islanding”, is apt here, both for the image it conjures up and for the artistic statement it makes as a new lexical creation. There are conflicting forces in “islanding”: on the one hand, isolating aspects of islanding (*isola/isle/isolation*) are necessary to the artistic process, while on the other, islanding as isolation on an island can thwart growth. Ireland gave Joyce insights into both. Once in Trieste, “islanding” among new languages and free to forge his own artistic expression, Joyce could work on Ireland’s damaged tongue by inflecting it with new power.

<sup>10</sup> In a different context, W.Y. Tindall evokes a notion of “an unassigned symbol – that is a meaningful thing of uncertain meaning” (1959: 37), an apt descriptor for such constructs as “Gretta”, “the bird-girl”, “Gerty” or “Molly”.

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