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**JOYCE'S FICTION
AND
THE NEW RISE
OF
THE NOVEL**

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Franca Ruggieri*

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DEFECATION AND THE OTHER: PERFORMING
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ART IN THE “HAUNTED
INKBOTTLE” SCENE

A long-established tradition defines autobiography as a textual representation of one’s own life events and as a means for communicating a comprehensible self to the world. This customary way of thinking about autobiographies signifies the possibility of providing a true account of one’s life and self and, in effect, qualifies the autobiographer as a historian. Both the historian and “the writer of his own life”, Samuel Johnson maintained, have “knowledge of the truth” (Johnson 1948: 263). More recent criticism acknowledges that concepts of knowledge and truth regarding any historical fact are impossible, and are similarly impossible with representations of one’s self and life. Notions of a “trans-historical” or a “universal” self (Freeman 2001: 285), as well as the idea of an “essential self” (Bruner 2001: 26), become ambiguous. Such principles as accuracy and verity of and in self-representations are likewise complicated because, Mark Freeman argues, the “self and narratives about the self are culturally and discursively ‘situated’” (2001: 287). Critical approaches which maintain that autobiographies reduce the self to “cultural or identitarian determinations” (Huddart 2008: 19) and to a “repertoire of types” (Harré 2001: 62) inquire into the extent to which autobiographies reconstruct a culturally desirable self and into the very possibility of representing it.

In *Finnegans Wake*, subjective qualifications of any of the members of the Earwicker family are a difficult task. They change names, forms, and functions within the family. Subjective distinctions are highly complicated with Shaun and Shem, as the twins repeatedly

“swop hats” (*FW* 16.08) or become “one and the same person” (*FW* 354.8). The context of unfixed identities and destabilized selves seems to contradict autobiographical practices which, conventionally, claim to represent a unitary self. However, the “Haunted Inkbottle” scene renders a conflict between the twins that concerns preeminently the tension between distinct forms of self-representation. Shaun constructs a culturally applicable self. He employs established autobiographical techniques of defining the self against an “other” and accords cultural conventions to both self and “other”. In Shaun’s account, Shem’s bad hygiene and consequent stench reflect his moral degradation while Shaun’s own unsoiled body mirrors his pure soul. On the contrary, Shem is “writing the mystery of himself” (*FW* 184.9-10) not by using situated narratives, but by discharging waste matter. I argue that, for Shem, defecation functions as an autobiographical performance which challenges the reduction of the subject into predetermined forms of subjectivity, and reconstructs the self as its own origin.

The writing of the self is a pivotal concern throughout the conflict between the brothers. At the beginning of the scene, Shaun reproaches Shem for his habit of stippling “endlessly inartistic portraits of himself” (*FW* 182.18-19). Later in the scene, Shaun specifically condemns Shem’s method of writing his self with “synthetic ink and sensitive paper for his own end out of his wit’s waste” (*FW* 185.7-8). As Shem’s autobiographical practice is one rooted in the body and in the bodily discharge of waste matter, I will examine the significance of autobiography as a physical performance. First, I distinguish Shaun’s autobiographical account from Shem’s methods of self-expression. Then I discuss the difference between textual and performative representations of the self. Finally, I account for defecation as Shem’s particular mode of autobiographical performance.

Although Shaun reproaches Shem for his autobiographical performance, Shaun does not condemn the autobiographical practice in its entirety. Rather, he is concerned with establishing legislative limits for self-representations. To do so, Shaun, first, outlaws Shem’s particular method of producing “inartistic portraits of himself” (*FW* 182.19) by employing legal terminology such as “plagiarism” and

“forgery”¹. Then, Shaun’s own autobiographical account exemplifies the proper “manner and matter” (*FW* 185.8) for representing the self. Self-representations are constructed, first and foremost, upon an opposition from an “other”. We learn that moral affirmation depends upon the dichotomous categories of “I” and “you”: “I shall shiver for my purity while they will weepbig for your sins” (*FW* 188.24-25). Also, as Justius, Shaun’s assertion of his physical and spiritual superiorities explicitly provides an autobiographical account that maintains the self/other division: “Brawn is my name and broad is my nature and I’ve breit on my brow and all’s right with every feature” (*FW* 187.24-25). In this opposition, the other is the Whore of Babylon who, shortly before this, had been depicted with a “brand of scarlet on the brow” (*FW* 185.11-12). That Shaun/Justius’s account insists on the width of his brow² allows him to affirm spiritual preeminence particularly by contrasting his measure of forehead against the branded brow of the Whore of Babylon.

Like the Whore of Babylon, Shem’s otherness goes hand in hand with his immorality. Shem’s “cruelfiction” (*FW* 192.19) is attested by “adding to the already unhappiness of this our popeyed world” (*FW* 189.9) and by being exercised “at the expense of the taxpayers” (*FW* 182.35). In addition, as the following accusations maintain, Shem’s production of a “no uncertain quantity of obscene matter not protected by copriright” (*FW* 185.29-30), as a form of self-expression, is socially corrosive, particularly, due to its reproductive potential. The threat of reproduction is manifest on the level of language when Shaun upbraids Shem as a “condemned fool, anarch, egoarch, hiresi-

¹ At the beginning of the scene Shaun laments: “how very many piously forged palimpsests slipped in the first place by this morbid process from his pelagiarist pen?” (*FW* 182.2-3). The several affiliations connected with Shem include “Jim the Penman (James Townsend Saward, b. 1799), a notorious British forger of the nineteenth century, as well as a popular play based on his criminal career, *Jim the Penman* by Charles L. Young (1886)” (Ellmann 2012: 39). That Shem, “the artist, the eminent writer” (McHugh 2006: 185), is associated with Jim the Penman enforces the idea that forgery is inherent to the artistic process.

² McHugh annotates “breit” as German for “breadth” (2006: 187).

arch” (*FW* 188.15-16). The denotation of “-arch” associates Shem’s practice with cultural dominance. At the same time, the repetition of the suffix “-arch”, through linguistic performance, connects the potential reenactment of Shem’s autobiographical methods with cultural dominance. Despite the moral and mental reduction of Shem to a “condemned fool”, the repetition of Shem’s practice would establish a cultural model. As such, Shem’s performance would regulate ensuing forms of self-representation in accordance with itself and, consequently, re-organize the existing culture into a “new Irish stew” (*FW* 190.9).

In order to determine Shem’s bodily performance, his “tries at speech unsyllabled” (*FW* 183.14-15) being harmful to social order, Shaun draws on the distinction between truth and fabrication. According to Shaun, Shem’s “piously forged palimpsests slipped [...] from his pelagiarist pen” (*FW* 182.2-3) may claim for authenticity but, like plagiarism and forgery, are inherently false and can produce nothing more genuine than “cantraps of fermented words, abracadabra calubra culorum” (*FW* 184.26). By likening Shem’s autobiographical practice with the art of magic, Shaun reveals his anxiety about the capacity of Shem’s practice to be mistaken for truth and, consequently, to persist as a “continuous present tense” (*FW* 186.1), that is, an existing social reality. The ability to deceive by bearing only the appearance of truth is especially hazardous at the hands of Shem whose disposition to “neither serve nor let serve, pray nor let pray” (*FW* 188.19) indicates his tendency to adjust social behaviour according to his own refusal to adhere to an external force. Shaun, however, perceives proper cultural conduct and social order as constructed upon referentiality.

An “other”, for instance, functions as an external referent against which one constructs a culturally applicable self. Yet Shaun also insists on referential language as a paradigm for maintaining the self/other dichotomy. Therefore, he deems that the “manner and matter” of Shem’s performative model should “be cloaked up in the language of blushfed porporates that an Anglican ordinal, not reading his own dunsy tunga, may ever behold the brand of scarlet on the brow of her of Babylon and feel not the pink one in his own damned cheek” (*FW* 185.8-13). The passive form, “blushfed”, characterizes language

as inert insofar as language conforms to a predetermined referential system. In contrast, “dunsky tunga”, an imperfect anagram of “dung”, connotes Shem’s use of his fecal matter and, thus, proposes a form of communication that generates from the body. Although Shem does apply language, for it is indicated that he “*wrote* over every square inch of [...] his own body” (*FW* 185.35-36, my emphasis), I argue that it is the performative dimension of his autobiography that challenges the authority of referentiality in self-representations and that *this* performativity sustains the conflict between the brothers.

Representing the self with language is restricted to a set of linguistic rules. On the other hand, as Kristin M. Langellier argues in her study of autobiographical performances, performativity is independent of linguistic conventions and carries the narrative “above and beyond its referential context” (Langellier 2001: 150). The release from the “fixed, unified, stable, or final essence” (*ibid.*: 151) of referential systems of signification allows performativity to produce new forms of self-construction and self-representation. By the same token, Shem’s performance marks his self-exile from language particularly as a referential framework for expressing the self. Accordingly, Shem’s autobiographical performance is rendered through Shaun’s speech and when Shem is finally given the stage to speak for himself, not only is he no longer Shem but Mercius, although his voice gradually turns into the voice of ALP. This allows Shem’s autobiographical performance to resist being “cloaked up” in language and to remain self-consistent. Shaun proscribes Shem’s claim for self-consistency precisely. By employing homosexual imagery as “prosodite” and “masculine monosyllables” (*FW* 190.35), Shaun correlates Shem’s claim for self-consistency with the capability of a single sex to satisfy its own needs. Even more so, “prosodite”, by associating “prosody” and “sodomite”, alludes to Lord Queensberry’s charge of sodomy against Oscar Wilde, and conflates Shem’s autobiographical self-sufficiency with the homosexuality that was condemned in Wilde’s trial. For

Shaun, therefore, Shem's claim for self-sufficiency is as illegal, and should be as proscribed, as Wilde's homosexuality³.

The referential framework from which Shem strives to extract himself also includes the parental factor. Shem's renouncement of the body that begot him, in his address to his twin brother, "I who oathily foreswore the womb that bore you" (*FW* 193.32-33), establishes his body as its own origin. By doing so, Shem insists not only on the self-sufficiency of his self-representation through the body's use of its own materials, but, also, on the self-consistency of the body via self-generation. For Shaun, however, such claims do not credit the original creator, be it God or the father or one's own culture. Self-generation is a claim for self-authorship that Shaun conceives as forgery and plagiarism (*FW* 182.2-3). Therefore, Shaun renames his brother "Shem Macadamson" (*FW* 187.35) in order to reinstitute Shem's *body* in a referential framework of patrilineal descent which traces all the way back to the first man.

Shaun condemns not only the performativity of Shem's autobiography, which allows his self-exile from referentiality, but, more poignantly, its relation to defecation. That "no uncertain quantity of obscene matter" is produced out of Shem's "unheavenly body" (*FW* 185.29-30), affirms the offensive nature of human bodies and of Shem's body in particular, who "will need all the elements in the river to clean" him (*FW* 188.5-6), and is, therefore, an "other" to "that pure one" Shaun (*FW* 191.14). Shaun's purity reflects even on his bodily functions and waste matter, as his excremental discharge is relieved in "spiritual toilettes" (*FW* 191.26). Even more so, that Shaun's "spiritual toilettes were the talk of half the town" (*ibid.*) which converts the physical act into discourse and, thereby, reinstitutes the body in lan-

³ Robert Boyle argues that Shem's artistic practice draws on Oscar Wilde's principle of "new aesthetics" according to which "Art never expresses anything but itself" (Boyle 1974: 72). Boyle's claim that "the charges brought against Shem the true artist include many of the charges leveled at Wilde", most particularly, "the charge of sodomy" (*ibid.*: 78) strengthens my suggestion that Shaun conflates Shem's and Wilde's transgressions in order to proscribe Shem's claims for self-consistency.

guage. Conversely, Shem's discharge of waste matter as an autobiographical performance enacts his self-extraction from the referential framework upon which both language and body are bound, and establishes the autonomy of the self. Shaun counters defecation as means for metonymic extraction from referentiality by constituting his own body as the progenitor of Shem's body: "the good brother feels he would need to defecate you" (*FW* 193.22-23). In this manner, Shaun re-conceptualizes defecation as means for metonymic re-insertion into referentiality.

The divergence between the twins' conceptualizations of defecation peaks in the contrast between life and death. For Shaun, self-exile from referentiality by way of defecation and Shem's use of his excrement is a "morbid process" (*FW* 182.3), but one that has a pretence of vitality. When reproaching Shem for "conceal[ing] your scotchphily by mating" (*FW* 190.33-34) Shaun associates Shem's autobiographic performance with death by insisting on its pretended vitality. This complex image connotes "scotophily", that is, something living and flourishing in the dark. As such, "scotophily" implies either the development of a fetus in the uterus or the production of dung in the digestion system. The former suggests the conception of new life, while the expelling of dead organic matter signifies death. According to Shaun, to "conceal" by "mating" allows Shem's discharge of waste matter to assume the pretense of procreation.

Shem's contrary view of defecation as a vital force is most explicit in the Latin passage⁴. Here, Shem's buttocks are likened to the "giving & allpowerful earth" and their function in expelling fecal matter is likened to the "lifegiving" capacity of earth. Shem, "the eminent writer", places the "foul dung" in an urn. That the urn was "once used as an honoured mark of mourning", seemingly, conforms to Shaun's association of feces with death. However, by displaying the dead organic matter in an urn, Shem "made himself an indelible ink". This

⁴ The translations of the Latin phrases into English are taken from McHugh's *Annotations to Finnegans Wake* (2006: 185).

transforms the implication of death into a twofold concept: the artist produces for himself an artistic creation by converting his feces into indelible ink; the artist conceives himself as an artist in this gesture of conversion. Finally, that the artist conceives himself through his artistic creation, associates every artistic process with an autobiographical act.

The opposition between life and death is also evidenced by the different means by which each brother conceives the effect of defecation on the body. Shaun conceives defecation in terms of the fragmentation of the body. As such, defecation challenges the indivisibility of the individual and brings about a “dividual chaos” (*FW* 186.4-5)⁵. For Shem, on the other hand, defecation functions in performing a cyclical movement that perpetuates the autonomy of both the self and representations of the self. In the Latin passage Shem is described as having “relieved himself into his own hands”. In this image, what is divided from the body returns to the body in a manner of recirculation that alludes to Vico’s “cyclewheeling history” (*FW* 186.2). The enactment of Vico’s cyclical model, in which the past collapses onto the present, re-conceptualizes cyclical movement in relation to the subject. In this new concept of cyclical movement, subjectivity is not undermined⁶. Rather, the recirculation of the body’s own materials maintains the autonomy of the self from pre-determined frameworks for self-representation and self-construction.

⁵ “(thereby, he said, reflecting from his own individual person unlivable, transaccidentated through the slow fires of consciousness into a dividual chaos, perilous, potent, common to allflesh, human only, mortal)” (*FW* 186.2-6). Although “transaccidentated” suggests that the spiritual essence overshadows the physical manifestations, Shem’s excrement is not subject to the sublimation that Shaun’s waste matter undergoes through “spiritual toilettes” (*FW* 191.26). The insistence on “human only” inverts the image of the Eucharist: in the reversal of sublimation, the spiritual turns into the corporeal because, as Boyle attests, “Joyce, never out to reject anything human, manages like Christ to encompass all of human experience [...]. He does not, like Christ, do it to carry men to something beyond the human, but, like Balzac, to provide a human, not a divine, comedy” (Boyle 1974: 73).

⁶ James Fairhall, for example, argues that the Vichian view of cyclical progress undermines subjectivity because in Vico’s model “conflict propels the historical process; the specific identity of the contestants [...] matters little” (Fairhall 1993: 222).

Julia Kristeva's concept of "Abjection" as "These body fluids, this defilement, this shit" which "life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death" (Kristeva 1982: 3) recalls Shem's resistance against predetermined forms of subjectivity by way of defecation. The abject, according to Kristeva, is the opposite of the thinkable and assimilable and is, therefore, expelled from the self. In this gesture of expelling the abject, the self, "weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside" (ibid.: 5) expels itself and, thus, constitutes its being in a "fortified existence" (ibid.: 9) set against "Religion, Morality, Law" (ibid.: 16). Kristeva argues that the constitution of the self takes place in the slippage of death into its opposite, life. By the same token, literature that is fascinated with the abject engages with "a crossing over of the dichotomous categories of Pure and Impure, Morality and Immorality" (ibid.: 16).

In the "Haunted Inkbottle" scene, Shem's "fortified existence" is constructed by setting "this defilement, this shit" against predetermined modes of self-definition. However, Shem's "fortified existence" is not one set against his artistic creations. The artistic performance which simultaneously creates the artist, the "eminent writer", and his "foul dung" as an artistic expression, break down the boundary between Shem and his creation in a manner recalling the blurred boundaries between Dorian Gray and his portrait and between de Valentine and his shagreen⁷. The division between the artist and his art breaks down as the dichotomy between filth and purification collapses in the act of defecation, in which the discharge of foul matter purifies the body. Finally, by way of defecation as an autobiographical performance, the separation between body and language collapses. That Shem produces "for his own end out of his wit's waste" (*FW* 185.7-8) the material with which he "wrote over the only foolscap available, his own body" (*FW* 185.35-36) redefines communication as filtered through physical performance. Shem's language is conditioned by his

⁷ Both works are alluded to in the scene: "from the crystalline world waned chargeenold and doriangrayer in its dudhud" (*FW* 186.7-8).

body and not by an external referential system. It is a form of language that issues from his body and concludes on his body. In effect, the body's use of its own materials allows for a self-engendered and a self-sufficient form of subjectivity.

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