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edited by
Franca Ruggieri

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CONTENTS

Franca Ruggieri
Foreword: Joyce's Fiction? "Oh! It is only a novel"
(Northanger Abbey*, 1798)* 9

1. JOYCE'S FICTION AND THE NEW RISE OF THE NOVEL

Talia Abu
Defecation and the Other – Performing Autobiographical Art in the "Haunted Inkbottle" Scene 19

Olha Bandrovska
The Anthropology of Odour in James Joyce's Ulysses 31

April Capili
'Yes, yes: a woman too. Life, life'. Lucia and the Life-Writing Aspects of Joyce's Novels 47

Annalisa Federici
Word and World, Fiction and Reality in Ulysses: *Joyce as Realist/Hyperrealist/Antirealist* 61

Dieter Fuchs
James Joyce's Ulysses *– A Menippean Satire?* 79

Allen C. Jones
Stephen "(*looks behind*)": *A New Paradigm for Reading Stage Directions in* "*Circe*" 91

Peter R. Kuch
"A Handful of Tea": Money and Monster Novels 105

Michal Moussafi
A Mirror up to Nature:
The Artistic Role of Reflection in James Joyce's Ulysses 115

Ennio Ravasio
Realism and Allegory in "Cyclops" 131

Simone Rebora
Encyclopedic Novel Revisited.
Joyce's Role in a Disputed Literary Genre 147

Fritz Senn
Mercurial Interpolations in Ulysses 169

Katherine E. Smith
A Spinster by Choice, Circumstance, or Calamity?
Potential Reasons for Physical and Emotional Spinsterhood
in James Joyce's Dubliners 189

Sara Spanghero
"*The incompatibility of aquacity with the erratic originality*
of genius (*U* 17.247)
Considerations on Stephen Dedalus' Fluid Development 203

Carla Vaglio Marengo
Tobias Smollett, Joyce's Grandfather: Circulation
and Recirculation, Satiety, Eructation, Regurgitation,
"Cursing and recursing" in Viconian Cycles 219

Jolanta Wawrzycka
'Tell us, aren't you an artist?'(SH: 26) – Revisiting
Joyce's Künstlerroman 233

2. JOYCEAN GLEANINGS

Andrea Cortellessa
Forse che sì forse che no. Joyce tra Pascoli e Gadda 251

Finn Fordham
Joyce in the Shadow of War and Fascism:
A Review of Finnegans Wake *by Mario Praz (1939)* 301

3. BOOK REVIEWS edited by Fabio Luppi

Muriel Drazien, *Lacan Lettore di Joyce* (Gabriela Alarcon) 323

Enrico Frattaroli, *Envoy verso: in: attraverso: da:*
Giacomo Joyce (Annalisa Federici) 326

James Joyce, *Best-Loved Joyce* (edited by Jamie O'Connell)
Anthony J. Jordan, *James Joyce Unplugged* (Fabio Luppi) 330

Geert Lernout, *Cain: but are you able?*
The bible, Byron and Joyce (Enrico Terrinoni) 335

James Joyce, *Pomi un penny l'uno* / *Poesie una pena l'una*
(edited by Francesca Romana Paci) 338

James Clarence Mangan, *Il mio cuore è un monaco*
(edited by Francesca Romana Paci) (Enrico Terrinoni) 338

CONTRIBUTORS 342

ALLEN C. JONES

STEPHEN "(*LOOKS BEHIND*)": A NEW PARADIGM FOR READING STAGE DIRECTIONS IN "CIRCE"

In the "Circe" episode of *Ulysses*, directly before Stephen proclaims, "So that gesture…would be a universal language" (*U* 15.105-6), a stage direction asks Stephen to make a very subtle gesture: "(*looks behind*)". This seemingly functional direction actually disembodies Stephen in order to give him an authorial voice. The word "behind" signifies a distinctly marked offstage location from which directorial power emanates. Throughout the episode, Joyce has used parentheses to trace the textual voices that battle to inhabit this space and thus author the text. Each time a character succeeds in entering the direction, the text expands the stage to include that voice, exiling the characters from the position of director/author and ultimately erasing the onstage/offstage boundary. This unbounded performance moves the singular directing voice completely outside the novel. The implied voice of an author established by this dynamic then commands Stephen to do the impossible, to join it. In other words, the direction "(*looks behind)*" asks Stephen to speak from a location in the universal atemporal realm of the author. The erasure of an offstage space, however, has left Stephen's body no way to exit: only his "look" passes beyond the performance. Thus, Joyce severs Stephen completely from the temporality of the novel and from his own body to allow him to speak directly to the textual audience. The result is an apparition, trapped in a gesture, speaking successfully but silently to us from across the parentheses that divide text and world.

Before the late seventies, it was common practice to divide "Circe" into two realms, the "real" fictional narrative of Bloom and Stephen in nighttown, and the psychological hallucinations playing out on the stage implied by the direction (Gibson 1994: 3). This division implied a single reliable authorial voice in the direction. Criticism in the eighties and nineties moved from this single voice towards a complex multiplicity of voices. In "A Battle of Voices: the Authorship of the Stage Directions in 'Circe'", Mariangela Tempera argued that rather than an authorial voice, the direction is "an extremely complex set of writing strategies which cluster around different personae" (Tempera 1986: 196). In other words, Joyce uses the formal trappings of a play to mark the tension between two authorial "personae": the author and director. She argued that increased direction reveals an author curtailing "the freedom of the director" (197). A decade later, Katie Wales developed this tension, calling the competing voices a "dramatic" versus a "novelistic impulse" (Wales 1994: 273). Developing Tempera's dyadic tension into a more complex array of characters, she argued that the voices of preceding chapters were continuously "displacing the impersonal voice of the director" (273). Essentially, she adds the concept of textual memory to Tempera's original argument. In the last decade we have forgotten these essays, returning to a singular authorial voice. I argue that we have yet to fully pursue the implications that theatrical form has on Joyce's construction of authorship in this episode.

Antony Hammond opens his seminal analysis of direction with this qualification: "The first, broad and general assumption, is that we all know what a stage-direction is, or in other words that it presents no intellectual problem of interpretation" (Hammond 1992: 71). As Tempera and others have pointed out, this formal assumption is actually necessary to set up the parenthetical text in "Circe" as stage direction. After the riot of formal ingenuity in the previous episodes, the reader "lowers his guard when confronted with the apparent stylistic simplicity of 'Circe'" (Tempera 1986: 195). Tempera goes so far as to call the parentheses an "unmistakable typographic conventions" (195). They are "unmistakable", and yet this is precisely why we have mistaken

them for almost a century. The problem is not so much our assumption, but the double assumption that has replaced it. First, we assume the chapter is a play; then we assume that we understand direction. Neither is the case.

When I first read “Circe”, I adhered to the general assumption that stage directions originate with the playwright. In fact, direction is often supplied by both directors and actors. Wales points out that Edward Gordon Craig saw them as a “personal insult” (Wales 1994: 243), and we are all familiar with directors resisting or reinterpreting a play for a modern production. While we might argue that these reinterpretations do not affect the text itself, there is no reason to assume “Circe” represents a published play-text and not a performance. In fact, a central effect of a play-in-a-novel is to invoke both text and performance. The play sets the stage upon which the novel is performed. Given this relationship, it would be more appropriate to call the episode either a prompt-book or a working script. Its location within a novel means that on one level it clearly functions to guide the performance of Bloom and Stephen’s narrative: they go to nighttown, get in a fight, etc. This means the parenthetical text could represent a director’s or an actors’ addition to the text written by the playwright this form implies.

Wales and Tempera established the concept of competing voices and stopped there. The concept is easy enough to establish; the problem is making it useful. How exactly do we identify specific cases of a director/actor voice in tension with the playwright? Comparing earlier drafts of the episode to the published version might give us a sense of an author at odds with himself; however, even in genetic inquiry we tend to treat each draft as distinct in its relationship to the writer. Assuming a single author leaves us few strategies for locating actor-director-author tension in the stage directions. Research detailing the kinds of direction a director or actor typically resists or reinterprets, allows us to identify direction in the chapter that arguably represents this tension. While specific research into the relationship between directors and playwrights remains anecdotal, we have excellent research on tracing authorial tension between actors and the playwright.

According to Hammond, actors are particularly apt to ignore gestural direction. He notes that "what an actor did on stage was his professional business, and was out of the prompter's control anyway" (Hammond 1992: 79). Facial expressions, anxious pacing, hand movements, etc. are an actor's particular area of expertise. Thus, gestural direction is almost nonexistent in prompt-books. Setting the scene or describing a costume is one thing, but telling an actor how to act is clearly impinging upon that actor's expertise. According to Hammond, gestural direction has historically been seen as "an attempt by someone—usually, in the Jacobean period, the author—to take away some of the actor's autonomy, to exercise control over an aspect of performance which had traditionally been the actor's prerogative" (81). This means that any gestural direction, particularly extreme cases—for example if the script asks an actor to "cover his left eye with his left ear" (*U* 15.1841)—points to a possible tension between playwright and actor over control of the performance. Likewise, if we can trace a systematic increase in the pressure put upon this kind of direction—in other words, if we see the direction ballooning out and asking actors to do all kinds of increasingly hallucinatory and impossible actions—we can argue that this tension contains its own narrative arc in which actor and playwright serve as protagonist and antagonist. One story is nighttown, the other is the battle over who controls the text and its performance. While the first narrative would climax in the world of the novel and/or the play, the second would consist of a character's success in defending himself from the playwright's direction, and we could read the climactic moment—when Bloom names the final apparition "Rudy!"—as a character forcing the novel to produce his dead son (*U* 15.4962). The tension developed through the well-documented resistance of actors to gestural direction creates a formal possibility for narrative to manifest as a tension between an actor and the playwright, a narrative arc defined by the degree to which actors are able to resist performing direction and succeed in directing the play themselves.

The actor-playwright tension over gestural direction allows us to locate two authorial voices; we can locate a third if we consider en-

trances and exits. Hammond points out that prompt books often fail to signal exits (Hammond 1992: 79). To some extent, this is an effect of performance, as "once the actor was on stage, there wasn't much the prompter could do to get him off again" (Hammond 1992: 79). This means we can read an exaggerated call for an exit as a prompter trying to control an action typically left up to an actor. This opens up the possibility of the prompter as a third authorial voice in "Circe". Temporality differentiates this prompting voice from the director's or the playwright's. A prompter performs the direction in the present time of the performance; the direction from the playwright or director comes from either the past moment of writing (playwright) or rehearsal (director). If we can locate a voice that demands an actor to exit, and if the text places the temporal moment of this aggressive prompting in the here-and-now of the performance (as opposed to the past of the textual script), we can argue that Joyce's text presents the authorial voice of a prompter. The prompting voice's position in the quasi-present moment of immanent performance means we now have three temporal fields: the moment of writing (playwright), the performance (actors), and a mediating space where an authorial voice intends to direct the action directly before it occurs in the performance (prompter).

In "Circe" the voice calling for exits and entrances uses words that render the dividing line between onstage and offstage unclear: "appear", "fades", "pass through", "jerks past", "vanish, there, there", "roll past", "peep from behind", and "thrown/limps/steps/sues/press/stumps/throng/thrust" followed by the word "forward." This blurring of boundaries undermines actor agency, making one of the simplest and most important tasks of an actor, when and how to get off stage, impossible to perform. Additionally, once actors are called onstage, they cannot leave. The result is a play where characters suddenly appear onstage without an entrance, as if they never left, and when they do enter, they come "forward" out of some vague, unidentified space. This also results in a stage slowly filling with actors. "Circe" is marked by huge crowds, forcing upon Bloom a mass of drunk, angry, lewd actors and voices, jamming the performance space until he exclaims how much he hates crowds, effectively marking his resistance to the direction.

One way to read this blurring of the offstage boundary is as an indefinite expansion of the stage itself, a voracious cannibalizing of any voice that appears.

Locating direction pertaining to gesture and entrances/exits has allowed us to locate tension between three authorial voices: playwright, actor, and prompter. As we have seen, this tripartite tension produces the following effects: three distinct texts (script, promptbook, and novel); three authorial temporalities (time of writing, quasi-present prompting moment of immanent performance, and performance); an erasure of onstage/offstage boundary (demonstrated by crowds and an ever-expanding stage); a dialogical narrative arc (the arc of tension between voices attempting to take on the authorial role). These divisions are marked by a formal graphic code (parentheses) that we have always assumed as mere stage direction.

We can address this complex set of tensions by examining how Stephen's "*(looks behind)*" represents a directing voice challenging actor agency. Although Stephen's statement is fundamental to his intellectual inquiry, the direction asks Stephen to look away as he says it. In his discussion of editing, E. A. J. Honigman points out that "when an editor adds 'Aside' he often implies that the speaker would not have dared to utter the same words openly" (Honigman 1976: 120). He notes that labeling asides as such in *Hamlet*, for example, reduces the character's agency: "Hamlet enjoys insulting those he despises to their face" (120). An aside is at least directed at the audience. The word "behind" goes so far as to ask Stephen to turn away completely. This is akin to the direction asking the actor to speak one of his most important lines unintelligibly.

Joyce sets up three kinds of aside in the chapter: an aside directed "behind" a body part onstage (hand or back), an aside directed to the onstage audience (the gallery), and an aside simply directed "behind". Each of these represents an increasing distance the aside must travel. When Joyce assigns an object to the word "behind"—for example, Private Carr speaks an aside "behind his back" (*U* 15.616) and Bloom "behind his hand" (*U* 15.769)—this implies sending the aside a short distance and unseen by the audience. When Bloom

speaks an aside inside the performance, the direction asking him to "turn to the gallery" (*U* 15.785), he must send his voice out into the audience of the trial within the play. We will see that the final "behind", lacking any defining limit, sends the actor's voice the furthest, and specifically asks him to speak as the author.

From behind a hand, to the gallery, to the unlimited term "behind", these three types of asides indicate a spatial hierarchy, each one directing the actor's voice further from themselves and the stage. Joyce makes "behind" the most radical of these directions by defining it as offstage. To understand this, we must consider that Joyce sets up looking or peeping as a kind of entrance. Later in the chapter the NYMPHS entrance is signaled by a "peep out" (*U* 15.3341) and Patrice Egan's entrance is a "peeps from behind" (*U* 15.4502). This does two things: first, it adds the verb "peep" to the list of alternative entrances/exits; second, it uses "behind" to refer to offstage, the Egan example defining "behind" as the place from which Egan enters. The spatial reference makes sense as the majority of entrance actions bring characters "forward", a term implying some line from *behind* which actors come. Finally, THE NYMPH refers to a voice heard "from behind" (*U* 15.3395), implying a voice we hear but cannot see, which is the very definition of an offstage voice. With these three examples in mind, Stephen's "looks behind" begins to look less like an aside directed behind a part of his body or directed at the audience, and much more like a command to look much further, into that vaguely defined offstage from which characters like Egan appear.

The difficulty with this argument is that the fluidity of entrance and exit has erased a clear concept of offstage space. This is also precisely the point. While the word "behind" directs Stephen to look offstage, the stage has expanded indefinitely so offstage is a location always on the run from the characters and their voices. This direction not only attempts to control how and where Stephen speaks his aside, but the authorial voice also asks Stephen to do the impossible, to look at a place this same directing voice has systematically erased using a series of fluid entrances and exits. In addition, this seemingly impossible direction creates a tension between Stephen's voice and his

body. On a stage without boundaries, voices offstage are no longer offstage, they are simply disembodied voices, calls emanating from bodies forever retreating just beyond the expanding stage. Stephen's "(*looks behind*)" asks him to direct his statement toward this retreating space. Because the word "looks" can act as an entrance, the direction also asks him to enter this location; however, as his body is trapped onstage without the ability to exit, it cannot follow his gesture, and so this direction effectively severs his ability to communicate with his body. He is forced to race toward an ever-retreating authorial space, to chase his own voice.

This pursuit is expanded indefinitely through the verb tense used in Joyce's direction and the alternative narrative it establishes. The direction in "Circe" is present tense as opposed to progressive. Katie Wales notes that the present-progressive direction signals an action taking place simultaneously with dialogue, present tense implying an action preceding it. Compare the following:

> HANNA (eating a pear): Delicious.
> HANNA (eats a pear): Delicious.

The first implies that as Hanna eats, she says "delicious". In the second, she eats the pear, finishes, and then says "Delicious". The present tense divides narrative time into two separate realms, the division marked by parentheses. Thus, we see a temporality developing in the direction separately from the dialogue. This parallel chronotope grows to extreme proportions, calling for absurd sequences that would take days if not decades; despite its brevity, "*looks behind*" is just as undefined in its temporal reference. The present tense renders parenthetical action indefinite and unbounded. Even this short two-word direction opens a time-space gap as flexible as the one necessary to build the "forty-thousand room" kidney-shaped "Bloomusalem" (*U* 15.1548-59).

Noting this unlimited expansion of time and space in such a short direction does little but create an unlimited and unspecific interpretation, unless we consider what this particular direction is saying: STEPHEN (*looks behind*), i.e., Stephen looks behind. Here we can

read the authorial voice stating that Stephen "looks" like he is late, that he is running "behind". Only twice in the chapter do we get this kind of authorial commentary: first when a voice in the direction states that "*a daintier head of winsome curls was never seen on a whore's shoulders*" (*U* 15.2587-8) and, second, when Bloom nods his "*gratitude*" to Stephen "*as that is exactly what Stephen needs*" (*U* 15.4915-6). These moments of direct authorial comment alert us to the fact that "STEPHEN (*looks behind)*" could also be commentary. Oddly enough, inside long, detailed direction where the hyper-creative use of multiple voices might seem to open space for a direct authorial voice, Joyce uses clear subjects and distinctly tagged character voices to diligently reject it. The phrase "looks behind", both grammatically and semantically, can be read as external authorial commentary. An actor who is stuck looking away into the indefinable distance for an indeterminate amount of time will certainly fall behind. Stephen's gesture, as long as he performs it, blocks the arrival of his dialogue, and as the space he has entered is infinite, he is forever trapped "behind". As we will see, it is the very impossibility of the task set out in this direction that forces Stephen forward and allows him to deliver his dialogue. This can be explained through examining the difference between fictional and functional direction.

Designating direction as either functional or fictional determines the power the playwright has to force actors to perform gestural actions. Fictional direction pertains to world building that is not necessary for the plot. Hammond calls this "the dramatic fiction" of the work (Hammond 1992: 72). A lengthy description that opens an act is often mostly fictional, structuring the larger world beyond what we see on stage. While it functions centrally for the textual reader, it functions only secondarily for a director. The director decides how much of that opening description to build into the set. The extreme battles between Beckett and production companies reveals just how real this tension can be in the twentieth century.

While the director has a primary relationship to fictional direction, the performance audience occupies a secondary position, world-building completely invisible to them except for those things seen

through the filter of the director's staging or actor's interpretation. The actors lie somewhere in between the director and the performance audience, equal to the director in having read the direction in the script (and thus possessing knowledge the performance audience does not), but still forced to base their actions on what actually exists on the set itself, something the director decides. To put it plainly, the director builds the world, the actor acts within it with a knowledge of the original author's world, and the audience gets only the actor's inhabiting of the director's world. This means there is little difference between textual audience, director, and actor in epistemological terms (we all read all of the direction), although there is an extreme gap in terms of agency (our ability to act within the bounds of that knowledge). The textual audience, who sees fictional direction as much a part of the play as dialogue, has no agency to resist these descriptions.

This changes radically when it comes to functional direction; in this case, the descending hierarchy of agency—from director to actor to audience—collapses into equal subservience to the playwright/author. Hamlet stabbing Polonius is functional and thus a director can little afford to ignore it. It is functional in the sense that it is so important it cannot be changed without fundamentally changing the play. It is easy to differentiate Hamlet's accidental butchery from something like the vague and ambient sound of a whistle. The director can easily decide to change the whistle's tone, or cut it altogether, without radically altering the performance of the play. This seems simple enough until a play begins to blur the functional/fictional distinction. If a whistle were to become a character and speak to us, a director would no longer be able to ignore it, and the playwright would, in essence, be forcing this direction into the performance. The same goes for Stephen's "(*looks behind*)". If the playwright can convince us this is functional, the actors, director, and audience are all forced to follow this direction.

There are two ways for the playwright to make direction functional: first, to make it a fundamental part of narrative; second, as I mentioned above, to transform fictional description into character (as Joyce does with the very first character in the episode, the call of the

whistle). To transform fictional direction into a functional part of the narrative, the text must convince the director it is fundamental. If the director interprets a direction as unimportant or indecipherable (for example, is it important/interpretable if an actor looks behind or just to the side), the performance audience will never get the opportunity to see this direction. If, however, character is used to make this transformation, there is no need to convince the director of the narrative necessity of that direction. When direction seeps over into dialogue, like Joyce's whistle, the director has much less power to overturn this decision. It is interesting to note that Stephen briefly takes over the role of director to order the only officially titled "exit" in the play (*U* 15.4730). When the text turns direction into a character voice like this, the director and actor are left little power to challenge it.

Stephen's "(*looks behind*)", however, cannot be read as a character's voice. I argued that it could be considered authorial commentary, but this is something the director and actor would be *most* apt to disregard, especially as it delivers a gestural direction aimed specifically at acting: it tells Stephen to look like he is behind. It is also difficult to read this direction as fundamental in terms of the play's plot. Does it really matter if the performance audience sees Stephen looking behind or up or down? This is precisely the conundrum Joyce faced. It does not matter if a direction represents a highly complex set of voices all vying for control of a text if there is no way to force the reader to actually read the text as such. Joyce solved this problem by turning the direction into an impossible hallucination.

Joyce presents us with fictional direction (not fundamental to the play) that seems to play at being unreal, a hallucination that not only seems indecipherable but actually defies our ability to imagine it. He then posits the central narrative of the chapter as hallucination itself, a move that renders this unexplainable/impossible direction fundamental thematically and therefore functional. For example, he gives us a direction in which a "*skeleton judashand strangles the light*" (*U* 15.2277) and a final scene that asks the protagonist to call his child's name while also not calling it. These images, like hallucinations, ask us to superimpose the impossible on the real. Because of the impossi-

bility of performing such a thing, the director and actor are forced to change or ignore it, the performance audience is left completely in the dark about what happened, and the reader sits alone, the only one in a position to hear the author's voice.

In short, a writer who creates a play-in-a-novel with impossible hallucinatory direction is using the authorial position of the implied playwright to destroy the possibility of performance precisely in order to overpower the director and the actors, forcing the performance out of the novel and into the textual reader's lap. If we play the role we are meant to, a reading audience that does not ignore or miss the significance of Joyce's "(*looks behind*)", we see that this direction is functional because it reflects one of the central themes of the chapter. The gesture of looking "behind" is a direct experiment in the possibility of communication. Stephen is trapped in an infinite gesture of pursuing his own voice into the authorial realm. It is an impossible action to complete, thus, the director ignores it, the actor fails, the audience never sees it, and only the reader is forced to hallucinate, to see Stephen doing something he cannot. We are faced with a formal construction that produces an apparition of a communicative act only the reader has the position to enact. Joyce has essentially forced the textual audience to join him in forcing even the most seemingly mundane and unimportant gestures upon characters who continue to fail in the impossible performance of his novel. Eternally attempting to communicate with us, to look/enter into the retreating space of the author, Stephen himself is left behind, trapped in the very gesture necessary for his voice to sound.

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