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

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*edited by  
Franca Ruggieri*

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TOBIAS SMOLLETT, JOYCE'S GRANDFATHER:  
CIRCULATION AND RECIRCULATION, SATIETY,  
ERUCTATION, REGURGITATION, "CURSING AND  
RECURSING" IN VICONIAN CYCLES

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Deeply felt throughout Joyce's works, Smollett's presence, "at first sight [thought of as] alien to (if not actually opposite to) the heritage of Swift, Fielding and Sterne"<sup>1</sup>, that is, ultimately, also to Joyce, was first singled out, although in the negative, by J.W. Beach (in 1932) in relation to *Ulysses* and the interior monologue. This was subsequently stressed by V.S. Pritchett (in 1946)<sup>2</sup> in relation to the language of *Finnegans Wake*, a trait later successfully explored by Giorgio Melchiori in *The Tightrope Walkers* (1956).

As Melchiori forcefully asserted, Smollett's art had ultimately to be seen as an art aiming at "telling a story on different levels implying in it two separate trains of thought" (1956: 46), being in that an *ante litteram* Joycean – Joyce, too, wanting to write at the same time from different perspectives, and "on different levels", Joyce who used different instruments and techniques to dismantle and refashion language, featuring himself as a "multiinstrumentalist", making the most of various artistic traditions, combining different stylistic and linguistic strategies.

<sup>1</sup> J.W. Beach, *The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique*, quoted in Melchiori 1956: 46.

<sup>2</sup> V.S. Pritchett, "The Shocking Surgeon" in *The Living Novel*, quoted in Melchiori 1956: 46.

Smollett's language has been considered by Pritchett as a language "hardly explorable where each word carries two or more contradictory meanings" (Melchiori 1956: 46), getting in that way very close to Joyce's "slanguage" (*FW* 421.17)<sup>3</sup>, or "vivle" (*FW* 110.12), an ancient, lively and powerful language in which words are animated and gestural, a language featuring concrete actions, a language of the senses and of emotions expressed in Joyce in various modalities: "audible-visible-gnosible-edible" (*FW* 88.06), mixing up body and mind, combining standard English and regionalisms, dialects and idiolects, slang and cant, together with different scientific specialised languages (legal and medical, historical and philosophical), in an essayistic, encyclopaedic style that could correspond to that of Smollett's scientific essays, reviews, translations and case studies as, for example, (and of great import for *Humphry Clinker*), the *Essay on the External Use of Waters* (1752).

An adequate representation of the complexity of the very similar cultural and political situations in both epochs, in an empire englobing many different "nations", with their specific cultures and languages, could only be rendered by a highly inventive and multi-faceted art, resorting to multilinguistic and polisignificant expressive means.

Writing across boundaries (internal or external, official or non-official, chartered or unchartered, regarding nation, class, religion, gender), Smollett and Joyce used linguistic tools capable of analysing these complexities by continually adopting different perspectives, moving across and trespassing boundaries, constantly looking at things from both sides – in Joyce's case, acting as an engineer "boring through a mountain from two sides. If my calculations are correct we shall meet in the middle"<sup>4</sup> – meant for them both having chosen to live and write as voluntary exiles.

Acting as exiles and as "adventurers", "forebanned and betweenly" (*FW* 347.30), constantly moving across linguistic and cultural boundaries, which meant infringing – "enfranchised her to liberties

<sup>3</sup> See on this point Vaglio Marengo 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Also, in a slightly different form, quoted from an interview with Auguste Suter in Ellmann 1959: 556.

of fringes” (*FW* 548.19) – and subverting laws, in the name of the liberty of art, these artists worked altering or “othering” orders – “order is othered” (*FW* 613.14) – finding new linguistic and stylistic moulds, rhythms and lilts into which to cast their languages, paying attention to intersections, most of the time ending up in a hybrid and yet fully expressive and lively “lingua franca” in which many things resonate at a time and intertwine – as in a “dockanddoilish” (*FW* 466.23), for example, or in the Welsh-Scottish language in which a Welsh family of “originals” reveals itself in letters in *Humphry Clinker*.

In this situation, translation and adaptation, production of calques (in gestural and mimetical languages) are a constant activity, by that contaminating and blurring word boundaries, Joycianly “conglomerating” “words” and “worlds”, in a “dangerous” and yet vital way of writing, in “almosting”<sup>5</sup> renditions of metamorphic realities and ultimately smuggling words, in an actual battle for survival carried on across borders – “betweenly” (*FW* 347.30) – a Darwinian, ferocious “struggle for life”:

so warred he, from first to last, forebanned and betweenly, a smuggler for lifer (*FW* 347.30)

all the sorts of smukklers (*FW* 327.01)

This is indeed what Joyce, establishing the primacy of the work on language and on the ways by which this is achieved, calls “dangerous writing”:

The important thing is not what we write but how we write, and in my opinion the modern writer must be an adventurer above all, willing to take every risk and be prepared to founder in his effort if need be. In other words, we must write dangerously.

(Power 1974: 95)

<sup>5</sup> “Almosting it” (*U* 3.366-367) a term adopted in relation to the discussion on translation, as “metatextual dynamism” or “interdynamism” (Fritz Senn’s coinage).



The modern writer must, therefore, “write dangerously”, being “an adventurer above all, to take every risk and be prepared to founder in his effort”, that is to say, to become an explorer who has lost all *points de repère* – as in Joyce, facing the uncharted, the “immarginable” (*FW* 4.19) and yet sitting down in the desert and trying to draw a map out of it<sup>6</sup>, or travelling in order to discover the sources of the Nile or, as in Smollett, travelling in order to redraw maps in the hope of finding out, for example, whether Cap Breton is an island or a peninsula (a constant cartographic problem which keeps reappearing) – both authors, therefore, training themselves as proper “tightrope walkers”, acrobatically performing in the void, finally ending up in a pickle, in failure or in death.

Both in Smollett and in Joyce the terms “pilgrim” and “pickle” seem to be closely connected, possibly because of their origin in a common phrase (“to be in a pretty pickle”, meaning “to be in a sorry plight”), but also because of a strong connection with a well-known common source: Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, in which the phrase “to be in a pickle”<sup>7</sup> (“How came’st thou in this pickle?”, *The Tempest*, V.i), represents the (moral) assessment of the entire action of the play and, more generally, of the human condition itself, which could, if interpreted in metafictional terms, point to a difficulty both in writing and in reading: “how can I, author / how can you, reader”, get out of this labyrinth (this pickle) set up by the artwork itself? Moreover, in a not definite cultural, historical and political situation, in which in Scotland, according to Smollett, or in Ireland, according to Joyce, “some people are wise and some are otherwise”<sup>8</sup> or “half of the nation is mad and the other half not very sound”<sup>9</sup>.

The guide both for entering and for getting out of the labyrinth is for Smollett the author himself who, incorporated into the work as a

<sup>6</sup> “His father once observed that if Joyce were dropped in the middle of the Sahara he would sit down and make a map of it”. Cf. Anderson 1967: 14.

<sup>7</sup> See Cobham Brewer 1900: 974.

<sup>8</sup> T. Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*.

<sup>9</sup> T. Smollett, *The Adventures of Sir Launcelot Greaves*.

character<sup>10</sup>, together with the peculiarities of his linguistic and cultural traits (in the literary quarrels of the times Smollett is referred to as “peeregrine puckle”), is also set side by side and confronted with the characters of his own works (Ferdinand Count Fathom reappearing in *Humphry Clinker*, for example) and characters of his own family, acts as an adventurous traveller or as a pilgrim, or as a knight errant, lost in the labyrinth, still representing, at the same time, the only possible key to get out of it.

Adventures, journeys, pilgrimages, expeditions (even military ones) and their implications, errantry, randomness: these are the allusions we get from the titles of Smollett’s works, representing the experience of constantly crossing shifting borders, porous to alterity, “everintermutuomergent” (*FW* 55.11), where the variety of incidents and of linguistic experiences the travellers are confronted with, produces effects of randomness and “picaresqueness” (*FW* 486. 34), indifferently, rendered in a dry factual chronicle-like style, or, in an amplified, mock heroic, burlesque and comic one – with Joyce: “serialcosmically” (*FW* 263.24).

In a world which, both for Smollett and for Joyce, wavered between Vice and Folly, key philosophical and religious concepts are submitted to a radical scrutiny, according to the sudden twists of a blaspheme, heretic, anarchic style of thinking and of writing: Smollett and Joyce adopting similar strategic linguistic devices.

In the scatological satire of Smollett, the terms “christian” and “unchristian” oscillate, contaminating high and low, punning and equivocating in order to dismantle certitudes and orders, Smollett presenting the “church” as a place of “ignorant superstition”, while the apparently strictly architectural discourse on churches exhibiting gothic spires, as reminiscent of minarets, opens up into an atrocious space of torture and punishment as in “The long slender spire puts one in mind of a criminal impaled, with a sharp stake rising up through his

<sup>10</sup> T. Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, London, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1951, p. 165. Hereafter quoted as *HC*.

shoulder” (*HC* 172). Similarly, Joyce reveals the church as “crux” (*FW* 327.04); both in Smollett and Joyce “grace” is transformed into “grease”<sup>11</sup>, Providence into “prodigence” (in *HC*) and in Joyce into “Pravidance” (*FW* 147.17), (in Joyce a sort of perverted “charys”), equally blasphemous, non-ritual and perverted as the “Phwriting” – “My eppripftaph, Be phwritt” (*U* 11.67) – a writing by *flatus ventris*, by which Bloom expresses and almost advertises himself as musical instrument (a rotten bagpipe) at the end of “Sirens”. And the novels of Smollett, rich in manifestations of physical life, abound in farts and belches.

A sign of the difficulties of apprehending reality as well as of writing about it, is given by the deformations and metamorphoses the verb “to know” undergoes: “mispelt” as “no” or “nose”, “gnose” in both Smollett and Joyce, again, a knowing by the senses, this spelling and meaning occurring several times in *Finnegans Wake* (133.16 “nose”, 322.13 “nose”). What appears in Smollett as psychological or a sociolinguistic problem – in a letter of the Welsh maid Winifred Jenkins in *Humphry Clinker* “As for madam Lashmiheygo, you nose, her picklearities” (*HC* 336) is by Joyce transformed into a more general modality of knowing. Not used as in the theatre, where malapropisms and misquotations are used as a diversion and a pretext for equivocations, deeper levels of meaning, deeper cognitive implications are presented. With Joyce, the problem of “gnosing” represents a philosophical stance infiltrated by doubt, the labyrinth becoming three-dimensional and even four-dimensional: “tales within tales”, “a rambling mock-heroic tale”, “Once upon a time”, as in:

Arabian Nights, serial stories, tales within tales to be continued, desperate story telling, caps another to reproduce a rambling mock-heroic tale. Scharazad’s feat impossible. Once upon a time.

(Joyce 1961: 25)

<sup>11</sup> Innumerable examples in Smollett (*Humphry Clinker*) and in Joyce (from *Dubliners* to *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*).

Smollett gives us an all-inclusive and totally explicit definition of what a novel is, describing it in terms of a labyrinth, the same idea being in Joyce reshaped as primigenius narrative structure of the Neanderthal man: “meandertale” (*FW* 18.22) or “meanderthailtale” (*FW* 19.25).

As for Smollett:

A novel is a large diffused picture, comprehending the characters of life, disposed in different groups, and exhibited in various attitudes, for the purposes of a uniform and general occurrence to which every individual figure is subservient. But the plan cannot be executed with propriety, probability or success without a principal personage to attract the attention, unite the incidents, unwind the clue of the labyrinth at last close the scene by virtue of his own importance<sup>12</sup>.

The “principal personage uniting all the incidents” and “unwinding the clue of the labyrinth” is a strikingly Joycean concept, as it applies both to the Ulysses-Odysseus-Bloom role of a main character bound to embody the work itself and its rules, to survive in order to lead us out of the labyrinth by telling his tale, paying attention to the fact that, for Joyce, this is a hopeless enterprise having to deal with a “labyrinth mobile” (as in the Linati schema), consisting of “roccie erranti” (*sic*), where the “rocks” are the characters themselves, “wondering rocks” in a labyrinth from which, according to Apollonius Rhodius, there seems to be no possibility of escape, as it extends into the air and hurts the wings of birds.

To define the domain, the structure and the progress of the novel, Joyce uses the same explicit term: “the labyrinth of their samilikes and the alteregoases of their pseudoselves” (*FW* 576.33) and projects a cartographic representation (“prospector projector”) by the visual evo-

<sup>12</sup> The statement is reworked by Smollett both in the mock dedication to himself introducing *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753) and in *Humphry Clinker*.

cation of an old-fashioned symbolic kind of map (a 1432 kind of map used in Jesuit schools) featuring molehills as mountains and mountains (and countries) as molehills, a narratological as well as a cartographic principle:

Prospector projector and boomooster giant builder of all causeways woesoever, hopping offpoint and true terminus straxstraitens and corkscrewn perambulaups which bring hills to molehunter Big Maester Finnykin with Phenicia Parkes, bring them at suntime flush with the nethermost gangrung of their stepchildren, guide them through the labyrinth of their samilikes and the alteregoases of their pseudoselves, hedge them bothways from all roamers whose name are, from loss of bearings deliver them; so they keep to their rights (*FW* 576.33).

The entire domain of the novel lays open before both authors who recirculate forms and styles: Roderick Random, just like Peregrine Pickle, as both picaro and anti-picaro, Telemachus and Stephen Dedalus, as “dispossessed sons” at the mercy of a violent society, just as Ulysses, all characters who must rely on their ability to understand the situations in which they find themselves, escaping and surviving, being “escapemaster[s]-in-chief” (*FW* 127.10), masters in “escapology” (*FW* 428.22), in “escaping” (*FW* 232.12), perfectly calculating times by “Escupement” (*FW* 151.19), (deadbeat escapement invented by Thomas Compton, watchmaker) and, at the same time, adhering to their roots and natures, finding in themselves and in their universality, everybodyness and everydayness, the energies to regenerate themselves and start a new life cycle again.

The invention of a new language, originating from the sensed impossibility to use “cutanddry grammar and go ahead plot”<sup>13</sup> anymore, relies on the power to dismantle language categories and invent new grammatical functions and structures in the utopian hope for a

<sup>13</sup> J. Joyce, letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1926.

universal grammar, a *Grammaire des Grammaires* – “Grammar’s grammar” only “mind your genderous” (*FW* 268.17) – to abolish all Grammars, being pure gesture, in order to speak “faciofacey” (*FW* 279.F08) as with God, but retaining all the sentiments and the sensations, as well as the “sintalks” (*FW* 269.03) “For you have sensed” (*FW* 268.F6) that originated them.

As for Joyce,

Stand forth, Nayman of Noland (for no longer will I follow you oblique like through the inspired form of the third person singular and the moods and hesitensies of the but address myself to you with the empirative of my vendettative, provocative and out direct), stand forth, come boldly, jolly me, move me, zwillling though I am, to laughter in your true colours ere you be back for ever till I give you talkingto!

Have your little sintalks in the dunk of subjunctions, dual in duel and prude with pruriel even the aoriest chaparound whatsoever plaudered perfect anent prettydotes and haec genua omnia... in the case to be becoming a pale peterwright in spite of all your accusatives whilsly you’re wall-floored like your gerandiums... For you may be as practical as is predicable (*FW* 269.04).

A new grammar of emotions must be set to work to render the complexity of reality in language, to reconcile “the practical” and “the predicable”: the invention of new modes, genres and “numbers”, as in the case of the “empirative”, of the “vendettative”, the “provocative”, of considering the ambiguities of the deponent, the animosity of the “dual in duel” (*FW* 111.02), could, in Smollett, only be matched by the invention and use of the “eructative”, the “regurgitative”, the “vomitive”, the “invective”, augmented expressive means, emphasizing the effervescent, animated and dazzling quality of his language.

As Melchiori (1956: 47) asserted, “the transformation of personal names” are examples of a creative and intimately animated language, of emotive energies shaping the language anew. While Smollett resorts to his experience as doctor, scientist, satirist, Joyce follows

the example of Jousse<sup>14</sup> who had theorized and exemplified the use of “gestural names” (“noms gestuels”), as a way of achieving the full expressivity of “*geste*”. Names and nicknames together with gestures, postures and poses – in Joyce: “Erect, beseated, mountback” (*FW* 108.01) – embody actual characters with moral qualities (names with stories behind), occupational names, often with distinctive national characteristics: in Joyce “borsaiolini”, or “polthrone”, as in “polthrone chair” (“poltroon”, lazy person); in Smollett “scroconni” (in Italian in the text), “minchione” (in the misspelling of Winifred Jenkins, “minchioned”, meaning “mentioned”, but also “made a fool of”, “Dunquisset” (*HC* 292) (which stands for Don Quixote); in Joyce “donkey schott” (*FW* 482.14); “Random”, precisely for his traits of “randomness”, the “sullenness” of Matthew Bramble in search of his health signified in “Matthewsullin” (*HC* 291) as a distinctive trait of his character.

In the title and name of Humphry Clinker, the phrase “to dine with Duke Humphries”, meaning “to eat poorly or not at all” – “with good Jook Humprey” (*FW* 331.07) – combines with a slang meaning of “clinker[s]”: “foecal anal bits”, ending up by giving the impression of a very risky “expedition” predictably bound to end up in “satiety”, exhaustion and failure. With the names of Bruno and Browning, Joyce plays on many levels of meaning: from “Bruno”, meaning, on the one level, “burnt” (Bruno having been “horribly” burnt in Rome in Campo de’ Fiori), to “brown”, meaning “dead”, as in a poem by Browning<sup>15</sup>, “browning” (meaning “dying”), which is tragically playing on the same concepts.

Despite the fact that James Atherton, in *The Books at the Wake* (1959), denies any possibility of Joyce borrowing from Smollett’s

<sup>14</sup> On this point see Vaglio Marengo 2014.

<sup>15</sup> The quip on “brown” meaning “dead” had already been used by Joyce in “The Dead” (“brown enough” and “all brown”) and later taken up, with a possible reference to a sonnet by Browning in honour of Rawdon Brown, an Englishman who had chosen to die in Venice, that is almost a self-obituary, anticipating Browning’s deathbed scene in Venice. On this point see Vaglio Marengo 2012.

play on words or gestural names, many examples of his treatment of language can be supplied.

In *Finnegans Wake*, pages 28 and 29, the references to Smollett's works increase ("a big rodyram at random", "humphing his share", "a poked wife in pickle", "three lice little clinkers") ultimately leading to a sort of "Old Vico Roundpoint" (*FW* 260.15) by an exercise in repetition: "cursing and recursing" ("cursed and recursed"), where everything appears to be re-enacted, recirculated and constantly regurgitated through a practice of exaggeration, amplification, repetition with variation that has a strong stylistic and structural impact.

Repose you now! Finn no more! For, be that samesake sibsubstitute of a hooky samon, there's already a big rodyram lad at random on the premises of his haunt of the hungredf bordles, it is told me, Shop illicit, flourishing like a lordmajor or like a buaboabaybohm, yardalong on the breezy side...as Phineas Barnum, humphing his share of the showthers is senken on him he' much a grandfallar, with a poked wife in pickle that'is a flyfire and three lice little, two twilling bugs and one midget And he cursed and recursed ...or he was never done seeing what you cool pigeons know (*FW* 28.33-29.11).

While the stylistic mode of "cursing and recursing" may well refer to, and be reminiscent of, the quality of Smollett's language, identified as the language of hyperbole, rhetorical amplification, compression, cumulative lists, disproportion, fermentation, surfeit, nausea, "satiety"<sup>16</sup>, it is in the movement of circulation and recirculation of cultural elements that Smollett makes a general statement on the progress of humanity and on the state and health of the nation.

<sup>16</sup> The term which had surfaced earlier on in Winifred Jenkins's words defining Bath as "the very squintasense of satiety" (42), where *satiety* stands for "society" and is used to bring the novel to a close, in the perfect ambiguity of a "society" that has become unbearable and nauseating. Maybe just as nauseating as the "satiety of arthurs" (the "society of authors") in *FW* 229.07.



In the grotesque description of the Pumproom in Bath – a “nauseous stew of corruption” (*HC* 62) – Smollett conveys his ideas about the health and progress of civilisation, as well as of science and of literature in his time. This is carefully prepared in an ironic *crescendo*, “cursing and recursing”:

I am now as much afraid of drinking as of bathing; for, after a long conversation with the Doctor, about the construction of the pump and of the cistern, it is very far from being clear with me, that the patients in the Pump-room don't swallow the scourgings of the bathers. I can't help suspecting that there is, or may be, some regurgitation from the bath into the cistern of the pump. In that case what a delicate beverage is everyday quaffed by the drinkers; medicated with the sweat, and dirt, and dandruff, and the abominable discharges of various kinds from twenty different diseased bodies, parboiling in the kettle below (*HC* 44).

It all leads to the Pump-room at Bath, a Viconian round-point recirculating waters and by that spreading diseases and perpetuating corruption:

I find that the old roman baths of this quarter, were found covered by an old burying ground, belonging to the Abbey; through which, in all probability, the water runs in its passage so that, as we drink the decoction of the living bodies at the Pump-room, we swallow the strainings of the rotten bones and carcasses at the private bath – I vow to god the very idea turns my stomach! (*HC* 45).

Fearing the degeneration and self-destruction of the human species, “radical dr. Smollett” (Bruce 1954) denounces the adulterous beverages that are assumed as drinks for health; he points to the ominous circulation of secretive and excretive fluids, to the contiguity of death and life, of sublime and grotesque, an infernal situation with no possibility of escape offered:

Snares are laid for our lives in everything we eat or drink; the very air we breathe is loaded with contagion. We cannot even sleep without the risqué of infection, I say, infection. This place is the rendezvous of infection (*HC* 45).

We will not be surprised at reading, in Winifred Jenkins's letters, that "affection" is turned into "infection" (*HC* 292). All the sentiments and the senses seem to be affected. Sterne, who invented for Smollett the nickname of "smellfungus", points out how the moral boundary of his universe had to be defined by stink, putrid effluvia and stercoraceous flavours (luxury and corruption going hand in hand). This had also to be intended as a way of recirculating and renewing languages bearing in mind that, as Vico said:

*Linguis ingenia, non ingeniis linguas formari.*

Everything happens in language, everything can happen in the languages of Smollett and Joyce by the recirculation of high and low, of tragic, comic and grotesque.

We are produced by language, not the other way round.

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