

JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY

21

**LANGUAGE
AND LANGUAGES
IN JOYCE'S FICTION**

Edited by
Serenella Zanotti

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Address: James Joyce Italian Foundation

Dipartimento di Lingue, Culture e Letterature Straniere

Via Valco di San Paolo, 19

00146 Roma

joyce_found@os.uniroma3.it

franca.ruggieri@uniroma3.it

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 “WHY MINOR SAD?”: MUSICAL THEORY IN *ULYSSES*

When Joyce started planning his career as a writer in his youth, he felt the need to channel his overwhelming creative potential and found the most suitable instrument for this in what Dedalus, in *A Portrait*, defines as “one or two ideas by Aristotle and Aquinas” (*P* 187). This working instrument must be considered simply as a device that is independent from Joyce’s religious beliefs or unbeliefs: if the Catholic Dante chose the pagan Virgil as a guide in his descent into hell, Joyce organized the structure of *Ulysses* on the basis of Aquinas’ Trinitarian treatise in the *Summa Theologiae* (*STI*, qq. 27-43). There are two concomitant elements which make the presence of a trinity necessary to the structure of *Ulysses*: first of all, the novel aims to *make the word flesh*, a concept which is closely connected with a Trinitarian dimension. Two meanings combine in the term “word”: the word of the Artist who, as an eighteen-year-old Joyce stated, has the power to turn “the bread of everyday life into something that has a permanent artistic life of its own” (Stanislaus Joyce 1958: 116), and the Word, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity who “was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John: 1.14).

The second reason justifying the presence of a trinity in *Ulysses* is that Dedalus, in the last two chapters of *A Portrait* and in the *Telemachy*, is depicted as pursuing the Act of Creation but, according to Thomas Aquinas, “to create is not proper to any one Person, but is common to the whole Trinity” (*STI*, q.45 a.6). Dedalus’ creative act takes place on Sandymount when, seemingly, he is only creating a fleeting quatrain: “His lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air: mouth to her moomb. Oomb, allwombing tomb. His mouth moulded issuing breath, unspeched: ooeeehah: roar of cataractic planets, globed, blazing, roaring wayawayawayawayaway. Paper. The banknotes, blast them” (*U* 3.401-

04). In all religions and myths, the act of Creation implies a passage from chaos to cosmos, here represented by blazing cataractic planets roaring in Dedalus' mind. This happens in an episode which is known as "Proteus", whereas the etymological meaning of *Proteus* is "divine first principle". The third episode of *Ulysses* is about Creation, the Creation of a novel starting with the words: "Mr. Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls" (*U* 4.1-2).

While creating the *primal matter* of *Ulysses*, Dedalus, the God-like Artist-Creator, simultaneously turns into God-the-Father by generating Bloom, the Son, the Second Person of the novel's trinity. At first "His lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air", then "His mouth moulded issuing breath": likewise, in *A Portrait*, on the occasion of his creation of the *Villanelle of the Temptress*, Stephen's verses "passed from his mind to his lips" (*P* 217). In both cases, we are faced with an allusion to several passages from the *Summa Theologiae* in which Aquinas compares the generation of the Son by the Father to an "interior concept of the mind" which, as soon as it is conceived by the human mind, becomes word (*STI*, q.34 a.1). Aquinas uses this metaphor from the very outset of his Trinitarian treatise (*STI*, q.27 a.1) in order to confute the opposing heresies of Arius and, especially, Sabellius: Stephen's continuous references to the Sabellian heresy, according to which "the Father was Himself His Own Son" (*U* 9.863), hint at Dedalus as the Creator of the "*livre de lui-même*" (*U* 9.114). The entire library episode, based on the relationship between the Artist-Creator and his created characters, reveals that Dedalus is both the Creator of *Ulysses* and a created character who, at the same time, "acts and is acted on" (*U* 9.1021-22).

In the light of the above, one of the functions of the Homeric parallels in *Ulysses* is to prevent the reader from grasping the actual structure of the novel: the young Dedalus-Telemachus turns out to be the Father of the older Bloom-Ulysses, but this is not in contradiction with Aquinas' statement that "the divine Persons are distinguished from each other according to the relations of origin" (*STI*, q.27 a.1). If we assume that a trinity based on the Holy Trinity takes action in *Ulysses*, we also have to accept that age or emotive inclinations have no relevance in the role that Dedalus and Bloom play within it.

The specific languages of many disciplines contribute to implement and, at the same time, to reveal the inner structure of *Ulysses*: theological, philosophical, theosophical and many more languages besides. Before analyzing how Joyce uses the topic of musical theory for his own purposes, I would like to highlight Joyce's skill in using the technique of puzzles and riddles. A good example is provided by "Oxen of the Sun", which is fully understandable if we consider it to be a huge riddle: the parallelism between the development of English literature and the birth of a child in flesh and blood reveals that in *Ulysses*, as in the Holy Trinity, "the Word was made flesh". Moreover, the episode opens with a very complicated puzzle consisting of three sentences repeated three times: "Deshil Holles Eamus"; "Send us bright one, light one, Horhorn, quickening and wombfruit"; "Hoopsa boyaboy hoopsa!" (*U* 14.01-06). This triple invocation is to be considered a three-part mosaic which, once assembled, shows an image evoking the roots of Catholicism. Cross-referencing the various interpretations given over time but starting from a different geographical location, the first invocation means: "Let us get out of the hospital and let us go right, where Holles Street and Denzille Street cross". On hurrying out of the hospital, the fellowship shouts the name "Burke's!", the exclamation that the text openly identifies with "the Word" (*U* 14.1390-91), with a capital "W" in all the editions of *Ulysses* from 1922 onwards, except Gabler's. The second sentence orbits around the verb "to send", in latin *mittere*, whence the noun *missio* derives. It is closely related to a passage from the *Summa Theologiae* in which Thomas Aquinas, on explaining the mission of the Divine Persons in the Holy Trinity, reaffirms that the Son was sent into the world by the Father: "The notion of mission includes two things: the habitude of the one sent to the sender; and that of the one sent to the end whereto he is sent. Anyone being sent implies a certain kind of procession of the one sent to the sender [...]" (*STI*, q.43, a.1). In the invocation that opens "Oxen of the Sun", "the sender", instead of a pagan deity, is God the Father and the Creator dispensing life, while "the one sent" is the Son, featuring both a divine and a human nature.

The expression "quickenning and wombfruit" embraces the physicality of a baby kicking in his mother's belly and the sacredness of the scene of the Annunciation, the same described in *A Portrait* when, on

Lynch's "long pointed cap", accurately highlighted in *A Portrait* (P 205), in "Circe" becomes a character in flesh and blood, entrusted with the task of saying the famous statement "Jewgreek is greekjew":

STEPHEN: As a matter of fact it is of no importance whether Benedetto Marcello found it or made it. The rite is the poet's rest. It may be an old hymn to Demeter or also illustrate *Coela enarrant gloriam Domini*. It is susceptible of notes or modes as far apart as hyper-phrygian and mixolydian [...].

THE CAP: [...] Ba! It is because it is. Woman's reason. Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet. Death is the highest form of life. Ba! [...]

STEPHEN: Here's another for you. (*he frowns*) The reason is because the fundamental and the dominant are separated by the greatest possible interval which ...

THE CAP: Which? Finish. You can't.

STEPHEN: (*With an effort*) Interval which. Is the greatest possible ellipse. Consistent with. The ultimate return. The octave. Which.

THE CAP: Which?

(U 15.2086-2114)

The expression "Jewgreek is Greekjew" hints at what Thomas Aquinas, in describing the relationship between Father and Son in the Holy Trinity, defines both in terms of "likeness" (STI, q. 35 a.2), namely, consubstantiality, and "opposite relation". According to Aquinas, in God subsists a Trinity, but God is one and, as such, the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity share the same substance. The only difference between the First and the Second Person is that, in their capacities as Father and Son, they show an *opposite relation*: "The Father and the Son are in everything one, wherever there is no distinction between them of opposite relation" (STI, q. 36 a.4). Two more sentences uttered by Lynch's cap allude to the concepts of consubstantiality and *opposite relation*, and their symbolic function is enhanced by their being borrowed from Bloom's interior monologue in "Hades": "From one extreme to the other" (U 6.382) and "In the midst of death we are in life. Both ends meet" (U 6.759-60).

Likewise, all the references to musical theory in *Ulysses* allude both to the consubstantiality and to the *opposite relation* between Dedalus and Bloom: minor opposite to major, mixolydian opposite to hy-

perphrygian, dominant opposite to tonic. Many of these references appear both in Bloom's interior monologue in "Sirens" and in the dialogue between Stephen and Lynch's cap: a telepathic correspondence on the common ground of musical theory takes place between Father and Son. Such an exchange starts in "Proteus", when Dedalus thinks: "I am lonely here. [...] I am quite here alone. Sad too" (U 3.434-36). In turn Bloom, while writing to Martha Clifford, thinks: "I feel so sad today. [...] So lonely" (U 11.894). Moments before, with reference to the music he was listening to, Bloom thinks: "Trails off there sad in minor. Why minor sad?" (U 11.893). In answer to Bloom's question, major and minor chords are formed by the first, the third and the fifth degrees of the relevant scales: minor mode sounds sad because the third degree of its scale is one semitone lower than the equivalent degree in the major mode.

A melodic fragment based on the same degrees of the key of D minor often appears in Bloom's mind: the opening of Mozart's *Don Giovanni a cenar teco*. The melody is anticipated by an introduction performed by the orchestra, which culminates in a chord based on the dominant, the fifth degree of the tonic: if we try to reproduce this chord with our voice, we would naturally sing the fifth degree, which corresponds to the note A. Therefore, the first notes of *Don Giovanni a cenar teco*, including this A, turn out to be: AAAD which, in neo-Latin languages, correspond to "La la la ree" (U 11.894), the first notes that Bloom hums while writing to Martha Clifford: the double *e* of "ree" reproduces the length of the note that the *Commendatore* sings at that point.

If Joyce's subliminal allusion to *Don Giovanni a cenar teco* seems to be unquestionable, it may be assumed that, in Bloom's mind, Mozart's fragment blends with another one: the opening of the sixth of Mercadante's *Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross*. It is written in D major, but is startlingly similar to *Don Giovanni a cenar teco*, both melodically and rhythmically, and it presents a brief introduction culminating with a chord based on the dominant. Throughout *Ulysses*, Bloom systematically confuses Mercadante with Mozart, Rossini and Meyerbeer: it is quite conceivable that in this case, as well, Bloom overlaps Mercadante's music with Mozart's, especially taking into account that the two fragments share the same musical substance but, at the same time, show an opposite minor-major relation.

In “Circe”, the adjective “sad” is once again connected with musical theory, and with the mysterious relationship between Dedalus and Bloom, when the latter succeeds in finding the former by means of the music that Stephen is playing on the piano: Bloom defines it “Sad music. Church music” (*U* 15.1278), a stage direction calls it “Oriental music” (*U* 15.1318) but a further stage direction will clarify that Dedalus is playing “the series of empty fifths” (*U* 15.2073). More than church or oriental music, empty fifths evoke ancient music, insofar as the third degree of the scale, which determines the major or minor mode in a modern tonal system, is missing: in fact, parallel fifths performed by long trumpets are overused in the soundtrack of movies set in ancient Rome or in the Middle Ages.

On performing a parallel fifth, two notes rise in the air, a less visible variant of the same symbology appearing at the end of “Scylla and Charybdis” when “two plumes of smoke ascended, pluming” in the sky (*U* 9.1219): the empty fifths played by Dedalus evoke the intrinsic union between him and Bloom, and the same happens when Dedalus mentions the minor, the mixolydian and the hyperphrygian modes. Dedalus’ series of empty fifths flows into the tonal system when he ambiguously cites the parable of the Prodigal Son and warns: “Minor chord comes now” (*U* 15.2500). Three hundred and fifty lines of text above, a stage direction reads: “Stephen turns and sees Bloom” (*U* 15.2142). In “Circe”, the hallucinatory scenes expand the actual temporal dimension, therefore the reader hardly realizes that Dedalus recalls the parable of the Prodigal Son and says: “Minor chord comes now” exactly when Bloom enters the piano room. Stephen seems to identify Bloom with the minor mode which in Western musical tradition, until a few decades ago, was invariably described as having a passive character, in contrast with the major mode’s active quality. In Robert Schumann’s words: “The difference between major and minor must be allowed beforehand. The former is the active, virile principle; the latter, the passive, the feminine” (Schumann 1946: 60).

Active and passive: these words derive from the Aristotelian concepts of *act* and *potency* and it is worth recalling that Dedalus defines himself as “entelechy, form of forms” (*U* 9.208), namely, as act and soul. On the contrary Bloom, since appearing in the novel, is constantly con-

nected with basic matter, with mutton kidneys releasing a “fine tang of faintly scented urine” (*U* 4.04-05). And matter, in Aristotelian lexicon, is a synonym of *potency* in opposition to *act*.

The relationship between major and minor modes finds its equivalent in the two Greek musical modes that Dedalus mentions but, before analysing their allegorical function, we should verify whether Joyce had any notion of ancient Greek music. He certainly had a first-hand knowledge of the passages on music in Aristotle’s *Republic* and *Politics* and in the *Problemata*, attributed to Aristotle. For instance, Dedalus’ search for “the greatest possible interval” or “the greatest possible ellipse” between the tonic and the dominant (*U* 15.2005-12), derives from a question appearing twice in the *Problemata*: “Why is *mese*” (“the middle note”) so called, though there is no middle of eight notes? Is it because in the old days scales had seven notes, and seven has a middle?” (*Problemata* XIX, 919^b, 20-23). It should be noted that the expression “is it because”, appearing dozens of times in the *Problemata*, recalls the statement made by Lynch’s cap: “It is because it is”. Incidentally, I would like to suggest that the *Problemata* supplies the model for the catechistic style on which “Ithaca” is based.

Besides his acquaintance with Aristotle’s works, Joyce’s intention to investigate Greek music is testified to by the *Early Commonplace Book*, the most important document revealing Joyce’s preparatory work for the elaboration of Dedalus’ aesthetic theory, as it includes what have been known for many years as the *Paris Notebook* (*CW* 143-46; *WD* 52-55) and the *Pola Notebook* (*CW* 146-48; *WD* 80-83). Here, in 1903-04, Joyce transcribed the sentences by Thomas Aquinas that Dedalus sets at the centre of his aesthetic theory starting from *Stephen Hero*, such as: “*Ad pulcritudinem tria requiruntur: integritas, consonantia, claritas*” (Crispi 2009: 9; *SH* 89; *P* 212). He also transcribed fifty-five passages from Aristotle’s works that he translated from French, including some crucial sentences haunting Stephen in *Ulysses*, such as “The intellectual soul is the form of forms” (O’Rourke 2004: 24; *U* 2.75) or “Movement is the actuality of the possible as possible” (O’Rourke 2004: 40; *U* 2.67). In about 1913, Joyce transcribed on the *Early Commonplace Book* itself the bibliographical references of some books in a list which “proves that Joyce returned to the manuscript at least 9 years after he first started using it.

This is the only known example of Joyce returning to a manuscript for further use after such a long hiatus” (Crispi 2009: 9). Shortly before starting the actual writing of *Ulysses*, Joyce felt the need to return to his notes on Aquinas and Aristotle and, presumably, he also returned to one of the books he listed in 1904: *The Modes of Ancient Greek Music* by David Monro.

Several clues suggest that Monro’s handbook represents Joyce’s main source of inspiration for the dialogue between Dedalus and Lynch’s cap: if the latter observes that “Extremes meet”, Monro highlights “The profound Hellenic principle of choosing the mean between opposite extremes” (Monro 1894: 8); if Dedalus speculates on the greatest possible interval, Monro reports a passage in which Plato mocks those musicians who “put down their ears to listen for the smallest possible interval” (Monro 1894: 53). Monro dedicates many pages to the thorny question of the Greek musical octaves, which is closely connected with the concept of *modes*: in ancient Greece, each musical mode was associated with a specific scale and a specific pitch but, among ancient and modern scholars, there is no agreement on this point. According to the scheme proposed by Monro, the scale based on the hyperphrygian mode starts from the modern note F, while the one based on the mixolydian starts from E flat (Monro 1894: 128): the distance between them is one tone, which implies that, in the modern tonal system, there is a reciprocal harmonic incompatibility between them, as the respective triads have no notes in common. This may be one of the reasons why Dedalus defines these two modes as reciprocally “far apart” (*U* 15.2090) but, more likely, Dedalus’ statement derives from two passages by Aristotle: in the *Politics* he states that some modes “make men sad and grave, like the so-called Mixolydian”, while “the Phrygian inspires enthusiasm” (*Politics* VIII, 5, 1342^b). Likewise, a passage from the *Problemata* reports that, on listening to a piece of music based on the mixolydian mode, “we adopt a passive attitude”, while “When we use the Hypodorian and Hypophrygian modes, on the other hand, we are active” (*Problemata*, XIX, 919^b, 20-23): as can be seen, such a duality reproduces the *opposite relation* between the minor and the major modes.

In actual fact, Dedalus mentions the hyperphrygian mode, instead of the phrygian or the hypophrygian. This way, consciously or not, Joyce

adds grist to his mill as, according to Monro's scheme, though the scales on which the hyperphrygian and the mixolydian modes are based start from different pitches, they both consist of one tone, one semitone, two tones, one semitone and two tones (Monro 1894: 128): in spite of their being reciprocally "far apart", the hyperphrygian and the mixolydian modes prove to be consubstantial. Consequently, Dedalus' statements about the two Greek modes hides a reference to the concepts of likeness and opposite relation, an allusion which can be fully understood if we assume that Bloom is identified with the passive minor and mixolydian modes while Dedalus, the "active intellect" in Aristotelian terms, corresponds to the major and the hyperphrygian modes.

While arguing with Lynch's cap, Dedalus also deals with another topic mentioned in *The Modes of Ancient Greek Music* but referring to Western musical theory (Monro 1894: 19): Stephen tries to define the harmonic relationship between tonic and dominant, the first and the fifth degrees of a diatonic scale. The chord built on the dominant establishes a harmonic region that is somehow an alternative to the tonic and creates a tension requiring a resolution: in fact, as occurs in the typical final cadenza of a Western composition, the chord based on the dominant is ineluctably preconditioned to resolve to the tonic, and so too is the scale based on the tonic, when it reaches its seventh degree. Dedalus only mentions the first and the fifth degrees of a scale but, implicitly, he also meditates on the seventh degree which accomplishes the "ultimate return" to the octave (*U* 15.2112): the circumstance is to be added to the long list of telepathic exchanges taking place between Stephen and Bloom throughout *Ulysses*. In fact, the first, the fifth and the seventh are the same degrees on which Bloom's humming in "Sirens" is based: "La la la ree [...] La ree [...] Dee" (*U* 11.894). In its entirety, this is a coherent melodic fragment which insists on the dominant ("La la la"), reaches the tonic with a longer note ("Ree"), bounces between dominant and tonic ("La ree") and ends on the seventh degree, as "Dee" corresponds to C sharp, in Italian *Do diesis*.

Bloom's melodic fragment is interrupted on the seventh degree and the missing ultimate return to the octave creates a sense of suspension recalling the one evoked by another of Bloom's musical reflections: "One plus two plus six is seven" (*U* 11.831). That is: if upon one note (D) we

build an interval of the second (D-E) and another of the sixth (E-C sharp), we achieve an interval of the seventh (D-C sharp). And if Bloom's calculation and melodic fragment stop on the penultimate degree, Dedalus' quotation of the parable of the Prodigal Son reproduces the same effect of suspension, as it stops on the penultimate word: "I will arise and go to my" (*U* 15.2496). Anyhow, it is not surprising that Dedalus does not finish his sentence as, otherwise, he would be compelled to say: "I will arise and go to my Son".

Finally, in "Circe" Dedalus splits into the double role of Philip Sober and Philip Drunk. The latter mumbles: "If I could only find out about octaves. Reduplication of personality" (*U* 15.2522-23). In this passage, Dedalus is subject to a phenomenon of *duplication* of personality, but Philip Drunk is alluding to another phenomenon, the *reduplication* of personality which, in the Holy Trinity, corresponds to the generation of the Son by the Father: two D's, separated by the octave interval, in harmonic terms are consubstantial but, as single notes belonging to the same scale, they show an *opposite relation*, as a scale starting on a given D ends on the following D, somehow reduplicating itself. The metaphor implies that Dedalus is the one who duplicates himself, is God the Father, while Bloom is the other who has been duplicated, a seventh interval orbiting around a tonic and, after traversing itself, returns to the tonic that originated it. Accordingly, Bloom fades out of the novel in a fetal position (*U* 17.2314-18): ineluctably preconditioned to perform his ultimate return, "the manchild in the womb" comes back to where he was generated, the virgin womb of Dedalus' imagination. This is the hidden meaning of all those self-rounding sentences, typical of *Ulysses*, in which an undefined himself returns to himself. In particular, the dialogue with Lynch's cap culminates in a self-rounding sentence in which God, Shakespeare and an ineluctably preconditioned return to himself are connected with our favourite commercial traveller: "What went forth to the ends of the world to traverse not itself. God, the sun, Shakespeare, a commercial traveller, having itself traversed in reality itself, becomes that self. Wait a moment. Wait a second. Damn that fellow's noise in the street. Self which it itself was ineluctably preconditioned to become. *Ecco!*" (*U* 15.2117- 21).

Shakespeare, the Artist by definition, is equated with God and with the sun, giver of life. But Dedalus, also the Artist by definition, in “Scylla and Charybdis” obscurely equates himself with Shakespeare. That is, Dedalus, who generated Bloom and created *Ulysses*, equates himself with God. In the scene from “Proteus” describing roaring cataclysmic planets, it is unclear whether Dedalus creates the primal matter of *Ulysses* from nothing, like God the Creator according to Thomas Aquinas (*STI*, q.44 a.1), or if he moulds an Aristotelian pre-existing primal matter (*Physics* I, 7, 192^a): the answer lies in Dedalus’ reference to Benedetto Marcello, another Artist-Creator by definition, and is connected with the Aristotelian concepts of *matter* and *form*. In some of the fifty psalms he composed, Marcello used pre-existing Greek and Jewish melodies as a *cantus firmus*, as a bass-line: at the beginning of his dialogue with Lynch’s cap, Dedalus remarks that it is of “no importance whether Benedetto Marcello found or made” such a primal matter (*U* 15.2087-88), as the listener only perceives the form that the Artist assigns to the matter he moulded.

Once again, music partakes in “Joyce’s feast of languages” to reveal the structure of *Ulysses*, which is based on Dedalus’ aesthetic theory. This, in turn, is based on “one or two ideas by Aristotle and Aquinas”. Or, should we say, three ideas: act and potency, Trinity, Creation.

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