LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGES IN JOYCE'S FICTION

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1. Consuming *Ulysses*: polysystem theory and intersemiotic translation

In this paper, I aim to explore the survival, recirculation and revitalization of James Joyce's *Ulysses* in today's global popular culture and Italian literary polysystem, through two apparently very different case studies – references to Joyce and Bloomsday in the animated series *The Simpsons* (§2), and in the Italian novel *Un'Odissea minuta* (Di Schüler 2016, §3), respectively. My scope is not to compare the texts themselves with the original *Ulysses*. Rather, I will try to point out the relevance of such revitalizations in terms of intersemiotic translation (§1.1), within the conceptual framework of polysystem theory (§1.2). As we will see in §4, this perspective might be useful to point out the survival and recirculation of another very Ulyssean (and modernist at large) trait, the cross-fertilization of popular culture and 'high' culture in a potentially infinite loop of reciprocal reference. Before going into any detail, however, it is worthwhile to point out from the start that the adjectives 'high' and 'low', used as qualifiers of literature and culture, should be intended here as commonplace descriptors of collective attitudes towards certain literary and cultural forms, not as quality judgements on my part.

1.1. Ulysses *across semiotic systems*

After the peak in retranslations that followed copyright expiration, *Ulysses* made a triumphant comeback in bookstores across the world. No doubt this surge of revitalization provides food for thought aplenty, both

for the translation and the Joycean scholar engaged in issues such as, just to name a few, paradigm survival through adaptation vs philological 'loyalty' to the original, or the inevitable canonization of an originally subversive work, additionally to more language-specific concerns. While such fascinating considerations have been explored elsewhere (to name just a couple, Mihálycsa and Wawrzycka 2012; Bollettieri Bosinelli and Torresi 2012), here I choose to focus on the close connection of *Ulysses* with what Roman Jakobson termed *intersemiotic* translation.

Although Jakobson glossed intersemiotic translation as "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" (Jakobson 1959: 233), the reverse must also necessarily apply, since there is no such thing as a receiving-only sign system (i.e. a code that can only be translated into). As much research has convincingly argued, *Ulysses* – like other Joycean and Modernist works – is heavily reliant on code-mixing and intersemiosis, for instance translating music, sound, or even silence, to the printed page.[1] The weaving of visual media such as print ads, typography, photography and the cinema into the narrative is another Ulyssean distinctive trait that can be interpreted as intersemiotic translation from the nonverbal into the verbal (see for instance Trotter 2007, ch. 3; McCourt 2010; Camerani 2008; Hayward 2017). The favour has been returned by music (Mangialavori 2010, and sources therein), cinema (Feldner 2015 and sources therein), and art,[2] not only in terms of explicit transpositions that foreground the novel, but also in terms of direct or indirect citations (even 'unconscious' ones, as Cheung 1996 termed them) that leave *Ulysses* in the background and often belong to the realm of so-called 'low' or 'popular' culture, like the ones analysed in §2 below (see also Tempera 2011: 367-371).

There is hardly any need to remind that in semiotic terms, the wall between literature as a form of art – a champion of the so called 'high' culture – and forms of mass or 'low' culture has fallen down in the 1960s

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[1] To mention but a few of the many sources on this matter, see for instance Wawrzycka and Zanotti 2018; specifically on the musicality of the "Sirens" episode, Wolf 2018: 226-237, and sources therein. Wolf's account of "Sirens" (originally published 1992) was intended as an answer to Rabaté 1986.

[2] Rohini Aggarwal, "How James Joyce's 'Ulysses' Influenced Art", updated July 12, 2017, https://theculturetrip.com/europe/ireland/articles/7-ways-ulysses-influenced-art/.

(Eco 1964; Kershner 1996). Long before academia, however, Modernist literature and art had already reclaimed 'low' culture as part and parcel of their own domains – Joyce being a notable specimen of the trend (Leonard 2004). From a semiotic angle, then, one might argue that Joyce's *Ulysses* (pick any edition, or all) *has the same status* (in terms of the 'high/low' divide) of any cultural product that reproduces it, or one of its emanations, into another language or mode of expression.

To complicate things even further, from a translational point of view, it has been argued that an 'original' product (e.g. a novel) and its intersemiotic 'translations' (e.g., a movie, or a theatrical play, a videogame taken from or inspired by that novel; or even a monument or costumed event celebrating one of its characters or scenes) can be conceptualized as *different versions of the same text*, all of them connected by a relation that is translational in nature, and equally (re)generated by the process of translation. The play, the movie, the videogame, etc., all translate the 'original' novel into a different semiotic mode (and possibly, another language), and therefore *exist thanks to* the novel; but the original also *continues to exist thanks to* those 'derived' works, is perpetuated by them, which makes the original-derivative relationship a circular, rather than linear, one (Bollettieri Bosinelli and Torresi 2016). The novel's 'derivatives', of course, may be translated in their own turn, into different languages or yet other modes of expression, thus adding new loops to the circular lineage.

This does not mean that translating *Ulysses* into Korean *is the same as* bringing Bloomsday to Korea, or that Enrico Terrinoni's and Gianni Celati's respective endeavours of retranslating *Ulysses* into Italian are tantamount to selling cookies bearing a sketch of Joyce's face as souvenirs from Trieste.[3] It does mean, by contrast, that both kinds of operations can be regarded as acts of translation, and that their respective products all partake of a circular "generation or filiation process that gives life to texts[4] that are then left free to roam the world of reception, thus giving new life to the 'original' in its own turn" (Bollettieri Bosinelli and Torresi

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[3] John McCourt through Trieste Joyce School, Facebook post, November 13, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/johntjs2/.
[4] The term should be intended in the semiotic sense, as illustrated in Semenenko 2012: 75-110.

2016: n.p.). They can also be equally productive in terms of the consumption of *Ulysses* – the term 'consumption', however literally fitting for biscuits and Bloomsday convivialities, being used here in the more technical sense that will be illustrated in the following section.

1.2. *Paradigmatic journeys: introduction to Polysystem Theory*

One theoretical framework that can be used to embrace all versions of a given text in an overarching conceptualization of paradigm (re)circulation is Polysystem Theory (henceforthwith PT), as set out by Itamar Even-Zohar in 1990 in the special issue of the journal, *Poetics Today*, entitled *Polysystem Studies*. PT postulates that any semiotic polysystem – e.g. a nation's literature, but also its language, society, science, technology and their superordinate container, culture – is an "open structure", "a system of various systems which intersect with each other and partly overlap, using concurrently different options, yet functioning as one structured whole, whose members are interdependent" (Even-Zohar 1990: 11). In the light of PT, value judgements about what is or is not a 'masterpiece', a classic or canonized work, or a product of 'high' vs 'low' culture, are replaced by the more neutral notion of multiple centres and peripheries of the system. This allows for diachronic differences in the collective reception of any given product, as well as for the synchronically different perceptions of diverse people and groups, hypothetically down to the level of the single individual. What dominates the literary polysystem as a whole is a function of what group dominates the culture of that society at a given time, thus moving the products that are central for them towards the centre of the polysystem.

Partly due to its slightly consumeristic terminology, which tends to highlight market-driven factors of polysystem creation and change, PT seems to get on well with the critical discursive concepts of power, hegemony and voice, on the one hand, and more recent reflections on the impact of social mobility and the publishing market on literary fortune, on the other hand. With a view to finding terms that could be used not only in the field of literature but also with reference to history, science, society, technology, and ultimately culture, Even-Zohar uses *products* instead of 'works', *producers* for 'authors', and most importantly for the

purposes of this papers, *consumers* in lieu of 'readers'.[5] This, however, is not solely a terminological issue, but presupposes that we shift our perspective from the addressees of the text, which is usually the case in reception studies, to a 'naturalistic' observation of what happens in the polysystem at large.

Usually readers *purposefully* set out to read a book, and usually do so from beginning to end and unabridged. Since literature makes up such an important part of society and culture, however, literary fragments and references may also *inadvertently* reach the members of a given group or society. They do so through other media, that may be as unexpected as a line dropped casually in daily discourse, or a commonplace allusion without mention of the original source. From a PT angle, this indirect exposure to the text, however 'unconscious' for those who receive it (to borrow Cheung's word again), still counts as *consumption* and contributes to the circulation of the text itself within the polysystem, if we make the effort of abstracting it from the reader's subjective agency.

Ulysses and James Joyce's figure at large provide striking examples of indirect consumption that ensure the survival and recirculation of the Joycean repertoire even within groups of consumers that would probably never take the initiative to read Joyce's works. While elsewhere (Torresi 2013) I have already examined a few such examples and their implications in terms of centrality/marginality and canonization within the Irish and the Italian polysystems, I now would like to take the discussion to a more international level, analysing a global media product (§2), before going back to the Italian literary polysystem with an update that was not available at the time when I first approached the subject (§3).

2. A Bloomsday in yellow: Joyce in *The Simpsons*

In the episode *In the Name of the Grandfather* (S20E14), the family of the world-famous animated series, *The Simpsons*, fly to Dublin, grandfather Abe's home city. On the taxi ride from the airport, Marge and the children see a series of 'typical' Dublin scenes, among which six people

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[5] The other components of any polysystem are institution, market, and repertoire (Even-Zohar 1990: 31 and following).

in Edwardian costume standing beneath a tree with copies of *Ulysses* in their hands.[6]

While the series authors' visual research – which seems particularly painstaking since the whole scene is only 16 seconds long – shows clearly not only from the details of Edwardian costumes but also because the book covers reproduce those of five different English-language editions of the novel, the verbal commentary of the scene connotes Bloomsday celebrations as dull and boring. Only Lisa guesses what is going on, but her enthusiasm is immediately quenched by her brother:

> LISA: It must be Bloomsday! Every June 16, lovers of James Joyce follow the route traveled by Leopold Bloom in the novel *Ulysses*.
> [...]
> BART: What you're saying is, we've run out of fun things to do.
> LISA: Pretty much, yeah. (*The Simpsons* S20E14, 17'30"–17'46")

The first episode to be aired in Europe before the US, *In the name of the grandfather* was broadcast by Sky1 at 7.30pm on St Patrick's Day, 2009. With over a half million viewers, the premiere totalled a 33% audience share in Ireland, much higher for children – 60.5% – and young people aged 15-24 (40%).[7] Given the expectation around it, it is little wonder that the airing was covered by several Irish newspapers. *The Irish Times*, in particular, emphasized the irreverent treatment of Bloomsday commenting, "When the family visited Dublin and discovered that it was Bloomsday, they groaned and decided that this meant they had run out of fun things to do. *It was perhaps the episode's smartest gag*".[8] The very possibility of its very being perceived a gag – at least in Ireland – is a confirmation of the canonical status of Bloomsday, and metonymically

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[6] A screenshot, taken at around 17'30" of the episode, can be seen at https://simpsonswiki.com/wiki/Bloomsday (last visited February 7, 2019).

[7] "Over 500,000 tune in to Irish Simpsons episode", *The Irish Times*, March 19, 2009, online edition. https://www.irishtimes.com/news/over-500-000-tune-in-to-irish-simpsons-episode-1.837784 (last visited February 7, 2019).

[8] Shane Hegarty, "Simpsons goes heavy on the stereotypes", *The Irish Times*, March 17, 2009, online edition. https://www.irishtimes.com/news/simpsons-goes-heavy-on-the-stereotypes-1.837659 (last visited February 7, 2019). My emphasis.

also of *Ulysses*. Meant for fun as it is, however, the Simpsons' treatment of Bloomsday also invites other reflections.

In postcolonial terms, the episode may be interpreted as a case of the US-centric gaze recolonizing the very cultural Other that it represents through a glass, darkly (or funnily), thus potentially influencing the Other's own self-perception (Bollettieri Bosinelli, Di Giovanni and Torresi 2005: 409). One wonders how that 60.5% of Irish children who saw the episode in 2009, and the many more who might have seen it in later re-runs, have reframed the Bloomsday celebrations that they see every year and maybe used to *be* fun in their eyes (or at least had a chance to be subject to their own non-mediated judgement). Additionally, *The Simpsons* are translated and broadcast throughout the world, therefore the same negatively connoted framing applies all the more to those non-Irish viewers who have never seen a Bloomsday celebration in their lives, but will forever retain the idea that it is *not* a fun thing to do or see. They might even doubt its being real, since the same episode also features yuppie Leprechauns walking the streets of Dublin. In this light, the Joycean community's sustained effort of keeping Bloomsday alive and bringing it to ever new locations appears particularly relevant as a form of resistant counter-discourse.

Leaving all legitimate critical and postcolonial considerations aside for a moment, however, one should bear in mind that in the frame of PT that is the focus here, *The Simpsons* seem to be a rather central media product that reaches vast portions of people, especially among younger age groups, and in all the nations speaking the languages it is translated into. If one visualizes national cultural polysystems as territories, then one may visualize the episode as *carrying* the notion of Bloomsday (very fleetingly, but at any re-run) towards the centre of its multiple audiences' polysystems. It is true that many viewers might not memorize what Bloomsday is about, but in case one needs a reminder after viewing the episode, one may consult the Wikisimpsons open-source paratext. The anonymous compiler wrote (verbatim): "Bloomsday is an annual event held on June 16 where lovers of James Joyce follow the root traveled by Leopold Bloom"; the history behind the entry being that "Bart, Lisa, Maggie, and Marge traveled to Dublin and seen people reading *Ulysses*"[9].

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[9] https://simpsonswiki.com/wiki/Bloomsday (last visited February 7, 2019).

The wiki is for any registered user to amend it – as is the "Bloomsday" Wikipedia page linked to the Wikisimpsons entry.

S20E14 is not the only *Simpsons* episode that contains a Joycean reference. In 1996, a James Joyce lookalike had been briefly shown in S8E18, as one of the characters of the 'Drunken Irish novelists of Spring-field' float at the St Patrick's parade, although no explicit reference to him or his works had been offered, and he appeared only for a handful of seconds.[10] During this cameo, the Joyce impersonator waves his hand from the float until the crowd pelt it with beer bottles. At this, all the 'novelists' obligingly jump down from the float and start a brawl with the crowd. Once again, the very connection between Joyce and recognizably stereotypical traits of the Irish national character bears witness to the author's canonization as one of the 'fathers' of Irish culture.

The Simpsons' allusions to Joyce and Bloomsday make good examples of indirect consumption of literary products – or in the case of Bloomsday, *by*-products, one might say – that would never reach such a broad public. The uninformed among the audience may never be compelled to find out who that bespectacled 'drunken Irish novelist' with a moustache is, but still, Joyce's face (although in yellow) is part of the material world out there, meeting the gaze of more curious consumers as well. It is a kind of contact that is very far from a reader's or Bloomsday participant's intentional, direct experience of Joyce and Joyceana. It carries inevitable biases that fit the re-encoders' purposes – in *The Simpsons'* case, irreverent humour – and run the risk of being accepted uncritically by viewers that lack the time, interest, or resources to delve deeper into that very one cultural reference among the myriad that reach them through the media (Bollettieri Bosinelli, Di Giovanni and Torresi 2005). Still, the Joyce readers, the Bloomsday-goers, the Irish, will recognise the cultural reference in full, and laugh all the more at it. And even those who do not fall into those categories might experience a subliminal feeling of *déjà vu* when they next see a copy of *Ulysses* on a bookshelf, although the author's face, back-translated from yellow animation to black-and-white photographic image, might look slightly odd to them.

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[10] At the time of writing, the scene can be seen at 2'01"-2'07" of https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJsDWaW4fak (last visited February 2, 2019).

In postcolonial and critical terms, then, this kind of representation may be read as a commodification of the Joycean universe for the masses, some sort of slightly blasphemous McDonaldization (Ritzer 1996) of what originally used to be an outcast repertoire (Torresi 2013). In terms of social semiotics and polysystem theory, however, this mainstreaming counts as revitalization, and does not have a much different status than reviving the Ulyssean repertoire in the high-end literary product that is described in the following section.

3. *Odissea minuta*: when Fantozzi met Bloom

In 2016, a prestigious Italian publishing house, Milan-based Baldini and Castoldi, published Daniel Di Schueler's first novel, *Un'Odissea minuta* ("A diminutive Odyssey"). Several of the paratexts, including the title, the back cover and book description on the publisher's website,[11] explicitly mention Joyce's *Ulysses* as an inspiration of the novel. In the text itself, however, the references are more implicit: the date on which the (in)action takes place is June 16, 2004, but this is never openly denounced as the 100th anniversary of the original Bloomsday. The structure of the novel may seem to draw loosely on the "Ithaca" episode of Joyce's *Ulysses*, as it consists of 637 pages of glosses to virtually every single word of an eight-page diary. At the same time, the diary that is being glossed is entirely devoted to the awakening sequence of the fictional author of the diary itself, Alberto Cappagalli, in a reminiscence of "Calypso" or more generally to the awakening sequences of so much Modernist prose. The glossing style, too, appears to mimic stream of consciousness: Cappagalli's prose triggers, in the mind of the gloss compiler (who is his brother-in-law), apparently loose memories and connections with Italian popular culture or Cappagalli's personal history. No explicit mention of *Ulysses*, Joyce, or any other literary reference – not even Homeric poems – can be found within the text of the novel. This is important for the novel's intention of achieving a subtly humoristic effect that is triggered by multiple contrasts.

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[11] http://www.baldinicastoldi.it/libri/unodissea-minuta/ (last visited February 7, 2019).

The most blatant and humoristic contrast may be said to be the dichotomy between Cappagalli's proud mistrust of any cultural or literary activity, and the very fact that his elementary descriptions have been turned into a bulky work fraught with high-sounding literary allusions – a book that can only hope to be approached by people with very different views about reading. Then, of course, there is the sharp contrast between Cappagalli's figure and his intellectually frustrated brother-in-law's egotistic urge to accomplish a writing career, which might be a key to read his not so original replication of turning an ordinary man's ordinary day into an epic(-sounding) novel. Additionally, as is all too clear to an Italian reader, a more immediate reference for the character of Cappagalli – in his apparently self-celebratory diary that reveals his intellectual dearth – is not Bloom, but rather the famous tragicomic character Ugo Fantozzi, the epitome of the underdog, a staple of Italian popular comedy and a champion of the uneducated, uncultured low bourgeoisie of the economic boom of the 1960s.[12]

In terms of intersemiotic translation and Polysystem Theory, then, *Un'Odissea Minuta* seems to revitalize a Modernist literary paradigm by grafting it with the tradition of Italian popular comedy cinema, thus collapsing the centres of the 'high' and 'low' Italian cultural polysystems. This operation, the novel's humoristic intent and irreverent approach to *Ulysses* (might Cappagalli's big-headed brother in law's figure be intended as a caricature of Joyce?), all outline a close resemblance with the two episodes of *The Simpsons* analysed above. The differences between the novel and the animated series vis-à-vis Joycean allusions appear to relate chiefly with the mode of their consumption. Whereas the staggering page count of *Un'Odissea minuta* can only be consumed through a long, concentrated reading that potentially allows the reader to perceive all the subtlety of the implicit references unravelling throughout the text, the format of the animated series is designed for instant witticism and more explicit

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[12] Francesco Permunian, "Il meticoloso risveglio di un Fantozzi di provincia", *L'Indice* XXXIII, no. 7-8 (June/July 2016), online edition, https://www.lindiceonline.com/letture/premio-calvino/daniel-di-schuler-unodissea-minuta/ (last visited February 7, 2019).

references that look rather disconnected from the context.[13] Both, however, become carriers of Joycean repertoires (or fragments thereof) through the means of indirect consumption.

4. Conclusion: many happy returns!

The case studies illustrated above are only two of the more recent reincarnations of *Ulysses* that keep it alive across very different, and diverse, polysystems. *The Simpsons* is an animated TV series made in the USA, aimed at all age groups from teenagers up. Although occasional episodes (such as the Bloomsday one) may be targeted primarily at specific audiences outside the United States, they are circulated and localized in large portions of the planet along with the rest of the series. *The Simpsons* is a globalized media product that has the power of generating or reinforcing stereotypes, (re)introducing them in the very cultures they portray (Bollettieri Bosinelli, Di Giovanni and Torresi 2005). By contrast, *Un'Odissea minuta* is a novel produced by a prestigious publishing house, a local 'high-end' literary product in which influences from *Ulysses* mingle with the echoes of Italian popular comedies of the 1960s and 1970s as well as innumerable allusions to contemporary material and consumerist culture – all of such sources enjoying equal status. Both products, however, perpetuate to some extent the Ulyssean repertoire through very different modes of consumption that accommodate diverse categories of consumers of culture, some of whom would normally not voluntarily approach Joyce's *Ulysses*. From the point of view of polysystem theory, this is not too far from what Joyce did in *Ulysses* itself, mixing and blending repertoires ranging from classical epic literature to early 20th century press and advertising, revealing their collective role in weaving the fabric of the Modernist everyman's everyday, exposing the quintessentially popular nature of 'high' culture, and vice versa (Latham 2001: 777).

Notoriously, with *Ulysses* Joyce revitalized epic paradigms thereto forgotten – not only Homeric poems, but also the Ulster cycle (Tymoczko 1994) – and threw them back into the literary polysystem of his own

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[13] One should bear in mind, however, that 'short text genres' are more complex than longer ones, since they have to rely more heavily on the receiver's encyclopaedia (Eco 2002).

world and time. Such paradigms may now be regarded as canonical, 'high' literature, but were originally intended for public entertainment: they used to be part of the oral repertoires of travelling poet/singers, *aoidoi* or *filid*, transcribed in later years by those who had heard them performed. Early English translations of Irish sagas carefully hid away the mundane, comic, and scatological paradigms that, by contrast, have a prominent role in Joyce's narrative (Tymoczko 1999: 90-121). Who better than Bloom, the everyday everyman, could incarnate the ironical side of Cú Chulainn, the hero who defeated the 'great army' that queen Medb sent to steal a bull in the night-time?

The publication history of *Ulysses* further confirms the intrinsic connection between popular culture and mass media – by the 1920s no longer the domain of travelling singer-poets but mostly of the press. The novel was famously denounced as a licentious book by the American press as soon as it was published in Paris in 1922, which is reported to have contributed to its international early fame (Latham 2007: 27). Its subsequent pirated American editions, which infringed both the ban on the book and copyright law, were marketed in popular, 'low-culture' series specializing in 'scandalous' material. Samuel Roth's *Two Worlds Quarterly* started serializing it in July 1926 (Gertzman 2009). An undated 'adults-only' edition by Collectors Publications, complete with 43 pages of erotica ads, could be mail ordered in the 1960s, well after the lift of the obscenity ban in 1933 (Spoo 2013). Apparently, there was still a fringe market for the titillation that accompanied the ban and Roth's first publications. Thus, *Ulysses* was intentionally repackaged as the pornographic work it had been accused to be back in the 1920s, even after the accusations had been proved unfair and the 1934 official American Random House edition had made it a fully respectable work.

The relationship between Joyce's *Ulysses* and popular culture across the centuries, then, appears a circular *nostos* (coming back), or rather a loop of multiple *nostoi*. Which of the two is the point of departure, and which the arrival, may be difficult to tell for sure. It is well beyond the scope and aim of this paper to establish linear causalities between the two; sometimes, one must content herself with describing the journey itself, from one Homer to another, through one James. As with the original *Nostoi*, it may be just as worthwhile.

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