UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI ROMA TRE

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JOYSPACE
JAMES JOYCE AND SPACE

Edited by
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CONTENTS

1. JOYSPACE JAMES JOYCE AND SPACE

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THE VEHICLE OF THE BROKEN SPACE HIEROPHANY IN 'ITHACA' AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JOYCE'S FINAL ANALYTIC

Abstract: The ingenious Joycean analytics catechism in 'Ithaca' puts forward a "literary montage [that represents] the method of construction of the dialectical image", implementing the dialectical relation that Walter Benjamin foregrounds as obtaining between what-has-been and an immensely scientific and experientially relevant *Jetztzeit/now,* invoked to blast open the continuum of history. When the Ithacan vehicle of the space/cosmic hierophany on which the paper focuses is invoked, in (*U* 17.1039: "heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit") only to be broken and kneaded into, or trodden down in, the overriding scientific denial of the same image 100 lines later "[t]hat it was not a heaventree, not a heavengrot, not a heavenbeast, not a heavenman. That it was a Utopia […]" (*U* 17.1139-40), the book itself rehearses seventeen times the blasting open of the narrative template and cosmos intertextually inherited from the Odyssean myth and James Joyce's unsurpassed character takes a modernist and courageous step forward into the already late modern Jetztzeit constructed all along the episodes where Leopold Bloom grapples with the traps and inescapable constants of his marital life. Readers can grasp the wider relevance, intentions, and significance of the 1922 *Ulysses* in the way the modern Odysseus checks himself in denying what he had asserted earlier. For he rather regretfully condones the high-flying romantic image that had carried him skyward and the hierophanic is replaced by most lucid dialectic. The focus on the assertive axis mundi image, also acknowledged by John Gordon 2004 and the analytic/scientific statistics employed in the author's argument inspired our own claim that 'Ithaca' in fact represents an exception to the predominantly architectural acoustics in *Ulysses* signalled by Valerie Bénéjam and John Bishop 2011. This makes emblematic the significance of Bloom checking himself and withdrawing from the all-encompassing space image of the heaventree by breaking it.

Keywords: Space/cosmic image, Hierophany, Axis mundi, Immensely relevant *Jetztzeit*/now, Dialectical image

In 'Ithaca', *Ulysses* rises star-high into outer space to convey, and subsequently break, a hierophany that revolves around the visual image of "the heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit" (*U* 17.1039)[1]. The context of this image, which covers the period after the two male protagonists' "egress […] into the penumbra of the garden" in 7 Eccles Street, is sobering for a reader running away [into cosmic space?] with the idea that the Dublin Odyssey moves towards a final hierophany, going cosmic right before its end, in a titanic *tour de force* that makes space, time and the cosmos actively correspond to the inspired person's structure of identity that engenders poetic/expressive structures. Marking from above the encounter of Stephen and Mr Bloom, the hierophanic image also sanctions the complementarity of the two characters whose paths[2] crossed repeatedly during the Bloomsday. But the same actually synaesthetic image sighted in the sky, though promising to act as an Eliotean objective correlative that seals the main characters' correspondence and to project it onto an Apollonian cosmic scale, proves momentary in spite of being momentous. It is undone in several stages. Firstly, the parallactic "drift of socalled fixed stars" introduces the relativity of outer space measurements – they are subordinated, as proved by astronomy, to the observation point. Gifford and Seidman explain things in their notes to *U* 8.110 and *U* 17.1052-53: parallactic outer space measurements shattered the illusory fixity of the stars, and, in addition, indicated that the constantly recorded discrepancies (or drift) in tracing star trajectories were due to the varying

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[1] After beginning the present paper, I found out that in chapter 10 of *Joyce and Reality,* John Gordon affirms: "The resplendent [image]….is Yggdrasil, Norse earth-tree said to transfix the heavens at the pole, with [the other] constellations hanging from its branches like ornaments on a Christmas tree" (Gordon 2004: 134). Though the author's final association with the Christmas tree baubles flattens the mythical potential of the image, Yggdrasil is still compatible with the *axis mundi* and may consequently support the hierophanic function which transfixes the poetic mind in the sudden realization of numinous correspondences and harmony, as Mircea Eliade has shown in *Patterns in Comparative Religion.*

[2] Narratologically understood, 'path' designates a character's order of experience, marking what exactly each character knows and in what order s/he grasps things. It is the third term added by Peter Rabinowitz to the story/plot dyad in the Wiley Blackwell *Companion to Narrative* 2005, Chapter 11. The term was used to explain the paronomastic intertextual clues and the detective narrative formula of *Ulysses* via what the present author's title termed *Fabula* and *Sjuzhet.*

places of the measurements: shifting points in space change the parallactic observation angle and the resulting measurement. After such a scientific wet blanket, which "breaks" the visual hierophany, proving that "socalled (a portmanteau for "specious") fixed stars" are – just like people, but on the astronomic space scale – "evermoving wanderers from immeasurably remote eons to infinitely remote futures in comparison with which the years, threescore and ten of allotted human life, formed a parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity" (*U* 17.1053-6), there comes a second moment which deals a blow to the soul-warming, *axis coeli* image sighted from the Earth: Bloom himself bluntly denies his own earlier image of harmonious plenitude, placing the heaventree in a drab, self-deprecating series and concluding: "[t]hat it was not a heaventree, not a heavengrot, not a heavenbeast, not a heavenman. That it was a Utopia […]" (*U* 17.1139-40). In these words, the original romantic image is denounced through the categorical break effected with the participation of the complete traditional hermeneutic stratigraphy.

The all-encompassing, systematic character of the denying cue is in keeping with the analytic template provided by the catechism structure, which displays, on clearly discernible, separate pegs, in order and almost didactically, the underpinnings of the novel's interactions. Pertinent, ingenious, predictable or delectable questions are asked about the characters' meeting, environment and biographies – jointly or in isolation – and they are answered with a tantalizing profusion of scientific detail sought and transcribed with what may appear as tongue in cheek precision. Truth telling, the exhaustive, axiomatic question-answer "method" (or artifice) surreptitiously introduces in the Bloomsday narrative many a page of *bona fide* space-creating or simply visual description that crowns the much-commended Joycean *auditive space* with directly visual, locative prose. It is tempting to find in 'Ithaca' an exception to the predominantly architectural *acoustics* signaled by Valerie Bénéjam in the volume coedited with John Bishop:

> Joyce's use of acoustics stands as a crucial element in his construction of Dublin's spatial environment: reading "Sirens", for instance, we can hear "in our mind's ear" the architectural acoustics of the Ormond, which might even make it possible to visualize the place. Further blurring the so-called ineluctable dichotomy between time and space, thanks to the linguistic, stylistic, and rhetorical achievement of his writing, Joyce has succeeded in

deriving the "ineluctable modality of the [audible]" (our own interior resonance of his text) from the "ineluctable modality of the visible" (or readable), the language resonating from the printed pages of *Ulysses* (*U* 3.1). This may remind us of Marshall McLuhan's distinction between visual space, which stresses linearity and regularity, and values objectivity, and acoustic space, which engages multiple senses and allows its various parts to co-exist simultaneously. According to McLuhan, acoustic space preexisted visual space, as the primary mode of communication of oral cultures was speech, while print culture is the realm of visual space. Revealingly, he saw modernist writers (Eliot and Joyce most prominent among them) as breaking up visual space through their revolutionary treatment of print. (Bénéjam and Bishop 2011: 66)

The catechism as discourse and the cues that are primarily space-related, stress "linearity and regularity, while valuing objectivity", which, according to Marshall McLuhan, should be associated to visual space. Is there not, then, more than the "breaking up of visual space *through [the] revolutionary treatment of the printed page*" here, in 'Ithaca'? Might it not be the male novel's paradoxical slow-motion coda employing genuine visual and space images – before the unstageable rapids of Molly's quick-witted monologue that is all over the place?

Studied closely, the space-creating catechismal answers total 182 lines (including one directly space-related question, "What occupied the position originally occupied by the sideboard?" *U* 17.1333). They are evenly distributed: 91 before the "heaventree of stars hung with humid night-blue fruit" and 91 afterwards, but they surprisingly amount to no more than 7.85 % of the overall 2,331 episode lines. To these should be added the visual but not three-dimensional clusters, not always directly related to perception acts: *U* 17.1435-45; 1480-89, the contemplation of celestial constellations in 1590-91; the inventory of the drawers' content in 1775-1822 and 1853-67; the description of Bloom's departed father on the bed in the Ennis hotel at 1889-92, before the perception of Molly's "female personal wearing apparel" in 2092-2100 and 2102-07.This count was meant to verify the impression that the seventeenth episode… made more room for (visual) space than did others, but a similar conclusion was reached by John Gordon in the tenth chapter of his book committed to proving the realism of Joyce's observation preceding the writing proper, which, however, bears so many traces of this precision as to justify the

subtitle of Gordon's study: *The Empirical Strikes Back*. In his chapter that makes light of both the letter and the spirit of the penultimate *Ulysses* episode, "'Ithaca' as the Letter C"[3], Gordon refers to the way this text makes a difference "in what Stephen would call 'the modality of the visible'" (Gordon 2004: 212). Following the Ithacan "book of diagrams, mainly Euclidian, progressing from one to the other, as with the turning of pages", and tending "to fall into set patterns, composed out of geometry's limited store of elemental shapes" – Gordon decides that the elemental shapes "tend to break down into just one of those shapes, that of the arc" (Gordon 2004: 212 for all the excerpts in this sentence). Thanks to a critical intertextuality with Hugh Kenner 1980 that discerns "'Odysseus' power manifested in his great bow'" behind the 'Ithaca' reminiscence about the schoolboy Bloom, who, when urinating, "had been capable of attaining the point of greatest altitude against the whole concurrent strength of the institution", Gordon charts "the figurative landscape of 'Ithaca' [as] a field of arcs and composites of arcs" from the "macrocosmic Northern Crown (*U* 17.2018-19) to [the] microcosmic 'protruding part of the great toenail' (*U* 17.1489)" (Gordon 2004: 213). The reference to macro- and micro-cosmic, rather than macro- and micro-*scopic* arcs that dominate the text of Joyce's seventeenth chapter, keeps the "heavenscape" and the image of cosmic hierophany somehow in abeyance, as does Kenner's momentary presupposition extended to a momentous one by Gordon – who justifies the minute and profuse cognition deployed in 'Ithaca' as the manifestation of unequalled powers that keep tense the bow-arcs of *Ulyssean* knowledge. At the end of the novel, the mana-like life-force that sustained it throughout, is allowed to fill the novel's denouement stage – with empirically palpable, and of course also more solid visual-*cum*-directly

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[3] Gordon makes his case starting from "the record number of question marks (sickle-shaped, bent arc above dot), and, most of all, the letter C [in 'Ithaca']. C appears more frequently than in any other episode of *Ulysses*, at a rate of incidence way off the curve"(Gordon 2004: 212). And the endnote he appended here includes the word-processor count of both capitalized and lower case C's for all the eighteen episodes - compared to which 'Ithaca' takes the lead, with 4,278 letter C occurrences out of the 151,637 characters, and with 1 occurrence every 35.45 characters, whereas in all the other episodes there are occurrences of 1 C in maximum every 69.89 characters (in 'Penelope'), and minimum 47.37 (in 'Eumaeus') (Gordon 2004: 291).

scientific data. Just as Odysseus' prowess and power that by far exceed the average acquire a centre-stage position after doing away with the suitors.

Though the Joycean Homeric mimesis just mentioned is decisive and causes the numerous novelistic intricacies of the fictional Bloomsday history to cohere under the immense power of the unifying Odyssean prowess/arc/bow, yet one must not forget the recurrence of breaks and iterations that cut short, interrupt, deflect, or deflate continuities. What is one to make of breaks such as the one that blurs and disperses the momentary cosmic hierophany, which corresponds to, and anticipates, the brevity of the converging male characters' paths, with Stephen's disappearance into *nowhere* after the handshake, leaving Bloom-*Noman* to himself? What do such cooperating *nihilities* point to? Is it not the case that Joyce is a revisionist who constructs and handles a dialectical image to evade the pressure of unifying forces and to break up all the constraining intentional/narrative flow? Can one comment with Benjaminian (rather than Bénéjamian?), concepts, viz. the dialectical image, to discern "the constellation of extremes" that configure a fresh-fangled Idea? The ingenious Joycean analytics catechism puts forward a "literary montage [that represents] the method of construction of the dialectical image" (Benjamin's *Selected Works* 4, 402 quoted in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). It feels as if Joyce's genius were instructed by Walter Benjamin in the guise of a genie to proffer the final heroic montage of details in 'Ithaca' and implement in this way the dialectical relation of what-has-been to an immensely scientific and experientially relevant *Jetztzeit/now*[4]. Like Odysseus skilfully bending his bow as only he himself could, the Irish writer expertly wields "the interruptive force" which allows understanding how "dialectical (you can read catechismal!) images impart experience as a consequence of the instantaneous temporality". The momentary flashes of the catechism's questions and answers have the power of the dialectical image deploying "the discharge of an explosive force – the explosive force of now-time, blasting open the continuum of

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[4] In 'Ithaca' the precise data lifted from Thom's Official directory are enhanced and merged with the most precise and up to datetheories and measurements yielded by sciences like astronomy, mathematics, geography, physics and chemistry, meteorology, medicine, philology, music, bibliotechonomy, gastronomy, history, archaeology, religion – not to mention the profuse and precise information geography and recent history of Dublin and its surroundings, etc.

history". When, as in Benjamin's *Arcades* project "what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation", [Hegelian] "dialectics [is] brought to a standstill" (Benjamin 2002: 462/N2a, 3), and the ghosts of earlier Joycean isolated epiphanies emerge in a flash from the space-gap of the broken hierophany.

All this brings a reader back to the last spectacular breech of spatiality in the final (if not definitive) question of 'Ithaca': "Where?" (*U* 17.2331). Though a fully space-related interrogative pronoun, as first learners of English as a Foreign Language well know, at the end of 'Ithaca' it functions as a valedictory question forbidding mourning; it makes the silence following it, with or without the much disputed double, treble, moth- or fly-mark full stop, ponderously resonate by way of a conclusion to the typographical symphony of the text. And we are borne from epiphany, to hierophany, to the immensely dialectical Joycean *Jetztzeit* in the Irish writer's departing, yet yearly returning, low-backed car[5]…

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[5] Reminiscing *U* 12. 687-88, a passage that returns to the lyrics of the song which inspired Joyce given in full by Gifford and Seidman 388.

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