JOYCE, "IN THE BUGINNING ..."

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I attempt to trace a brief outline of Joyce's complex personality and commitments. The paper begins by providing a global vision of Joyce's personality in the context of Modernism and of his genius as an independent artist, through the eyes of relevant critics. Next, young Joyce is presented exhibiting the rebellious nature he displayed during his school years. There will also be an explanation of the main features of his motto, as well as his conception of epiphany, the importance of the words and the symbolic fragmentation of the "etym" in his last work.

I

Ian A. Gordon connects Joyce's work with the romantic prose of the end of the eighteenth century, directed to manipulate the feelings of the reader and characterized "by the continuous use of syntactical and metaphoric devices to excite an affective response" (152). This was practised by writers such as Lamb and De Quincey and, at the end of the nineteenth century, by Pater, Ruskin, and Hardy. There is no doubt that, although not defined as such, a certain romantic atmosphere[1] could be perceived that *fin de siècle* in which the individual was the measure of everything, once any reference to God and nature had been cancelled. The English romantic trend from W. Blake to the pre-Raphaelites clearly influences the appearance of modernism, when a loss of credibility is patent with regard to the idea of a common world for everybody and when there is no agreement on what is significant in the experience nor, therefore, on what the novelist has to select.[2]

Towards 1902, the Victorian period collapsed under figures such as Freud, Zola, Havelock Ellis, Elinor Glyn, O. Wilde, Joyce, and D.H. Lawrence (Adams, *AfterJoyce* xi). At the dawn of the new period, great masters such as Hardy, James, and Conrad were present and, although partially overshadowed by the startling experiments of modernist writers (Albert 434), all of them contribute decidedly to the appearance of the new novel. When traditional ways of expression are invalidated,[3] the artist seeks for new areas of experience like Pound's orientalism, Yeats's esoteric mysticism and Joyce's steady search for obscure mythologies (Litz 53). Each writer defines his own range of action, his themes and his narrative techniques. The 20's and 30's represent, principally, a period of experimentation and in all the literary genres important transformations take place: Pound defines his concept of *Image*,[4] Joyce and Woolf develop the *stream of consciousness* technique[5] and D.H. Lawrence explores thoroughly the most basic human relations. Great avant-garde writers such as Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Rilke, Yeats, Kafka, Mann, Proust, Valéry, Gide, Conrad, Lawrence, Woolf, and Faulkner will exert a great influence upon the postmodernism of the 50's (Butler 8).[6]

According to H. Ehrlich, Joyce lived several stages of modernism: a) In Ireland, at the turn of the century, sharing two opposing forces, one to establish the national identity and the original forms of expression, and the other seeking to break the old moulds; b) in Trieste, before the First World War, the modernism of Freud, Mahler, Strauss and Schoenberg; c) in Zurich, during the war, Dada defying every kind of authority; d) in Paris, after the war, when surrealism, exploitation of dreams, transfiguration and metamorphosis were on fashion (Pearce 371). Nevertheless, inside of modernism, Joyce stands as a different personality. H. Kenner, for example, tells us that his interest for painting was virtually zero, that he preferred *The Bohemian Girl* to Stravinsky's *Le Sacre* and that he did not even read modern literature ("Notes" 41). But Joyce's complex personality and highly creative mind shatter the English novel from his first works. This fact surprises more than one sharp-eyed reader. Thus, A. Burgess writes in *Re Joyce* that after reading any story of *Dubliners* one feels frustrated as there is no plot or ending. He also says that "Joyce isn't playing fair; he's a confidence trickster; he pretends to be in the tradition but he's really walked out of it" (19).[7] From his first writings, his independence and originality stand out against many of his contemporaries.[8] Just as R.M. Adams affirms: "Pound and Joyce stood apart, as pariah-priests of the imagination... What was unusual about Joyce and Pound was that, in the tradition of Blake and Baudelaire, they were both prophets against the culture that produced them... Their independence of popular values and vulgar standards made up an act of defiance in which only a few have tried to emulate them" (*AfterJoyce* 198). His "splendid extravagance" is described to us by R. Ellmann at the end of Joyce's biography with these words:

> The surface of the life Joyce lived seemed always erratic and provisional. But its central meaning was directed as consciously as his work. The ingenuity with which he wrote his books was the same with which he forced the world to read them; ... his disregard for bourgeois thrift and convention was the splendid extravagance which enabled him in literature to make an intractable wilderness into a new state. In whatever he did, his two profound interests –his family and his writings– kept their place. These passions never dwindled. The intensity of the first gave his work its sympathy and humanity; the intensity of the second raised his life to dignity and high dedication. (756)

Referring to his influence in the modern novel, J.I.M. Stewart writes: "He is the great artificer in English prose in the age of Proust and Gide and Mann. And he attempts more radical innovation than any of these" (424). Pound, after the publication of *Dubliners*' stories, said, in Ellmann's words, that "they marked a return of style into English prose and the introduction of a new subject-matter into Irish literature" (364). The same author insists on considering him "the leader of European prose" (599). William Faulkner regards himself as a debtor to *Dubliners* and *A Portrait in The Sound and the Fury* (Ellmann 308). Joyce is inseparably associated to modern prose as Eliot is to poetry and Picasso to painting (Ellmann 2). T.S. Eliot, who had said that Joyce was the great master of the English language after Milton (Wilson "The Dream" 228), confessed to Virginia Woolf that Joyce, with *Ulysses*, "killed the 19th century" (Trilling 145).[9] Some time later he would also break away from modernism with *Finnegans Wake*.

His gift and mastery was not always understood by his Irish compatriots, for whom Joyce was an obscene writer and probably mad.[10] For the English he was an eccentric, as well as "Irish".[11] Much of this criticism came from people who had first worshipped him. Thus, L. Edel, who had met him in 1931 after being invited to the reading of the French translation of Joyce's "Anna Livia Plurabelle",[12] proclaimed openly his admiration for the artist. Nevertheless, later in life, he regarded Joyce as a selfish and solitary genius obsessed by the idea of being "an injustice collector". What is more, after saying that *Finnegans Wake* was "both a work of art and an act of revenge" (476), L. Edel brings forth the confidences of Jolas about Joyce's alcoholic habits, accusing him of parasitism and questioning his genius (482).[13]

II

Joyce, as a rebellious artist, displays an out-of-the-ordinary artistic code. These words of *A Portrait* announce the birth of the artist:

> - Hello, Stephanos!
> - Here comes The Dedalus! (152)

They are premonitory to those of *Finnegans Wake*: "Here Comes Everybody" with which Harold Childers Earwicker introduces himself at the time that he represents humankind. Stephen will be called Dedalus. At this moment of his life, young Stephen-Joyce takes the firm decision of devoting himself entirely to literature. As he himself affirms, he wants to become "a priest of eternal imagination, transmutting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life" (*A Portrait* 200). The beginning of Joyce's consecration to Art is indicated with these words written at the end of *A Portrait*:

> 26 April: ... Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race. (228)

He would still have a very long and hard way from that first promise to the moment when he carried to unpredictable goals the motto of his first years –"Silence, exile, and cunning"– with which he renounced his country, his family and his church:[14]

> I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it calls itself my home, my fatherland or my church; and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use –silence, exile, and cunning. (222)[15]

Joyce assumes a voluntary exile in the Continent from 1904. He lives in Paris, Trieste, Rome and Zurich, and, although he changes his address very often, he maintains his creation powers in an extraordinary way. H. Cixous observes that his life seems to be that of the wandering Jew, being the protagonist of his own escape to Egypt but without a promised land. After turning a deaf ear to the world, the only thing that exists for him is "that which he is going to create", the only place is the space of his books and the only time that of his work in progress (17). Joyce willingly adopts the attitude of the alienated artist, out of every convention and social rule: "The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiword, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails!" (194-95). This voluntary exile paves the way to silence: During the Irish revolution, neither Joyce nor any of the members of his family took part in the conflict. He was never politically committed and he does not even attempt to explain his political opinions in his works, although we can find plenty of references to the political life of his country and of his period: there are quotations of Whitman, Lenin and Marx and references to democracy, the Gestapo and Nazism (Levin 129).[16] Hugh Kenner, as sharp as ever, observed: "No writer was more autobiographical than Joyce, but no writer ever revealed, in the telling of his story, less of himself. He keeps silent, he never judges, he never comments" (*Joyce's Voices* 24).[17] When Shaw and Yeats were about to found the Academy of Irish Letters, Joyce declined their invitation politely. They tried to persuade him on the basis that all the writers "who are likely to form our Council are students of your work", but he refused again (Ellmann 672).

This exile and silence laid the foundations of his cunning: the quest for his own ways of living and of writing. In effect, from his school years, words had special relevance for him. This little poem composed in his first days at school seems a good example:

> The ivy whines upon the wall
> And whines and twines upon the wall
> The ivy whines upon the wall
> The yellow ivy on the wall
> Ivy, ivy up the wall.

The poem is commented by Joyce in this way: "Did any one ever hear such drivel? Lord Almighty! Who ever heard of ivy whining on a wall? Yellow ivy: that was all right. Yellow ivory also. And what about ivory ivy? The word now shone in his brain, clearer and brighter than any ivory sawn from the mottled tusks of elephants. 'Ivory,ivoire,avorio,ebur'" (*A Portrait* 162). Many of the words that im-

pressed a young student of the Jesuit School at Clongowes belong to the world of sensuality: "kiss", "suck", "smug", "wine" (Cixous 369) and "foetus" provoke the appearance of a feeling of guilt (Cixous 411). There were "big words" which caused him much unhappiness, as it is the case of "Politics" (S. Joyce 53). As H. Cixous tells us, it is through Parnell, hero of the Irish revolution, that young Stephen discovers that the word is also mortal, in the same way as it is the person who carries it: when he was alive, the mere name of Parnell was powerful but, later on, it was just a name with no power. The word becomes only a sound. When Parnell was alive, Stephen could identify himself with the hero; now that he was dead, the word was reduced to nothing (278-81). All names are false because Victoria, Simon, and Stephen, when they are juxtaposed, have no real meaning; they cannot form a whole or another name, they are simply objects and sounds, noises (Joyce, *A Portrait* 85). Through the experience of the power of the Word and its ineluctable disappearance, Joyce came to the conclusion that the relation between word and reality, between sound and sense, depended on the listener as much as on the speaker. God and the artist are, therefore, at the mercy of the listener and they are only the interpretation given by the latter. Within this context, it is easier to understand that in "Proteus", Stephen re-established a world which began with his own word (Cixous 686). Later on, in *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce would try to reduce the distance between the word and its impression on the senses, he would try to create "a full kind of writing", a language full of meaning and, at the same time, understood in an instant. Language is reality and the forms of language –the words– "mimic reality, without commenting upon it or passing any judgement" (Cixous 688).

Joyce's conception of words is tightly attached to his concept of *Epiphany*. His aesthetic principles are condensed in three words, "wholeness, harmony and radiance" (Joyce *A Portrait* 192), which is his own translation of those of Saint Thomas of Aquinas: "ad pulchritudinem tria requiruntur, integritas, consonantia, claritas".[18] "Integritas" is redefined as a way of isolating the object from all that is not the object. "Consonantia", or formal "harmony", leads to "claritas", that Stephen eventually replaces with the term "quidditas", as the essence, or the soul of the object, the radiance of the image that manifests itself in the epiphany (Joyce *Stephen Hero* 190). The first epiphanies that Joyce collected were small dialogues, trivial phrases, and verbal tics which he subsequently used in his works (Cixous 610). Epiphanies were then "sudden spiritual manifestations" (Joyce *Stephen Hero* 188). As the time passed, the epiphany changed from revelation or recognition to a simple act of possession, since the subconscious could produce images without words. In fact, the discovery of non-verbal zones implied the absolute negation of epiphanies as the "claritas" of an object or emotion (Cixous 610). This is described by Stanislaus with these words: "My brother's purpose was different and his angle of vision new. The revelation and importance of the subconscious had caught his interest. The epiphanies became more frequently subjective and included dreams which he considered in some way revelatory" (Cixous 617).[19] As it became impossible for him to believe in the autonomy of a reality independent from himself, the epiphany turned into not a discovery of the world but "the moment of gathering and peace prior to the creative act" (Cixous 619).[20] A word may produce a chain reaction in which sensations and words with an intense symbolic meaning all rush together. This fact, as an epiphany, reveals the magic or symbolic power of words such as "paralysis" (repeated in *Dubliners* so many times), "gnomon", and "simony" (Cixous 378).[21] All Joyce's works are "a way through to perfec-

tion", a firm quest –through the Word– for a reality not given immediately by the senses. This Word is interpreted by R. Boyle as the Trinitarian Word (109), and for B. Benstock it is the essential miracle in Joyce's works: "For Joyce the word was the essential miracle: two millenia of the Church were founded on a pun ('petrus'), an historic political court case was won on a misspelling (hesitency)" (16).[22] Joyce's obstinacy towards artistic perfection creates an unbroken leading line from his first works, as it may be appraised through some testimonies: Robert Sage, one of the first critics of "Work in Progress" and one of Joyce's close friends, commented that "most readers have failed to realize that Joyce's writings, from *Dubliners* to the present book, form an indivisible whole" (Sage 149). Twenty years later, T.S. Eliot added that it is "the whole journey, not any one stage of it, that assures him his place among the great" (Litz 121). R.M. Adams earnestly proclaimed: "It is not just the blazing noon of hindsight which enables us to say assuredly that *Dubliners* implied the *Portrait*, the *Portrait* led necessarily to *Ulysses*, and *Ulysses* could only have been followed by the *Wake*... The last book –surely not by accident– repeats with symphonic amplitude the situation and basic themes of the very first short story" (*AfterJoyce* 30-31).[23] W. Litz went even further affirming that Joyce, in a sense, "wrote only one book", endowing "the Dublin of his youth with universal significance" (121). Joyce really left his home town at twenty-two but, virtually, never kept away from Dublin: his characters, his education, the atmosphere of his works, and the sources of his symbolic realism are from Dublin: "For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities in the world. In the particular is contained the universal" (Peake 348).[24]

III

Joyce, the independent and rebellious modernist writer, devotes himself to literature with the only arms he allows himself to use: "silence, exile, and cunning". His motto led him to a vital compromise with language and, in particular, with the word. This word is, at first, a vehicle of sensuality, consciousness of guilt, producer of unhappiness, and mortal. At a later stage, all the bonds with reality broken, words lose their real meaning and are then transformed into the reality they tried to imitate. The words are eventually the expression of deep and mysterious feelings, a direct consequence of the artist's epiphanies. The words written in Joyce's works reveal the primal elements of "the essential miracle", while they express the gestation of the artist. At the end of the road, he had forged a new language in the shape of a verbal galaxy: "In a sense, while *Stephen Hero* deals with aesthetic gestation, *Portrait* is the gestation of a soul venturing among words, while in *Ulysses* and after the sentence itself becomes the scene of experience. Finally, in *Finnegans Wake,* the words themselves contain the meaning carried by an ordinary sentence, while the linear construction of the latter is burst asunder and replaced by a kind of verbal galaxy" (Cixous 606). The words in *Finnegans Wake* represent "an insolence", in opinion of Susan Sontag (Walton 170), because the patternings of history or conscience are not followed any more. The order is imposed by the artist and not by the ideology of the culture, the history or the conscience. Joyce turns into the god who has created the only existing reality and the words turn into "signs of a white field", that the reader

must decipher (Cixous 689).[25] At this point, the lineal structure of language is broken and with it, the fragmentation of the physiognomy of the word itself, an "abnihilization of the etym by the grisning of the grosning of the grinder of the grunder" (Joyce *Finnegans Wake* 353).[26] The artist, abnihilated in the same way after living his vital experience, invites the readers of his works to share his experiences of destruction-creation. It could well be possible that, in the end, we recognize our own existence as an inmense epiphany that is revealed to us through the reading and re-reading of Joyce's works. We do not know whether what is behind Joyce's mythology really exists, or is it the void –"In the buginning is the woid" (*Finnegans Wake* 378)? We do not know whether it is the death of human being, lost in a maze of words and symbols, or could it be, perhaps, our own innocence reconquered after a long journey through the dark night of the soul? Every reader needs draw their own conclusions.

Notes

1. H. Kenner, in *The Pound Era* comments, for example, on "the romantic quest for purity, the one Pound's generation inherited" (109); on *The Waste Land* says that, in it: "A romantic quest for the primitive, for early man giving tongue to impassioned communion with thunder and falling water, had united with romantic Orientalism (Xanadú) to draw the philological imagination back through Sanskrit to Indo-European roots" (110).
2. See *Nueva Enciclopedia Larousse*, "Modernismo". See D. Daiches, *A Critical History*, 1152-78; also: 1161-64. By the same author, *The Novel and the Modern World*, Ch. 1.
3. Observe R.M. Adams's concise description of the central values of the traditional English novel: "Mimetic solidity, stylistic transparency, consecutive narration, psychological insight, and moral authority within a middle-class framework" (*AfterJoyce*, 198).
4. *Image* is the aesthetic concept that illuminates Joyce's methods in some of his works. The *Imagist* movement in poetry was announced by E. Pound in 1913, formulating some aesthetic principles which influenced the development of modern literature.
5. There is a wide variety of terms that critics use interchangeably to describe this technique: 'monologue intérieur', internal monologue, stream of consciousness, stream of thought, soliloquy, and silent soliloquy. See the suggestive study by E.R. Steinberg, *The Stream of Consciousness*, mainly, Ch. 12.
6. C. Butler also establishes the characteristics of the period in chapter 1.
7. Also, H. Kenner claims that Joyce had arrived at new means of expression "by old-fashioned routes". See H. Kenner "Notes", 41.
8. H.G. Wells, for example, chose the easy way, with his didactic easy-reading novels. The typical novelists were then H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett: see E. Wilson, *Axel's*, 155-89. Easy-reading novelists go on existing nowadays. As Lukács said in 1965: ... "literature and art really can be manipulated and ... content and form can be manufactured to order according to the needs of the day" (G. Lukács, 22).
9. See also R.M. Adams's interpretation of the first chapter of *Ulysses*: R.M. Adams, "The Bent Knife", 169.
10. R. Ellmann observes that "few authors, considered geniuses in life have been at the same time the targets of so much reproach ... even by those who had praised him before" (1-2).
11. R. Ellmann makes this little comment on "Irish": " ... an epithet which, considering the variety of the literature produced by Irishmen during the last seventy years, sounds dangerously 'English'" (2).
12. "Anna Livia Plurabelle" would be later Ch. 8 of *Finnegans Wake*.
13. See also: 484, 486.

14. This triple oath is called "Wagnerian" by some authors. A full discussion about the relationships between Wagnerian leitmotifs and Joyce's narrative could be read in V. Mahaffey. The seed of rebellion was sown from the moment he faced up to the dean of studies of the Jesuit school for the Irish word "tundish" (See *A Portrait,* 168-73). Later he would write in his diary: "13 April: That tundish has been on my mind for a long time. I looked it up and find it English and good old blunt English too. Damn the dean of studies and his funnel! What did he come here for to teach us his own language or to learn it from us? Damn him one way or the other! (*A Portrait* 227)."
15. R. Ellmann (365) comments that "Silence, exile, and cunning" is the translation of Balzac's "Fuge...Late...Tace".
16. See also J. Segall.
17. See also: 25.
18. A. Burgess translates "integrity, symmetry and radiance" (185).
19. More about epiphany: R.A. Day, 357. About his aesthetic theory: F.C. McGrath explains in full the sources of Stephen's aesthetic principles. Further developments: C.D.K. Yee. E.R. Steinberg compares Stephen's aesthetic theories and Impressionism in Ch. 13, "The Sources of the Stream".
20. See also: 617-22.
21. See also: 406, 413-15.
22. See more comments in B. Benstock, xv-xvi. About Stephen's love for words: 169.
23. A similar remark is made by C. MacCabe, 31. It is also interesting the application of the physiological term "anastomosis" to the last chapter of *Finnegans Wake* and, extensively, to all Joyce's works. M. Norris points out that "Using the device of *anastomosis*, Joyce attempts, in the last chapter of his last work, to bridge life and death, between male and female" (M. Norris, "The Last Chapter of *Finnegans Wake*", 11).
24. Fuller development of this line: R. Ellmann, 717; or Jolas's account, in R.H. Deming, 384.
25. See also the opinion of H. Levin, in M. Beja, ed., 86. And R. Ellmann: "In his earlier books Joyce forced modern literature to accept new styles, new subject matter, new kinds of plot and characterization. In his last book he forced it to accept a new area of being and a new language" (730).
26. M. Norris, from a psychoanalytical view, speaks about the presence of the father –Adam– in "etym" or "etymon" and affirms that when Joyce refers to the abnihilisation of the etym, he is really referring to the destruction of the father: See her *The Decentered*, 124.

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