

Joyce and Eternity: From Dante to Vico

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Abstract

This paper establishes multiple ties between Joyce's work and a distinguished series of poets, novelists, and thinkers, among them Manzoni, Leopardi, Dante, William Hogart, John Donne, Yeats, Fielding, Homer, Richardson, Sterne, Blake, and Vico. The paper concludes by seeing Joyce most clearly articulate his understanding of eternity in the poem "*Ecce Puer*."

The theme I have chosen for the present paper might seem quite ambitious, suggesting a comparison with the excellent essay "Dante . . . Bruno. Vico. . . Joyce" written by Samuel Beckett when Joyce's last work was known only as *Work in Progress*. For this reason, I would like to approach the theme gradually.¹

Firstly, I believe Joyce's *Ulysses* must be considered the main and most representative work in the twentieth-century novel. In the area of Italian literature, the novel, which dominates the whole of the nineteenth century, finds a summary expression in *I Promessi Sposi* by Manzoni. I do not intend to deal with both novels, although both had a very considerable influence on the contemporary writers in their fields, especially as regards narrative structure. Both Manzoni and Joyce wrote poetry before their experience in narrative. In Joyce's case, his lyrics included in *Chamber Music* clearly show that facet of his genius, as do his "Epiphanies," written when he was twenty years old; the "Epiphanies" are prose poems of first impressions suggested through different places and casual meetings. Manzoni's poetry is quite different: not only dramas in verse, but meditation on the human condition facing the divine, written not by a twenty year old, but by a man of more than thirty years of age. For example, the ode *Il Cinque Maggio* is not only memorable to be listened to, as one remembers from primary school, but is also, as Sapegno says, a meditation on the human condition with respect to eternity. The poetic language here is not used in order to create

images and suggestions that take shape in the figurative field as well. Let us look at the ode's conclusion:

'I Dio che atterra e suscita,
che affanna e che consola,
sulla deserta coltrice
accanto a lui posò.

It is difficult to visualize the meaning of these lines, which indicate that the divine image closes on the "deserta coltrice". The ode is based on its own "singability", like the operas of the mid nineteenth century, but without musical help in order to rescue the grotesque aspects. The most effective visual suggestion is perhaps that contained in the eleventh stanza:

Come sul capo al naufrago
L'onda s'avvolge e pesa,
L'onda su cui del misero,
Alta pur dianzi e tesa,
Scorrea la vista a scernere
Prode remote invan;
Tal su quell'alma il cumulo
Delle memorie scese!

To Manzoni the dying person is involved and submerged in the stream of his past.

Two years before Manzoni wrote his *Il Cinque Maggio*, the Italian poet was able to find a more direct and totally different language to express his own sense of eternity:

. . . e mi sovviene l'eterno,
e le morte stagioni e la presente
e viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa
immensità s'annega il pensier mio:
e il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.

In a second poem, Giacomo Leopardi's *L'Infinito* is a meditation on life and eternity, and without the presence of the divine the poem reaches an intensity of beauty in its last lines. What most impresses is the image of a castaway, of leaving oneself to nothingness as an *exitus mortis* both positive and expected: it is a return to origins and to the prenatal condition. The contrast with the 'consigliere fraudolento' Ulysses in the twenty sixth canto of Dante's *Comedia* seems clear to me. Ulysses goes

to the unknown with his friends “per seguir virtute e conoscenza”: when they arrive and see the distant landing place and thus the unknown land, in other words near the conquest of knowledge, we read the following:

Noi ci allegrammo, e tosto tornò in pianto, chè de la nova terra
un turbo nacque e percosse del legno il primo canto.

Tre volte il fe' girar con tutte l'acque; a la quarta levar la poppa
in suso a la prora ire in giù, com' altrui piacque, infin che 'l
mar fu sovra noi richiuso.

The main image is of course the vortex, an image reflected by the whole structure of Dante's poem, structured by a continuous mechanic circularity through the circles and the turns of Hell, the frames of Purgatory and the nine concentric heavens of Paradise. The destination of Dante's journey is supreme heaven, the manifestation of divinity, created as a whirl of light, as in the last canto of the *Paradiso*:

Ne la profonda e chiara sussistenza
de l'alto lume parvermi tre giri
di tre colori e d'una contenenza;

e l'un da l'altro come iri da iri
parea rifleso, e l'terzo pareo foco
che quinci e quindi igualmente si spiri.

O luce eterna che sola in te sidi, sola t'intendi, e da te intelletta
e intendente te ami e arridi!

Quella circolazion che si' concetta pareva in te come lume
refleso, da li occhi miei alquanto circunspatta, dentro da se',
del suo colore stesso, mi parve pinta de la nostra effige per che
'i mio viso in lei tutto era messo.

Qual è 'l geometra che tutto s'affige per misurar lo cerchio, e
non ritrova, pensando, quel principio ond' elli indige, tal era io
a quella vista nova: veder voleva come si convenne l'imgo al
cerchio e come vi s'indova; ma non eran da ciò le proprie
penne: se non che la mia mente fu percossa da un fulgore in
che sua voglia venne.

A l'alta fantasia qui mancò possa; ma già volgeva il mio disio e
'i velle, si' come rota ch'igualmente è mossa, l'amor che move
il sole e l'altre stelle.

In the last of his illustrations of the *Divina Commedia*, John Flaxman, an exponent of the Michelangelo revival in England at the end of the eighteenth century, mainly represented by William Blake and Heinrich Fussli, places the human figure at the centre of the three circles of light. What interests the artist is not the representation of God characterized by Jesus, but rather the centrality of man in the flaming whirl of light that encircles him in continuous movement. It is as if the human figure could represent the vortex of a bright conical spiral.

On the aesthetic plane, the inspiring idea was that suggested by William Hogarth in his *Analysis of Beauty*, in which the great English writer took into account the *Trattato dell'arte della Pittura* by Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, already translated into English by 1598. The part of the work in which Hogarth mainly bases his theory of beauty is the following:

It's reported then that Michael Angelo upon a time gave this observation to the Painter *Marcus de Scienna* his scholler; *that he should always make a figure Pyramidall, Serpentlike, and multilied by one two and three.* in which precept (in my opinion) the whole mysterie of the arte consisteth. For the greatest grace and life that a picture can haue, is, that it express *Motion*: which the Painters call the *spirite* of a picture: nowe there is no forme so fitte to express this *motion*, as that of the flame of fire, which according to *Aristotele* and the others Philosophers, is an element most active of all others: because the forme of the flame thereof is most apt for motion. for it hath a *Conus* or sharpe pointe wherewith it seemeth to divide the aire, that so it may ascende to his proper sphere. So that a picture having this forme will be most beautiful.

Perhaps John Donne was thinking about this when in 1611, in his *Anatomie of the World*, he thought about the condition of the contemporary world in these words:

We think that the heavens enjoy their Spherickall
 Their round proportion embracing all.
 But yet their various and perplexed course,
 Observ'd in divers ages doth enforce
 Men to fide out so many Eccentrique parts,
 Such divers downe-right lines, such overthwarts,
 As disproportion that pure form. . . .
 . . . nor can the Sunne

Perfit a Circle, or maintaine his way
one inche direct; but where he rose today
He comes no more, but with a cousening line,
steales by that point, and so is Serpentine.

It could be said that John Donne still moves in Dante's vision dominated by the principle of perfect circularity and refuses for this reason the deformation that the principle experiences during the following centuries. But the innovative character of his *Songs and Sonnets* is found in the way that he has transferred in the traditional poetic forms a type of sensibility for which the universe, the Planets' movement, the spirit of man, his thoughts, his poetry were not represented by a perfect circle, but by that curved line that was, in the figurative field, the main representative character of Mannerism, of which Michelangelo may be considered the founder.

As regards their style, both John Donne and his contemporary William Shakespeare can be considered the founders of Mannerism in English literature, an expressive form that will find a new balance with the evolution to Baroque, for example in Shakespeare's last romances and in Donne's last sermons. Rather than the great meditation about death and eternity, the sermon of 25 February 1631 in Whitehall, in front of the King and his court one month before his death, is in fact a monument of Baroque architecture.

If it is true that the Baroque is a recovery of the values of order and formal symmetry, although enriched by the taste for an inner movement inherited from Mannerism, the alternation between periods governed by a sense of balance and others in which the game of the correspondence between the parts appears insignificant continues during the following ages, through Rococo and the rationalism of the Enlightenment, Neoclassicism, and Romanticism, until the latter part of the nineteenth century, with the rejection of traditional values—what was called the death of God.

When I was young, I called the exponents in the fields of literature and art of the last decades of the nineteenth century until the middle of twentieth century 'tightrope walkers', especially the exponents of Aestheticism and Symbolism. I do not repent; how else can we define with others words two writers from an apparently marginal or colonial tradition, the Irish, but that in the European culture had a position more important than England and had a revolutionary charge that, especially in the field of narrative, still survives.

I allude to the great poet William Butler Yeats and to James Joyce,

announced in the title of this paper, of which some might suspect I had lost track. I am going to start with Joyce, even if Yeats will have an important part too in this paper. Joyce permits me to link again directly to the attribute of tightrope walkers in their work, art and work: he is the supreme tightrope walker, ready to move on the thread of words, conscious that every wrong choice will make the precarious structure built fall down.

The first of ten children in a strictly Catholic family, Joyce studied in Jesuit schools, where he studied the Italian language, Dante and D'Annunzio. It is important that, as Jacqueline Risset observed, the Italian Joyce's works preserve echoes Dante's language. As the wonderful central chapter of his autobiographical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* says, the influence of the Jesuit culture led him close to taking sacred orders. His reaction of rejection was stronger when he understood that his vocation was false. For the greatness of his cultural interests, he considered Dublin's atmosphere to be very provincial and bigoted; he considered Ireland the slave of two masters: the British Empire and the Catholic Church of Rome. The 10th chapter of his *Ulysses* will be built on a graphical representation of the double slavery of his Dublin: in the northern part of the city walks the Jesuit Conmee, while in the southern part we find the carriages of the British Viceroy. According to Linati's scheme, Joyce calls this episode "labirinto mobile fra due sponde". The escape from this condition of intellectual paralysis results in the voluntary exile from Ireland and in his *non serviam*, which allows him to replace the idea of divinity with the idea of an anthropocentric universe in which the only creative impulse is art. Now we have to remember once again the famous passage of *A Portrait*:

The artist, like the God of Creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.

We need not be deceived by the idea that the Dublin Odyssey, created by Joyce with such great care that only at the end of the work will he be able to gaze at it with the detachment necessary to the artist (altogether different from the indifference of God), has been written, episode by episode, with the sequence of the events in Homer's poem. *Ulysses* was born like a labyrinth, that is, with research to which it is essential to find an exit that gives it a precise formal order.

We must remember that two centuries before 1922, one of the founders of the modern English novel, Henry Fielding, designed his first

work, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, and of his Friend Mr Abraham Adams* (1742), as a transposition, in contemporary England, of travels and adventures of a new bourgeois Ulysses, creating what he defined as a “comic epic poem in prose”. The writer’s intention was moralistic and satiric at first: he wanted to unmask the hypocrisy of a female character, Pamela Andrews, heroine of the epistolary novel by Samuel Richardson, which had great success and unprecedented diffusion, not only in England but in the whole of Europe. Fielding has shown the respectability of his society in an epistolary pamphlet, now known as *Shamela*, published in 1741 under the pen name of Conny Keyber, of which we can in part quote the long original title: “An Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews. In which, the many notorious FALSEHOODS and MISPRESENTATIONS of a Book called PAMELA, are exposed and refuted; and all the matchless ARTS of that young Politician, set in a true and just Light”.

At this point Fielding decided to give more prominence to his controversy by developing around it a *comic romance*, for which a model was ready that he even declared on the new book’s title page, naming it “Write in Imitation of The *Manner* of Cervantes, Author of *Don Quixote*”. So he will narrate in that mood Pamela’s brother’s events, so young and innocent to take the name of the pure biblical Joseph. This kind of narrative, satire in the form of a novel as they called it in classic epic, greatly spread in European culture, especially French culture, in which Fielding was interested. Among this kind of book the better known was undoubtedly the book written by the Archbishop of Cambrai, Monsieur Fenelon, to educate and edify his young and lazy pupil, the Duke of Burgundy, son of Louis XIV. With the title *Les aventures de Tlemaque* Fenelon tells how Ulysses’ son redeems himself of the youthful intemperance thanks to the knowledge that he acquires by visiting, with Mentore, the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean basin during the journey to meet his father. The great popularity of this adaptation of Homer’s Telemachia existed because, when it was illegally published in 1699, it was considered a key novel about the behaviour of the young prince (causing the author’s leaving from the French court for this reason).

Fenelon’s aim was essentially didactic, and also writers like Cervantes and Fielding wanted to suggest moral principles with a criticism of the contemporary society through the transposition of ideals or events of the historical or literary past in their time. Fielding transforms the moralistic reading of the *Odyssey* by Fenelon in the way of *Don Quixote* by Cervantes. In this odyssey through the streets, taverns,

inns, aristocracy's homes in his England, the young Joseph Andrews is not Ulysses, but Telemachus, accompanied in his pilgrimage by a new Mentore, the presence of whom is underlined, in the same novel's title, in the person of the good minister Abraham Adams. So we can say that Fenelon's novel is a point to start and Fielding's novel is the first place to update the events of the *Odyssey*. Lady Booby, the temptress, is, in the biblical parallel, Putifarre's wife, but in Homer's work she is first the nymph Calypso and then the witch Circe. As a heroic comic poem, even if in prose, it has a happy end: Joseph will find his true father, who was a landlord, Mr Wilson, from whom he was stolen by gypsies when he was a baby. For this reason, he is not the brother of Richardson's Pamela: so it is left as the starting point of the novel that presented it as a simple literary satire of a previous narrative form.

The eighteenth century in England was an age of fundamental experimentation in the narrative field, which had as its greatest representatives, after Richardson, who still followed the epistolary novel's custom, the real innovators, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett and Lawrence Sterne. I had the opportunity to say that the great innovator of the twentieth century novel, James Joyce, directly followed them after a century and a half. In this picture Fielding's contribution is registered: freeing himself from the narrative customs of his contemporaries, Fielding gave Joyce a model that is present in the reading of *Ulysses*, especially for the play on the ludicrous element that let him constantly move on the thread of irony, and also on concepts deeply rooted in his art.

For this reason, we can recognize a direct line of transmission in the modern key readings of Homer's poem from the seventeenth century, then through Fenelon, Fielding. and finally to Joyce's text, noticing certain interdependences among them. The variety of planning in each case is evident when we consider how the characters that derive from the *Odyssey* are presented. It is curious to verify how in Fenelon and Fielding's versions the protagonist, the character of Ulysses-Odysseus, is practically absent. In *Les Aventures de Telemaque* the narration stops after Telemachus ends his search for his father, while in Fielding's novel it is difficult to recognize the Greek hero in the dull character of Mr Wilson, who tells his story in the last chapters, proving him to be the real Joseph / Telemachus. Stephen Dedalus is an autobiographical character, recovered from Joyce's previous novel, who is the point to start the new work. Near Telemachus in the two first novels is the very important figure of the more mature character who accompanies him on his adventures: clearly Fenelon sees in the character he called Mentore a

projection of himself as preceptor of the young French Prince. Probably the very figure of Mentore near Telemachus suggested to Fielding that he put beside Joseph Andrews as adventure fellow and adviser a character who is among his best creations, the good parson Abraham Adams (as we can see from the choice of names, Fielding complicates the parallel to Homer with his allusion to the Old Testament).

In the case of Joyce the complexity of references is greater. The function of the good adviser of Mentore or of Parson Adams is entrusted to the real protagonist of the novel, Leopold Bloom, who is its Ulysses. Bloom is not only the reincarnation of Homer's hero who walks along the streets of Dublin as if they were the Mediterranean seas and islands; he is also an autobiographical character like Stephen: Stephen is Joyce at a little more than twenty years of age, Bloom is Joyce at 39 years of age, completing his great novel. The system of references contrived in the book essentially plays on contrasts, so, if Fielding made the adviser of Telemachus / Joseph a parson of pure Christian faith, Joyce presents Bloom as a non-practising Jew who moves in very Catholic Dublin with an inexhaustible spirit of curiosity, of observation and of search; therefore he is also a reincarnation of the Wandering Jew.

The main theme of the book remains the search for the father, but that is transposed on another level because the father, who Stephen is searching for, is not the natural one (who does make appearances in the book), but rather a paternal figure that will take his place. Another search corresponds to this, Bloom's, who having lost his only natural son, wants to find a son-like figure. Behind these characters, among whom appears the female figure of Molly Bloom to complete the human comedy's representation, we can discover a close set of references to another reading level. In the same way that in Fielding's case the references were to the Old Testament, in *Ulysses* we can see, as in *filigree*, a duplex neotestamentary plan: the Sacred Family that sees Bloom as a putative father, Stephen as the son and Molly, according to Joyce's typical play of contrasts, as the unfaithful wife instead of the Virgin; the references to the Trinity are even more bold, for the figure of Molly, overbearingly sensual, all flesh and natural fertility, replaces the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

For these reasons we understand why on 21 September 1920 (before having completed the last two episodes of *Ulysses*' final draft) Joyce wrote to Carlo Linati:

Vista l'enorme mole e la più enorme complessità del mio maledettissimo romanzaccio credo sia meglio mandargliene

una specie di sunto-chiave-scheletro-schema (per uso puramente domestico).

It is more probable that Joyce, compiling his “sunto-chiave-scheletro-schema”, had in mind those graphical schemes or synoptic tables that accompany every modern edition of the *Divina Commedia*, listing the damned, purgative or holy spirits according to their nature. Joyce’s care to structural elements—the architecture—in his work is given prominence by passages of the letter to Linati; for example:

È una specie di enciclopedia, anche. La mia intenzione è di rendere il mito sub specie temporis nostris; no doltanto ma permettendo che ogni avventura (cioè, ogni ora, ogni organo, ogni arte connessi e immedesimati nello schema somatico del tutto) condizionasse anzi creasse la propria tecnica.

But what leaves us perplexed is a sentence that synthesizes the novel’s sense and content in few words:

È l’epopea di due razze (Israele-Irlanda) e nel medesimo tempo il ciclo del corpo umano ed anche la storiella di una giornata (vita).

This affirmation suggests a linear narrative form that during a day consumes and exhausts the whole cycle of human life, losing itself in the dark of night, but the final “Yes” of Molly Bloom is not only the acceptance of earthly existence as the only wealth of man, but also a promise of community during the time of this condition. The vital cycle does not close itself but opens itself continuously. The conclusive notation of Linati’s scheme reads:

NOTTE ALTA	ALBA
Ulysses (Bloom)	Telemachus (Stephen)

This indication introduces a cyclical vision of man’s life and of History that is of eternity. When Joyce wrote *Ulysses*, he only knew by hearsay *La Scienza Nuova* of Giambattista Vico, the importance of which we will see later. But we can find an anticipation in the second episode of the novel, when Stephen Dedalus names the address of one of his pupils: Vico Road, Dalkey. Vico Road is a winding panoramic road in the middle coast in the residential area in Dalkey, in the south of Dublin. In

the following episode, “Proteus”, Stephen, walking along the Sandymouth beach, thinks about eternity, taking the cue from the prophetic books by visionary poet William Blake. Echoing a Blake passage about the access to eternity through the overcoming of space and time, the ironic reflection of Stephen is explained, who walking with closed eyes to the two dimensions of existence, asks himself: “Am I walking into eternity along Sandymount strand?”

Passing from the visions of William Blake to those of another visionary poet, a contemporary of Joyce, William Butler Yeats, we can find a more elaborate conception of eternity that, even if based on the cyclical movement of human history, does not correspond to Vico’s courses and recourses. The imposing cosmological treatise by Yeats, *A Vision*, it is said, by the author himself, derived from esoteric experiences, from his concourse of spiritualism’s places in the latter nineteenth century and the early twenty-first. The graphic imagination of Yeats made him represent his vision of history as two cones, better conical spirals, the one with the apex in the centre of the base of the other, along which the course of centuries developed. Yeats postulates cycles of 2000 years each to complete the spiral movement: the end of each bimillenary cycle marked the start of the following, with an inverse movement to the just finished. Some of Yeats’ greatest poems speak about the announcing of these cycles, beginning with the wonderful sonnet about Leda and the swan that marks the pagan millennium’s beginning, until the last cycle’s end, which is the Christian Age that he saw next, at the end of the twentieth century, preannounced in his poem “The Second Coming”:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
 The darkness drops again; but now I know
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep
 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,

Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

This disquieting prophetic vision calls to mind without doubt the images created by William Blake (Yeats provided, with E. J. Ellis, a monumental edition of Blake's works in 1893); but the greater debt, even if perhaps partially unconscious, for the imaginative and graphical conceptions of his 'system' represented in the *gyres*, the two conical spirals interlaced with one another, is with Dante Alighieri; the presence of *Divina Commedia* in Yeats' poetry is pervasive: one of the most important works in the last Yeats, "Cuchulain Comforted", written the same year of his death, is inspired by Dante in metre, tercet, substance: it is a reading in terms of Celtic mythology of the Christian mythology of the *Commedia*.

How can we not believe that, behind the figure of the two conical spirals, there is the reminiscence of those graphical representations of Dante's canticles mentioned before, the invented cone of the *Inferno* and the one with the apex turned to the heights of *Purgatory*?

The descending spiral is prefigured in the vortex that, "com'altrui piacque", swallows up Dante's Ulysses and his friends, as happens to Gordon Pym of Poe (surely not forgetful of that *Commedia* passage); the crew disappears when they were already near the Purgatory mount that rises to the sky. Dante's sailors go into the place of no hope, in the eternity of damnation; but Poe's ones go to a white gigantic appearance as a man: perhaps it is that apparition that to Dante "parve pinta de la nostra effige" in the dazzling light of the Empire? For this reason, if Ulysses' friends as dammed cannot know the mystery of eternity, for Gordon Pym and his friends that mystery will be the extreme challenge.

Yeats' double spiral can be connected with the words echoing from the holy throne repeated in the first and in the last chapter in the book of Revelation (1.8, 1.11, 22.13): "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending". Every beginning is an end and every end is a beginning: this is the sense of his *gyres*, with the one's vortex in the centre of the other's base, to suggest the image of a sandglass, symbol, thanks to his continuous spiral's movement, not of time but of eternity. The eternity is not static, but a cyclical movement in constant becoming, always new and infinite.

Joyce himself, when he writes his "storiella di una giornata (vita)", does not conceive it as a course from a point A to a point B, from Alpha to Omega, perhaps serpentine like Vico Road in Dalkey, but, as is indicated by the conclusive words of Linati's scheme, as a part of a cycle that recurs every day from dawn to night to new dawn. Joyce reads *La*

Scienza Nuova by Giambattista Vico only after the completion of *Ulysses*; it is just on the escort of the cyclic vision of three ages of the world which recur in the recourse, that Joyce embarks on his last adventure. On the first page of *Finnegans Wake* the name of the road in Dalkey assumes another meaning, becoming “a commodius vicus of recirculation”, and the first sentence is the continuation of the last sentences of the book: every end is the beginning, according to Revelation.

In fact, *Finnegans Wake* was born not like a continuous narration, from Alpha to Omega, but as in an open order of fragments to distribute in a structural organic scheme, that Joyce gave *a posteriori*, like the *Ulysses* scheme by Linati when the novel was ended. But in the case of his *Work in Progress*, the initial care of Joyce was on the linguistic plan: to create a universe of polysemic language, in which all words were a wonderful vocable, drawing from forty different languages incorporated in a speech led according to the rhythms and articulations of the Anglo-Irish speaking of Dubliners. What we call “finneganese” today is not an indiscriminate mixture of every kind of language, but the recovery of deep ethnic roots of language with their exact local connotation. In fact, Joyce himself wanted to translate a wonderful passage of *Finnegans Wake* in his second language, used with his children, that is, Italian. The result of the application to Italian of the linguistic transfiguration’s exercise appeared with the double title “Anna Livia Plurabella” and “I fiumi scorrono” in two numbers of the magazine *Prospettive* in 1940, a few months before his death. In his Italian version, *Anna Livia Plurabella* is an autonomous work concluded, and for this reason it is considered the last complete work by James Joyce after the publication of *Finnegans Wake* in May of 1939.

The first drafts of several passages of the new book he was working on suggested that in that period Joyce does not set himself to write an organic work, but only several short stories as counterpart to his *Dubliners*, transposed into a new polysemic language. The seven passages, written in 1923, were presented as an incomplete collection with the title *Finn’s Hotel*, but this green attempt to add another work to Joyce’s canon was stopped soon by his grandson, Stephen Joyce.

Although Joyce continued during many years until 1938 publishing separately in the Parisian *Transition* and in other avant-garde magazines, large passages of the work in progress as self-sufficient narrations (well-known and notable is *Anna Livia Plurabella*), in 1927 he considered his new work as an open verbal fresco that held and represented his conception of existence and the universe, of time and eternity. Since he

was at the University, the thinker that most touched him (also a heretic who suffered torture for his ideas) was Giordano Bruno, who the young Irish rebel identified himself with, and he chose as his *nom de guerre*, for his non-realized future career as an actor, Gordon Brown, that he considered an Anglo-Irish translation of the name of the philosopher of Nola. From Bruno, Joyce especially took the theory on the coincidence of opposites that can be read as the coincidence of beginning with end, expressed in the Yeatsian vision of the image of two cones or spirals opposite one to another.

But Joyce found a more solid and articulate ideological and structural principle in the study of *La Scienza Nuova* by Giambattista Vico. So he decided to structure his new book according to the cyclical vision that sees History as following the three ages of Vico's cycle, along with the recourse. In doing this he institutes a play of correspondences. To Vico's cycle—Gods, Heroes, Humans, Recourse—corresponds, in the historical plan, the sequence of origins, of ascent, of fall and of rebirth; in the human plan, the four periods of birth, marriage, death and rebirth. In the spatial dimension the correspondence is rather obvious: North, South, East, West, but more important is the temporal dimension, in which the past, the present and the future cycle finds its completion in eternity.

In a second moment, the vastness of the material accumulated for his book suggested to Joyce that he complicate further Vico's scheme. The first book included eight chapters, while the second and the third had four already and the fourth book, the recourse, was a single chapter. Practically on the original quadripartite framework another was placed through the first book's halving, dividing chapters I-IV from V-VIII, and thus resulted a sequence of four sections with the same size, plus a fifth shorter conclusion. Joyce identifies in this graphic plan a new disposition with the quincunx, that is, the five points disposed four at the ends of the arms of an imaginary cross, and the fifth in their crossing point; in the same way the cyclical conception of the work will seem as a circle divided in four parts, with a pivot in the centre on which the whole structure rotates, and this pivot corresponds to the last book/chapter of the work. The variants with respect to the correspondences' play already indicated are not many: in the human plan the first part of the initial book corresponds to the masculine protagonist, the second to the feminine one, the second book to children, the third to mortal life and the fourth (recourse) to rebirth; so also in the other correspondences to the four well-known elements, we add as fifth the wheel's pivot, the central point of quincunx, the body reaching a delicate balance, in the spatial ambit the four cardinal points rotate around the centre of the rose. Every arrival is a

new departure. This is eternity for Joyce.

But just in the years in which he was very committed to raising the gigantic verbal architecture of his “Work in Progress”, according to the elaborate structure inspired by the cyclical vision of Vico, when John Joyce his father died and his grandson Stephen was born, after about a month, in January 1932, Joyce composed a short lyric, “*Ecce Puer*”, in which the intensity of feeling expresses itself in an extreme simplicity of language. These verses, in their essentiality, synthesize Joyce’s thought on life, time and eternity:

Of the dark past
A child is born;
With joy and grief
My heart is torn.

Calm in his cradle
The living lies.
May love and mercy
Unclose his eyes!

Young life is breathed
On the glass;
The world that was not
Comes to pass.

A child is sleeping:
An old man gone.
O, father forsaken,
Forgive your son!

In Joyce’s anthropocentric universe, this is eternity: the unceasing following of human generations.

Notes

¹ This essay was translated from the Italian by Anna Raiola and Jefferey Simons.