

From Iconophagy to Anthropophagy: Cannibalising Images in *Ulysses*

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Abstract

In a figurative sense, this paper expands anthropophagy, or cannibalism, to the world of advertising and to the complex network of images that populate *Ulysses*. The paper specifically examines how human beings daily “devour” images in a process of iconophagy as represented by the Plumtree ad that Bloom appropriates and eventually dismantles. Then, in an opposite process, the paper shows how we, as consumers, are “devoured” by those images that enter our minds in order to remain inside us. How will those images finally be expelled? The process inverts the strategy of the modernist text as an “isolated fetish,” its fierce resistance to being appropriated and, in consequence, to being digested.

In old cannibalistic practices, the eaters shared their enemy’s blood and flesh in a profane ritual that promoted unity and communion among the members of the tribe. But the natives not only ate flesh and organs, they also did away with their victim’s prestigious image as a charismatic leader or as a fearless warrior. In a similar way, in our present time, the unconditional admirers of a musical group or of an international celebrity collect their pictures in order to cannibalise their images. Our present environment, thus, offers images of famous people, but also of any aspect of reality, as images proliferate in such a way as to constitute true banquets in our daily routines. They, in fact, share our lives, our streets and motorways, our offices and bedrooms, and furthermore, we have granted them the status of meals, dreams and of live beings. Many of them belong to our commodity culture which, as Garry Leonard commented, “is the new religion; department stores . . . are the new cathedrals, and advertisements are *The New (Improved!) Testament*” (576; emphasis in the original).¹

Our view of anthropophagy, or cannibalism, in this way expands, in a figurative sense, to the world of advertising and to its complex network of images. Those images that keep appearing in ads and in the media also feed on previous images. They, in fact, cannibalise other images in a process that may be called “pure iconophagy.” This term has its origin in the Greek words *eikon*, which means “likeness, image, similitude,” and *phago-*, a lexical root meaning “eating.”² On the other hand, when images are “eaten” by humans, that is by consumers, this process is called “impure iconophagy.”³ This appropriation becomes a third modality of anthropophagy which involves the consuming, or the colonising, of human minds by constellations and clusters of images.⁴ However, the primary purpose of icons is to attract our attention, and once our attention has been caught, to appropriate our will, making us frantically desire their train of images or their manufactured products. They create an addiction to more and more images, transforming consumers into constant and true “eaters” of images. But those images that inevitably invade our lives are not spontaneous creations, but rather conscious constructs created in labs, marketing offices and studios. Being aware of this fact is the first step we need to take in order to defend ourselves against such images and, thus, to be able to dismantle them.

Precisely what I want to demonstrate in this essay is how some of the constituents of *Ulysses*’ new beauty and strangeness emerge from Joyce’s unexpected and creative use of advertising. Firstly, it is my intention to examine several aspects of *Ulysses* where images and ads are perceived and consumed, and also how several characters’ minds, mainly Bloom’s, are “devoured” by them. Finally, I will also examine the way in which the language and techniques of advertising will be dismantled and reassembled in very creative ways.

Etymologically, the verb *to consume* also means in a passive sense to be totally taken, to be devoured. Therefore, in the process of consuming images, we lend our eyes and bodies to images that feed on our own mental energy. In fact, by frantically consuming them we can even be expropriated from ourselves, in particular, by offering them too much attention and by faithfully following their instructions with our behaviour. *Ulysses* will, thus, appear as a dubious and affluent battlefield of consuming and devouring images. Throughout the 16th of June, Leopold Bloom will have to deal with advertisements such as “House of Keys,” “Plumtree Potted Meat,” religious slogans such as “Elijah is coming,” or the scarlet triangle of the Bass Ale bottle in “Oxen of the Sun.” The constant flux of images will enter Bloom’s mind, displacing some of his most intimate images and thoughts. But also, like Odysseus’

fight against Proteus, Bloom will transform ads and slogans into a creative flux.

The influence of advertising language and images permeate *Ulysses* very powerfully. According to Tim O'Neill, at least twelve of the business advertisements that were published in *The Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac* in 1903 appeared in *Ulysses*.⁵ The advertising imagery impinges on Bloom's ideal country home in "Ithaca" (*U* 712-714).⁶ The mantelpiece clock, for example, is defined by its advertisement: "guaranteed timekeeper with cathedral chime" (*U* 713). As Ellen C. Jones comments about Bloom's ideal house: "The detailed enumeration of objects in Bloom's fantasy acts as a prospectus, and, as such, the entire detailed fantasy constitutes an advertisement."⁷ The advertising language even reaches the realms of religion and death. In "Lotus-Eaters," for example, when Bloom sees people gathered in church receiving the Holy Communion, he admires the persuasive marketing technique that the Catholic Church employs to make them acquire the commodity of the host. And he thinks: "Good idea the Latin. Stupefies them first" (*U* 80). In "Hades," advertising verbal techniques abound to announce, for example, a gentleman's corpse as splendid manure for gardens (*U* 108). But in the same way that advertising slogans infect our daily language, they also unnoticeably catch our attention and remain inside us. For example, while Bloom is contemplating Gerty's legs, he thinks: "A dream of wellfilled hose" (*U* 365). He, then, wonders where he got that verbal image from, only to realise that it was one of the advertising slogans of the mutoscope, a peeping show machine used for men to see pictures of slightly-dressed ladies. Thus, advertising images, phrases and slogans become well-ingrained in our minds, sharing our mental constellations with other images and concepts and also giving way to the "anthropophagy" process of the images that daily devour us.

Devouring advertisements' images

The Plumtree Potted Meat ad will now be examined as a clear illustration of how a whole advertisement is metamorphosed (devoured and expelled) throughout *Ulysses*. A few known comments might inevitably emerge during our examination process, but the new perspective used and several new features added will make our enterprise worthwhile. Throughout the novel, readers will witness, as if in a biology laboratory, how this particular ad, like a living organism, is born, grows and proliferates, until it is finally killed by Joyce's ruthless stylistic hands. The potted meat

verbal ad, like most images, in order to be acceptable and believable for consumers, has to be, first of all, not only very appealing to our senses, but also perfectly made. In the case of verbal icons, they may exhibit alliteration, rhyme, musicality and enough charm (eloquence and sharp wit may also be needed) not only to attract our attention, but to remain inside our minds, like the advertisement that Bloom reads:

*What is home without
Plumtree's Potted Meat?
Incomplete.
With it an abode of bliss. (U 75)*

As a verbal artefact, the advertisement generously fulfils all the requirements that, according to P. Bruthiaux, advertising language should possess.⁸ It prefers, for example, generic terms (home, bliss, abode) to specific ones; it avoids polysyllabic words, and when they appear, like the word “incomplete,” they may assume a negative role. Advertising syntax favours parataxis and hardly ever uses subordination or complex sentences. Finally, in its phonological aspects, consonant-vowel combinations abound, while consonant clusters are practically non-existent. In fact, the ad has some of the qualities of memorable, which does not mean good, poetry. Semantically, even visually, the ad expresses a dilemma (the alternate alliterations in “m” and “t” seem also to reinforce this idea) about a possible garden of Eden. In the centre of the advertisement a tree grows; a very appropriate image, as advertising imagery promotes a re-encounter with the original object: in this case, with a mythical tree in a mythical garden, both promising heavenly happiness. But it is not the biblical tree of Good and Evil, but the Plumtree, a modern brand name, that offers, not a tempting fruit, but a product that we all have to buy. It is announced in a God-like, all knowing voice that threatens the consumer: if His manufactured product is not bought and eaten, our home will suffer tremendous deficiencies.

It must be remembered that from the moment the potted meat advertisement is born from the paper Bloom reads in “Lotus-Eaters” it is branded by the foundational themes of “missed sex” and “death.” It is born when, partly due to M’Coy’s conversation about Dignam’s death, and above all to a passing tram, Bloom misses the opportunity of some vicarious sex when he tries to catch a glimpse of a lady’s stockings (*U* 75). The birth of the former ad also takes place when Bloom is talking about his wife’s concerts, which subtly hints at the approaching adultery.

The ad slogan, well-ingrained from that scene onwards in Bloom's mind, will reappear in "Lestrygonians," reinforcing and extending the earlier-stated ideas. In this episode, and in a proper Hamletian pun, to eat and to be eaten are made equal. Life and death are simply two different sides of the cycle of life: "His ideas for ads like Plumtree's potted under obituaries, cold (meat) department" (U 154). The ad's previous connotations of erotism and food are now duplicated as it is not only juxtaposed with news of Dignam's death, but placed under the obituaries in the paper. Firstly, by being allocated next to the obituaries section, it might ironically hint at the idea that, only after death, when the deceased is already cold, potted meat, can an abode of bliss, as in eternal life, be obtained. It also hints at sexual death, as Bloom and Molly have not had a proper sexual life since Rudy's death. But the advertisement that keeps on living in Bloom's mind will finally be transformed. The reified verbal icon is changed by Bloom's creative mind and intermingled with other textual issues, both of which begin its dismantling:

Potted meats. What is home without Plumtree's potted meat? Incomplete. What a stupid ad! Under the obituary notices they stuck it. All up a plumtree. Dignam's potted meat. Cannibals would with lemon and rice. White missionary too salty. Like pickled pork. Expect the chief consumes the parts of honour. Ought to be tough from exercise. His wives in a row to watch the effect. *There was a right royal old nigger. Who ate or something the somethings of the reverend Mr MacTrigger.* With it an abode of bliss. (U 171)

A key feature in the whole undoing process is the distance assumed between the ad and the narrative voice. When the faithful of a church, or consumers in a commodity culture, distance themselves enough from theological commands and from received advertisements, respectively, they are able to approach the given instructions in a critical and creative way. Bloom, on his part, reaches that distance, thanks to his tremendous sense of humour and to the playful mood with which he approaches the serious ad. And in doing so, he multiplies, in an imaginative way, the ad's connections, rendering it into pieces in many unexpected ways. The first step Bloom takes in dismantling it is by recognising its most intrinsic flaw: "What a stupid ad!" Then, he acknowledges its contextual fault: "Under the obituary notices they stuck it," that is, it is allocated to the last place it should appear. Bloom, in a third step, takes the ad out of its advertising function and incorporates it into his imaginary world. Bloom invites an imaginary audience to climb up a humorous (the brand name's)

tree: “All up a plumtree.” Finally, if the ad was previously deeply associated with death, it is also now associated with sexual pleasure, as an old tribe chief, after eating a missionary, will give his wives the time of their lives. This allusion means a transient, temporary physical pleasure. The personal, more restricted topics of the ad are expanded, further on, in a wider frame of references in “Lestrygonians,” as it extends to nationalistic and religious issues. On the one hand, the Plumtree ad is related to Exodus through the fleeing of Sodom and Gomorrah (“Pillar of salt” [*U* 154]); and “potted,” also suggesting “pot” and “flesh pot,” acquires Biblical resonances in relation to the flesh pots of Exodus 16:3 and the returning home.⁹ To restore a home may also mean to restore a nation (Ireland) that is incomplete. With Home Rule it will be an abode of bliss. As Mark Osteen remarks: “The Plumtree ad draws on and manipulates Irish political anxiety and nostalgia through its pledge to reconsecrate the domestic order. . . . The Plumtree’s ad replaces political and communal bliss with private satisfaction; indeed, its picture of an insular and self-sufficient ‘home’ actually encourages consumers to forget about politics and community and concentrate on rehabilitating the domicile.”¹⁰ The creative use of the Plumtree ad, thus, ruthlessly unmasked it. It shows, firstly, how advertising appropriates the language and imagery of religion. Then, it discloses the way that advertising, in a subconscious way, transforms political ideals into mere consumer practices. Yet, the most important thing of all is that it proves how false advertising language and imagery can be, and how empty and inefficient its transcendental promises are. After the potted meat has been consumed, people would realise that they have not achieved the much-promised abode of bliss, but they would simply feel their stomachs full. The ad, and the product it represents, will leave a gap, only to be filled by acquiring the next commodity.

However, the exclusively physical, marital bliss that the Plumtree ad promised in “Lestrygonians” will be inverted, further on, in “Circe,” as potted meat will be related to marital unhappiness. When Mrs Breen, whose home is an abode of madness and mortification, asks Bloom for a little present, he eagerly answers: “Kosher. A snack for supper. The home without potted meat is incomplete” (*U* 446). “Kosher”, referring to food regarded as ceremonially clean by Jewish law, tints Mrs Breen’s and Mr. Bloom’s marital sufferings with overtones of purification. Therefore, the Plumtree ad has, by now, acquired two layers of references. On the one hand, it is related to a kind of cannibalism, and to an adulterous meal, that leads to an increase of sexual power. On the other hand, for Mrs Breen, and especially for Mr Bloom, the ad seems to dramatically signal their

exclusion from a truly content home. Also, it points to Bloom's masculine anxieties and to the idea that he is not the head of a house of bliss, but more like the servant of a house of absence and non-completion. His son, Rudy, is missing forever, and Milly (physically) and Molly (mentally) are temporarily absent. The aspect of homelessness in the ad was enhanced in "Lestrygonians" by being related to the Hely's sandwichmen. Like Plumtree, Hely's advertising potential is almost zero, as the men, without names, bodies or faces, seem also to voice an absence. With all their purposeless wanderings, they seem to stage a dull carnival of homelessness in Dublin streets, so contrary, on the other hand, to the homely bliss promised by Plumtree. An ad, then, that also voices sexual exclusion through its association with Molly's affair. But, in a proper exorcism that seems to hint, indirectly, at overcoming the adultery, Bloom's creative mind will sublimate the ad, multiplying it into different verbal figments and artefacts, in order to regain personal power. Thus, if cannibals and lovers extract their strengths from hot or cold meat, Bloom extracts some of his verbal power from the linguistic quarry of the ad. That was probably one of the reasons why Joyce made Bloom an ad canvasser. The ad's verbal multiplication seems to be, partly, the shield and the weapon that this vulnerable Odysseus must acquire.

But, if Bloom carries in his mind an advertising slogan that he ruthlessly tears and multiplies, Blazes Boylan, for his part, carries "the real thing"; namely the meat that the lover courteously carries to Eccles Street in order to be warmly shared and deeply enjoyed in bed. Yet, as soon as the real thing appears, the multiple names and verbal references of the advertisement disappear. A sharp contrast is produced, then, between the proliferation of the advertisement's words and references in Bloom's creative mind when the real product is missing, and the lack of any verbal term when the real product finally appears. In "Wandering Rocks," Boylan, who has already bought a bottle of Port and the potted meat jar, takes them to the place where he is going to buy fruit. He asks the assistant to place the real fruit on the top of the manufactured meat: "The blonde girl in Thornton's bedded the wicker basket with rustling fibre. . . . She bestowed fat pears neatly, head by tail, and among them ripe shamefaced peaches" (*U* 227). What is noticeable about the scene is the total absence of names ascribed to the Plumtree Potted Meat, which is only vaguely alluded to, at the beginning of the passage, as simply the "jar".

Thus, when the product gains substance and is semantically reinforced, the names given to it disappear. The advert that created a verbal simulation and linguistic halls of multifarious mirrors, the ad that

has been repeating itself in Bloom's mind all day long, suddenly faces the real thing in "Ithaca." When Leopold Bloom arrives home late at night, among the things he finds that on the kitchen dresser shelves are "four conglomerated black olives in oleaginous paper, an empty pot of Plumtree's potted meat, an oval wicker basket bedded with fibre and containing one Jersey pear" (*U* 675). The objective arrangement of things of apparently equal importance produces a strong irony in the readers' mind. They know the importance that some sexually charged objects such as "basket bedded" or "one Jersey pear" have for our story at a subconscious level. But those allusions and the pieces of fruit that Boylan bought in the shop in "Wandering Rocks" multiplied, in a figurative sense, the potted meat presence and substance. On the contrary, when the real product is absent in "Ithaca," all the words used to name it appear together: "an empty pot of Plumtree potted meat" (*U* 675). The product, then, is completely absent now, as it has been totally consumed by the lovers. "To consume," which comes from the Latin *consumere*, means to take together or wholly. And etymologically, it also means to waste wholly, to devour, to destroy, and, therefore, to kill.¹¹ The complete consumption of the product has already taken place before Bloom arrives home. The eloquent ad slogan that has so persistently been proliferating in Bloom's mind, promising bliss all day, has missed the real product. The verbal icon has been disclosed as a set-up because it does not correspond, if it ever did, to the real product. Browne Sartori has already warned us about the media imagery,¹² about that icon that will never again fulfil its role of representation. In fact, it becomes a sort of "simulating icon" that escapes from the code it originally belonged to. It no longer corresponds to its established referent, as it now disappears into unknown and multifarious meanings and forms.

The Plumtree ad, with its fossilised, reified aspects, appears similar to the concept of "tree" that Deleuze and Guattari considered as an indelible image—from biology and linguistics to politics—of official thought.¹³ In opposition to this, the aforementioned French thinkers, who believed in the power of unpredictability and in life's incessant germination, vindicated the concept of rhizome.¹⁴ In biology, it refers to those stems of plants that grow horizontally underground, but for Deleuze and Guattari it refers to a new, asystematic, experimental, proteic way of thinking. Furthermore, the rhizomatic guidelines seek to undermine received knowledge, to make the trees of power and science lose their balance. This concept, then, offers justice to the world as a changeable and multiple reality, always in constant variation and open to new connections and forms.

Beyond being the antithesis of the rhizome concept, because of its similarity with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "tree," the advertisement reaches another realm, a category that Milan Kundera defined as "no-thought." By this term, the novelist did not mean the absence of any form of thought, something unusual in human minds, but rather a petrified and imposing reality that advances and threatens to invade us. In fact, by "no-thought" Kundera meant the no-thought of clichés and the commonplace, the no-thought that the media spreads everyday; some given reality that, by demanding unconditional acceptance, erodes any form of critical and creative thought.¹⁵

But Bloom and the narrator(s) in *Ulysses*, in a true rhizomatic operation, dismantle the Plumtree ad, multiplying and reconnecting it in a proteic process that the text is often keen to accomplish. Those offsprings of cloning, advertising codes, by entering Leopold Bloom's mind, transform the reified beauty of advertising props into a constellation of unpredictable images and connections.

Therefore, before arriving home, the potted meat ad has been a multifarious centre of cross references that shared some of the rhizome's asystematic qualities. But now, the real thing that it refers to has been usurped by emptiness. The real thing has been excluded, just as Bloom, the third party, has been excluded (and the reader who travels so close to him) from the pleasurable dual banquet in bed. Thus, all the artificiality and mechanisms of the Plumtree ad must be disclosed, all its false pretences of poetical efficiency and universal knowledge must be unmasked. Furthermore, the Plumtree ad is, for Bloom, the opposite of his ideal advertisement, as this would be one that not only catches the eye, but one that, as Kino's ad for trousers does, fuses stasis and kinesis. Its language should also be appropriated to the product it advertises, which is the opposite in this case, as Plumtree's language is too lyrical and heavenly for a vulgar potted meat. Also, its context should be the most adequate, which in this case is the most inadequate, as it was placed under the obituaries. Yet, its connotations, in a subconscious way, are very adequate to the adultery (moral death) and the physical death (Dignam's) with which the ad is figuratively saturated by now. In fact, the Plumtree ad is the opposite to the Garden of Eden, as man had lived there without knowledge and free from death. Even more, the ad, in an ironic way, suggests the temporary expulsion and exclusion (of Bloom) from an earthly paradise. Thus, the ad must be destroyed in "Ithaca" before Bloom arrives home. Not only because it is the nadir of tasteless advertising, but because it voices Bloom's exclusion from 7 Eccles Street. So, when in "Ithaca" the question is asked as to what particular

thing never stimulated Bloom's thoughts, the answer comes without hesitation:

Such as never?
 What is home without Plumtree's Potted Meat?
 Incomplete.
 With it an abode of bliss.

Manufactured by George Plumtree, 23 Merchant's quay, Dublin, put up in 4 oz. pots, and inserted by Councillor Joseph P. Nannetti, M.P., Rotunda Ward, 19 Hardwicke street, under the obituary notices and anniversaries of deceases. The name on the label is Plumtree. A plumtree is a meatpot, registered trade mark. Beware of imitations. Peatmot. Trumplee. Montpat. Plamtroo. (*U* 684)

Thus, the Potted Meat ad's "magic" and fictional reality, its seemingly poetry and catchy rhymes, are sundered into pieces by revealing its hidden, marketing machinery. The verbal icon, a piece of no-thought, is corroded in "Ithaca." It is in some aspects destroyed and extinguished by being revealed as an arbitrary business construct. Also, the disclosed ad shows its prosaic origin: the name of the person who pays, and the hands—Mr Nanetti's—that place it in the most inappropriate place, under the obituaries in the paper, becoming a grisly *memento mori*. The ad is dismantled in the way that twentieth-century literature has often undone language. On the one hand, by reducing it to a minute, absurd pseudo-scientific explanation; and on the other hand, by eliminating it in the form of a nonsensical construct, figments of a private language disqualified for any human interaction.

Thus, with the ad (and its transformations) inside the character's mind, Bloom has faced the real product at home, but as an absence. But now, and just before the end of the day, Leopold Bloom finally finds and touches the real product. As he gets into bed, he stretches his limbs to find "the imprint of a human form, male, not his, some crumbs, some flakes of potted meat, recooked, which he removed" (*U* 731). He finds the real product, but as "remanufactured" by another human body, his rival's. Bloom, then, eliminates the leftovers of the sensual banquet, expelling, in an instinctive exorcism, some remains of the adultery's existence. As the real thing disappears inside the lovers' digestive systems, Plumtree's verbal icon is destroyed in the form of lexical nonsense in "Ithaca," and thanks to Joyce's stylistic virtuosity. The real product and the verbal ad have disappeared—each one following its own distinctive channel, as the ritual against loss has, by now, been

completed. Thus, Plumtree's ad finally constitutes itself as a many-sided construct that (by being created and destroyed) properly mirrors the macro-discourse of the great theme of adultery concerning Bloom.

Those images that devour us

Just as consumers devote themselves to the daily consumption of images, images also, and sometimes in a fiercely, unnoticed way, "devour" consumers. TV spots, publicity notices, repetitive slogans, jingles on the radio, catchy theme tunes from soap operas and car advertisements—all colonise our minds. Each media programme brings with it a parasitic series of advertisements. They remain in our minds because we are almost defenceless in front of images, as we haven't been taught how to defend ourselves against the constellation of icons created by clever publicists and marketing experts who know how to manipulate audiences. Moreover, images enter our minds easily because they haven't been created to be examined, but to be uncritically digested. To enter, like the sacred Host, unchewed, directly into the consumer's body. Thus, they influence us in such a powerful way that the formation of our opinions may depend on the media channel we tune into. Furthermore, they seem to be created to consume us, to be our mental parasites, to displace our thoughts and our capacity to create images; that is, our imagination, in order to inoculate us, like a hungry fungus or a devouring bacteria, with their clever icons.

However, advertising icons not only "devour" us, but they also enter our consciousness. In "Oxen of the Sun," Bloom joins the convivial party at the Maternity Hospital. While he is listening to the students, he gazes upon the label of a Bass Ale on the dining table. And in such a profound way, as the narrative style, first, and then Buck Mulligan make clear, that it seems as if the triangular icon that advertises the beer were devouring Bloom's mind in an unusual supernatural experience.

This passage is described in De Quincey's narcotic, visionary style, a style always protean, offering, to use musical terminology, now a solemn "largo," and then a brisk "allegretto," often lending itself to many digressions. It is the appropriate medium to depict Bloom's dreamy experience as his mind enters a trance induced by the vision of the label. More than recording the aesthetic experiences produced by opium, De Quincey's style is a pioneering study of the operation of the subconscious mind in dreams. Furthermore, he may well have been a precursor of Bloom's intimate journeys in his interior monologues, as De Quincey

invented a literary form that involved an “interior epic,” a true odyssey of the soul. Mighty ships, imposing armour and sharp weapons became the imagination’s proper tools that had to fight long, internal battles, that had to face psychic Cyclops and Sirens in a mind, always doubtful, and slightly shy, which explored vast, dark internal regions. The battles’ spoils, the true booty, were probably unexpected dreams and internal visions. And to reach Ithaca could well have meant to arrive at reality and peace, and to finally grasp the safe rock of good sense. Or probably, Ithaca, on the contrary, was the much sought, smoky vision.

The De Quincey passage that renders Bloom’s perceptual experience begins with the phrase, “The voices blend and fuse in clouded silence. . .” (*U* 414). Bloom’s mind, then, is taken away wandering along sidereal and interstellar spaces, among phantoms and stars. Previous motives and images reappear now in the text, but hugely transformed by fantasy and by defamiliarization techniques. Agendath, from “Calypso,” for example, is now a wasteland, as Netaim becomes “the golden, is no more” (*U* 414), and the cattle herding of the docks are magnified into a threatening zodiacal animal host. But eventually, a radiant virgin bride appears at the same time as Martha and Bloom’s daughter, Milly, the symbol of youth:

It floats, it flows about her starborn flesh and loose its streams emerald, sapphire, mauve and heliotrope, sustained on currents of cold interstellar wind, winding, coiling, simply swirling, writhing in the skies a mysterious writing till after a myriad metamorphoses of symbol, it blazes, Alpha, a ruby and triangled sign upon the forehead of Taurus. (*U* 414)

Robert Janusko suggested the “Dream Fugue” section of De Quincey’s “The English Mail Coach” as a background to the passage just quoted. In both texts, a female child appears, but in the nineteenth-century passage the girl, half veiled by mist, is threatened with death by the hurried horses of a carriage. Later, at the blast of a trumpet, the girl reappears as a woman in the distance, and above an altar of crimson glory. In Joyce’s text, as Janusko observes,

Milly, as a phantom fillyfoal, is seen through the grey twilight. She, too, disappears and is replaced by a vision of wasteland with a “moving moaning multitude, murderers of the sun” (*U* 14.23-24) going to drink at the dead sea. Like De Quincey’s female child, she reappears, blended with Martha, rising as a constellation in the sky, her veil finally blazing “Alpha, a ruby

and triangled sign upon the forehead of Taurus" (*U* 14.440-41). In both, the shadowy young female disappears, only to reappear as a woman associated with the color red. Both are also summaries, in symbolic compression, of what has gone before, De Quincey's near collision between the mail coach and a young couple in a small gig and Bloom's encounters with the women in his life.¹⁶

A certain knowledge of astronomy and astrology may not be redundant in order to clarify the intoxicating opacity, the Pentecostal unintelligibility, of the former passage. The overpowering apparition of the animals, above all "the equine portent grows again" (*U* 414), may well refer to Boylan's powerful, instinctual strength, as it takes possession of the house of Virgo, which is Molly Bloom's star sign, as she was born on the eighth of September. On the other hand, this act of possession, as well as others, as we have seen, does not take place with real characters, but in their stellar, or otherwise ethereal or fantastic, transformations. Thus, another plane is added to the parallax that represent females characters, and above all, the different aspects of the character of Leopold Bloom. For his part, his possession takes place at the end of the De Quincean passage: ". . . till after a myriad metamorphoses of a symbol, it blazes, Alpha, a ruby and triangled sign upon the forehead of Taurus" (*U* 414). The Bass Ale advertising sign, which is the red triangle that Bloom is staring at, is taking possession of the consumer Bloom's mind.

However, before the red triangle alights on Bloom's forehead, there seems to be a female renovation, a true "Birth of Venus" in the sky: "It is she, Martha, thou lost one, Millicent, the young, the dear, the radiant. How serene does she now arise, a queen among the Pleiades. . . . It floats, it flows about her starborn flesh and loose its streams emerald, sapphire, mauve and heliotrope. . ." (*U* 414). The woman that is newly-born in the sky seems to be all the women that are in Bloom's life. She is like Venus, born in the sky's blissful light, finally cleansed from animal juices and stains. A Venus, newly-born, stark naked, and pure innocence. In the former reference "It blazes, Alpha," Alpha as the first letter of the Greek alphabet could well mean a new beginning, a finally renovated woman, but it could also be a hint about Bloom and Stephen's relationship that is about to begin. As John Gordon explains,

it seems clear that to a great extent this visionary narrative forged by Bloom out of the available background material functions as a parable of wish-fulfilment. The essential story

(or masque) conjured is that Molly and Milly appear in all their grace and beauty, are eclipsed by a nightmare stampede of the forces of darkness, led by Boylan, then finally reappear reborn and rejuvenated, in the person of the goddess of love as she ascends into the house of Bloom's birth sign Taurus, horned but happy.¹⁷

Garry Leonard, for his part, relates the triangle on Bloom's forehead to the Alpha of the Book of Revelation, which is associated with origins and destinations, with "birth and death: 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord' (Rev. 1:8). Any object, label, slogan, or symbol that indicates it to us, knows the beginning and the end."¹⁸ But also, for Harry Blamires, the triangle suggests a religious meaning: "The Scarlet triangle on the Bass's beer bottle, which both mesmerises and releases a vast imaginative fertility, recalls the tongues of flame on each apostle's head."¹⁹

Bloom's vision is induced by a beer label that, being an aesthetic icon, doubtless creates mythological, religious and heavenly projections. Yet, the scarlet icon is nothing less than the colourful warden of the most abused beverage in Ireland: beer. It is the cause of many crazy, Dionysiac trances and the destroyer of many homes, like Dignam's. But Bloom hardly drinks any beer in the hospital; instead, he pours it away. It is, also, noticeable how he finds his "opium doses," the seeds of his vision, on the label, the exterior and colourful part of the drink, which is the cause of so much beastly intoxication in others. Alcoholic ingestion is, then, crucially opposed to the ethereal, colourful fabric of vision. Furthermore, the triangle on Bloom's forehead may represent the opening up of an extra perception, which in oriental philosophy is called the third eye: a new door to an unexpectedly wider and richer field of vision, but also, perhaps, a moral shield before he enters the perilous and immoral streets of "Circe." Or perhaps it is the purifying gift, the necessary, lofty and fatherly sight he needs to properly meet Stephen, the necessary gift Bloom needs to morally face and to surmount Eccles Street's much-disturbed reality. Even more, the triangle may represent Bloom's perceptual birth. After his sight has been blurred in an animal way, excessively and stubbornly focused on another (seductive Gerty's) body, Bloom's perception needs to be like Venus aesthetically, but also in moral matters, newly-born. And then the great triangle of births in "Oxen of the Sun" may be completed. Bloom's perceptual birth (for four minutes) is placed on one vertex. Then, Mina Purefoy's long, painful, physical birth (three days), which enhances at the same time as it contrasts with Bloom's birth, is placed on the second vertex, and finally,

on the third one, the amazingly long birth of the English language is placed.

However, with respect to advertising images, we must remember that the latter devour consumers, but as simulative icons. They do that as images that have forgotten, as it seems, the product that they represent. This happens in the former scene, where the Bass Ale triangle has nothing to do with the cool, appetising beverage it represents. The icon shines, stands out as a being in its own right. Completely oblivious to its function, the icon projects itself into a potential consumer's mind, absorbing it, flooding it with its own radiance. Furthermore, Joyce infuses the ad, like ecstasy or L.S.D pills, with the capacity to induce dreams and transient states, but woven into the consumer's restless, mental "looms." This is what happens with opium which, after all, as De Quincey stated, cannot give you interesting dreams unless you already have the power to dream interestingly.²⁰

In a final stage, Joyce dismantles the advertisement and, with it, the experience that it helped to create. As cubist painters used to do with commodities and brand name labels in their paintings and collages, Joyce rearranges the Bass Ale's perceptions. He does so by representing Bloom's experience in three different stylistic planes. First, he depicts a passage of sublime beauty through De Quincey's narcotic style. Then, the advertising icon that so intensely absorbed the consumer's mind is dereified in a similar creative way as Joyce unmaskes the potted meat advertisement in "Ithaca." The process is not so different from the way that, according to Fredric Jameson, the power of commodities is dereified by being undermined with linguistic means, such as popular voices.²¹ Bloom's "supernatural" consumer's experience will be undone by Buck Mulligan's too earthly voice: "Malachi saw it and withheld his act pointing to the stranger [Bloom] and to the scarlet label. . . . It is painful perhaps to be awakened from a vision as to be born" (*U* 416). In Walter Savage Landor's style, the reader, then, is taken from a heavenly vision down to the sleepy reality of an uneasy waking up. Eventually, through the third perspective of Thomas B. Macaulay's style, the advertisement's magic is torn up although not in such an absurd and radical way as the potted meat ad was. But in this case, both product and advertisement are eventually disclosed as down to earth, manufactured constructs. The beer's producer, the entrepreneur who gets plenty of profits, is revealed in "one Bass bottle by Mersrs Bass . . ." (*U* 417) and also the town where the business flourishes: Burton-on-Trent. The text makes us return to the daily reality where the scene is marked by actual time and a real place. Finally, the marketing "secret" that makes the product so seductive and

alluring, and the consumer so mesmerised by its form, is unmasked: “. . . [the bottle’s label] was certainly calculated to attract anyone’s remark on account of its scarlet appearance” (*U* 417).

The way images end

Paradoxically enough, *Ulysses*, as a literary text, stands in opposition to all those clusters of advertising images that proliferate in its pages, icons and advertisements that properly mirror all those images that consumers uncritically swallow every day. And *Ulysses*, like many modernist works, due to its complexities and multiple planes and references, realises its opposition to the former images, to borrow a phrase from Terry Eagleton, as an “isolated fetish.”²² The novel seems to act against the consumer’s zeal to easily appropriate a commodity, as Joyce’s work shows a fierce resistance to be digested and devoured and, in consequence, to be expelled.

We know how most substances end their lives. But what about those special properties that they so cannily carry? John Milton, in an attempt to undermine the Catholic Communion as an act of cannibalism, pondered similar questions: “To speak candidly, after being digested [Jesus’ body] in the stomach it will be at length excluded.”²³ The divine body will, then, according to Milton, disappear from faithful bodies and down the latrine in a similar way as commodities end their commercial lives by losing their grace and their seductive powers in the rubbish bin. The potted meat product, for example, will end up being expelled by the lovers’ bodies and its flakes swept away by the broom, as the Bass Ale beer will lose its grace and sparkling, cheering substance by being expelled by the thirsty party on any Dublin street corner.

Now we may wonder, along with Baitello Junior, about a few questions that lead to our conclusion. When we devour images, do we eliminate them in a proper “iconorreic” flux? Do those images that daily devour us produce excrements of human perception? What is, finally, the real nature of the detritus of those images that devour us?²⁴ Leopold Bloom, in contrast to the candid consumer, will not critically swallow the potted meat ad’s seductive rhymes and promise of bliss, but as a proper artist, he will transform it in a creative way. The advertisement’s verbal sirens will be atomised in the aseptic lavatory of “Ithaca” by taking the forking paths of cryptography and polysemy. And so it will be in the same two, extreme ways that the contemporary novel has sometimes unmasked human language’s pretences to represent, even to usurp,

reality. On the one hand, the language of the ad appears as logical, objective and well-constructed. But its language is not only pseudo-scientific, it is plagued with unnecessary and redundant explanations that produce a piece of nonsense infused with indirect humour and much irony. On the other hand, at the end of the passage in “Ithaca,” which concludes “Peatmot. Trumplee. Montpat. Plamtroo” (U 684), the language, through an absurd reduction, transforms the ad into a meaningless carnival of pure nonsense. The phrasing “Beware of imitation” becomes the clownish portal that leads to surrealistic verbal fireworks.²⁵ The language, following a notorious tradition that reaches from Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll to Joyce, ignores the Saussurean arbitrariness of the linguistic sign and reinvents new and meaningless words that stage a colourful rebellion against fixed signifiers. The paragraph ends in a true harlequinade of known syllables and phonemes, but emptied of the necessary social meanings we need in order to communicate with each other. But, finally, how will the scarlet icon, that so persistently devoured Bloom’s perception, expel the human matter that it helped so eagerly to enlighten? As Buck Mulligan subconsciously suggested in “Oxen,” expulsion may work as a new kind of birth. Bloom, then, has to be born to a new perceptual state that will enable him to meet Stephen and to renovate Eccles Street’s much wrecked reality. Thus Joyce, through fiercely undermining official systems, and eagerly corroding immobilised discourses and fossilised images that he received from tradition, boldly re-uses the rich, advertising quarry to create a new realm of beauty. As Milan Kundera eloquently stated: “Beauty in art: the sudden illumination of what has never before been said. The light that great novels irradiate which time will never be able to overshadow.”²⁶

Notes

¹ Garry Leonard, “Joyce and Advertising: Advertising and Commodity Culture in Joyce’s Fiction,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 30.4 / 31.1 (Summer / Fall 1993) 576.

² *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. T. C. Onions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) 459.

³ Baitello Junior, “A iconofagia e a Antropofagia. As Imagens que nos devoram.” *Comuniquiatra* 5 (Sevilla: 2002) 3.

⁴ For the purposes of this study, we equate *image* with *icon*, the latter, according to Pierce, being an image that represents an object. The image of a Coca-Cola bottle on an advertising board in the street represents, for example,

the actual beverage we can drink. See Charles S. Pierce, *Obra lógico-semiótica* (Madrid: Taurus, 1987) 273.

⁵ Tim O’Neill, “Calendars, Convents, and Clerical Habits: Joyce and the *Irish Catholic Directory*”, 868-869. Qtd. in Leonard 585.

⁶ James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Random House, 2002); henceforth cited parenthetically as *U* plus page number.

⁷ Ellen C. Jones, “Commodious Recirculation: Commodity and Dream in Joyce’s *Ulysses*,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 30.4/31.1 (Summer/Fall 1993) 744.

⁸ See Paul Bruthiaux, *Discourse of Classified Advertising* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 177.

⁹ Barry McCrea, “Secrets of Szombathely: The H.E.L.Y.’s Sandwichmen and Irish Citizenship,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 41.3 (Spring 2004) 399-400.

¹⁰ Mark Osteen, “Seeking Renewal: Bloom, Advertising, and the Domestic Economy,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 30.4 / 31.1 (Summer/ Fall 1993) 721-722.

¹¹ See Walter W. Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2005). This is a revised and enlarged new edition of the original Clarendon Press edition published in 1910.

¹² See Rodrigo F. Browne Sartori, “De antropófagos devoradores de imágenes a iconofágicas imágenes que nos devoran.” *Razón y palabra* 27 (June/July 2002), Atizapán, Mexico, 14.

¹³ See especially Gilles Deleuze and F. Guattari, Introduction, *Rizoma* (Valencia: Pre-textos, 1997).

¹⁴ Needless to say, this philosophical concept has its roots in Nietzsche’s thought.

¹⁵ Milan Kundera, *El arte de la novela*, trad. F. de Valenzuela and M. V. Villaverde (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1987) 156.

¹⁶ Robert Janusko, *The Sources and Structures of James Joyce’s “Oxen”* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983) 73.

¹⁷ John Gordon, “Tracking the Oxen,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 22.2 (1998/1999) 73.

¹⁸ Leonard 36.

¹⁹ Harry Blamires, *The New Bloomsday: A Guide Through “Ulysses”* (London: Routledge, 1994) 149.

²⁰ Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, intr. Alethea Hayter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) 21.

²¹ I use Fredric Jameson’s concept “to dereify.” Jameson observed that it is by “means of gossip and through the form of anecdotes, that the dimensions of the city are maintained within humane limits.” See “*Ulysses* in History,” in *James Joyce and Modern Literature*, eds. W.J. McCormac and Alistair Stead (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982) 135.

²² See Terry Eagleton, “Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism,” *Against the Grain: Essays 1975–1985* (London: Verso, 1986) 131–147.

²³ John Milton, *Selected Prose*, ed. C. A. Patrides (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) 123.

²⁴ See Baitello Junior 3.

²⁵ Although the words look like pure nonsense, some critics have managed to decipher them. Rosemary Camilleri, for example, submitted the words *Peatmot. Trumplee. Montpat. Plamtroo* to a subtractive operation. She took out the letters of “meat pot” from the first and the third words, and then the letters of “plumtree” from the second and the fourth words, and two words were the result: “PONMA” and “TRAMPLOO.” If we alter the order of the former letters in each word, we have “NO MAP” from the first, obviously referring to the destinies of Odysseus/Bloom, and “LOOM TRAP” from the second, in reference to the doom of Penelope/Molly. Camilleri finally conceives her discoveries as “Homeric patterns woven into Dublin tapestry” (461-462). See Rosemary Camilleri, “Plumtree’s Meatpot: A Cryptogram in *Ulysses*,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 20.4 (Summer 1983) 461-62.

²⁶ My translation of “Belleza en el arte: luz súbitamente encendida de lo nunca dicho. Esa luz que irradian las grandes novelas nunca alcanza el tiempo a ensombrecerla. . . .” See Kundera 137.