

“Reading It for Ourselves”: Dialogical Implication in Joyce’s *Exiles*

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Abstract

Among Joyce’s works *Exiles* has been least appreciated because its sophisticated psychological dialogue has been under-interpreted. In fact, the dialogue exemplifies the strategies of implication that Joyce so admired in Ibsen’s plays, where each sentence has its own subtext. Dialogue is also the theme of the play as the four characters seek real communication in their verbal power struggles by focusing metalinguistically on the force and limitations of speaking and listening, on the meanings of silence, and on the interpretive complications added by their gestures.

In *Exiles*, his only surviving play, Joyce creates a conversational utopia in which the dramatic action is subordinated to intense dialogues among the four central characters—Richard and Robert, Bertha, the woman they struggle over, and Beatrice, Robert’s intellectual cousin. Most critics and readers seemed to have agreed that “neither time nor Harold Pinter has been able to redeem *Exiles* fully from unfavorable comparison to Joyce’s fiction” (Bowen 581). Even Joyce enthusiasts such as Hugh Kenner have concluded that it is “not much of a play” (*Voices* 24). Yet *Exiles* has been little appreciated, I suggest, because the dialogue has been under-interpreted, and since it is rarely performed few have had the opportunity to experience its subtle exchanges in the theater. As a consequence, “an unconventional play, *Exiles* has been conventionally read” (Bauerle 37). Nevertheless, as arguably the most sophisticated dialogue that Joyce ever wrote, *Exiles* fully exemplifies the strategies of implication that the young Joyce so admired in Ibsen’s plays, where “each phrase is a chapter of experience,” (*CW* 57) and each sentence has its own subtext. In contrast to the work of other playwrights, for example Shaw, “we have the pleasure not of hearing it read out to us, but of

reading it for ourselves” (CW 50), supplying with our own imaginations what the playwright has left implicit in the dialogue.

Dialogue is, I suggest, the theme as well as the dramatic technique of *Exiles*. Throughout the play the four characters repeatedly confront the linguistic and psychological obstacles to truly communicating with another person. As Beatrice remarks early on, “It is hard to know anyone but oneself” (E 121). Offering a clue to *Exiles*’ mystery, Joyce said that “Life is suspended in doubt like the world in the void” (qtd. in Ellmann 557), an insight that applies to more than Bertha’s suspected adultery. Yet they continue to seek possibilities for real dialogue by focusing metalinguistically on the force and limitations of speaking and listening, on the interpretive complications produced by gestures, and on their verbal power struggles.

The special intensity of the dialogue in *Exiles* has drawn frequent comment from critics, either in praise or condemnation. Clive Hart, for example, criticizes the speeches for their lack of realism, the language being “by turns stiff, overlush, trite, or muted to extinction” (135), while contending that “the dramatic tone need not be the dramatist’s” (124). But this may reflect more recent standards for dramatic dialogue, since a thoughtful contemporary reviewer praised Joyce for his conversational realism: “He is exceedingly keen in making people talk like people. He has a genius for idiom and idiosyncrasy and no one could be better than he in the way he dovetails his conversations” (Hackett 146). Not that realism necessarily means clarity, since “Joyce carried realistic dialogue to a point at which characters use language more to disturb than to communicate” (Voelker 500). And as Suzette Henke notes, “all the characters seem to speak in tongues that hide encoded messages” (99). They may be unaware of their situation, since “living inside this subtle verbal framework, the characters of the play are isolated as much by words and silence as by their personal circumstances” (Hart 135). Thus, Joyce goes beyond conventional stage dialogue “by inserting moments when language ceases to work for the characters” (Sanner 283). Coded, disturbing, or ineffectual as their speeches may be, Joyce remains aware of “the impact of words as discrete devices, as lives having an action of their own, of weapons used with cunning or with blunt intent” (Benstock 378). Hart’s may be the most relevant overview of *Exiles* as

the curious blending of a serious plot about freedom and bondage, creativity and sterility with a gamut of language which explores, without, as it were, sparing the characters’ feelings, how to talk about it all, how not to talk about it, how

to engage with each other, how to make a mess of personal relationships. (135)

The urge to explore ways of communicating—the dialogical subtext of *Exiles*—may be why Joyce turned to drama, taking as a model his literary hero Ibsen.

As Joyce wrote that unlike other modern dramatists whose “lyricism parades as poetic drama, psychological conversation as literary drama,” Henrik Ibsen attained “such mastery over his art that, with apparently easy dialogue, he presents his men and women passing through different soul-crises” (CW 49-50). Using verbal economy and implication instead of authorial moralizing, Ibsen leaves interpretation to the reader (or playgoer). Of *When We Dead Awaken* Joyce noted that “there is from first to last hardly a superfluous word or phrase” (CW 49). Full of wisdom as they were for Joyce, Ibsen’s plays were not written just for library reading, since “at some chance expression the mind is tortured with some question, and in a flash long reaches of life are opened up in vista, yet the vision is momentary” (CW 67), a quick epiphany, and the play moves on. Yet the economical dialogue that Joyce so prizes in Ibsen’s plays can still convey profound insight into the underlying laws of human nature and society, “in all their nakedness and severity” (CW 41). These universal laws can be readily presented in the microcosm of the family, with its conflicting roles of husband and wife, parents and child.

Thus, it is hardly coincidental that in 1914-15 while he was working on *Exiles* Joyce was also transforming *Stephen Hero* into *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Both protagonists are creative intellectuals who feel superior to their friends and family; both follow their own moral codes which make strenuous demands on themselves and on others. However, Stephen is still the promising if rebellious student, while Richard is a well-known writer who is being considered for a university professorship in Dublin. The theme of close male friendship runs through both works, together with the tantalizing possibility of romantic betrayal. Yet Stephen’s suspicion of Cranly’s interest in EC is a minor tension compared to Richard’s manipulation of Robert’s clumsy attempts to seduce his wife Bertha, thereby creating a self-inflicted “wound of doubt” which he hopes will lead to his own spiritual rejuvenation, whatever the emotional costs may be to his wife and his best friend.

Along with the protagonists’ different stages of maturity come very different modes of self-presentation. Unlike in *A Portrait*, the characters

in *Exiles* analyze and interpret themselves and each other without the assistance of a mediating narrator. In their articulate self-consciousness they become, in effect, their own narrators. All the major characters have their thoughts and feelings heightened—not just Stephen. In fact, “all the characters in *Exiles* take each other seriously” (Bowen 582), although as Kenner notes, “the other three characters are being carefully exhibited as versions of Richard because creatures of his” (*Dublin’s* 85). In *A Portrait of the Artist* dialogical features often seem incidental and opaque, showing Stephen’s alienation from his social world, whereas in *Exiles* each of the speeches, gestures, and tones of voice becomes a significant aspect of the plot.

As Stephen in *A Portrait* is potentially the mature Richard, so Joyce put Stephen’s theory of drama into practice in *Exiles*. To recall the familiar phrases from his talk with Lynch as they walk the streets of Dublin, the epic or narrative impulse stems from the lyric, when the “personality of the artist passes into the narrative itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea.” In an extension of this water metaphor, the dramatic form is attained when “the vitality which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible esthetic life” independent of the writer whose own personality then “refines itself out of existence. . .” (*P* 233). In the independence of his characters Joyce shares with Bakhtin, for example, the view that “a character’s discourse is created by the author, but created in such a way that it can develop to the full its inner logic and independence as *someone else’s* discourse, the word of the *character himself*” (65). Or as Kenner puts it: “The artist lives in two worlds, the world he understands and the world his characters understand” (*Dublin’s* 75).

Dialogue as Metalanguage

Joyce’s characters in *Exiles* work to understand themselves through introspective and analytical conversations; they are also aware of the impact of their language on themselves and on their listeners. Their speeches often refer to the act of speaking itself, taking a metalinguistic turn. For as Bakhtin reminds us, a common topic of all dialogues is “the relation between utterances and the code they are derived from” (qtd. in Mecke 198). Speakers may actually be present or just imagined. For instance, in his first conversation with Beatrice, Richard angrily recalls his mother’s rejection of his wife and son: “There were tongues here

ready to tell her all, to embitter her withering mind still more against me and Bertha and our godless nameless child. . . . Can you not hear her mocking me while I speak?" (E 128). Her voice continues to haunt him. Richard's harsh tone shocks his sensitive friend, who asks him, "Mr. Rowan, why do you speak to me in such a way?" Later she repeats "O, do not speak like that!" And finally: "Mr Rowan, something is on your mind to make you speak like that" (E 129). Beatrice objects more to the manner of his speech than to what he says.

Robert's attempted seduction of Bertha involves his speaking in ways that they both regard as self-consciously romantic. As he tells her, "I was awake half the night. I could hear your voice. I could see your face in the dark. Your eyes. . . . I want to speak to you. Will you listen to me? May I speak?" Since he is already speaking to her, he's really asking for a more intimate conversation. When he says that her face is like a flower, Bertha smiles, so he asks "Why are you smiling? At my words? . . . Did you not like me to speak to you in that way?" (E 140-41). Mollified by his sincerity, she says, "Thank you for saying it," although she later suggests that "men speak like that to all women whom they like or admire" (E 142). After she allows him to kiss her, Bertha says, "Why don't you say: *Thanks?*" Misreading her humorous tone, he responds melodramatically that "my life is finished—over," to which she replies "O don't speak like that now, Robert" (E 146). Toward the end of their dialogue, he says again, "I want to speak to you—alone," that is, in private, and she replies, "I too want to speak to you." Robert: "Yes, dear, I know (*he kisses her again*). I will speak to you, tell you all then. I will kiss you then, long long kisses. . . ." Speaking becomes their euphemism for a love-making that would go beyond this flirtation. Later when they are alone together in his cottage, Robert asks excitedly, "Bertha, say my name! Let me hear your voice say it. Softly! . . . Speak, dearest!" (E 228). Act II ends with him asking her if she loves him: "Tell me. Tell me with your eyes. Or speak! (*She does not answer. In the silence the rain is heard falling*)" (E 229). Nature thus speaks for her, expressing the ambiguity of their behavior that night.

Speaking in *Exiles* can also be transgressive, even at times risky. As Roland Barthes remarks, speaking unlike writing can be "dangerous because it is immediate and cannot be taken back" (*Grain* 4). Richard's mother had written to him before her death, "bidding me break with the past and remember her last words to me" (E 127), and for him her words still have power. So when Beatrice criticizes him for his callous description of his mother, he defends himself: "(*fiercely*) How can my words hurt her poor body that rots in the grave?" (E 127). Words can be

weighted with foreboding. Predicting that Beatrice will prove to be ungenerous, Bertha adds, “Remember now what I say,” and again insists, “Remember my words” (*E* 179). Later when Bertha accuses Richard of having taken unfair advantage of her youthful innocence, he replies, “(*violently*) And you have the courage to say that to me!” (*E* 175). Driven by jealousy Bertha calls Beatrice “The diseased woman!” Richard responds: “(*gravely*) Bertha, take care of uttering words like that” (*E* 178). As Clive Hart notes, Richard is “acutely aware of the danger and difficulty of words. . .” (126). Later he accuses Bertha of having an affair with Robert, adding “I am in the way. You would like to be free now. You have only to say the word” (*E* 252) that would dissolve their own partnership. In *Exiles* the characters’ speeches provide the activity that plot provides in more conventional plays.

The decision to speak or remain silent can remove or create barriers between the characters. For as Maurice Blanchot observes, “silence is only deferred speech, or else it bears the significance of a difference obstinately maintained” (76). One *Exiles* critic has described the play as “a rhythmic sequence of discomfitures, moments of socio-epistemological shut-down, repeatedly signaled by the stage directions ‘a long pause’ and ‘silence’” (Voelker 500). Even though Richard has just accused him of seducing his wife, Robert replies: “What a relief it is to me that you have spoken” (*E* 188), instead of just observing them in silence. While Richard uses silence to control, “for the others, silence is a threat, a trap” (Hart 127). The next day Richard remains ominously silent, and Bertha remarks, “You have not spoken to me,” to which Richard responds, “I have nothing to say” (*E* 249). That morning Robert was planning to leave Dublin “without saying anything,” because he felt that “What I have to say I said here”—pointing to his newspaper article ambivalently praising Richard (*E* 253). But Bertha insists that he “must speak to him,” telling him exactly what happened at his cottage the previous evening, to which he objects, “I am a man speaking to a man. I cannot tell him everything” (*E* 250). Barriers exist between the women as well. At the end of her frank exchange with Beatrice, Bertha says: “It is so strange that we spoke like this now. But I always wanted to. Did you?” (*E* 248). As a recent critic points out, the women “deal with their palpable hostility by cultivating sympathy and a sense of obligation” rather than male competition (Valente 141). Confession may seem to be the ultimate openness. When at the end of the play Richard is immersed in his self-generated doubts about her fidelity, Bertha says to him: “Speak to me. Speak out all your heart to me: what you feel and what you suffer. . . . Explain to me what you mean. I will try to understand everything you

say" (*E* 265). Speaking seriously places an obligation on the listener to at least try to understand.

Given the thematic significance of speaking in *Exiles*, the major characters are naturally attentive to the words they use. As Benstock puts it, the "characters are painfully sensitive to the nuances of each other's diction" (378). Their hermeneutical anxiety keeps reappearing. When Beatrice admits to Richard that she comes to see *him*, not just to give his son piano lessons, he asks her: "Tell me what your words mean" (*E* 121), although her romantic interest seems clear. Likewise, Robert's love note to Bertha ("*There is one word which I have never dared to say to you.*") prompts her to ask him: "What does it mean? . . . What is the word?" (*E* 138). Later Bertha reports back to Richard, who also asks what he meant. She replies: "He said I must know. I said I had an idea" (*E* 165-6). Thus, even common words can take on a special power and mystery in these highly-charged dialogues.

The subtlest examples of metalinguistic awareness in *Exiles* occur in the central confrontation scene between the two men. After his attempted seduction of Bertha is revealed, Robert initially offers to "tell everything," and then shifts to the more defensive tactic of explanation. Richard shrewdly turns Robert's words against him, taking up his generalized offer with an embarrassing specificity: "Explain to me what is the word you longed and never dared to say to her. If you can or will" (*E* 185). His last phrase neatly impugns either Robert's rationality or the honesty of his offer. In response Robert simply repeats Richard's second alternative: "Yes. I will." Of course, Richard has already had Bertha's report on their exchange, so he's testing him. Robert's actual words to her were "That I have a deep liking for you" (*E* 138). But that is a full sentence, presumably a paraphrase for "love," the only word that would require real daring. The explanation that Richard now coaxes from Robert is even more euphemistic: "I admire very much the personality of your . . . of . . . your wife. That is the word, I can say it. It is no secret" (*E* 185). He hesitates not where we would expect it—before "admire" or maybe before the abstract "personality"—but before the seemingly neutral category of "wife," although because they remain unmarried, Bertha's social status is problematic. But as happens so often the reader of *Exiles* is left in uncertainty. One critic, for example, suggests that the troubling word is "mistress" (Henke 88). At any rate, Richard decides not to confront him with the considerable difference between this neutral version and what Bertha had already reported to him. Instead, he picks up on Robert's final comment on the word ("It is no secret") and generalizes it to: "Then why did you wish to keep secret your wooing?" Again Robert

bridles at the word, a common tactic in their metalinguistic dialogue. So Richard explains its relevance—and his detailed knowledge.

Later in the same scene Robert speculates aloud about what might have happened if Richard had waited until the seduction had gone farther. His question refers to speech rather than to any real action: “Would you have spoken to me then as you have done just now?” His reference is ambiguous, since Richard has said many things, both accusatory and forgiving. Of course, Robert has disguised as purely hypothetical the passion that he obviously already feels for Bertha. When Richard doesn’t respond to his question, Robert goes on “*more boldly*” to imagine a quite different dialogue, assuming it would then be “too late.” While the audience or reader expects this phrase to signal their sexual relations, Robert refers only to the depth of his own feelings. His own speech would then be compelled by the new situation:

What could I have said then? I could have said only: You are my friend, my dear good friend. I am very sorry but I love her. (*with a sudden fervent gesture*). I love her and I will take her from you however I can because I love her. (E 188)

His gesture reveals his true feelings as he verbally enacts what he doesn’t dare actualize, though the strength of his imagination combined with the violence of the phrase “take her” does give him the rhetorical upper-hand. Richard doesn’t answer his questions, so once again “they look at each other for some moments in silence” as equal opponents, at least in Robert’s scenario.

When Richard finally does respond, he characteristically does so on the metalinguistic rather than the emotional level: “(*calmly*) That is the language I have heard often and never believed in,” because it is overly dramatic. He next critiques Robert’s conventional metaphor of “take her from you” by literalizing it: “Do you mean by stealth or by violence? Steal you could not in my house because the doors were open: nor take by violence if there were no resistance” (E 188)—by him or by her he doesn’t say. As Henke comments, “Richard implies that Bertha is a metaphorical possession” (94). Robert’s response is doubly puzzling: “You forget that the kingdom of heaven suffers violence. And the kingdom of heaven is like a woman,” a strange analogy for Bertha that passes unquestioned, as if they’ve used it before, perhaps in their younger days of “wild conversation.” (The allusion is to Matthew 11:11: “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”) Despite the serious

context, Robert must intend it as a joke, since Richard apparently finds the analogy amusing and says: “(*smiling*) Go on.” However, instead of developing his odd woman/heaven analogy as suggested, Robert takes a more direct approach, paradoxically merging the contrasting tones of his two previous speeches—“(*diffidently but bravely*).” “Do you think you have rights over her—over her heart?” He qualifies his initial statement by restricting it to feelings which cannot be controlled. Richard bluntly denies that he has such rights, though his later behavior reveals more complicated feelings.

Rather than denying Richard’s suspicion of Robert’s crudely sexual motive, however, he confirms it and extends the impulse to all men—including Richard. The faster pace of his speech reinforces its emotional message: “(*rapidly*) Those are moments of sheer madness when we feel an intense passion for a woman. We see nothing. We think of nothing. Only to possess her. Call it brutal, bestial, what you will” (*E* 190). His new madness theory goes far beyond his initial excuse of mere lightheadedness. Richard’s response is pedantically metalinguistic: “(*a little timidly*) I am afraid that that longing to possess a woman is not love,” which refers back to Robert’s hypothetical statement “I love her” (*E* 188) and questions how physical passion relates to love. Ignoring his redefinition, Robert impatiently exaggerates its universality in an emphatic clarification: “No man ever yet lived on this earth who did not long to possess—I mean to possess in the flesh—the woman whom he loves. It is nature’s law” of sexual reproduction, which arouses Richard to an angry twisting of Robert’s metaphor: “(*contemptuously*) What is that to me? Did I vote it?” As if scientific laws were comparable to civil ones.

Robert is not prepared to argue for what is to him intuitively obvious: “But if you love . . . what else is it?” Richard’s definition of love—“(*hesitatingly*) To wish her well”—would turn romantic love into generalized friendship. Robert then calls him on his hypocrisy: “(*warmly*) But the passion which burns us night and day to possess her. You feel it as I do. And it is not what you said now” (*E* 190), oddly not throwing Richard’s phrase back at him. “Her” is ambiguously Bertha and women in general. Robert must be speaking here from their earlier experience as bachelors, and Richard does not deny his friend’s confident insight into his real emotions.

Instead, Richard takes a different tack, posing a question so perfectly phrased that it must have been rehearsed. That he first “*stops for an instant*” signals not uncertainty but his dramatizing instinct. He counters Robert’s claim of passion’s rights and power with a broader

view that parallels mind and body, and also redirects their focus from women in general to Bertha:

Have you . . . ? (*he stops for an instant*) Have you the luminous certitude that yours is the brain in contact with which she must think and understand and that yours is the body in contact with which her body must feel? Have you this certitude in yourself? (*E* 190)

He assumes that a woman without a man is incomplete; she can’t think and feel for herself. He equates the body with feeling rather than sexuality. Of course, Robert has only imagined a hypothetical future claim to Bertha, but Richard accepts it as his actual intention. In response to his formal question, Robert uses Richard’s own technique of the terse echo: “Have you?” We fully expect Richard’s answer to be an angry affirmation. Instead he is “*moved*,” saying “Once I had it, Robert: a certitude as luminous as my own existence—or an illusion as luminous.” At this point he even doubts his own past conviction.

Robert asks if his romantic statement is not “the language of your own youth” (*E* 201), emphasizing the words themselves as well as the beliefs. Of course, the fact that “I heard [them] from you so often in this very place where we are sitting now” enforces their reality. To his question “Have you changed?”, Richard answers ambiguously: “Yes. It is the language of my youth.” Robert now cleverly claims to be the passive vessel of Richard’s own will and words: “Richard, you have driven me up to this point. She and I have only obeyed your will. You yourself have roused these words in my brain. Your own words. Shall we? Freely? Together?” “Your own words” neatly omits the major qualification of youth. In this gesture Robert is the disciple reminding his teacher of their shared ideals; his past words have prompted his present actions, or so he says. Richard, “mastering his emotion,” takes off on Robert’s final word: “Together no. Fight your part alone. I will not free you. Leave me to fight mine” (*E* 201-02). Richard returns to his idea of a duel, and for this confrontation words and their implications remain the weapons of choice.

Dialogue as Gesture

The meanings of their words depend, of course, on much more than the words themselves. The fact that we “speak with our vocal organs, but we converse with our entire bodies” (Abercrombie 64) points to the

paralinguistic aspects of dramatic dialogue. Joyce's stage directions for tones of voice, facial expressions, and gestures help to guide the reader's (and the director's and actors') interpretations of the characters' speeches. Scripted gestures have an added interest for the reader, because they are the only words that remain in the author's own voice, uninflected by the voices of his characters. So they give the reader clues as to how Joyce visualized an ideal performance of his play. Our look at the gestural dialogue in *Exiles* will focus on Richard—the central character whose unusual personality and motives both control and mystify the other two participants in the triangle—and on Robert, his friendly antagonist. Of the many kinds of gestures, their use of hands as signifiers is especially revealing. Joyce's notes for the play add a symbolic resonance to these hand gestures: Richard is "in fact fighting for his own hand, for his own emotional dignity and liberation..." (E 348). Robert wants Richard to use on him "the weapons which social conventions and morals put in the hands of the husband" (E 343.)

That Robert's surname is "Hand" emphasizes his gestural dialogues throughout the play, particularly in his romantic relationship with Bertha, where their hands become focal points of communication. Kenner even goes so far as to call Robert "a 'Hand', not a mind" (*Dublin's* 85) Joyce deftly choreographs his seductive approaches, leaving the viewer surprised by her acquiescence. They talk about her return from Italy, and Bertha says she noticed he had gained weight. In response, Robert "*takes her hand*," saying "And this poor fat Robert—do you dislike him then so much?" (E 142). He holds her hand for a minute while she says that she doesn't believe the seductive talk of men, except for Richard who is different. When Robert asks if she's sure about that, she responds, "*(a little confused, tries to withdraw her hand)* I have answered you." He counters her withdrawal by asking her permission to kiss her hand. She lets him, and he "*lifts her hand to his lips slowly*," pausing when they think they hear Richard returning. A minute later he again grasps her hands and asks if he may kiss her eyes. Next he "*kisses her mouth and passes his hand many times over her hair*." Just before Richard enters from the garden, Robert kisses her passionately, "*holding her head between his hands*" (E 148), a gesture that Richard also uses but with an inquisitorial intent at the end of the play.

Later in his cottage that night, Robert asks Bertha if she appreciates Richard's giving her freedom and "*stretches out both hands to her*," adding that his gift was himself, not an abstraction (E 222). When the wind blows the lamp's flame, "*he stretches his hand across the table*" to extinguish it, leaving just the symbolic light from his bedroom. The next

day he comes to say farewell, and he tells Bertha that all night he saw her face and felt “your hand in my hand.” He takes her hand and asks, “Why do you not look at me? May I not touch you?” Bertha “points to the study: Dick is there.” Robert “*drops her hand*,” remarking caustically, “In that case children be good” (*E* 253). Before she calls Richard from his study, Robert, “*catching her hands*,” asks what in fact happened the previous night (*E* 255). She responds: “You dreamt that I was yours last night.” He then “*kisses both her hands*,” saying “In all my life only that dream is real.” In their romantic dialogues the expressive language of their hands represents more fully sexual contact.

Joyce’s stage directions also give Robert more idiosyncratic, less conscious hand gestures. Describing Bertha’s striking appearance the previous night when she walked beyond the dark trees, he “*moves his hand slowly past his eyes*” (*E* 139), and his own gesture seems to imitate her movement. When Bertha enters his cottage, Robert says, “I fear you (*clasping his hands at his back, quietly but a little defiantly*)” (*E* 210), where the gestural description also expresses his vocal tone. Later when Richard confronts him about Bertha, he twice “*passes his hand over his forehead*,” in an ambiguous gesture of embarrassment (*E* 184, 186). He “ *rubs his hands nervously*” (*E* 191) in a gesture that could also mean anticipation. As they converse, Robert passes “*his hand once or twice thoughtfully over his hair*” (*E* 218). Toward the end of the play when Richard accuses him of betrayal, even more desperation is expressed: “*after a pause [he] strikes his forehead with his hand*” (*E* 189). He makes “*a little gesture of despair*” (*E* 191)—the reader isn’t told exactly what this is. When Richard confesses his sinister motives in allowing the seduction to continue, Robert responds with “*an involuntary gesture*” (*E* 199), and most dramatically, he “*places his hands over Richard’s mouth*” (*E* 200) to silence him.

Within Richard’s more constrained gestural repertoire, his hands also predominate, expressing emotions that range from an outgoing friendliness to desperation. Many gestures are conventional enough. For instance, when Beatrice comes to see him, he walks to her, “holding out his hand,” in a formal gesture of welcoming (*E* 145). He does this again in Act III when she brings him the newspaper with Richard’s article (*E* 245), except this time instead of Beatrice taking his hand, she “places the paper in his hands.” When conventions are deliberately violated, they can send a powerful message. Thus, when Robert comes to say goodbye, Richard comes from his study “but does not hold out his hand” (*E* 256). And when Robert leaves near the end of the play, he says, “Richard,

goodbye. (*offering his hand*) To our next meeting,” but Richard merely “touches his hand” and says goodbye (*E* 262).

Although Richard is more physically restrained than Robert, he does occasionally use dramatic gestures. After Beatrice admits that she comes to his home to see him, she impulsively decides to leave, and Richard “*extending his arms*” asks her to stay. While describing his mother’s mocking voice to Beatrice, Richard is “*holding out his hands to her*” (*E* 128). In Act II when he confesses to Robert his fear of interfering with Bertha’s full experience of life, he first “*lays his hand on his arm*” (*E* 198). Minutes later he tells Robert that when he saw the latter’s humility in the scene with Bertha and the roses, he “*longed to put my arm around your neck*”—though he didn’t in fact do so. After he accuses his wife of planning to meet her lover and Bertha bursts into tears, Richard touches her on the shoulder, but she “*pushes his hand aside*” (*E* 252). At the play’s end Bertha caresses his hand, but Richard “*releases his hand and, taking her head between his hands, bends it back and gazes long into her eyes,*” before announcing his painful doubts about her fidelity (*E* 265). Yet during her last emotional speech Bertha “*holds his hand still*” (*E* 266).

Some of Richard’s gestures suggest an emotional subtext quite different from his statements. For example, he tells Beatrice how much he is suffering, yet as he “*leans back, his hands locked together behind his head*” (*E* 125), his gesture suggests relaxation. When Richard hears of Robert’s rendezvous with Bertha, he exclaims sarcastically: “My great friend! A patriot too! A thief—nothing else! (*he halts, thrusting his hands into his pockets*). But a fool also!” (*E* 173). His gesture seems to mime checking for his wallet. When Bertha accuses Richard of having an affair with Beatrice, he responds bitterly: “Love! (*throws out his hands with a sigh and moves away from her*) I cannot argue with you” (*E* 176). During his impassioned speech proclaiming her independence, he holds her hands, although when she decides to remain with Robert in the cottage, “*he lets her hands fall*” and leaves her (*E* 209). After her meeting with Robert, Bertha vows to tell Richard the truth about what happened, and Richard, “*clenching his hands in the air, passionately*” as if in triumph, says: “Yes, yes. The truth. But I will never know, I tell you” (*E* 250). In a play of such restrained behavior these simple physical gestures carry much more weight than they would in a more conventional drama.

In his confrontation with Richard, Robert suddenly has an insight that works cleverly as both an excuse and a compliment: the issue is not that Bertha is an attractive, sympathetic woman in her own right and he is an inveterate womanizer, but that Richard is “so strong that you attract

me even through her.” Richard, as he frequently does, deliberately misreads Robert’s conventional metaphor of personality by taking it literally: “I am weak.” Enthusiastically responding to his apparent modesty, Robert reasserts his insight: “You, Richard! You are the incarnation of strength.” Instead of standing corrected, Richard oddly enacts his literal meaning: “(*holds out his hands*) Feel those hands,” here the locus of male power. Robert then makes the obvious point that he “meant strength of another kind”—leaving it unspecified. Yet he says this only after participating in Richard’s submission ritual: “(*taking his hands*) Yes. Mine are stronger.” Richard ends this exchange—still holding Robert’s hands—with the fantastic claim that “(*gloomily*) I think you would try to take her by violence,” deliberately misinterpreting Robert’s phrase “take her from you” as referring to attempted rape, for which Richard wouldn’t have the strength to fight him off and defend his wife. After this statement “*He withdraws his hands slowly*” as if reluctant to lose contact with Robert’s strength.

These scripted hand gestures—some conventional, even melodramatic, and others more original and ambiguous—are Joyce’s guidance to the director’s and (secondarily) to the reader’s visualizing of the play’s emotional high points. In addition, Joyce’s stage directions sometimes specify the tone of voice for speeches, shaping their meanings in the give-and-take of the dialogue. Of course, any script “preserves only a fraction of the total physical reality constituting each utterance . . . such as pitch contours, stress, pacing and usually facial expressions and other gestures as well” (Smith 18).

Joyce’s vocal characterizations often suggest psychological subtleties beyond mere tone, revealing the “interplay of language, personality, and implicit authorial comment” (Hart 133). As David Lodge notes, “intonation in speech [has] a quasi-metaphorical function. . .” (78). For example, during their cottage rendezvous Robert, having learned that Richard knows about their flirtation, says “(*quietly but a little defiantly*) I fear a new torture—a new trap” (E 210), and adds “(*impulsively*) Why did you lead me on?” He asks Bertha “(*hesitatingly*) Did you tell him—everything?” He asks “(*diffidently*) Used you to laugh over me—together?” (E 212). How differently this last sentence would read, for example, if said “*sarcastically*.” Similarly, when Bertha urges him to take off his rain-soaked coat, he responds, “I fancy I have a jacket here. (*maliciously*) In my bedroom,” the site of his planned seduction, an adverb such as “*hesitatingly*” would convey a very different sense (and characterization). Like their hand gestures, their selectively scripted tones

of voice can both clarify and complicate otherwise ambiguous or straightforward dialogues.

Dialogue as Power Struggle

While we may think of dialogue participants as ideally equal, in reality “language is always a matter of force, to speak is to exercise the will for power” (Barthes, *Reader* 381). Or as Blanchot puts it, “each of us, and at every moment, either is or finds himself in the presence of a judge” (81), an insight particularly relevant to *Exiles*, since in the confrontation scene Richard “does double duty as both the prosecuting attorney and the accused” (Valente 136), knowing what he does of Robert’s secret wooing, although as Tyndall notes, he “questions all motives but his own” (109). As Kenner writes, “It is in his role as lonely deity that Richard catechizes everyone” (*Dublin’s* 84) with his questions. Indeed, Padraic Colum even suggests that *Exiles* is “a series of confessions; the dialogue has the dryness of recitals in the confessional. . .” (11). But as their dialogue develops, the balance of power and knowledge shifts, so that by the end Robert challenges Richard to a “duel of souls.” In fact, dueling with speeches may be the best metaphor for their whole dialogue.

After he arrives at Robert’s cottage by surprise, Richard asks the probing question, “Have you an appointment?”, to which he already knows the answer—thanks to Bertha. Robert’s response, “(*laughs nervously*) Suspicious to the last!”, echoes his earlier criticism of Richard (“You are too suspicious” [*E* 151]) and implies an anonymous romantic rendezvous. Of course, Robert is in the vulnerable position of not knowing when—or even if—Bertha will appear, so thinking quickly, he discards his earlier plan of delaying his own appearance at the provost’s dinner until 10 p.m. (*E* 160), hoping to leave with Richard before Bertha arrives. This gives Richard the opening to confront Robert about his flirtation with Bertha, but he does so indirectly: “Your appointment also was for the same hour. Here.” He states this “(*wearily, sadly*)” rather than angrily or triumphantly.

Richard obviously has the upper-hand at this point, so he can manipulate the situation in whatever way he chooses. As Benstock comments, “every topic of conversation adds to Richard’s easy accumulation of subtle victories” (369). Robert at first feigns ignorance (“What appointment?”), and when Richard responds “With Bertha,” Robert pretends to be outraged at the very suggestion—“(*stares at him*) Are you mad?”—though he must realize by now that Richard knows.

Richard merely returns his accusation (“Are you?”), implying Robert was crazy to try to deceive him, an abrupt shift from his “weary” tone of voice. Instead of responding, Robert falls silent, realizing he can’t keep up his pretense of innocence, especially since Bertha might arrive at any minute.

At this stage of their dialogue, Robert alternates between long quasi-monologues and short factual questions, while Richard remains strategically silent throughout, allowing his friend to hang himself with his own words. In fact, both men use silence instead of explanation and accusation. So “(after a long pause)” Robert calmly asks, “Who told you?”, implicitly admitting the fact. Richard’s answer couldn’t be briefer—just “She.” Robert’s shock occupies “[A short silence].” Beyond the initial terms “weary, sadly,” there are no adverbials to reveal Richard’s emotional state.

Robert breaks this tense silence between old friends with another semi-monologue “(in a low voice),” first answering Richard’s earlier question with “Yes. I must have been mad.” He then begins to speak “rapidly,” as if to persuade Richard (“Listen to me”), repeating the phrase “a great relief.” He says that he had wanted to call off the rendezvous, although there is no visible sign of his intent, nor is Richard likely to believe him. “I even intended to send word . . . a letter, a few lines. (suddenly) But then it was too late. . .” (*E* 184). The ellipses suggest an improvised deception; he doesn’t explain why it was too late, and his abrupt statement imitates running out of time.

Next Robert’s nervous gesture (“passes his hand over his forehead”) signals the end of his relief theme, and he tries a new approach: “Let me speak frankly, will you?”, implying that he hasn’t been frank until now. But his confessional impulse (“Let me tell you everything”) is cut off by Richard’s terse echo: “I know everything. I have known for some time” (*E* 185). Robert responds with an equally terse question: “Since when?” Richard had earlier asked Bertha the same question in response to her report that Robert “liked me very much” (*E* 166), and Robert had asked Bertha when she realized that he liked her (*E* 142). Richard answers ambiguously, “Since it began between you and her.”

Robert might still deny these accusations, vague and subjective as they seem, but he accepts the accuracy of Richard’s information and again asks “(bewildered) But how did you know all this?”, when he already knows the only possible source—Bertha. The audience then watches him assimilate the surprising fact that Richard knew all along yet did nothing: “You knew? From her? (*Richard nods*) You were watching

us all the time.” Richard corrects his pronoun: “(*very coldly*) I was watching you,” implying that he trusted Bertha. Robert quickly accepts his correction—“I mean, watching me.” But then he turns the tables on Richard with his own accusation: “And you never spoke! You had only to speak a word—to save me from myself,” appealing to their friendship rather than the legalistic gathering of evidence. Richard’s prolonged silence was, in fact, his action.

Then he focuses on Richard himself and on what remains of their lifelong friendship: “You hate me now for what I have done and for. . .” (*E* 186). His pause is mysterious, leaving the audience wondering what else he might hate him for. Richard’s controlled tone deliberately counters Robert’s excitement: “(*quietly, looking at him*) Have I said that I hate you?”, as if literal statements were the only way to convey feelings. Robert, naturally surprised by this, follows up with a more direct question and answer: “Do you not? You must.” From his past experience in seducing other men’s wives, one of whom he describes later in this scene (*E* 194), he obviously finds this incredible. As Mahaffey suggests, “It is Richard, not Robert, who values honesty, and it is Robert, not Richard, who is obsessed with possession; the treachery of both is the assumption that the other should share his own values” (187).

Exchanging the role of priest for sinner, Richard uses the confession of his secret motive for silence as a power play to shock his idealistic friend and gain the upper hand:

That is what I must tell you too. Because in the very core of my ignoble heart I longed to be betrayed by you and by her—in the dark, in the night—secretly, meanly, craftily. By you, my best friend, and by her. I longed for that passionately and ignobly, to be dishonoured for ever in love and in lust, to be. . . . (200)

At this point Robert interrupts him forcibly before he can complete his explanation: “(*bending down, places his hands over Richard’s mouth*) Enough. Enough. (*he takes his hands away*) But no. Go on.” Ironically enough, Richard had earlier warned Robert *against* carrying out this secret betrayal, and he himself already knew the “secret.” As if he is the perpetrator—in a sense, he is—rather than the victim of their betrayal, his dishonor would be not merely temporary but perpetual, and extend beyond lust to include love. Richard “longed” for it, but depended on them to do it of their own free will. He completes the confession Robert interrupted with “To be for ever a shameful creature and to build up my

soul again out of the ruins of its shame.” His spiritual shame is paradoxically eternal and remediable.

Toward the end of the scene the power shifts from Richard to Robert, who cleverly transforms his attempted seduction into a potential spiritual liberation. As if just waiting for the opportunity, he announces his plan as a question:

May it not be that we are here and now in the presence of a moment which will free us both—me as well as you—from the last bonds of what is called morality? My friendship for you has laid bonds on me. (201)

Richard seems unimpressed by his formal speech, getting a dig in with “Light bonds apparently.” Quoting Richard’s own phrase, Robert admits that “I acted in the dark, secretly,” adding, “I will do so no longer. Have you the courage to allow me to act freely?”

To this question Richard could just say “yes,” but instead he turns it into a competition: “A duel—between us?” Robert extends and deepens his metaphor to “a battle of both our souls,” but not against each other—“against all that is false” in their souls and the world. Robert has this spiritual battle planned: “A battle of your soul against the spectre of fidelity, of mine against the spectre of friendship.” Later he defines fidelity as Richard’s “last illusion.” Robert states his belief that “All life is a conquest, the victory of human passion over the commandments of cowardice,” which follows his description of an “intense passion for a woman” when we “see nothing. We think of nothing” (*E* 190). War metaphors of battle, conquest, and victory glorify their middle-class domestic triangle as the “duel of souls” glorifies their verbal sparring.

Robert’s brave resolution to free himself from bourgeois morality melts away humorously when Bertha knocks, and he says “(*in alarm*) What does this mean?” He apparently forgot that she might arrive at any time. While Richard remains calm, Robert panics, saying desperately “Keep her and forgive me”—agreements they had already reached. At this point their high-minded spiritual duel dissolves into a bedroom farce in which both men say they are leaving, Richard remains to face his own baffled wife, and Robert escapes into the back garden forgetting his umbrella, which leaves him standing in the rain.

Conclusions

In developing his dialogical theme in *Exiles*, Joyce's strategies of implication are multiple in both types and examples, and in this essay we have examined just a few of each. For as the young Joyce wrote of Ibsen's best plays, "each phrase is a chapter of experience," so as readers "we have the pleasure not of hearing it read out to us, but of reading it for ourselves. . ." (CW 50). When read as closely and imaginatively as Joyce read his model Ibsen, *Exiles* stands out as a sophisticated psychological drama able to hold its own with Joyce's much more celebrated fiction. While the social issues of freedom within marriage, the obligations of friendship, and the constraints of gender roles retain their relevance today, even more intriguing is Joyce's metalinguistic exploration of the role of implications in speaking, the complications introduced by communicative gestures, and the power struggles that go on beneath the surface of conversations as characters work to understand each other and themselves.

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