

Carlyle in *Ulysses*

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The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences . . .

It may appear wild and farfetched to claim that Thomas Carlyle's rhetoric is the link that intertwines some important symbolic episodes of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. There is no strong evidence to show that Joyce knew the Scottish philosopher's work in depth: neither the biography written by Ellmann (1959) nor his later edition of part of the writer's letters (1975) provide information which throws light on the Carlylean influence over Joyce's narrative discourse.² Thus, taking into consideration the extensive list of studies on Joyce, Carlyle seems to be a rather secondary name for the analysis of the polyphonic network of literary texts which the Irish writer carefully introduces into one of his most important novels: *Ulysses*. Yet, notwithstanding this critical silence, there exist some unmistakable elements that persistently hint at the underground presence of the Victorian essayist in some central passages of Joyce's celebrated novel. Before suggesting how Carlyle's texts linguistically seep back into the complex verbal structure of *Ulysses*, it will be helpful, however, to go over some preliminary questions.

There are at least three key aspects of Carlyle's work that might somehow or other account for his important influence in the Anglo-Irish literary panorama of the second half of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth century:

(a) First, Carlyle is not only one of the most outstanding exponents of German Idealism in Great Britain. This is a philosophical school which, in opposition to the scientific dictates of positivism, seeks a knowledge of the world beyond the material appearance of things. Carlyle is also a political thinker who supported the replacement of a democratic liberal system by an authoritarian model of power ("herocracy").³ Thus, it is not at all surprising that even as late as 1905 G. B. Shaw is still so preoccupied with the social applicability of Carlyle's political ideas that he presents to the audience *Major Barbara*, a play which, despite the myriad of meanings it encloses, is primarily a dramatical enactment of the Carlylean model of Political Economy, as I have attempted to demonstrate elsewhere.⁴ Similarly, Yeats, despite his thematic and rhetorical novelty, very frequently follows Carlyle's principles both in his personal devisal of the theory of the symbol and music as the prime units of poetic communication, and in his cyclical theory of history. Faced with this Anglo-Irish literary atmosphere intoxicated with Carlylean ideas, it is not unlikely that Joyce had a thorough in-depth knowledge of the philosopher's work.

(b) Secondly, one of the major concerns of Carlylean transcendentalism is the construction of a philosophy of language as a system of symbolic signs ("All visible things are emblems . . . Matter exists only spiritually, and to

represent some Idea, and body it forth"⁵) whereby each unit is endowed with a doublet of meanings: one literal, empirical, via the objective formula X is Y; the other, symbolical, charged with a subjective spirituality. We know that an ever-present preoccupation about language pervades Joyce's discourse from the very outset; a preoccupation which gradually leads to a definite fragmentation of the linguistic code as a set of univocal signs to give way to a system in which the kaleidoscopic game of multiple crossed references will become the basic rule.

(c) Finally, Carlyle is the author of an essay entitled *Chartism* (1843) in which one of the moot points is the so-called Irish question. For a writer so obsessed with the creation and circulation of distorted pictures and false images of the national identity and idiosyncrasy of his country, as Joyce was, Carlyle's political essay, as far as the representation of Ireland is concerned, must have proved to be at the very least stimulating enough to become the target of one of his parodies. A clear example of this can be found in chapter 14 of *Ulysses*, namely in the narrator's praise of the progenitor's qualities of Theodore Purefoy, the father of the baby whose birth is expected throughout the novel. The passage is short but it clearly indicates the covert presence of Carlyle's rhetorical flourishes in the direct attack on the pseudo-Malthusian theories of birth-control, in the passionate defence of procreation and work as sacred principles, and finally in the great number of references and quotations in German (*U* 345-46).⁶

Obviously enough, all I have argued so far could be refused as an ungrounded—even unsound—surmise. There is nothing more linguistically and ideologically different from Joyce's novel than Carlyle's writings. Yet let us accept at least momentarily that the argument proposed here may be plausible, i.e. that Joyce knew all too well Carlyle's work and that consciously or unconsciously, either by chance or as the result of a deliberate choice, the shadow of the philosopher could lurk behind some of the episodes of *Ulysses*. In this regard there is a passage that keeps a much closer relation with Carlyle than is expected. I am referring to an episode which can be found at the end of the novel, in chapter 16, the one that precisely narrates the well-known meeting between Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus and their night walk through the streets of Dublin. First, we have to make it clear that this is precisely the chapter in which Bloom, in a most concise manner, takes a stand on the conflicting political independence of his country. This is no other than a rather pacifist creed: the utter rejection of the violence and uncontrolled turmoil of the pro-independence movements of his time, and simultaneously the defence of an anti-nationalist, anti-partisan ideal according to the Latin motto *Ubi patria, vita bene* (*U* 526). The theme of the destiny of Ireland, that is to say, which role she must play in the making of her history, is somehow present throughout the discursive structure of the entire chapter: during their walk along the city streets, Leopold and Stephen have only come across the image of wrecked people, tossed to and fro by destiny rather than the makers of their history. Lord John Corley, a vagrant of dubious aristocratic lineage, who pesters passers-by with the pitiful story of his misfortunes; sailor Murphy, whose behaviour and distortion of reality can only arouse a feeling of compassion; the prostitute and all the characters they run into come to forge a national identity at odds with the idealized image of the glorious past of Ireland, the most fertile of all nations, the only one capable of building a heroic destiny, according to Murphy's long-winded speech. Immediately the patriotic conversation of all those present at the Cabman's shelter becomes a martial discourse: Ireland will beat England in the fight,

Hibernia will claim victory over Albion. Bloom's refusal of this kind of belligerent attitude is well-known. His conversation with Stephen will again insist on the same idea. Later, both characters decide to leave the pub and carry on with their walk. From this moment onwards, at least on a purely textual level, the references to the Irish question vanish altogether: Bloom shows the young boy a photograph of his wife and suggests his spending the night at home. Yet, before the chapter closes, there are two significant mentions of a horse which, "dragging a sweeper" (*U* 540), cleans the city streets. The question we must make at this point is twofold. First, which meaning—if any—are we to associate with the image of a lean horse, weakened by hard labour, which submissively obeys the cabman's orders in its humble job? Secondly, could the image of this animal be somehow related to what we have argued to be the central theme of the chapter, that is, the Irish question? Or, is it only a picturesque element completely out of key with the thematic unity of the chapter at stake? Obviously, it is Bloom that muses over the sight of the poor defenceless animal, biologically created to do hard labour, trained to be a slave ever dependent on its master's commands. It is also Bloom who surprisingly compares the submission of the horse with the threatening image of the rabid dog he saw in Barney Kiernan's pub. i.e. with Garryowen, the Citizen's loyal companion:

. . . Bloom looked at the head of a horse not worth anything like sixtyfive guineas, suddenly in evidence in the dark quite near so that it seemed new, a different grouping of bones and even flesh because palpably it was a fourwalker, a hipshaker, a blackbuttock, a taildangler, a headhanger putting his hind foot foremost the while the lord of his creation sat on the perch, busy with his thoughts. But such a good poor brute he was sorry he hadn't a lump of sugar but, as he wisely reflected, you could scarcely be prepared for every emergency that might crop up. He was just a big nervous foolish noodly kind of a horse, without a second care in the world. But even a dog, he reflected, take that mongrel in Barney Kiernan's of the same size, would be a holy horror to face. But it was no animal's fault in particular if he was built that way like the camel, ship of the desert, distilling grapes into potheen in his hump. Nine tenths of them could be caged or trained, nothing beyond the art of man barring the bees. (*U* 541)

Here we find two totally different animal images: in opposition to the maxim of blind obedience and utter acceptance of the master's voice, symbolized by the horse, the dog epitomizes the opposite pattern of behaviour: disobedience and fight against his superior. Undoubtedly, what is at issue from a metaphorical or symbolic perspective is which kind of political attitude the Irish people must assume or, in other words, which position regarding her political status must be adopted by Ireland: either to be submissive to the British empire or to fight for the political emancipation; either the equine or the canine model. This might be a tentative interpretation of the multiple meanings which these animal images fulfill in *Ulysses*. Yet if we keep in mind that identical symbols play an important part in Carlyle's political writings, my weak hypothesis begins to gain glimpses of plausibility and even of veracity. What do we find, then, in Carlyle's political discourse?⁷ Simply a prescriptive model which aims to teach the nineteenth century British citizen the correct pattern of behaviour within his/her social community. For the Scottish philosopher there are two opposing attitudes which the individual or the social whole can assume in the development of the political realm:

(i) An attitude of obedience, of subordination, even of subjugation to the leader. Man needs to be guided by his superiors in order to reach the longed-for harmony in the social *status quo*:

Man, little as he may suppose it, is necessitated to obey superiors. He is a social being in virtue of this necessity; nay he could not be gregarious otherwise. He obeys those whom he esteems better than himself, wiser, braver. . . . (*Past and Present*, 234)⁸

(ii) An attitude of rebellion against any form of authority, of civil disobedience which can only bring about social chaos and anarchy.

It is a truism that in the political model designed by Carlyle only the first pattern is adequate for the foundation of a well-structured society. Given that the second pattern does not acknowledge the supremacy of the leaders and goes as far as to question the validity of their commands, it can only evolve into a revolution or a war, i.e. in the final dissolution of any kind of bond that holds fast the social contract. What is striking, however, is that Carlyle uses animal images to illustrate his political theory. For the Victorian thinker the *horse* is the clearest symbol of the first model of social relationships: blind obedience and submission to the leader. The equine metaphors epitomize the correct social attitude, since a domesticated horse accepts the commands of an agent who is able to control it. Otherwise, the horse becomes a wild unbridled creature:

Surely of all "rights of man," this right of the ignorant man to be guided by the wiser, to be, gently or forcibly, held in the true course by him, is the indisputablest . . . If Freedom have any meaning, it means enjoyment of this right, wherein all other rights are enjoyed . . . The brawny craftsman finds it no child's play to mould his unpliant rugged masses; neither is guidance of men a dilettantism . . . The wild horse bounds homeless through the wilderness, is not led to stall and manger; but neither does he toil for you, but for himself only.⁹

The *horse*, then, symbolizes, as far as Carlyle's discourse is concerned, the subordinate in the implicit contract that enables the social game. That is, it is the image of the working classes dependent at any moment on their employer. Within this social class, the figure of the "Sanspotatoe", i.e. the Irishman, becomes an illuminating example of the lowest conditions that can be reached by workers (*Chartism* 25).¹⁰ It is no coincidence, then, that Carlyle continuously compares the employer-employee relationship with the one kept between a hockey or a farmer and their horse. If the former neglects the latter, the ride or the farming fails altogether, i.e. the mechanism that guarantees the proper working of the social machinery breaks down.

Not surprisingly, the image of the second pattern of political attitude, i.e. the image of disobedience and social riots, is no other than the dog: "A Dog of knowledge has free utterance; but the Warhorse is almost mute, very far from free!" (*Past and Present* 213). A state whereby the power of the leading classes fails—this Carlyle considers to be the case of Great Britain in relation to Ireland—becomes a state on the border of its own disintegration: "A world of Patent-Digesters will have nothing to digest: such world ends in, and by law of Nature must end in 'overpopulation'; in howling universal famine, 'impossibility' and suicidal madness, as of endless dog-kennels run rabid" (*Past and Present* 249). In one of his most controversial writings, *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850), a propos of the conflictive emancipation of the African-American people, Carlyle, totally opposed to this political process,

warns us about the dangers of a hypothetical state in which horses, driven by reasons of inequality and abuse, decide to break free of their masters. Carlyle's words are interesting in its conclusions: in the long run the equine independence can only bring about the dismantling of any form of social institution, a chaotic world which the philosopher imagines to be dwelled by ferocious "watchdogs" and "helldogs":

Certainly Emancipation proceeds with rapid strides among us . . . West-Indian Blacks are emancipated, and it appears refuse to work: Irish Whites have long been entirely emancipated; and nobody asks them to work, or on condition of finding them potatoes . . . permits them to work. Among speculative persons, a question has sometimes arisen: In the progress of Emancipation, are we to look for a time when all the Horses also are to be emancipated, and brought to the supply-and-demand principle? Horses too have 'motives'; are acted-on by hunger, fear, hope, love of oats, terror of platted leather; nay they have vanity, ambition . . . The Horse, poor dumb four-footed fellow, he too has private feelings, his affections, gratuities. . . .

Him too you occasionally tyrannise over; and with bad result to yourselves, among others; using the leather in a tyrannous unnecessary manner . . . To remedy which, so far as remediable, fancy—the horses are all 'emancipated'; restored to their primeval right of property in the grass of this Globe . . . And Farmer Hodge sallying forth, on a dry spring morning, with a sieve of oats in his hand, and agony of eager expectation in his heart, is he happy? Help me to plough this day, Black Dobbin: oats in full measure if thou wilt. 'Hlunh, No -thank!' snorts Black Dobbin; he prefers glorious liberty and the grass . . . Not a quadruped of them will plough a stroke for me. Corn crops are *ended* [sic] in this world! For the sake, if not of Hodge, the of Hodge's horses, one prays this benevolent practice might now cease, and a new better one try to begin. Small kindness to Hodge's horses to emancipate them! The fate of all emancipated horses is, sooner or later, inevitable. To have in this habitable Earth no grass to eat—in Black Jamaica gradually none, as in White Connemara already none; to roam aimlessly, eating the seedfields of the world; and be hunted by Chaos, by the due watchdogs and due hell-dogs, with such horrors of forsaken wretchedness as were never seen before!¹¹

Even taking the risk of making what Eco (1992) labels as an "overinterpretation of the text"¹² we believe that it is this Carlylean identification horse-submission to/dog-fight against the superiors that operates again in certain passages of *Ulysses*. In the case of Joyce's novel, the superiors are the British Empire and the Catholic Church. Yet, the parallel we can draw between Carlyle and the Irish novelist should not be pushed too far: what we find along the pages of *Ulysses* is simply a deliberate use of certain animal images with a clear political connotation, but this does not entail Joyce's acceptance of their original ideological premises. Bloom is never in favour of any pattern of social behaviour: whereas it is evident that he refuses the doctrine of violence and the riots of the pro-independence movement, enacted by the Citizen and his dog Garrygowen, for the sole reason that it can only make the delicate Irish question worse, it is no less true that he is against perpetuating a political situation responsible for a *horse-like* country defined by hunger and submission to the British rule.¹³ Joyce's use of these animal metaphors designed by Carlyle in his political writings can only be considered as one of the many examples that show the boundless polyphonic nature of *Ulysses*.

Notes

1. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon, 1972) 23.

2. See Richard Ellman, *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1959) and *Selected Letters of James Joyce* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975). We know that at the early age of sixteen Joyce wrote a short essay titled "Force" for which he took Ruskin's *A Crown of the Wild Olive* as a model and source of inspiration. Obviously Ruskin is not Carlyle, but it is well-known that the former was a close disciple of the latter and that his political discourse repeats many of the key concepts already exposed by the Scottish philosopher (JJ 70).

3. Examples of Carlyle's political proposal of a government of a hero invested with military and spiritual attributes of leadership, what he once called a "king-Pointiff," can be found scattered throughout his work. See especially *Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1845) and the cycle of lectures compiled under the title of *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, 2 vols., ed. H. M. Buller (London: Macmillan, 1926). See Jean Touchard *Historia de las ideas políticas* (Madrid: Tecnos, 1961) 534, as well as ch. 2 "Les vertus de la hiérarchie" of François Bédarida's *La société anglaise du milieu du XIXe siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1990) for a brief but interesting exposition of Carlyle's political ideas. See also Michael Timko, *Carlyle and Tennyson* (London: Macmillan, 1988) for an interesting discussion of Carlyle's aesthetic thought.

4. See Mauricio Aguilera Linde, "Modelo de Economía Política en *Major Barbara*: apuntes sobre ideología victoriana," *Actas del Congreso TEATRO siglo XX*, ed. Joaquín María Aguirre et al. (Madrid: Facultad de Ciencias de la Información, Universidad Complutense, 1994) 50-58.

5. Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1902) 76. See also ch. 2 ("El modelo de lenguaje transcendentalista: Carlyle") of Mauricio Aguilera Linde's *Modelos de lenguaje poético en Tennyson: un análisis de la economía política y la teoría metapoética en dos lecturas de "Maud"* (Granada: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Granada, 1994).

6. All the quotations included hereafter have been taken from James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).

7. We only refer to the political discourse that can be found in works such as *Chartism*, *Past and Present* and *Latter-Day Pamphlets*. It is here that the animal images become more recurrent and significant. In *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (1834) the image of the horse is replaced by the image of the pig with identical symbolic content. See the connotations associated with this animal symbol in "The Pig Philosophy" as exposed in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, ch. 8: 268-70.

8. Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1845). Subsequent references have been taken from this edition.

9. Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1842) 53. Subsequent quotations are to this edition.

10. See ch. 4 of *Chartism*, "Finest Peasantry of the World" (24-35) for an exposition of the critical economic and political situation of Ireland at this time. Carlyle affirms: "Ireland has near seven million of working people, the third unit of whom, it appears by Statistic Science, has not for thirty weeks each year as many third-rate potatoes as will suffice him . . . Was change and reformation needed in Ireland? Has Ireland been governed in a 'wise and loving' manner? . . . The Sanspotatoe is of the selfsame stuff as the superfinest Lord Lieutenant. Not an individual Sanspotatoe human scarecrow but had a Life given him out of Heaven, with Eternities depending on it" (25).

11. Thomas Carlyle, *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1894) 22-23.

12. See Umberto Eco, "Overinterpreting Texts," *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 45-66.

13. Joyce's attitude, though conflicting and never simple, was rather clear from the beginning: he never supported any warfare activity in the process of the political

independence of Ireland. He was, however, in favour of other non-belligerent methods: either the economic boycott against Great Britain or the refusal of the Irish people to enroll the British army in case of a war (*Selected Letters* XVI).