

Flaubert's *Trois Contes* and Joyce's *Dubliners*.

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Abstract

This essay carries out an intertextual reading of both authors' short stories to reveal the extent of Joyce's engagement with Flaubert from the earliest days of his writing career. Joyce's response to Flaubert in *Dubliners* can be traced directly to the linguistic, thematic, and structural details of Flaubert's short stories. The most important of these echoes, and the focus of this essay, concerns the extremely rare word 'gnomon', which appears in the first paragraph of Joyce's opening story, "The Sisters." This term has never before been related to its appearance in the last of Flaubert's short stories, "Hérodiade." This essay will argue that Joyce's use of the word constitutes a self-conscious signpost to his subtle but extensive response to Flaubert in *Dubliners*.

"In *Dubliners*, English prose catches up with Flaubert"
(Ezra Pound, "Past History," May 1933)¹

Despite Ezra Pound's numerous early comparisons of their works, critical interest in the influence of Gustave Flaubert on James Joyce has been surprisingly scarce. Vague analogies —on the grounds of their association with realism, or of their reputations as frenzied workers obsessed with the quest for the *mot juste*— are not rare, but they are usually made in casual asides rather than in the context of any focused analysis.² Pound's identification of a connection between the two novelists is supported by Budgen, who states not only that Joyce had read Flaubert's every word, but also that "Of all the great nineteenth-century masters of fiction Joyce held Flaubert in highest esteem."³ That Joyce was familiar with Flaubert's letters is revealed by the reformulation, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, of one of Flaubert's central tenets regarding authorial effacement. Stephen declares that "The artist, like the god of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (*P* 219), unmistakably echoing Flaubert's assertion that "L'artiste doit être

dans son oeuvre comme Dieu dans la création, invisible et tout-puissant, qu'on le sente partout, mais qu'on ne le voie pas."⁴ In 1968, Constantine Curran's memoirs established that Joyce was familiar as a student with Flaubert's short stories ("Flaubert frequently cropped up in our talk; it was Joyce who made me read *La Légende de saint Julien l'Hospitalier*, that ingenious piece of literary vitrail"⁵). As early as 1922, Pound had aligned Joyce's stories with Flaubert's, claiming that in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce "fait du Flaubert, mais ne dépasse pas les *Trois Contes* et *L'Education sentimentale*."⁶

The sparseness of direct and easily recognizable allusions to Flaubert within Joyce's works goes some way to explaining the critical vacuum surrounding the literary relationship. The case for a substantial enquiry into the existence of an indubitable Flaubertian influence seemed to have been abandoned until the discovery by David Hayman, in 1990, of three jottings in one of the *Finnegans Wake* notebooks. On non-consecutive pages, they read:

Flaub. treatment
of language as a kind
of despair
J.J contrary (*JJA* 30, 315)

J[ohn] S[tanislaus] J[oyce] can rest having made me
G[ustave]. F[laubert] can rest having made me (*JJA* 30, 329)

Larbaud result of
J[ames]. J[oyce] + G[ustave]. F[laubert]. (*JJA* 30, 338)

These crucial jottings were revealed in an article published in the same year in a slim collection entitled "Joyce et Flaubert."⁷ Even this failed to ignite Joycean critical circles as might have been expected. The articles in the booklet mostly focus their attention on the major works, or in general trends discernible across the bodies of both authors' works, leaving the specific connections between *Trois Contes* and *Dubliners* largely unexplored. This is not, as I hope to show, for lack of a real intertextuality—subtle though it may be—at work between the two collections.

The neglect of this specific connection may have something to do with a notion that these works are not "the heart of the matter," that the real Flaubert and Joyce lie in the lengthy masterworks, in *Madame Bovary* and *L'Education sentimentale*, in *A Portrait*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*. It might also have something to do with the fact that the contexts in which both authors set to work on these stories stand in stark opposition to each

other —*Dubliners* (1914) being one of Joyce’s earliest written and published works, and the pages of *Trois Contes* (1877) being amongst the very last Flaubert wrote. The two collections, moreover, were written to completely different purposes. Flaubert —aging, lonely, impoverished, depressed, and perhaps above all disillusioned by the failure of his previous works to raise the French people out of its bourgeois apathy— was no longer writing as a disgusted scourge, but in an attempt to soothe his nerves —raw from the writing of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*— and to please his friend George Sand, who had always pleaded against the cold impersonality of his works: “la suprême impassibilité est une chose anti-humaine, et un roman doit être humain avant tout.”⁸ Flaubert assured Sand that in *Un Coeur simple*, “vous reconnaîtrez votre influence immédiate” and that “la tendance morale, ou plutôt le dessous humain de cette petite oeuvre vous sera agréable!”⁹ The excitement he experienced in the writing of *Trois Contes* was unprecedented: “Il me semble que la prose française peut arriver à une beauté dont on a pas l’idée.”¹⁰ Having left the grimmer impressions of his earlier works behind, Flaubert was praised by reviewers and read by a public who for the first time was spending for pleasure rather than for the thrill of owning a potential *succès de scandale*. The sympathetic tones of *Trois Contes* bring into question the truth of the first of Joyce’s “Flaubert” jottings in the *Finnegans Wake* notebook (“Flaub. treatment of language as a kind of despair”): it was as a bulwark against despair that the exalting task of writing *Trois Contes* was carried out. The extent of the jotting’s simplification is obvious from even the most casual reading of *Dubliners*. In the context of a comparison of *Trois Contes* and *Dubliners*, the last line of the jotting, “J.J contrary”, has some —limited— degree of truth, but not in the sense Joyce intended. “Despair” —though too strong a word— is more consonant with Joyce’s first published work than with Flaubert’s last.

Indeed, Joyce’s ambitions could not have been more different from Flaubert’s when he set out to write *Dubliners*. The Marxisant closing words of his early essay, “A Portrait of the Artist” —written only a few months before the first version of “The Sisters”— with their haughty condemnation of “the general paralysis of an insane society,”¹¹ are suggestive of what was to come. Joyce’s letters about *Dubliners* testify to his belief in the power of his “chapter of the moral history” of Ireland, with its “style of scrupulous meanness” and “special odour of corruption” (*Letters II* 134, 123), to “forge [...] the uncreated conscience of [his] race.” (*P* 257) Though Joyce’s quarrel with Ireland and Dublin can be seen to mellow even within the collection itself, his treatment of the city and

its inhabitants was offensive enough to his contemporaries to cause a decade's acrimonious delay in achieving publication.

These differences in the conception and reception of *Trois Contes* and *Dubliners* may make an intertextual relationship seem unlikely. But Pound's intuition of an influence is correct: examined closely, the stories reveal a complex web of linguistic, thematic, structural and technical echoes.

Several specific linguistic echoes seem to put Joyce's response to Flaubert's short stories in *Dubliners* beyond doubt. Before making note of direct intertextual occurrences, it is worth pointing out that like *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Dubliners* very closely rephrases a key Flaubertian statement. The borrowed phrase originally occurs in *L'Education sentimentale* when the narrator describes Mme Dambreuse's mastery of social situations: "s'il lui échappait des lieux communs, c'était dans une formule tellement convenue que sa phrase pouvait passer pour une déférence ou une ironie."¹² As Prendergast¹³ has shown, this comment (entirely¹³ concordant with Flaubert's assertion that his *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* was written in such a way that "le lecteur ne sache pas si on se fout de lui, oui ou non"¹⁴) constitutes a highly self-conscious gesture on Flaubert's part, by means of which attention is drawn to the "reversibility" of the text, to the way in which its various unattributable discourses leave readers struggling to decide whether to read a phrase ironically or naively—a decision with which the reader of any Flaubertian text is continually confronted. Joyce's stories present us with the same interpretative gamble. In *Counterparts*, Lenehan is described in precisely the same terms as Flaubert's Mme Dambreuse: "A shade of mockery relieved the servility of his manner. To save himself he had the habit of leaving his flattery open to the interpretation of raillery." This self-consciousness about the hermeneutical efforts demanded by the text is a feature of all the *Dubliners* stories; in this instance, however, the Flaubertian echo is unmistakable—and would be even if Joyce had not thrown in, as an extra hint, that final word, "raillery," with its French look, French sound, and French etymology.

This virtual quotation supports the hypothesis of a general Flaubertian influence in *Dubliners*. The hypothesis of a specific relationship between the collection and *Trois Contes* is substantiated by a cluster of echoes to be found in the first of the *Dubliners* stories, "The Sisters." The least momentous of these echoes consists in a single adverb. But of all Flaubertian adverbs, none has attracted as much attention as the one Joyce chooses for insertion in his opening story. The last word of *Trois Contes*, it occurs at the end of the mesmerizing description of the transportation of Iaokanann's head away from Hérode's

palace into Galilee: “Comme elle était très lourde, ils la portaient alternativement.” (*Trois Contes*¹⁵ 186). Prolonging the sentence with its heavy, sonorous, slowly-unfolding syllables, reinforcing the reader’s sense of the head’s weight, and suggestive of the length of the journey ahead, it is an excellent example of what Culler has termed Flaubert’s “elephantine grace” and deliberate “compositional clumsiness.”¹⁶ Proust, referring specifically to this instance, commented that adverbs “sont toujours placés dans Flaubert de la manière à la fois la plus laide, la plus inattendue, la plus lourde...”¹⁷ The same impression of rhythmical imbalance and postponed closure is produced by Joyce’s use of the almost identical adverb in “The Sisters”: “and, as I pattered, he used to smile pensively and nod his head, now and then pushing huge pinches of snuff up each nostril *alternately*” (*D* 13). I quote from the semicolon because the use of that ponderous punctuation mark, followed by “and,” and then by further commas, is highly reminiscent of Flaubert’s habits regarding the (heavy) use of punctuation and conjunctions: the quoted adverb is encased in a sentence which vividly recalls the cadences of the French forebear.

The second direct intertextual echo occurs in the second sentence of “The Sisters”: “(it was vacation time)” (*D* 9) —a peculiar phrase, not only because the parentheses generate a double emphasis on the unusual nature of the period of time in which the story is set, but also because the emphasis is difficult to understand: the story could very well have unfolded precisely as it does had it not been vacation time —though the suggestion of freedom does eventually ring in tune with the boy’s sense of liberation, rather than distress, at the priest’s death. One possible reason for the phrase’s inclusion may be found in a sentence —also syntactically isolated as a unit at the beginning of a paragraph— from Flaubert’s opening story, *Un Coeur simple*: “C’était l’époque des vacances” (*TC* 44).¹⁸ In the next *Dubliners* story, “An Encounter,” the phrase occurs again, slightly modified: “The summer holidays were near at hand...” (*D* 21). The word “holidays” situates the action of the second story within the same ambiguous time-frame as the first, but is less obvious than “vacation” in its suggestion of vacancy —“vacance” in French— with all the negative intimations of lack (gnomon) and “the incertitude of the void” (*U* 17.1020) which that shared Latin root may carry. This “vacation time” has been related to the word “gnomon” in other ways as well. Hélène Cixous, amongst others, has attempted to make sense of the puzzling emphasis on “vacation time” by suggesting that this distinction between special time and ordinary time may be related to the geometrical term¹⁹ which, occurring in italics within the story’s opening paragraph, insistently begs for attention.

The suggestion gathers force from the previously unnoted fact that the word “gnomon” constitutes an act of intertextual signposting on Joyce’s part. Indeed, the rare word appears in exactly the same form in “Hérodiades” (the last of the Flaubertian stories), in the context of a heated discussion, at the banquet, of a miracle performed by Jesus, with time—a gnomon—at the heart of the story: “Et il l’avait trouvée sur le seuil, étant sortie de sa couche quand le gnomon du palais marquait la troisième heure, l’instant même où il abordait Jésus.”²⁰ The extreme rarity of this word in all contexts suggests that the echo in *Dubliners* is not innocent, in spite of the fact that the narrator of “The Sisters” specifically relates his knowledge of the word to “the Euclid”—a provision of source which ensures the plausibility of the child’s knowledge of the word, but in no way occludes its other meanings, one of which—as illustrated by the Flaubertian use—relates to time. According to the *OED*, the first meaning of “gnomon” is “a pillar, rod, or other object which serves to indicate the time of day by casting its shadow upon a marked surface; esp. the pin or triangular plate used for this purpose in an ordinary sun-dial.” This definition ties in nicely with the imagery of the opening paragraph of “The Sisters,” in which the boy looks up at the blank surface of a window in search of a mark (a matter of light and shadow, as on a sundial) of death—of time passing:

Night after night I had passed the house (it was vacation time) and studied the lighted square of window: and night after night I had found it lighted in the same way, faintly and evenly. If he was dead, I thought, I would see the reflection of candles on the darkened blind for I knew that candles must be set at the head of the corpse. (*D* 9)

The *OED* second definition for the word states that “gnomon” is “occasionally applied to other instruments serving as ‘indicators,’” and according to a French dictionary,²¹ “gnomon” has also come to mean the frame of the sun-dial itself as opposed to the reflecting rod—this explains the use of the word in “Hérodiades,” where “gnomon” refers to the time-keeping device as a whole, rather than to the sun-dial’s rod. It is easy to see, in the light of these definitions, that Joyce puts the image of the gnomon to use even before the word occurs in the text. The window itself is a gnomon, as the frame on which the sign of time, the sign of death—the candles: multiple gnomons—will appear “at the head of the corpse” to mark the time of death. (More echoes of “Hérodiades” rush in, of course, at this early mention of “the head of the corpse.”) Meanings spiral into each other when we factor in the meaning the text foregrounds, of the Euclidian gnomon as “the part of a parallelogram which remains after a similar parallelogram is taken away from one of its corners” (*OED*). An image of both presence and absence, like the window which so

captivates the boy's morbid wonder, the geometrical gnomon also stands for lack — a theme prominent in this story where secrecy and its grammatical counterpart, aposiopesis, prevail.

Two further points can usefully be made regarding the import of the word “gnomon” from the last of Flaubert's stories into the first of Joyce's. The first — semantic — is that an even earlier meaning of “gnomon,” from ancient Greek — “to perceive, judge, know” (*OED*) — is as relevant to “Hérodiad” and “The Sisters” as the other meanings. Indeed, as Fritz Senn²² has pointed out, the opening of “The Sisters” is full of words which seem to invite interpretative labour: “I'll tell you my opinion,” “I have my own theory,” “My idea is,” “That's my principle.” The narrator recalls his own bafflement regarding the gnomonic statements which act as tantalizing screens to his understanding (“I puzzled my head to extract meaning from his unfinished sentences”), and we hear that his bond with the priest had consisted partly in the pursuit of meaning: “he had explained to me the meaning of the different ceremonies” (*D* 11, 13). The boy's detective quest for knowledge fades in prominence as the story develops so that in the end he listens in silence to the conversation of dissimulating adults, defeated — “crossed” and “resigned” (*D* 17, 15), perhaps, like the priest, to the baffling lack or inscrutability of signs.

The second point follows from the first. It concerns the window at the beginning of the story — a window which performs its function in the story only by being, in fact, the opposite of a window: a screen. The site of a haunting lack of signs, “uncanny” (another word from the first page of “The Sisters”) because of the faintness and evenness of its lighted square, it is anything but transparent. It seems, therefore, to have bearing on the question of impossible knowledge, irretrievable meaning — a question of gnomon. As a screen to knowledge and as a symbol of the lack of knowledge resulting from its screening, the window constitutes a strong intertext with Flaubert's second story, “La Légende de saint Julien l'Hospitalier” — a literary recasting of the story of the saint as it appears on the stained-glass window of Rouen cathedral. As in Joyce's story, the tale's emphasis is on the opacity of its windows. Even the closing sentence, in which the narrator names the cathedral window as his source (“Et voilà l'histoire de saint Julien l'Hospitalier, telle à peu près qu'on la trouve, sur un vitrail d'église, dans mon pays” [*TC* 129]),²³ seems to act as a veil, shutting away from memory the text's earlier, more problematic, stained-glass windows. References to these are clustered together around the scene of Julien's parricide. Whilst Julien is away on his second great hunt, his parents arrive at the castle gate and are invited by his wife to spend the night in the younger couple's bed. The narrator comments

on their sleep as if from within the chamber: “Le jour allait paraître, et, derrière le vitrail, les petits oiseaux commençaient à chanter.”(TC 112)²⁴ The emphasis, as Felman²⁵ has shown, is on border lines, border times —night and day, life and death: as in “The Sisters” (and to some extent, “The Dead”), the window symbolizes the divide between the living and the dead (or the soon-to-be-dead). Both windows are intimations of an impending and expected change, and both reverse the usual mode of gnomonic time-telling. It is not shadow that will reveal, but light. The ludicrous motto incorrectly attributed to Pope Leo XIII in *Grace* takes on a strange ironic relevance to these windows: “*Lux upon Lux*” (D 167), light upon light. It is the light of the candles superimposed upon the lighted window which is to signify death in “The Sisters,” just as the light of day on the stained-glass window in “La Légende” will signify death by marking the time of Julien’s return. And yet by an ironic twist of plot, Julien returns to his castle before the light of dawn is light enough. The window, in this instance, is literally a screen, obscuring the light that might have prevented the double murder: “Les vitraux garnis de plomb obscurcissaient la pâleur de l’aube”(TC 116).²⁶ And then, with Julien lost in darkness, “perdu dans les ténèbres,” the killings take place, their bloodiness multiplied by the window’s refraction of the light — which finally, ironically, shines in at full strength: “Le reflet écarlate du vitrail, alors frappé par le soleil, éclairait ces tâches rouges, et en jetait de plus nombreuses dans tout l’appartement”(TC 116-7).²⁷ Joyce’s story echoes this striking image of intense patterned light. The boy in “The Sisters” enters the death chamber, and stands on the other side of the illegible window, which remains a screen, no more amenable to being seen through from the inside than it had been from the outside: “The room through the lace end of the blind was suffused with dusky golden light amid which the candles looked like pale thin flames” (D 14). Finally, it is worth noting that both these passages relate intertextually to a sentence in *Un Coeur simple*, a testimony to Joyce’s concentrated intertextual response as well as to the tight unity of *Trois Contes*. The same effect of patterned light streaming in is achieved in a moment which exemplifies the static quality which to some extent pertains to all the stories under consideration: “L’éblouissante clarté du dehors plaquait des barres de lumière entre les lames des jalousies”(TC 36).²⁸

In neither of these two collections is the importance of “gnomon” merely semantic, thematic, or symbolic. Indeed, as Weir²⁹ has shown by highlighting another of its meanings, the gnomon is an apt figure for the structures of these stories as well. The meaning Weir explains is related to the geometrical meaning foregrounded in “The Sisters.” Weir takes as his reference a textbook of Euclid’s *Elements*³⁰ and infers from its diagrams and definitions

that Joyce is likely to have had a slightly different geometrical conception of the gnomon from that which his critics have for the most part assumed.³¹ As is the case with many geometrical figures, the definition of a gnomon varies. One of these definitions calls gnomon a figure formed by the prolongation of the diagonal running from one point of a parallelogram through the opposite point and beyond, and the use of this third point to construct a new parallelogram containing the first. Inversely, the third point may be taken on the diagonal within the original parallelogram, so that a new, smaller parallelogram is formed, contained within the larger. Thus, the gnomon is related to notions of expansion and contraction, of progression towards ever greater units or towards ever smaller units contained within each other. Weir adduces the metaphysical thoughts of Bruno —whom Joyce, as testified by his early essay,³² greatly admired— on the gnomon: “The gnomon is that which, added or subtracted enlarges or diminishes a figure without changing its form.”³³ Weir argues convincingly that the gnomon is made to function structurally at various points throughout *Dubliners*. He identifies Farrington, the protagonist of “Counterparts,” as representative of two applications of the gnomon as structuring device. Firstly, as an exponent of a kind of failed —gnomonic— mimicry. Farrington’s job is to copy, but his copying is lacunary: he fails to reproduce documents completely. His account to his friends of his witty repartee to Mr Alleyne —omitting his humiliating forced apology— is similarly lacunary. The other, Nolanesque, application of the gnomon stems from Farrington’s behaviour at home when he rolls up his sleeves (as he had done in the pub) to beat his son, a younger and safer counterpart than Weathers had been. Weir suggests that Farrington’s oppressive relationship to his son is but a smaller-scale version of the oppression he himself is submitted to by Weathers (with his English-sounding name) and by his colleagues at the office, and that these relationships figure the nature of Ireland’s gnomonic relation to England. In this reading, Farrington’s son is the smallest and weakest in a set of increasingly powerful structures —Tom, Farrington, Weathers, The Office, Dublin, Catholic Ireland, Protestant Ireland, England— the largest gnomonic unit being constituted by the English oppressors. In other stories, such as “A Little Cloud” —with its condescending continental visitor— and “After the Race” —“through this channel of poverty and inaction the Continent sped its wealth and industry [...] clumps of people raised the cheer of the gratefully oppressed” (*D* 42), the largest gnomonic unit would be “the Continent.”

A similar structure may be seen at work in “The Dead,” where the collection’s East-West antagonism reaches its climax, before being reversed by the closing vision of

Ireland. After the brief skirmishes with Miss Ivors and his wife about the West of Ireland and its desirability as a holiday destination, Gabriel's view freezes in a moment of realization brought on by his wife's confession, before panning out slowly (the rhythm of his thought and imagination governed by the cadence of the snowfall) westward: "The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland" (*D* 223). The sequence of the two sentences suggests that the gnomon of the West of Ireland, that part of the country which Gabriel had blotted out of his mind as unsuited to his ambitions and self-image, must be restored: Ireland appears whole again, and the "corner," to use the uncle's phrase in "The Sisters," is "box[ed]." (*D* 11)

This however, is only one application of the word gnomon. As in "Counterparts," the Nolanesque interpretation adopted by Weir yields an interesting perspective. In such a reading, the dreams of eastward movement represented throughout *Dubliners* (dreams of Persia in "The Sisters," Araby's bazaar, admiration for "successful Gallicism" in "After the Race," a penchant for Turkish Delight in "A Mother," glamorous fantasies about continental life in "A Little Cloud"), decrease to a minimum in this story. Gabriel not only puts in a good word for his country (famously reflecting Joyce's own shift in attitude), but also reverses the collection's entire dynamic by apparently resolving to go West after all. The emphasis in the closing paragraphs is on reduction, fading, disappearance, as though a gnomonic series had reached its infinitesimal limit: "His own identity was fading out [...] the solid world [...] was dissolving and dwindling." The diminution ends when the snow draws attention to itself by tapping against the window: it is prompted by the sight of the flakes, those tiny, almost atomic units that Gabriel's thoughts pan out (the gnomonic progression, that is, begins to move in an opposite direction) over Ireland's "central plain" and "treeless hills," and then "farther westward." In this movement through a flake-sized point zero, the reconciliation of the living and the dead occurs, fulfilling Bruno's doctrine of the identity of opposites: "the maximum and the minimum come together into one existence."³⁴ And the moment of maximum awareness, occurs, paradoxically enough, at the moment of minimum consciousness: "He watched sleepily..." "His soul swooned slowly..." (*D* 223, 224)

That such a model should be at work as a subterranean structure in *Dubliners* seems to me to be substantiated by the very similar motifs to be found in *Trois Contes*. Indeed, all three of the contes display tensions between minima and maxima. In *Un Coeur simple*, the structure is obvious, as Félicité's world closes down around her, through hardship and

successive bereavements, until she remains entirely alone with her dead, stuffed parrot. The diminution in her circumstances continues as her health (her hearing and eyesight in particular) and her mental faculties (“Le petit cercle de ses idées se rétrécit encore...”—*TC* 65) deteriorate. Even the stuffed parrot is affected by decay (“les vers le dévoraient” —*TC* 75)³⁵. However, when the situation reaches its lowest possible point, the minimum — Félicité’s final agony— turns into the maximum —the moment of greatest exaltation, her epiphany: “quand elle exhala son dernier souffle, elle crut voir, dans les cieux entrouverts, un perroquet gigantesque, planant au-dessus de sa tête” (*TC* 79).³⁶

A comparable chain of events governs the structure of “La Légende de saint Julien l’Hospitalier.” The opening, with its prophecies of sainthood and greatness in war, is far from suggesting the rigours that present themselves as the legend unfolds: exile, isolation, self-disgust and extreme self-abnegation. In the final section of the legend, the Leper³⁷ presents Julien with an opportunity for maximum self-chastisement. When Julien joins the Leper in a strange embrace which subsumes all selfhood, the skies open up, and from the minimum comes the maximum exaltation of godly favour:

une abondance de délices, une joie surhumaine descendait comme une inondation dans l’âme de Julien pâmé; [...] Julien monta vers les espaces bleus, face à face avec Notre-Seigneur Jésus, qui l’emportait dans le ciel. (*TC* 128-9)³⁸

The pattern of maximum exaltation coming from minimum selfhood (and minimum consciousness: like Gabriel, who swoons, Julien is “pâmé,” and Félicité’s eyes are closed) at the end of these stories is perfectly summed up by the strikingly gnomonic phrase (in Bruno’s sense) which is at the heart of “Hérodias” —the story in which the word “gnomon” features: “Pour qu’il grandisse, il faut que je diminue” (*TC* 138, 185).³⁹

The self-consciousness of this gnomon-related intertextuality between *Dubliners* and *Trois Contes* is reinforced by both collections’ insistent use of geometrical vocabulary. The openings of all three contes are full of such terms. In *Un Coeur simple*, boxes and cartons are stacked up to form “un tas pyramidal.” Julien’s castle is set “au milieu des bois,” and “sur la pente d’une colline.” The emphasis is on its squareness (“Les quatres tours aux angles”), on the unusual neatness of the tiles in the castle’s churchyard, on the grounds’ endless enclosures (within enclosures —another gnomonic pattern). Similarly, “Hérodias” opens with a flurry of geometrical terms: “pic,” “cone,” “base,” “cercle,” “zigzag,” “angles,” “contours,” “surfaces,” “cube,” “plaine”(TC 22, 83-4, 133-4).⁴⁰ It is significant that these noticeable semantic clusters should have counterparts in *Dubliners*, such as the “gnomon” and the “square” of the lighted window in “The Sisters,” the thrice

repeated “crossing [of] the lines” in “A Painful Case,” the quincuncial arrangement in which the five men sit in “Grace” (*D* 9, 114, 172). The case is more obvious in “The Dead” where quadrilles are danced, Freddy Malins is described as having a “convex” brow, and the food on the table is arranged in geometrical patterns: “parallel lines of side-dishes,” “a solid rectangle of Smyrna figs,” “in the centre [...] a pyramid of oranges,” and on the “square piano,” “squad[s] of bottles [...] with transverse green sashes” (*D* 183, 184, 196, 197). Echoing Hérode’s view of the “plaine aride,” Gabriel thinks of Ireland’s “dark central plain,” as well as the graveyard’s “crooked crosses” (*D* 223). It is as though the author were reminding us, in extremis, of the geometrical theme that has run through the entire collection.

In the light of these clear linguistic, thematic, and structural correspondences between *Dubliners* and *Trois Contes*, it seems to me not only that there is a discernible influence of Flaubert on Joyce in these stories, but also that this influence was one which, though it appears to be more screened than other influences such as Ibsen, Browning, Blake and others, was nonetheless one of which Joyce was conscious and which he was to a limited extent prepared to subtly signpost. Finding the extremely rare word “gnomon” from “Hérodiades,” the last of the Flaubertian tales, in the first of Joyce’s stories, cannot be explained away as mere coincidence once the other echoes have been identified. James Joyce starts where Flaubert left off, mastering and developing his predecessor’s images techniques in a kind of gnomonic progression. Flaubert died in 1880. Joyce was born in 1882 —these are not facts which lend any added weight to an argument for an influence, but they are the kind of fact of which Joyce would have been aware, and which may well have caused him pleasure. With his knowledge of Flaubert’s letters, he may well also have been aware of Flaubert’s prophecy:

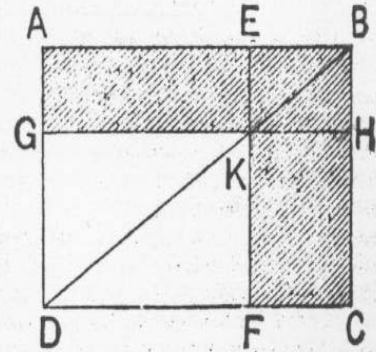
La tâche que j’entreprends sera exécutée par un autre. J’aurai mis sur la voie quelqu’un de mieux doué et de plus né. Vouloir donner à la prose le rythme du vers (en la laissant prose et très prose) et écrire la vie ordinaire comme on écrit l’histoire et l’épopée (sans dénaturer le sujet) est peut-être une absurdité. [...] Mais c’est peut-être aussi une grande tentative et très originale.⁴¹

Years later, with *Dubliners*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses* written and published, and *Finnegans Wake* in progress, Joyce’s answer came, as simple as that of Julien’s parents after their years of wondering in search of their lost son (“Eh bien! C’est nous!” —*TC* 110): “G.F can rest having made me.”

In any parallelogram the figure formed by either of the parallelograms about a diagonal together with the two complements is called a **gnomon**.

Thus the shaded portion of the annexed figure, consisting of the parallelogram EH together with the complements AK , KC is the *gnomon* AHF .

The other gnomon in the figure is that which is made up of AK , GF and FH , namely the gnomon AFH .



Reproduction of a diagram and definition for “gnomon,” from Hall and Stevens’ *A Textbook of Euclid Elements*, 2nd edn, (London: Macmillan, 1892), 120, as it figured in David Weir’s article “Gnomon is an Island: Euclid and Bruno in Joyce’s Narrative Practice,” *James Joyce Quarterly*, *Dubliners Issue*, 28.2 (Winter 1991) 347.

Notes

¹ Ezra Pound, *Pound/Joyce: The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce: with Pound's Essays on James Joyce*, ed. Forrest Read (London: Faber and Faber, 1968) 248 —first published in “Past History,” *The English Journal*, XXII (May 1933): 349-358, (351).

² There are two exceptions: Richard Cross, *Flaubert and Joyce: The Rite of Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971) —vague and highly reverential; Hugh Kenner, *The Stoic Comedians* (London: W. H. Allen, 1964) —which includes a comparative analysis of the encyclopaedic impulse in the authors' later works.

³ Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of 'Ulysses'* (London: Grayson and Grayson, 1934) 186, 184.

⁴ Flaubert to Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie, 18 March 1857, in *Correspondance*, ed. Jean Bruneau, 4 vols, (Paris: Gallimard, 1973-1998), vol.2 (1980) 691.

⁵ Constantine Curran, *James Joyce Remembered* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) 29. Joyce's acquaintance with *Trois Contes* is confirmed by Jan Parandowski, who remembers Joyce's declamation of a passage from “Hérodiades”—see ‘Meeting with Joyce’, in *Portraits of the Artist in Exile*, ed. Willard Potts (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1979) 160— and Richard Ellmann, who writes of Joyce's identification of two grammatical errors in “Hérodiades.” (*JJI*, 506)

⁶ Ezra Pound, “James Joyce et Pécuchet,” in *Pound/Joyce*, 202 —article first published in *Mercure de France*, 1 June 1922, (307-20), 308.— “[Joyce, in *Dubliners*] is doing Flaubert, but does not go past the *Three Tales* and *Sentimental Education*.” (My translation).

⁷ David Hayman, “Toward a Postflaubertian Joyce,” in ‘Scribble’ 2: *Joyce et Flaubert*, ed. Claude Jacquet and André Topia (Paris: Minard, 1990). The collection includes particularly relevant contributions by Jacquet (“Joyce et Flaubert”) and Topia (“Flaubert et Joyce: les affinités sélectives”).

⁸ Sand to Flaubert, 12 January 1876, in *Gustave Flaubert-George Sand: Correspondance*, ed. Alphonse Jacobs (Paris: Flammarion, 1981) 519. Translated as “supreme impartiality is anti-human, and a novel ought above all to be human,” in *Flaubert-Sand, The Correspondence of Gustave Flaubert and Georges Sand*, trans. Francis Steegmuller and Barbara Bray (London: The Harvill Press, 1999) 386.

⁹ Flaubert to Sand, 29 May 1876, in *Gustave Flaubert-George Sand*, 533. Translated as: “you will recognize your own direct influence” and “I believe you will like the moral tendency, or rather the underlying humanity, of this little work,” in *Flaubert-Sand* 398.

¹⁰ Flaubert to Turgenev, 25 June 1876, quoted in Pierre-Marc de Biasi, *Carnets de Travail* (Paris: Balland, 1988) 703. (The fifth volume of the *Correspondance* in *La Pléiade* is as yet unpublished) — “French prose, it seems to me, can attain almost unthinkable levels of beauty.” (My translation).

¹¹ James Joyce, “A Portrait of the Artist”, in *Poems and Shorter Writings*, ed. Richard Ellmann et al., (London: Faber and Faber, 2001) 218.

¹² Gustave Flaubert, *L'Education sentimentale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965) 392. Translated as “if she made a commonplace remark, she put it in such a banal form that it was impossible to tell whether she had her tongue in her cheek or not.” in *Sentimental Education*, trans., Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964) 357.

¹³ Christopher Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 210.

¹⁴ Flaubert to Bouilhet, 4 September 1850, *Correspondance*, I (1973) 676. Translated as “so that the reader has no idea whether or not we're taking the piss” in *Gustave Flaubert, Selected Letters*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1997) 155.

¹⁵ Gustave Flaubert, *Trois Contes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973). Translated as “As it was very heavy, they carried it in turn” in *Three Tales*, trans., A.J. Krailsheimer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 105.

¹⁶ Jonathan Culler, *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (London: Paul Elek, 1974) 203-4.

¹⁷ Marcel Proust, *Chroniques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1927) 202. — “[adverbs] in Flaubert are always placed in the ugliest, most unexpected, and ponderous fashion.” (My translation).

¹⁸ Translated as “It was the time of the school holidays” in Krailsheimer, 17.

¹⁹ Hélène Cixous, for instance, in “Joyce: The (r)use of writing”, in *Post-structuralist Joyce*, ed. Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 25-7.

²⁰ Translated as: “And he had found her standing at the threshold; she had got up from her sickbed when the palace sundial marked the third hour, the very moment when he approached Jesus.” in Krailsheimer, 95.

²¹ *Le Trésor de la langue française informatisé*, Centre National de Recherche Scientifique, <http://atilf.atilf.fr/>, (accessed 14 July 2006).

²² Fritz Senn, “Dynamic Adjustments in *Dubliners* ‘(as Joyce clearly states),’” in *European Joyce Studies* 7, ed. Mary Power and Ulrich Schneider (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997) 17.

²³ Translated as “And that is the story of Saint Julian the Hospitaller, more or less as it can be found in the stained-glass window of a church in my part of the world.” in Krailsheimer, 70.

²⁴ Translated as “Day was about to break, and behind the glass, the little birds were beginning to sing,” in Krailsheimer, 59.

²⁵ Shoshana Felman, “Flaubert’s Signature: *The Legend of Saint Julian the Hospitable*”, trans. Brian Massumi et al., in *Flaubert and Postmodernism*, ed. Naomi Schor and Henry F. Majewski (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984) 66.

²⁶ Translated as “The leaded lights dimmed the pale gleam of dawn” in Krailsheimer, 62.

²⁷ Translated as “The crimson reflection from the stained-glass window, just then catching the sun, lit up these red patches and scattered others still more plentifully about the room.” in Krailsheimer, 63.

²⁸ Translated as “The dazzling brightness from outside interposed bars of light between the slats of the drawn blinds,” in Krailsheimer, 13.

²⁹ David Weir, “Gnomon is an Island: Euclid and Bruno in Joyce’s Narrative Practice”, *JJQ*, 28.2 (Winter 1991): 343-360.

³⁰ H.S Hall and F.H. Stevens, *A Textbook of Euclid’s Elements for the Use of Schools.*, 2nd edn, (London: Macmillan, 1892). Ellmann lists the 1900 edition as one of the books Joyce owned in *The Consciousness of James Joyce* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977) 111.

³¹ That is: a conception which takes gnomon to mean “the part of a parallelogram which remains after a similar parallelogram is taken away from one of its corners” (*OED*) —a figure of lack easily applicable to almost any of the existences portrayed in *Dubliners*.

³² James Joyce, “The Bruno Philosophy”, in *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing*, ed. Kevin Barry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 93-4.

³³ Giordano Bruno, *De Triplici Minimo*, quoted in Weir, 348.

³⁴ J. Lewis McIntyre, *Giordano Bruno* (London: Macmillan, 1903), quoted in Weir, 348. McIntyre’s book was reviewed by Joyce in 1903.

³⁵ Translated as “The narrow range of her ideas shrank even further” (31), and “he was all worm-eaten”, (38) in Krailsheimer.

³⁶ Translated as “quand elle exhala son dernier souffle, elle crut voir, dans les cieus entrouverts, un perroquet gigantesque, planant au-dessus de sa tête.” in Krailsheimer, 40.

³⁷ The capital is Flaubert’s.

³⁸ Translated as “delights in abundance, a superhuman joy came flooding into the soul of Julian, who lay in a swoon; [...] Julian rose up into the blue of space, face to face with Our Lord Jesus, who bore him off to heaven,” in Krailsheimer, 70.

³⁹ Translated as “For him to increase, I must decrease,” in Krailsheimer, 74, 105.

⁴⁰ These phrases are translated, respectively, as “a pyramid of piled-up boxes and cartons” (3), “in the middle of a forest, on the slope of a hill”, “The towers at each of the four corners” (41), “conical peak”, “base”, “circle”, “zigzag”, “angles”, “outlines”, “slopes”, “cube” (71), “plain” (72) in Krailsheimer.

⁴¹ Flaubert to Colet, 27 March 1853, *Correspondance*, II (1980) 287. Translated as “But the task which I am undertaking will be carried through by someone else. I will have shown somebody the way, someone more gifted and more *born for it* than I am. Perhaps it is an absurdity, to want to impart to prose the rhythm of verse (leaving it still prose and very prosey), to want to

write about ordinary life as we write history or epic (without distorting the subject). [...] But perhaps it is also a great and a very original undertaking." in Wall, 203.