

Hamlet, Laforgue, and Joyce

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It is not difficult to find similarities between James Joyce and Jules Laforgue. Both are, each in his respective language, creators of neologisms. To be precise, they are the most spectacular examples of inventors of a new lexicon in the French and English languages.¹ Laforgue's role as a forerunner in this respect has already been considered by scholars such as Warren Ramsey, who states that "[n]o other 19th century writer anticipates so clearly the intense word-consciousness, the linguistic innovations of Léon-Paul Fargue and James Joyce."² Biographically speaking, both have remarkable similarities: they begin by cultivating poetry, which is followed by tales where the classical myth is treated according to modern, parodical or ironical formulations, and they are both playwrights.³ Both choose to live abroad: to change lands, or, as Steiner would say, "extraterritorialise" themselves,⁴ and recreate a new language while in contact with another; both certainly keep a background language in touch with another hidden, omnipresent language from their childhood: Gaelic in Joyce's case and the Spanish of Montevideo in that of Laforgue, who, incidentally, was christened Julio, not Jules. Both maintain a close relationship with T. S. Eliot,⁵ an essential part of the study of their works. We must remember that Eliot, who got married in the same church as Laforgue when he married Miss Leah Lee,⁶ was inspired to commence his poetic creativity by one of Laforgue's poems. It is recognised that the "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a variation of Laforgue's "Solo de lune." It is extremely complicated to translate either Joyce or Laforgue; complicated to such an extent that Eliot was forced to abandon his project of translating Laforgue. Hart Crane,⁷ who undertook the translation of "Locutions des pierrots" (sixteen poems of approximately twelve lines), stopped at the third poem, and not before making several errors of misinterpretation. There is much more; their relationship with Édouard Dujardin, editor of *La Revue Indépendante*. Joyce admits he is indebted to Dujardin's novel *Les lauriers sont coupés* for its invention of the internal monologue technique. On the other hand, Dujardin, Laforgue's editor and personal friend, has always recognised that he is indebted to him, and, by a strange coincidence, in the issue of *La Revue Indépendante* which published *Les lauriers sont coupés*, Dujardin, in his capacity as editor, inserts the news of the death of Jules Laforgue, whose work he praises,⁸ on the page preceding the end of the novel. We must also remember that together with this coincidence between Joyce, Eliot and Laforgue, there are two more: Valéry Larbaud and Huysmans. Larbaud, who translated Joyce into French, is perhaps the writer of his generation who has best understood Laforgue, and bridges the gap between Laforgue, Güiraldes and Supervielle. Huysmans, who also influenced Joyce's writing with his novel *A rebours*, reprinted in 1904, is another passionate defender of Laforgue's work.⁹ Up to this point we find something more than a curious coincidence between friendship and tendencies. But there is still more.

Where Joyce and Laforgue coincide in particular is in the attention both pay to the figure of Hamlet.¹⁰ In fact, as the great French poet Yves Bonnefoy notes: "Pour comprendre Laforgue, c'est à la question Hamlet qu'il faut s'attacher d'abord."¹¹ In this sense Laforgue is ahead of other typical 20th century experiences such as Tom Stoppard with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* or Beckett.¹² As Bonnefoy points out, "pour bâtir son nouveau *Hamlet* il va s'attacher lui aussi dans la tragédie de Shakespeare à ce qui ne semble que le *sub-plot*, l'action secondaire: la fascination sans bonheur qui garde le prince près d'Ophélie."¹³ Bonnefoy ends his study by noting that Laforgue's *Hamlet* is basically an "immense soliloquy," the opposition of two poetic theories in the form of the limit of experience.

At any rate, it is clear, as we already pointed out in the prologue of our translation of *Les moralités légendaires*,¹⁴ that that immense soliloquy with a double narrative voice includes, at least in Dujardin's final version (1887), the introduction of the interior monologue technique, by which the narrator allows the character's thoughts to intrude. This is obvious, for example, in the episode where Hamlet is watching Ophelia's funeral procession and the monks hurrying to bury her. I do not consider it to be of vital importance to know whether Joyce based his idea on Dujardin, or on both Dujardin and Laforgue in order to develop the interior monologue technique. It is easy to see in either case that Dujardin did base his ideas on Laforgue, especially if we consider that it is precisely the sections of interior monologue which represent Laforgue's innovations in his final version compared with the previous version published a year earlier by Dujardin himself in *La Revue Indépendante*. It is also obvious that the narrative empathy between Laforgue and Joyce goes far beyond the question of the interior monologue.

What I am particularly interested in here is in noting certain details in the composition of *Ulysses* where Joyce shows a clear knowledge of Laforgue's narrative works and certain aspects of his biography. I am not pointing to inspiration in the form of mimicry, but to an understanding of the problems of narrative writing and a common reflection by both authors as to what the recreation of a myth such as Hamlet entails, as a sub-plot of what is, at the same time, a paramythical narrative. I am going to select various passages from *Ulysses* and describe the relationship with motifs, themes or sub-themes from Laforgue's works. I am attempting, above all, to uncover an *esprit de fin-de-siècle* present in Laforgue's narrative which sets the pace for Joyce's composition strategy. The first passage I have chosen is of great interest. Before reading it I would like to clear up a point about Laforgue and his *Hamlet*: the innovative aspect of his treatment of the Prince of Denmark lies in the total absence of Ophelia from the tale; she is not referred to at all, although in the evening her coffin appears, and at night her burial takes place. Laforgue's *Hamlet* replaces Ophelia with the actress who, in William Shakespeare's company, plays her role in the performance at Elsinor in 1601. This actress's name is Kate. However the narrator is Laforgue's own alter ego and Laforgue's wife is called Leah Lee. Our attention is thus drawn to the appearance of the three names, Kate, Ophelia and Leah, in the company of Hamlet in the same paragraph from *Ulysses*: "Leah tonight. Mrs. Bandmann Palmer. Like to see her again in that. Hamlet she played last night. Male impersonator. Perhaps he was a woman. Why Ophelia committed suicide. Poor papa! How he used to talk of Kate Bateman in that" (*U* 5.194-98).

In the previous chapter he had referred to the idea of *morality*: "It begins and ends with morality," which is another reference to Laforgue's work. In chapter 1 of *Ulysses* there is a reference to Pan, another of Laforgue's

moralités: "Pan's hour, the Spirit's noon." In this very chapter there are several references to passages from Laforgue's *Hamlet*, which insist on the "Latin quarter" aspect of Hamlet and the tempting crescent of Elsinor, as well as references to typical motifs of Laforgue's works recognised and exploited by Eliot, such as the top deck of the tram, the twinkling of the stars, the quotations in French ("Zut!" [U 1.665]), one of the poetic groups of French decadence, the ballad of joking Jesus (U 1.608), or the foetus, and allusions to two of the poems from *Les complaintes de Jules Laforgue*. Other coincidences are also intriguing, such as the references to horse racing (U 2.300), the pigeon (U 3.1160) ("Les deux pigeons" by Laforgue), the elevation of the mass, etc., as well as definite quotations in Latin and Greek, also present in Laforgue or the introduction of popular cantilenas or satirical distiches. This creates a general narrative atmosphere and therefore, regardless of a possible direct influence from *Les moralités*,¹⁵ it is evident that both styles of writing employ the same strategies of popular intrusion and parody within the narrative. Even more interesting is another coincidence concerning the beginning of the work's composition. In Laforgue's *Hamlet*, the prince sets out from his castle in the morning and wanders around the castle and the countryside surrounding Elsinor; he visits the cemetery, returns to the castle, meets the players, and at night, after the performance, meets his death at the hands of Laertes before Ophelia's tomb. The use of interior monologue allows the splitting of voices between the narrator and Hamlet himself, and allows him a flashback of another previous episode which reproduces symbolically that day's events. This is a general narrative framework which also coincides with the general philosophy of Joyce's work. Other motifs and details also coincide in a way that does not appear to be fortuitous. In Laforgue's work, Hamlet amuses himself by wringing a bird's neck, which coincides with the reference to the dead bird at the end of chapter 6 of *Ulysses*. Also there are the references to Pygmalion and Galatea in chapter 8 of *Ulysses* and in Laforgue's poem "Dimanches IV." It is not necessary to dwell on the quotations which, according to my calculations, total over a hundred. This brief article merely tries to point to a path of exploration and analysis of a likely compositional source which seems highly productive, and, in any case, is backed up by two well-documented pieces of evidence: the large number of editions of Laforgue's *Hamlet* or *Les moralités légendaires* published between 1887 and 1920, and the evidence that other innovative narrators, such as the Argentinian Güiraldes,¹⁶ admit that *Les moralités* was their source of inspiration for works written in the same years as Joyce's writing. If all of this were just coincidence, it would still be a case of aesthetic kinship, in which we would have an author, Laforgue, who in 1886-87 explores a parodical atmosphere similar to that later used by Joyce, employing the most modern composition techniques, as James Joyce reveals years later; if there really were a direct influence, it is of particular interest to scrutinise how the Irishman's creative genius is able to convey in a highly complex work a kind of writing which acts in the area of exploration of the literary myth (common to Laforgue), exploring the construction of a parodical literary universe as the axis of composition and the vertebral basis of the great 20th-century novel. In both cases the relationship between the two writers helps us to understand the processes of aesthetic renovation of literature in our century.

Notes

1. Raquel Halty Ferguson has pointed out the similarity between several neologisms created by Laforgue and Joyce: "Algunas de las fusiones de Joyce se parecen a las de Laforgue: 'anquished' (*¿vanquished y anguished?*) (FW 490); 'anachronistic' (*anachronistic, Acheron*) (FW 202); 'bisexycle' (*bicycle, bisexual*) (FW 115). Pero el efecto total es muy distinto: mientras las invenciones de Laforgue se destacan ('se ironizan') por el contraste con un fondo más bien tradicional, la fuerza irónica de las de Joyce parece diluirse en la multiplicidad de convenciones lingüísticas." See Raquel Halty Ferguson, *Laforgue y Lugones: dos poetas de la luna* (London: Tamesis Books, 1981) 77.

2. See W. Ramsey, *Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance* (New York: Oxford UP, 1953) 139.

3. In fact, according to the late discovery made by D. Arkell, Laforgue's first work during his youth is a short play *Tessa*, inspired almost certainly in François Coppée. The text has been published in the *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 178 (1980): 87-129. As for *Pierrot fumiste*, which can probably be dated in 1883, the Spanish translation, which I myself carried out, can be consulted, published as an offprint of *Pamiela*, supplement 6 (San Sebastián, 1981).

4. See George Steiner, *Extraterritorial* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1977).

5. On this aspects of Laforgue's influence on English writing consult W. Ramsey, ed., *Jules Laforgue: Essays on a Poet's Life and Work* (Southern Illinois UP, 1969).

6. On Leah Lee see the article by C. W. Lee, "Leah Laforgue, Her Parents and Family," Ramsey 16-25.

7. Hart Crane's translation can be found in his complete works. On Laforgue's influences see M. Cowley, "Laforgue in America: A Testimony," Ramsey 3-15.

8. For further details, consult D. Grojnowski, *Jules Laforgue et "l'originalité"* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1988), and M. Collie, *Jules Laforgue* (London: Athlone, 1977).

9. J. K. Huysmans obviously also exerts an influence on Laforgue, as W. Ramsey points out: "From Huysmans, the young Laforgue acquired a whole aesthetics, ultimately traceable to Baudelaire and the Romantics, it is true, a theory of the beautiful that lead him to welcome into his verse urban and suburban imagery, grotesqueries of modern industry that self-respected Symbolists regarded as unfit for poetry" (*Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance* 11).

10. There is an English translation of Laforgue's *Hamlet* in *Six Moral Tales*, trans. F. Newman (New York: Liveright, 1928). More recently, in *Selected Writings of J. Laforgue*, trans. W. J. Smith (New York: Grove P, 1956). There is a Spanish translation by Lisa Block de Béhar in *Jules Laforgue* (Montevideo: Academia Nacional de Letras, 1987).

11. Yves Bonnefoy, "Hamlet et la couleur," *Laforgue aujourd'hui*, ed. J. Hiddleston (Paris: José Corti, 1988) 167.

12. The relation with Samuel Beckett has been pointed out by E. Ostrovsky in her article "Jules Laforgue and Samuel Beckett: a rapprochement," Ramsey 130-45. In note 4 Ostrovsky writes: "We know that James Joyce admired the *Moralités légendaires* of Laforgue, and while there is no direct mention of Laforgue in his work, it seems evident that many of the procedures coincide sufficiently with those of Laforgue to permit us at least to assume some link between the two writers. There seems to be little doubt that Beckett felt the impact of Joyce. This is the opinion of Kenneth Allsop in *The Angry Decade* (London, 1958), p. 38, and is shared by many other critics." Likewise, Ramsey notes in his introduction to *Jules Laforgue: Essays on a Poet's Life and Work* (xxvi) that "[i]ndividual consciousness reconstructs the myth, and it was Laforgue's appreciation of this fact that interested James Joyce."

13. Bonnefoy 173.

14. Jules Laforgue, *Moralidades legendarias* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1994).

15. Until 1920, *Moralités légendaires* existed in the following editions: loose in the reviews *La Vogue* (1886) and *Revue Indépendante* (1887), together, in 1887, the edition Librairie de la Rvue Indépendante; 1894, in Léon Vanier, Paris; 1897-1898 in London, Hacon and Ricketts and Paris, Mercure de France (illustrated edition by Lucien and Esther Pissarro); 1904, Paris, Mercure de France; translated into German

by P. Wiegler, *Sagenhafte Singspiele* (Stuttgart, 1905), with a preface by Maurice Maeterlinck; 1919, translation into Italian by M. G. Sarfatti, *Allegorie leggendarie*, Milano, and 1920, in French, edition Crès. Our attention is drawn to the Italian translation in a year when Joyce was already in Trieste.

16. In Güiraldes' case this influence is confessed and perfectly assumed: "Under Laforgue's influence, who I literally adored, I wrote *Salomé* and *La hora del milagro*." See R. Güiraldes, *Obras completas* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1962) 30. See also, Alfredo Rodríguez López-Vázquez, "Laforgue, Güiraldes y el tema de Salomé," *El Guiniguada* 4-5 (1994): 91-99.