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Dickens in *Ulysses*

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Richard Ellmann, in the list of books appended to his work *The Consciousness of Joyce*, mentions five novels by Dickens which Joyce kept at his library in Trieste, namely, *Barnaby Rudge*, *Bleak House*, *David Copperfield*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Oliver Twist*. Thornton mentions twelve allusions to the novels of Dickens in *Ulysses*, and Gifford and Seidman, in the latest study of this kind, two more, that is, fourteen in all.¹

Allusions to Dickens's works in *Ulysses*, however, may be said to be rather more numerous but I would not dare to be conclusive about this. There seem to be not only a few other direct allusions, that is, words or phrases that are present in Dickens's novels, but also the kind that may be very easily overlooked because the words are slightly distorted or because they are only echoes detectable through the style. To point out such other possible allusions will help scholarship to, as Michael Patrick Gillespie states in his work *Inverted Volumes Improperly Arranged*, "be more certain of the sources which shaped some of his chapters,"² and thus interpret the text with more accuracy.

Echoes of Dickens may be found in "Oxen of the Sun." The drunkards at the end of the episode speak almost unintelligibly because of the frequency of colloquialisms, slang and dialectalisms, but also because of the way in which their faulty pronunciation is reflected in written form and the way that syntax is reduced to a minimum, producing the effect of gabbling and incoherence, as in:

Tis, sure. What say? In the speakeasy. Tight. I shee you, shir. Bantam. Two days teetee. Bowsing nowt but claretwine. Garn! Have a glint, do. Gum, I'm jiggered. And been to barber he have. Too full for words. (U 14.1507-09)

The alteration of spelling to represent pronunciation, the compounding of several words into one and the reduction of syntax through omission are devices that were used by Dickens, a master in the rendering of speech. For instance, we find a drunken man saying "Lorblessmer! Agnes"³ in *David Copperfield* or the worn-out nobility in *Bleak House* attempting communication through their minced words:

The debilitated cousin says of her that she's beauty nough - tsetup shopofwomen - but rather larming kind - reminding-manfact - inconvenient woman - who *will* getoutofbedandawthstablishment - Shakespeare.⁴

Cataloguing and enumeration are also recurrent technical devices in Joyce which appear in Dickens. We find innumerable examples of these, for instance, in "Cyclops." Nevertheless, as has been established by critics, eighteenth-century writers appear in Joyce's works, and such devices are often present in their prose. Taking this into consideration, we may want to reach back to Defoe, Swift and Sterne through Dickens as regards this

stylistic feature, but the link, however, may also be established with Pope, and it is through the connection between Dickens and Pope that Joyce's sources may be settled in a more constructive way.

With respect to Pope, Gifford mentions a parody of "Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux" (*The Rape of the Lock* I.138) in "Beer, beef, business, bibles, bulldogs, battleships, buggery and bishops" (U 14.1459-60; and with a variation in "Circe," U 15.2242-43). But there could be another parallel with this same line by Pope in the mocking description made of Charley Kavanagh who "used to come out on his high horse, cocked hat, puffed, powdered and shaved" (U 8.506-507). Again, keeping this poet's satire in mind, we are not surprised at finding an echo of Pope's famous line "And maids turn'd bottles, call aloud for corks" (*Rape* IV.54) in Bloom's "Man and woman, love, what is it? A cork and bottle" (U 15.1974).

The connection between Joyce and these eighteenth-century writers may be said to be direct, since we know through Ellman that he owned many of their works. Nevertheless, it could also be suspected that there is a stronger linking element through the novels of Dickens, who also imitates some of Pope's lines in *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*:

Whether he shall be put into the main road by constables, or by beadles, or by bellringing, or by force of figures, or by correct principles of taste, or by high church, or by low church, or by no church. . . . (*Bleak House* 683)

or again,

Whether she would instantly depart, bag and baggage, to Lady Scadgers, or would positively refuse to budge from the premises; whether she would be plaintive or abusive, tearful or tearing; whether she would break her heart, or break the looking-glass. . . .⁵

Both these fragments that have strong overtones of Pope's "Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,/Or some frail China jar receive a flaw,/Or stain her honour, or her new brocade,/Forget her pray'rs, or miss a masquerade,/Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball" (*Rape* II.105-109) may be seen to have a strong stylistic influence on Joyce's enumerations, more so if we consider passages of the following sort:

. . . he had been led into this thought by a consideration of the causes of sterility, both the inhibitory and the prohibitory, whether the inhibition in its turn were due to conjugal vexations or to a parsimony of the balance as well as whether the prohibition proceeded from defects congenital or from proclivities acquired. (U 14.667-72)

Another allusion, which combines both stylistic features and direct allusion, may be said to be present in "Aeolus." Gifford already mentions the "stylistic intrusion [which] echoes the Dickens of *David Copperfield*": "I have often thought since on looking back. . . ." (U 7.763), but says nothing of the overtones that seem to enfold the previous sentences and which automatically transfer the reader to a Dickensian setting. The passage reads as follows:

Pause. J. J. O'Molloy took out his cigarette-case.
False lull. Something quite ordinary.
Messenger took out his matchbox thoughtfully and lit his cigar.
I have often thought since on looking back over that strange time that it was that small act, trivial in itself, that striking of that match, that determined the whole aftercourse of both our lives. (U 7.760-65)

With respect to these lines, Paul Van Caspel, in *Bloomers on The Liffey*,⁶ does not agree with Gifford's statement. He comments: "The situation reminds [Stephen] somehow of a passage such as might be found in certain cloak-and-dagger stories. 'Messenger' may even be the name of a character in such a story (otherwise, why not 'The messenger'?)" and goes on to describe the extract as simply a parody of "trivial or pulp literature." Gifford, on the other hand, in his explanatory note to "Messenger," states that "J. J. O'Molloy is about to deliver a message, and in a much higher sense, Moses was 'God's messenger,'" thus relating it to O'Molloy's previous words.

Neither Van Caspel nor Gifford relate the word "Messenger" to Dickens's technique in characterizing Sir Leicester's footmen in *Bleak House*, whom he calls "Mercuries": "'Pray,' says Sir Leicester to Mercury," or "With this apology, Mercury directs a scornful and indignant look" (458); "Mercury in attendance with coffee informs Sir Leicester"; "Enter Mr. Tulkinghorn, followed by Mercuries with lamps and candles" (626); "Mercury has announced Mr. Rouncewell" (708), etc. To call the footmen Mercuries, who do nothing but "look out of window" all day long, is typical of Dickens's use of names for ironic purposes. Furthermore, the shortening of the noun phrase through the omission of the determiner produces a double effect: it dramatizes the scene through its imitation of the style of stage-directions; and it is also a means of depersonalizing the character, turning him into a mere role-player, a messenger (of the gods?, that is, of the self-complacent nobility?), or, going a step further, a mythical figure. It is not *the* footman, *the* messenger, nor even *the* Mercury, but just Mercury, that is, myth, fiction. In its connection with the select yet decadent world of the aristocracy of Chesney Wold, the metaphor is the more effective and clarifies the writer's sombre view of Victorian society.

If this passage in "Aeolus" is to be interpreted as Stephen's interior monologue from the moment in which Lenahan ends his utterance until the end of the text quoted above, then lines 760-62 might be taken as the words of the playwright directing his scene (notice his earlier quotation from *Hamlet* ten lines before). Stephen, undertaking the critical role of a writer, turns the situation into drama, that is, into fiction, questioning its authenticity, doubting the myth of Moses, messenger, and interpreting the assembled men's behaviour as mere fictional performance or role-playing and the last representation of a dying people. Then, the closing lines, in the shape of narrative, may be said to put into perspective the typically Dickensian melodramatic atmosphere that Stephen chooses to attribute to the situation in such a bitterly mocking way.

That Joyce had Dickens's Mercuries in mind when writing such lines may be supported further by other references in *Ulysses* to secondary Dickensian characters who are never explained at length nor seem to perform any particular function, but just have symbolic meaning. Gifford mentions three characters from *Bleak House*: the "crossing sweeper" or Jo ("Eumaeus"); the "elderly female" leaving the building of the courts of chancery, as recalling Miss Flyte (*U* 10.625; the old woman, who remains a puzzle, has already appeared before in the same episode, 10.473). Last, both Thornton and Gifford take Mr. Turveydrop as the model for Professor Maginni ("Wandering Rocks" and "Circe"), basing their argument on the word "deportment" which appears several times in connection with him. Yet it could be said that Professor Maginni may not only be based on Turveydrop in terms of this repeated behavioural trait, but also through the descriptions made of his clothes, especially the one in the "Circe" episode, which is overlooked by the above scholars:

He wears a slate frockcoat with claret silk lapels, a gorget of cream tulle, a green lowcut waistcoat, stock collar with white kerchief, tight lavender trousers, patent pumps and canary gloves. In his buttonhole is an immense dahlia. He twirls . . . a clouded cane. . . . (U 15.4034-38, my italics)

Notice now the articles of clothing that are mentioned in the following introduction of Mr. Turveydrop to the reader, which coincide to a large extent with those worn by Maginni above:

He had a fur collar, and he had a padded breast to his coat, which only wanted a star or a broad blue ribbon to be complete . . . He had such a neckcloth on . . . He had, under his arm, a hat of great size and weight, shelving downward from the crown to the brim; and in his hand a pair of white gloves with which he flapped it, as he stood poised on one leg in a high-shouldered, round-elbowed state of elegance not to be surpassed. He had a cane, he had an eyeglass, he had a snuff-box, he had rings, he had wristbands. . . . (Bleak House 242-44, my italics)

In the first description of Maginni (U 10.56) a silk hat is also mentioned, all of which contributes to the similarity of the two characters at one remove. Nevertheless, Mr. Turveydrop is fat and old, not exactly the impression we get of Maginni, whereas his son is on the contrary “a little blue-eyed man of youthful appearance” with “little dancing-shoes” and a “feminine manner.” Mr. Maginni, with his colourful clothes and patent pumps suggesting that same manner, is obviously a composition of both father and son.

Furthermore, if we look back to Pope once again, it is possible to find the original type that may have given shape to Dickens’s Turveydrop and later to Joyce’s Maginni: “(Sir Plume, of amber Snuff-Box justly vain,/And the nice conduct of a clouded cane)/With earnest eyes, and round unthinking face,/He first the snuff-box open’d, then the case” (Rape IV.123-26). Turveydrop’s “snuff-box,” Maginni’s “clouded cane” and their “nice conduct” are already present in Sir Plume’s characterization, which seems to establish an additional link between these three writers.

Other allusions to Dickens could be found in slight distortions of the original titles of novels and periodicals—in “Circe,” we find the following: “a household word” (15.827; cf. *Household Words*); “Hard lines” (15.1232; cf. *Hard Times*); and “Our mutual faith” (15.3049; cf. *Our Mutual Friend*)—or in the theme of “spontaneous combustion” with reference to a tragic accident on board a ship (“Wandering Rocks,” 10.728), which is a well-known phrase connected to the death of Krook in *Bleak House* (512).

A less obvious one could be the famous bell-ringing to indicate the time of day and which appears throughout *Ulysses* in different guises. What is interesting in the two following texts are the attributes given to the bells:

A creak and a dark whirr in the air high up. The bells of George’s church. They tolled the hour: loud dark iron. (“Calypso,” U 4.544-45)

The bells of George’s church toll slowly, loud dark iron. (“Circe,” U 15.1184)

Metonymy and animation by means of the qualifiers “loud” and “dark” help create a vivid visual and auditory image that endows the scene with immediacy and fixes it in our mind. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, Dickens also presents a bell striking the hour:

The sound of a deep bell came along the wind. One. “Lie on!” cried the usurer, “with your iron tongue!”⁷

Even though the only repeated word is “iron,” we cannot but notice the similarity in the imagery. In the first text by Joyce we find sound presented in onomatopoeic terms (“creak” and “whirr”), wind (in the more static word “air”), as well as animation that is seen in the Dickens passage. Furthermore, we must not forget Dickens’s well-known device of using unusual “metallic” (!) attributes for his characters, such as we find in “The iron gentleman makes an iron bow” (*Bleak House* 712) or in the introduction of Bounderby to the reader as a man with “a metallic laugh” and “that brassy speaking-trumpet of a voice of his” (*Hard Times* 58), thus relating human characters to inanimate nature. On the other hand, Joyce chooses connotative words in his representation of the sounds produced by the bells (“Heigho” in “Calypso,” and “Cuckoo” in “Nausicaa”) instead of the more realistic and yet more striking word “One” used by Dickens, which constitutes a single sentence in its own right and has greater emphasis and impact.

Again, although it may seem pure coincidence, in “Circe” the atmosphere is created in the following terms:

Snakes of river fog creep slowly (*U* 15.138)
the drifting fog without (*U* 15.2168)

These images recall the memorable opening page of *Bleak House* with its emphatic description of foggy London, where we also find animation:

Fog up the river . . . fog down the river . . . Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs. . . . (*Bleak House* 49)

Not only the river fog seems to have been lifted out of a Dickensian setting, but also the snakes, and serpents and snakes appear in *Ulysses* quite a few times, as in the following extract: “Her boa uncoils . . . She snakes her neck” (*U* 15.2082 and 15.2084). Neither sentence has any allusive significance taken separately, but “snakes” and “uncoils” placed close together in the same paragraph bring to mind another well-remembered image, on this occasion in Dickens’s description of Coketown in *Hard Times*:

It was a town of red brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but, as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. (*Hard Times* 65)

Since *Hard Times* was not one of the books owned by Joyce, small evidence would it be on its own to assert that Joyce had this picture of Coketown in mind when writing the above words in “Circe” if it were not for the aforementioned reference to “Hard lines” in this same episode and due to another more obvious allusion to the same work in episode 2, “Nestor.” Stephen, waiting for Mr. Deasy to pay him his salary, reflects upon the objects in Deasy’s office thus:

Stale smoky air hung in the study with the smell of drab abraded leather of its chairs. As on the first he bargained with me here. *As it was in the beginning, is now.* On the sideboard the tray of Stuart coins, base treasure of a bog: *and ever shall be.* And snug in their spooncase of purple plush, faded, the twelve apostles having preached to all the gentiles: *world without end.* (*U* 2.199-204, my italics)

Smoke, one of the main features of Dickens's Coketown, appears twice in the description quoted above, and it is part of the atmosphere present in Deasy's room, signalling in both novels a lack of communication. However, what actually strikes the reader in the above quotation is the intermingling of words from a prayer to expose Stephen's view of never-changing life. The words from the "Gloria Patri," submerged within the stream of thought in Joyce (and which appear again in Stephen's speech in "Circe," *U* 15.3935), are distorted by Dickens to refer to the same subject in his comment upon another school that represents a system of education, the Gradgrind school, in smoky Coketown:

The M'Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you couldn't state in figures or show to be purchaseable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, *was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen.* (*Hard Times* 66, my italics)

Dickens presents in his characteristic emphatic style the unavoidable materialistic life cycle of urban, industrial, Utilitarian society by means of repetition, commercial jargon, symbols, and the concluding words to a prayer (notice the cemetery and the lying-in hospital, which are the settings for two of the following episodes in *Ulysses*, "Hades" and "Oxen," and notice the reference to commerce and finances, which is going to be one of the topics of the ensuing conversation between Mr. Deasy and Stephen). Money and trade, which stand for the only possible bond between masters and men in Dickens, are present here in Stephen's receiving his pay. Within the larger context, however, it is Stephen's main worry all the while, that is, his position as "a servant of two masters." The smoky air hanging over Coketown and in Deasy's room, in the same way as the fog blurring London and its court of Chancery, creates a density which is symbolic of moral atrophy, corruption and death, themes that are also part of Joyce's main concerns in *Ulysses*.

Notes

1. See Richard Ellmann, *The Consciousness of Joyce* (London: Faber, 1977); Weldon Thornton, *Allusions in Ulysses: An Annotated List* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1961); Don Gifford with R. J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated, Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1989).
2. M. P. Gillespie, *Inverted Volumes Improperly Arranged: James Joyce and His Trieste Library* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research P, 1983) 19.
3. Qtd. in Norman Page, *Speech in the English Novel* (London: Longman, 1973) 28.
4. Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 706; subsequent references are to this edition.
5. Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) 139; subsequent references are to this edition.
6. P. Van Caspel, *Bloomers on the Liffey, Eisegetical Readings of Joyce's Ulysses* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986) 115.
7. Qtd. in Page 17.