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“In a Kind of Retrospective Arrangement”:
Essays on James Joyce and Memory

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CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	9
CHAPTER 1. Mind Strata: Archives, Palimpsests and Memory in <i>Ulysses</i>	21
CHAPTER 2. Remembering, Commemorating, Celebrating: Paternity and the Ghosts of the Past in <i>Ulysses</i>	53
CHAPTER 3. Memory, Personal Identity and the Text as Mirror in <i>Ulysses</i>	79
<i>Bibliography</i>	105

*To Daniele,
who makes
everything possible*

Introduction

Ever since early commentators' accounts of James Joyce's prodigious mnemonic faculties, considerable critical attention has been devoted to the theme of memory in relation to the author's compositional process, as well as its enactment in his major works. The essays collected in this book focus on different aspects of Joyce's treatment of memory in his masterpiece *Ulysses*. Though independent and conceived on different occasions¹, they share

1. The essay "Mind Strata: Archives, Palimpsests and Memory in *Ulysses*" was originally written (though in the end not presented) for the interdisciplinary conference "Strata: 1845-1945", held at the University of Birmingham on 8 May 2015. The essay "Remembering, Commemorating, Celebrating: Paternity and the Ghosts of the Past in *Ulysses*" is based on a paper delivered at the XXV International James Joyce Symposium (University of London, 13-18 June 2016) within a panel on "Shakespeare's Ghosts". Finally, the essay "Memory, Personal Identity and the Text as Mirror in *Ulysses*" reworks and expands a paper entitled "'The Mirror up to Nature': Reflexivity and Self-Reflexivity in *Ulysses* and *Hamlet*", presented at the IX James Joyce Italian Foundation Conference in Rome "Shakespearean Joyce/Joycean Shakespeare" (Roma Tre University, 2-3 February 2016) and forthcoming in *Joyce*

the attempt to reveal the manner in which concepts of memory, time, personal identity and text production entwine in the very fabric of the novel; to put it differently, they explore the interplay between these issues with particular emphasis on memory as textual construct. Memory, as several scholars have pointed out, is both a major theme and the primary narrative method in *Ulysses*, the structural and linguistic basis of Joyce's writing and of his lived experience. By analysing the way in which the characters' pasts are constructed and presented in the book, as well as the devices by which the text assumes the function of a memorial/archive/palimpsest, this work proposes to show that, through the authorial process of writing and the reader's act of interpreting, the novel actually becomes a site of memory.

The first essay, "Mind Strata: Archives, Palimpsests and Memory in *Ulysses*", provides a general introduction to the theme of Joyce and memory. Moreover, it attempts to highlight the *fil rouge* connecting author, text and reader by showing that the central role played by memory in the authorial act of composition of *Ulysses* is reflected in the way in which characters are constantly engaged in acts of recollection of past experiences, which, in turn, is reflected in the way narrative displays its own form

of textual memory (mainly through formal devices such as repetitions and internal references), which, in turn, compels the reader to exercise his own mnemotechnics in order to catch the innumerable allusions to the same and other texts, and hold together “this chafing allincluding most farraginous chronicle” (*U* 14.1412)². The novel, therefore, can be said to require a twofold effort of memory, by the producer of the text as well as by the reader, so that fragmented threads ultimately connect to form a coherent whole. This essay also proposes to interpret *Ulysses*, Joyce’s self-proclaimed “encyclopaedia” and “epic” of a novel³, as a comprehensive archive displaying the workings of at least four main types of memory – personal, interpersonal, textual, intertextual – which should not be considered sepa-

2. All quotations from the novel are taken from J. JOYCE, *Ulysses*, ed. by H.W. Gabler, W. Steppe and C. Melchior, The Bodley Head, London 2008 (first edition 1986), cited parenthetically by episode and line number.

3. I am of course referring to the famous letter to Carlo Linati dated 21 September 1919, in which Joyce describes *Ulysses* in these terms: “it is an epic of two races (Israelite/Irish) and at the same time the cycle of the human body as well as a little story of a day (life). [...] For seven years I have been working at this book – blast it! It is also a kind of encyclopaedia. My intention is not only to render the myth *sub specie temporis nostri* but also to allow each adventure (that is every hour, every organ, every art being interconnected and interrelated in the somatic scheme of the whole) to condition and even to create its own technique” (J. JOYCE, *Letters*, vol. I, ed. by S. Gilbert, Viking, New York 1957, p. 146).

rately, but as creating complex stratifications and overlappings. The text as palimpsest, that cultural product representing the place where writing and reading converge, definitely acquires a central position and effectively mimics the mnemotechnics involved in its creation; in other words, it exposes and mirrors Joyce's own reliance on mnemonic techniques and use of trigger-words or phrases contained in his notebooks during the compositional process, also functioning as clues and memory-triggers for the reader.

Other critics as well have focused on the different kinds of memory which manifest themselves in *Ulysses*. In what is perhaps the most comprehensive study on the subject, *Joyce's Book of Memory: The Mnemotechnic of Ulysses*, John Rickard analyses the interrelation between notions of subjectivity and memory seen as the thread of personal and collective/cultural consciousness, showing how the protagonists of the novel are markedly shaped by their own distinct pasts. The thorough investigation undertaken by Rickard into different types of memory, along with their effects on textual structure and the reader's understanding of the novel, offers an invaluable theoretical background for the papers collected here. In a thought-provoking essay, John Paul Riquelme has adopted a similar stance: "through a defining reliance on memory", he remarks,

“Joyce’s writings encourage us to remember in various ways and to recognize that remembering is part of moving forward, whether we are moving forward in the process of reading or moving forward in life, as we see the characters doing”⁴. Riquelme also outlines a taxonomy that is analogous to the one fully analysed in Rickard’s extensive study and discussed here:

Joyce’s texts are constituted by and as memory, specifically by elements of form and narrative that rely on memory of at least four kinds: a broadly cultural, though often literary, memory for earlier works; a linguistically and structurally focused memory for details of form and narrative; the memory of individual characters; and a historical, social memory that may also be communal.⁵

The first type is what I call intertextual memory, according to which the text at hand remembers, includes and reworks previous texts, which may be seen as precursors, either by the same author – *Dubliners*, some of whose characters reappear in *Ulysses*, and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, with its focus on Stephen Dedalus – or belonging to a

4. J.P. RIQUELME, “Preparatory to Anything Else”: Joyce’s Styles as Forms of Memory – The Case of “Eumaeus”, in M.P. GILLESPIE-N. FARGNOLI (eds.), “Ulysses” in *Critical Perspective*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville 2006, 9-34, p. 12.

5. *Ibid.*

broader cultural tradition. The second kind of memory is what I define, also following Rickard, textual memory, that is to say the presence of details of language and narrative – in brief of formal aspects such as repetitions and cross-references – that we encounter in the process of reading, and which show how the text remembers itself and incessantly reworks its own materials. This involves a double perspective, which Riquelme names “retrospective” and “proleptic”:

We recognize references to earlier moments of *Ulysses*' narrative and form in a proliferating sequence that includes multiple retrospective recognitions of those earlier moments as proleptic, moments that have pointed forward to the one we currently inhabit in the reading process and almost surely also to moments yet to emerge.⁶

The third type is the memory of individual characters engaging in personal recollections, or personal memory. As Riquelme aptly remarks, “not only do we realize that remembering is occurring when the recollections are presented in a detailed and intimate way; we may begin to share the characters' memories because in our attentive reading, we remember them, too”⁷. This kind of overlapping can

6. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

7. *Ibid.*

also concern the memory of different characters (what I name interpersonal memory), showing how their recollections may occasionally cross the boundaries between individual minds and subjectivities, or even affect all the different types of memory here discussed, creating complex superpositions and stratifications. In Riquelme's words, "frequently in *Ulysses*, cultural memory and individual memory coincide when a character's remembering includes details from a literary or popular text. These two kinds of memory mingle and merge for the characters and for us"⁸.

The second essay, "Remembering, Commemorating, Celebrating: Paternity and the Ghosts of the Past in *Ulysses*", narrows the scope of the previous one by analysing some specific aspects of the different forms of recollection that can be seen as constantly at work in the novel. Inside the vast repository of the characters' personal memories of their own past life and experiences, special attention is paid to such traumatic events as the loss of fatherly and filial figures, that Stephen and Bloom desperately try to overcome and repress. This shows that, in the fluid temporal dimension of *Ulysses*, the past is not simply "received" by the present in a voluntary act of recollection; rather, the present is actually "haunted" by

8. *Ibid.*

the past, which in turn is modelled, reinvented and reconstructed by the present itself. Although the most obvious interpretation would be one that brings into question contemporary psychoanalytic theories⁹, the attention is, rather, focused on the Bloomian notion of anxiety of influence and Joyce's agonistic relationship to the literary father, model and predecessor *par excellence*, William Shakespeare. The nu-

9. Richard Ellmann and other scholars have often pointed out Joyce's disavowal of interest and even aversion to psychoanalysis. It is perhaps for this reason that John Paul Riquelme, discussing both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, cautiously states that "the sort of consciousness these books evoke is not an empiricist one that functions primarily metonymically by association. [...] We require a more supple theory of mind, one that includes some recognition of the unconscious, of memory, of imagination, of what is sometimes called the imaginary than any empiricist view can muster. I am not suggesting that a Freudian notion of the unconscious operates in Joyce's writings or that a Freudian critical perspective is necessary for explaining Joyce's works. But repression, repetition, forgetting, and the return to or return of the repressed are helpful notions in describing the complicated representations of mind in Joyce's fiction" (J.P. RIQUELME, *Teller and Tale in Joyce's Fiction: Oscillating Perspectives*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1983, p. 150). There is an extensive bibliography on the subject: see, for example, M. SHECHNER, *Joyce in Nighttown: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry into "Ulysses"*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1974; S. BRIVIC, *Joyce Between Freud and Jung*, Port Washington, Kennikat 1980; J. KIMBALL, *Family Romance and Hero Myth: A Psychoanalytic Context for the Paternity Theme in "Ulysses"*, in «James Joyce Quarterly», 20.2(1983), pp. 161-173; S.S. FRIEDMAN, *Joyce: The Return of the Repressed*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1993; L. THURSTON, *James Joyce and the Problem of Psychoanalysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004.

merous analogies concerning the treatment of the themes of memory and paternity that link *Ulysses* to *Hamlet* (its major subtext along with the *Odyssey*) allow us to analyse the close connection between personal recollection seen as the commemoration of crucial events such as the death of Rudy Bloom and Rudolph Virag (Leopold's son and father, respectively), their frequent recurrence in the form of repetitions and leitmotifs (an instance of textual memory) and, obviously, intertextual memory or pervasive reference to the Shakespearean intertext. Both the characters' minds and the very fabric of the novel are literally haunted by the ghosts of the past, whether these are absent fathers/sons still vividly present in the thoughts of the living, or literary father figures as precursors, models and rivals. Furthermore, both the paternity theme and the references to Shakespeare provide a subterranean link between Bloom and Stephen as spiritual father and son, crossing the boundaries of character subjectivity and representing an interesting example of shared or interpersonal memory, which can often be found in the book.

Finally, the third essay, "Memory, Personal Identity and the Text as Mirror in *Ulysses*", focuses on the blurred distinctions between opposing terms and dichotomous elements related to Joyce's treatment of the theme of recollection in the novel, then individuating a

common denominator in the specularity – both literal and metaphorical – of the text. Memory in *Ulysses* has the potential to cease to be a static reflection of the past, and to become instead a process of creative exchange in which past, present and future moments are allowed to interconnect. Such fluid representation of time at work in the novel is of course closely related to the question of identity and the continuity or discontinuity between former and actual selves. The habit of comparing present experiences with what is no longer present is typical of the main characters of *Ulysses*: both Stephen and Bloom reflect on notions of permanence and change, and adopt attitudes which may vary from a nostalgic evocation to an obstinate refusal of the past. As for Molly Bloom, her stream of consciousness interspersed with recollections of past experiences, pervading the text of “Penelope”, is also an illuminating example of the way in which questions of memory and identity are entwined with notions of textuality. The retrospective quality of the last episode, a *summa* pointing back to everything that happened before, foregrounds the self-reflexivity and metafictionality of the whole of *Ulysses*, as other chapters – “Wandering Rocks” and “Circe”, for instance – also demonstrate. The power of memory to reflect the past, be it the characters’ or the novel’s past, is closely related to the specularity of the

text, where the manifold occurrences of real and metaphorical mirrors ultimately suggest the central importance of mimesis, narrative representation and self-representation, or the author's ability to create a microcosm that is entirely made of language. As Patricia Waugh has pointed out,

Metafictional writers [...] are self-consciously anxious to assert that, although literary fiction is only a verbal reality, it constructs through language an imaginative world that has, within its own terms, full referential status as an alternative to the world in which we live. [...] Metafiction lays bare the linguistic basis of the "alternative worlds" constructed in literary fictions.¹⁰

In conclusion, looking back on Joyce's masterpiece "in a kind of retrospective arrangement" (*U* 10.783) primarily means recognising the equal importance that mnemonic and imaginative faculties had in his creative process. Joyce spent all the years following his self-imposed exile recalling, reimagining and revising his memories of Dublin life, and of the most disparate – literary as well as non-literary – sources and traditions, to be remoulded and included in his own novels. The great significance of memory in his works, however, goes

10. P. WAUGH, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Methuen, London 1984, p. 100.

far beyond the author's mnemonic powers, or his compulsion to re-elaborate his own past. As Rickard puts it, "much of Joyce's writing involves itself in a reflection on the nature and extent of our access to the past – personal and collective – and the effects the past has on the present and future. His fascination with memory amounts to a philosophical and psychological obsession that profoundly influences not only the content but the form of his work"¹¹. What is distinctive of Joyce, then, is a metafictional consciousness that manifests itself in the fact that his entire *oeuvre* depends on elaborate repetitions, reworkings and even distortions of its own materials. In other words, it is the narrative itself that bears traces of the author's deep interest in the nature and functioning of memory, retrospectively arranging the past in order to construct the present and move on to the future.

11. J.S. RICKARD, *Joyce's Book of Memory: The Mnemotechnic of "Ulysses"*, Duke University Press, Durham-London 1999, p. 2.