Revisiting *Ulysses*: Joyce, Derrida, and the Legacy of Deconstruction

Introduction

In the second half of the 20th century, philosophical ideas such as "deconstruction," "post-structuralism," "postmodernism," "linguistic constructivism" and "neo-pragmatism" have revolutionized the academia and shed new light on literary criticism. These views often question the universality of truth and the transparency of linguistic communication. Ludwig Wittgenstein describes in his *Philosophical Investigations* that words participate in a series of "language-games," in which their meanings are determined from their use, like "tools in a toolbox."[1] Jacques Derrida critiques the Western philosophical tradition of privileging speech over writing, as the latter is often thought to be non-present and thus not as immediate as speech.[2] Richard Rorty similarly shows that truths are invented rather than discovered. He writes in his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* that:

> Truth cannot be out there—cannot exist independently of the human mind—because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own—unaided by the describing activities of human beings—cannot.[3]

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[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. ANSCOMBE (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1958), §11, §64.

[2] See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2016).

[3] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 5.

This passage echoes Jacques Derrida's famous statement "there's nothing outside the text," which does not mean that everything is a text, but rather points to language's inability to go beyond itself to reveal truth.[4]

Since then, we have now moved on into a new era where these philosophical ideas are again being contested, a "post-deconstruction" or "post-post-structuralism" if you will. Alain Badiou, for example, rejects postmodernist ideas and instead embraces a mathematical or set-theoretical model of universalism.[5] Badiou grounds his philosophy of truth in set theory, specifically Cantor's demonstration of the infinite multiplicity of infinities. For Badiou, Truths are infinite procedures.[6] Ronald Dworkin, on the other hand, attacks the entire postmodern intellectual milieu in his essay brazenly titled "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe it," framing that postmodernists often overlook the "evaluative" nature of truths when they are in fact only criticizing the "descriptive" nature of truths.[7] Dworkin views postmodernist thinkers as

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[4] Jaques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.

[5] "Translator's Introduction," *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (New York: Verso), xlii: "[the] philosophical tradition of Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and the others that frequently get referred to as 'French theory.' For Badiou, in fact, this tradition of thought is complicit with the posthumous betrayal of the events of May '68 and their aftermath in the first half of the 1970s."

[6] With regard to Badiou, see for example: Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2013). Badiou mentions his revelation on set theory in "Commitment, Detachment, Fidelity," published in *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, 33: "What got me out of this—awoke me from my Sartrean slumber? —is an interminable meditation on set theory, and especially on its two existential extremes, which are the axiom of the empty set and the axiom of infinity."

[7] Ronald Dworkin, "Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 88.

pure skeptics who believe that it is impossible to have any knowledge about universal properties.[8]

In light of all this, interpreting James Joyce's *Ulysses* now becomes an even more difficult problem than it already poses. Ever since Jacques Derrida published his magnum opus *Of Grammatology* in 1967, Joyce scholars have frequently employed a Derridean framework to probe the Joycean text.[9] Yet, we now find ourselves in an age where universalism is re-emerging within the academy. Just a decade ago, Logan Wiedenfeld has argued that Joyce's work often operates vis-à-vis the Socratic notion of "logocentrism."[10] He argues that Joyce's "Aeolus" traces the entire phonocentrist argument of the *Phaedrus*; therefore, Joyce is in favor of the "pureness" of speech over "dead" writing.[11] Wiedenfeld's argument is seemingly correct as Joyce does indeed antagonize the printing press (a written media) in the text of "Aeolus." However, the problem that immediately arises from his interpretation is that the text of the *Phaedrus* is heavily annotated by none other than Jacques Derrida in his *Dissemination*, which of course explicitly critiques logocentrism and is crucial in understanding the deconstruction reading of Joyce's

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[8] Ibid., 88-90.

[9] See for example: Mitchell, Andrew J., and Sam Slote, *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014).

[10] Logan Wiedenfeld, "The Other Ancient Quarrel: *Ulysses* and Classical Rhetoric," *James Joyce Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 70: "Socrates's argument, logocentric as it may be, is an important one for the philosophy of rhetoric… Written texts might have a particular audience in mind, but, as Socrates makes clear, there is no guarantee that the texts will find the right one or vice versa. It is no coincidence that the pieces of rhetoric discussed by the men in the newspaper office are extracted from live speech, rather than the print that surrounds them. More often than not, it would appear, a written text ends up with 'those who have no business with it.'

"In light of Socrates's argument, we can see the significance of Joyce choosing a newspaper office in which to set his dialogue on rhetoric."

[11] Ibid., 72.

text.[12] What's at stake here is whether we should decide on a postmodern reading for the text of *Ulysses*, or a conventional reading that disavows the intellectual milieu developed in the second half of the 20th century.

In what follows, this essay will attempt to do justice to the deconstructionist interpretation of Joyce's *Ulysses*, with an emphasis on the text's relationship with Plato's *Phaedrus*. First, I will demonstrate how Derrida deconstructs the dichotomy of speech and writing. Second, I will interrogate the text of "Aeolus" and examine its intersection with Jacques Derrida's notion of deconstruction and his critique of presence. Last, I will pay close attention to episode 9 of the novel, "Scylla and Charybdis," and illustrate how Joyce anticipates Derrida's ideas on supplementarity.

Derrida's Deconstruction

For Jacques Derrida, the dichotomy of speech and writing—a seemingly prereferral point of focus—problematizes the tradition of Western philosophy and metaphysics. Derrida argues that the reason why Western philosophy privileges speech and hearing (*entendre*) over writing is because the *phonè* produces the illusion of being able to understand (*entendre*) and communicate the thing in itself.[13] Speech then creates the notion of absolute proximity between the signifier and the signified: "[phonocentricsm produces] absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice

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[12] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbra Johnson (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004).

[13] "The system of 'hearing (understanding) oneself speaks' [*s'entendre-parler*] through the phonic substance—which *presents itself* as the non-exterior, non-worldly, therefore non-empirical or non-contingent signifier—had to dominate the history of the world through an entire epoch." Jaques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 8.

and the meaning of being, of voice and ideality of meaning."[14] Thus, the privileging of speech over writing is the privileging of presence: "The formal essence of the signified is presence, and the privilege of its proximity to the logos as *phonè* is the privilege of presence."[15]

Alphabetical or phonetical writing then could only be said as a shadow of speech, the externalization of mind or memory, a symbol of a symbol, a representational image or stand-in supplement for the original. Indeed, it is a tradition for western philosophers—such as Socrates, Kant, Rousseau, and Saussure—to view writing as a means to preserve speech: "phonetic writing has a precisely functional principle of respecting and protecting the integrity of the 'internal system' of the language."[16] Yet, the invention of writing also produces a lapsarian dilemma: on the one hand, writing reflects and preserves speech; on the other hand, writing shifts the focus of language from speech to writing because of its usefulness. Indeed, philosophers Like Saussure want to bring humanity back to the prelapsarian state of phonocentricsm. Writing corrupts the original (speech) and violently usurps the original from its place, "[writing is] the intrusion of an artful technique, a forced entry of a totally original sort, archetypal violence: eruption of the outside in the inside, breaching into the interiority of the soul, the living self-presence of the soul in the true logos."[17] Writing is treated as the original sin, the reversal of the "natural" sequence.

However, for Derrida, the supplement's usurpation is not simply a violence to the original, it also reveals or exposes a lack. Indeed, for Derrida, speech is also a form of

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[14] Ibid., 12.

[15] Ibid., 19.

[16] Ibid., 36.

[17] Ibid., 37

representation; therefore, it is simply another kind of writing: "there is an originary violence of writing because language is first, in a sense that will gradually reveal itself, writing. 'Usurpation' has always already begun."[18] Derrida thereby exposes that the original is always already a copy of itself in the very beginning; it is already a representational image, a reflection:

> In this play of presentation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. There are things, reflecting pools and images, an infinite reflection from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring. There is no longer a simple origin. For what is reflected is duplicated in itself and not only as an addition to itself of its image. The reflection, the image, the double, duplicates what it doubles. The origin of the speculation becomes a *difference*.[19]

The passage echoes Derrida's philosophy of supplementarity and *différance*. This inflationary circulation or slippage between terms (origin/reflection) is exactly where the notion of *différance* operates.[20] On the one hand, each dichotomy defines itself as its other's negation or antithesis. On the other hand, it is its other's supplement. Hence, *différance* does not simply break apart the boundaries of speech/writing, but it also functions as the principle of deconstruction. It breaks apart the dichotomy of founding metaphysical terms (soul/body, *physis/mimesis*, speech/writing, inside/outside, signified/signifier), which, according to Derrida, have all sprung out from the "original" dichotomy of speech (the original, the inside) and writing (the imitation, the outside).

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[18] Ibid., 40.

[19] Ibid., 39.

[20] Richard Begam, "Beckett's Mirror Writing: Doubling and Differance in Molloy," *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 100.

Thus, terms like nature (*physis*) finds within itself its other, its mediated substitute, namely culture (*mimesis*):

> *différance* as the displaced equivocal passage of one different thing to another, from one term of an opposition to the other ... (the intelligible as differing-deferring the sensible, as, the sensible different and deferred; the concept as different and deferred, differing-deferring intuition; culture as nature different and deferred, differing deferring; all the others of *physis—tekhne*, *nomos*, *thesis*, society, freedom, history, mind, etc.—as physis different and deferred, or as physis differing and deferring. *Physis* in *différance*. And in this we may see the site of a reinterpretation of *mimësis* in its alleged opposition to *physis*).[21]

Therefore, through the lens of deconstruction, we can see that speech finds in itself its mediated other (writing); culture (*mimesis*) similarly becomes the opposite of nature (*physis*) and its substitute. The inside becomes the outside; the signifier becomes the signified. The original defines itself as its other's opposite while simultaneously contains in itself its other.

Wind and Rhetoric

In James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the episode "Aeolus" takes place in a newspaper office and is structured like a series of headlines, mimicking the brisk, chaotic environment of journalism. The "thumping" in this episode refers to the sound of the printing press at work, symbolizing both the mechanical, technological, and impersonal production of the news and the relentless, rhythmic

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[21] Derrida, "Différance," *Margins of Philosophy* (The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 17.

pulse of modernity: “The machines clanked in threefour time. Thump, thump, thump. Now if he got paralysed there and no one knew how to stop them they’d clank on and on the same, print it over and over and up and back.”[22] Joyce’s attitude toward the printing press is a negative one. According to Ellman, when Joyce was notified by his publisher that his short story “Two Gallants” needs revision, Joyce commented that “in no other civilized country in Europe is a printer allowed to open his mouth.”[23] His disproval attitude toward the press is apparent in the text of *Ulysses*. In “Aeolus,” Myles Crawford proposed to Stephen Daedalus that he ought to write for the newspapers; in “Eumaeus,” Leopold Bloom similarly urged Stephen to join the press as “[it] is the readiest channel nowadays” (16.1152-54). Yet, in both cases, Stephen showed no signs of interest.

Although “Aeolus” is associated with the press, the Linati schema lists the organ of the episode as the “Lungs.”[24] The lungs are obviously the producer of pulmonic egressive sounds of English speech. Why then is journalistic writing compared with the lungs which produces speech or sound? The answer, I argue, lies in the episode’s title, “Aeolus.” Aeolus appears in Book 10 of Homer’s *Odyssey* as the keeper of the winds and the ruler of the island Aeolia. In the epic, Aeolus gives Odysseus a bag made of ox-hide that contains all the winds. Aeolus’s “windbag” is then punned in the episode with the “lungs,” the former of which figuratively means a person who talks at length but says nothing of value. Therefore, by comparing journalistic writing with speech, Joyce treats journalism as the senseless chatter of mechanical rhetoric. It is of course the

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[22] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler et al. (New York: Vintage, 1986), 7.101-03; hereafter parenthetical citations are to this edition, by episode and line number.

[23] Richard Ellman, *James Joyce* (Oxford University Press, 1982), 220.

[24] See the Linati schema.

automated printing machines in the newspaper office that "speak" in the episode through a series of mechanical onomatopoeia: "Sllt. The nethermost deck of the first machine jogged forwards its flyboard with sllt the first batch of quirefolded papers." (7.175-77). Hence, by comparing writing with speech, Joyce expresses his almost pragmatist attitude on the nature of language—words we speak are as empty as the wind or puffs of hot air, inadequate to reveal truth.

Wiedenfeld however, argues that Joyce expresses his love for speech over writing in "Aeolus" because the text alludes to Plato's *Phaedrus*. Although Wiedenfeld situates the debate around rhetoric vs philosophy instead of speech vs writing, and further acknowledges the symbolism of the lungs as the mechanization of senseless rhetoric,[25] he states that speech is more immediate than writing for Joyce:

> In light of Socrates's argument, we can see the significance of Joyce choosing a newspaper office in which to set his dialogue on rhetoric… The key difference is that the newspaper disseminates writing rather than live discourse. The newspaper represents a kind of mechanization of discourse, an absolute sundering of speaker and speech… The newspaper embodies speech that is not twice but thrice removed from its author: the author's speech is transcribed, and that transcription is then printed. As such, the newspaper becomes even more susceptible to the dangers Socrates attributes to writing.[26]

Wiedenfeld points out that writing is associated with death in the same sense as we see in the *Phaedrus* because Bloom compares Dignam's decomposing body with that of the machines:

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[25] Wiedenfeld, "The Other Ancient Quarrel: Ulysses and Classical Rhetoric (James Joyce Quarterly, Volume 51, Number 1, Fall 2013)," 69.

[26] Wiedenfeld, "The Other Ancient Quarrel: *Ulysses* and Classical Rhetoric," 71.

"[Dignam's] machineries are pegging away too. Like these, got out of hand: fermenting. Working away, tearing away" (7.81-83). Wiedenfeld thus arrives at the conclusion that "Aeolus" —like the "logocentric" text of the *Phaedrus*—critiques journalism as a type of writing that is both mechanical and "soulless," therefore incomparable to spoken rhetoric.[27] Journalistic writing is treated as dead and "frozen in time."[28]

It is of course Jacques Derrida who famously critiques the logocentrist argument of the *Phaedrus* in his *Dissemination* and his *Of Grammatology*.[29] One reading that came out of Derrida's analysis is that the reason why Socrates valorized speech over writing is because there were no means to record speech during his time, making writing the only available medium to preserve speech. For instance, Friedrich Kittler, particularly in his book *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, shows that the traditional privileging of speech over writing in Western metaphysics (which Derrida critiques in *Of Grammatology*) is bound up with the media technologies available at the time.[30]

With this notion in mind, we can see that what Wiedenfeld overlooked in his argument is the fact that Joyce himself actually recorded the entire episode of "Aeolus." According to Sylvia Beach, Joyce explained to her that "Aeolus" is the only episode that could be "lifted out of

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[27] Ibid., 71.

[28] Ibid., 72.

[29] See specifically "Part I: Writing before the Letter" in *Of Grammatology* and "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Dissemination*.

[30] See Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford University Press, 1999).

Ulysses," and is the only episode "declamatory" enough to be suited for recording.[31] Joyce recorded his reading alone in His Master's Voice studio, before a phonographic recording device.[32] If Joyce indeed privileged the immediacy of speech over writing, it would be unlikely for Joyce to record an entire episode dedicated to immediacy of speech, since Joyce has effectively turned his own voice into a lifeless speech which is—in Wiedenfeld's own words—"frozen in time." Indeed, Joyce's view on the dichotomy of speech and writing is much more complicated than that of the Socratic notion of logocentrism.

To further investigate Joyce's enigmatic attitude towards speech and writing, I will now direct the attention back to the topic of rhetoric. "Aeolus" is famously composed of an assemblage of rhetorical devices, and among which is prosopopoeia, which means a non-human element or inanimate object is personified to speak. We may find an instance of prosopopoeia in Leopold Bloom's internal monologue as he observes the printing machines at work: "Sllt. Almost human the way it sllt to call attention. Doing its level best to speak. That door too sllt creaking, asking to be shut. Everything speaks in its own way" (7.175-77) What Bloom or Joyce describes here is that at the center of speech is a kind of writing machine. It is the inanimate or "dead" machine that is speaking. Hence, speech is only another kind of "writing." We are reminded of Derrida's essay "Tympan," in which he describes a "stereographic" writing machine is located

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[31] Sylvia Beach, *Shakespeare and Company* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1956), 171. Coincidentally, Jacques Derrida, half a century later, would during the composition of his essay "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce" addressed to the 9th International James Joyce Symposium in Frankfurt (1984), record his ideas in a mini tape recorder: "Now I happened to be in Tokyo more than a month ago, and it is there that I began to write this lecture, or rather to dictate its main points to a small pocket tape recorder." Jaques Derrida, "*Ulysses* Gramophone: Here Say Yes in Joyce," in Mitchell, Andrew J., and Sam Slote's *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 43.

[32] Beach, *Shakespeare and Company*, 171.

inside the ear as opposed to a "stereophonic" one.[33] Although unlike Derrida, Joyce is not rhyming the writing machine with the ear, but with the lungs as a mechanical organ that blows hot air.

The word "prosopopoeia" is polysemic. Besides the notion of personification, it is also used as a rhetorical device by which an absent or dead subject is represented as speaking. Death and absence are of course Socrates' critiques against writing in the *Phaedrus*. For Socrates, genuine philosophical inquiry requires a living, dialogical exchange where questions, clarifications, and objections can be answered and addressed. Writing, by contrast, is mute: once a text is written, it cannot answer new questions, defend itself without its author, or correct misunderstandings. Wiedenfeld believes that for Joyce, "the newspaper press functions as the mechanization of the human voice. That is to say, it replicates the *absence* inherent in the written language, which is itself a surrogate to present language (speech)."[34] Yet, death or absence cannot simply be associated with writing when one takes into consideration that Joyce actually recorded himself reading the text of "Aeolus." We may hear Joyce's words from the mechanical representation of recording, but Joyce himself is always absent. The absence of the speaking subject in Joyce's own recording reminds us of Kittler's analysis of the gramophone: "Ever since the invention of the phonograph, there has been writing without a subject. It is no longer necessary to assign an author to every trace, not even God."[35] For Joyce, it would then seem that the notion of speech, like writing, does not always imply presence.

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[33] Jacques Derrida, "Tympan," in *Margins of Philosophy* (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982), xxiii. See also Lynn Turner, "Tympan Alley: Posthumanist Performatives in *Dancer in the Dark*," *Derrida Today* 6, no. 2 (2013): 224.

[34] Wiedenfeld, "The Other Ancient Quarrel: *Ulysses* and Classical Rhetoric," 72.

[35] Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 44.

Joyce continues to criticize the newspapers in the episode "Cyclops." Although the "Cyclopic" character is associated with The Citizen who is a satirical portrayal of Irish nationalist Michael Cusack,[36] the word may also be a reference to the press. Richard Ellman has documented that Joyce once called people of the press as "one-eyed."[37] In the episode, Joyce parodies the journalistic style multiple times. In the episode, what really was nothing but a heated argument between Bloom and the Citizen at the pub became a journalistic bombast and a nationalist hyperbole:

> The catastrophe was terrific and instantaneous in its effect. The observatory of Dunsink registered in all eleven shocks, all of the fifth grade of Mercalli's scale, and there is no record extant of a similar seismic disturbance in our island since the earthquake of 1534, the year of the rebellion of Silken Thomas. The epicentre appears to have been that part of the metropolis which constitutes the Inn's Quay ward and parish of Saint Michan covering a surface of fortyone acres, two roods and one square pole or perch. All the lordly residences in the vicinity of the palace of justice were demolished and that noble edifice itself, in which at the time of the catastrophe important legal debates were in progress, is literally a mass of ruins beneath which it is to be feared all the occupants have been buried alive. From the reports of eyewitnesses it transpires that the seismic waves were accompanied by a violent atmospheric perturbation of cyclonic character (12.1858-71).

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[36] Ellman, James Joyce, 61: "Clancy was an enthusiast also for Gaelic sports like hurling, and therefore a great friend of Michael Cusack, the founder of the Gaelic Athletic Association. He brought Joyce to meet Cusack a tew times, and Joyce liked him little enough to make him model the narrow-minded and rhetorical Cyclops in Ulysses."

[37] Ibid., 220.

Joyce's parody of Journalism here anticipates Derrida's critique on the privilege of presence. Journalism as a mediatic form is often assumed as capable of accurately preserving reality; it is the task of the journalist to unbiasedly report and document events. The journalistic form should therefore have a close proximity to reality. Yet, Joyce here demonstrates how newspaper writings could be easily manipulated to create a biased and over-exaggerated narrative. Joyce here is not critiquing journalistic writing in favor of speech, but he is critiquing the assumed "zero-degree" proximity journalism has to the event it attempts to describe.[38] Thus, Joyce's "Aeolus" anticipates Derrida's critique of presence.

"Dublin" all the time: Supplementation and Originality

Joyce's allusion to the *Phaedrus* is much more pronounced in "Scylla and Charybdis." In the episode, Stephen delivers his elaborate theory of *Hamlet* in the National Library of Ireland. During the lecture, Stephen meditates on the figure of Thoth: "Thoth, god of libraries, a birdgod, moonycrowned" (9.353). It is of course Socrates who alluded to the myth of Thoth in the *Phaedrus* when arguing against writing.[39] According to Joley Wood, Joyce's allusion to the *Phaedrus* is Joyce distancing himself from Stephen's theory of authorship.[40] Wood reasons that, since Socrates privileges speech as closer to truth than writing, the dialogic structure of the episode reflects Stephen's own belief in his theory's validity, but because the dialectic ultimately

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[38] For proximity, see Derrida's *Of Grammatology.*

[39] Obviously, the allusion to Thoth doesn't necessarily imply an allusion to the *Phaedrus*. However, due to the Socratic undertones of the episode, Wood reasons that Joyce is alluding to the *Phaedrus* when Stephen meditates on the figure of Thoth.

[40] Joley Wood, "'Scylla and Charybdis' (and *Phaedrus*): The Influence of Plato and the Artistry of Joyce," *James Joyce Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 566-67.

appears in Joyce's *Ulysses* as a form of writing, the theory must be false or invalid for Joyce.[41] Wood here is obviously still very on board with the logocentrist argument presented in the *Phaedrus*. Certainly, one could view Joyce's treatment of Stephen as ironic distancing.[42] However, I argue that the allusion to the *Phaedrus* is not Joyce signaling that he has distanced himself from his literary alter-ego, but rather Joyce is inverting Socrates' argument in the *Phaedrus* to validate his own theory of authorship, thus anticipating Derrida's analysis of usurpation/supplementation in "Plato's Pharmacy."

Stephen's theory is the claim that Shakespeare "is the ghost of his own father" (1.556-57). In other words, when the ghost of King Hamlet demands remembrance from his son, Stephen sees Shakespeare himself speaking through that figure, haunted by his own role as both father and son. The ghost embodies the presence of Shakespeare's own father, John Shakespeare, whose decline into poverty and obscurity weighed heavily on his son. But the ghost also expresses Shakespeare's own paternal grief after the death of Hamnet, his only son, whose name echoes *Hamlet*. Stephen thus reads the play as Shakespeare mourning both upward toward his father and downward toward his dead child. Stephen reads Shakespeare's Hamlet as the aestheticization of consubstantiality.

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[41] Ibid., 567.

[42] For Joyce's ironic distancing from Stephen, see for example Tobias Boes, "*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and the 'Individuating Rhythm' of Modernity," *ELH* 75, no. 4 (Winter 2008).

Of course, Wood having doubts on Joyce's belief in Stephen's theory is reasonable. Historical evidence suggests that Shakespeare likely did not play King Hamlet's ghost.[43] However, the point being made here by Joyce is that, by aestheticizing the trinity, the son is able to supplant the father. Thus, Joyce is able to break free from the "anxiety of influence" from literary predecessors.[44] In the logic of anesthetized consubstantiality, Joyce predates Homer. This point is made apparent through the words of Mr. Best: "You ought to make it a dialogue, don't you know, like the Platonic dialogues Wilde wrote" (9.1068-69). Wood focused on the fact that Stephen turned down Mr. Best's suggestion to write down his theory, therefore Stephen is in favor of speech as a it leads to truth. What Wood neglected here is that Mr. Best is not attributing the author of the Platonic dialogues to Plato, but rather to Oscar Wilde. For Joyce, Wilde supplants Plato by writing his own version of the Platonic dialogues. Likewise, Joyce supplants Homer by rewriting the *Odysseys*. *Ulysses* then becomes the father text that comes before the Homeric epic. Joyce's theory then carefully plays on the theme of usurpation, which alludes to the suitors in Homer's *Odysseys* and is echoed by Stephen at the end of "Telemachus" as a silent protest against Mulligan who "usurped" the place of Cranly (1.744).

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[43] It's a common claim in theatre history that Shakespeare himself may have played the Ghost in *Hamlet* (as well as Adam in *As You Like It*), but there's no surviving documentary evidence that proves it. In *Some Account of the Life of Mr. William Shakespeare*, Nicholas Rowe reported having heard that Shakespeare played the ghost in his own *Hamlet*. However, he offered no documentary evidence to support this claim. See Brian Cumming's interview in the Folger Shakespeare.

[44] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). See also José Vergara, *All Future Plunges to the Past* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2025), 5-7.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates relates that Thoth, the god of writing, tried to "usurp" speech by presenting to the father-god Ammon his invention of writing as a medicine for memory and wisdom. However, Ammon claimed that writing could only lead to the opposite of wisdom:

> Your discovery ... is a medicine not for memory, but for recollection, —for recalling to, not for keeping in mind. And you are providing for your disciples a show of wisdom without the reality. For, acquiring by your means much information unaided by instruction, they will appear to possess much knowledge, while, in fact, they will, for the most part, know nothing at all; and, moreover, be disagreeable people to deal with, as having become wise in their own conceit, instead of truly wise.[45]

In Socrates's view, unmediated speech certainly came before the invention of mediated writing.

However, speech, as Derrida defines it, is already a form of writing because language itself was always mediated.[46] Therefore, writing's usurpation of speech has already begun in the very beginning. Derrida integrates this mythical aspect of writing and its usurpation of speech in his essay "Plato's Pharmacy." Derrida argues that, by inventing writing, Thoth supplants his father:

> "The system of these traits brings into play an original kind of logic: the figure of Thoth is opposed to its other (father, sun, life, speech, origin or orient, etc.), but as that which at once supplements and supplants it. Thoth extends or opposes by

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[45] Plato, Phaedrus, Five Dialogues of Plato Bearing on Poetic Inspiration, ed. Ernest Rhys, intro. A. D. Lindsay (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1910): 271. This is the version that Joyce possessed.

[46] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 40.

> repeating or replacing. By the same token, the figure of Thoth takes shape and takes its shape from the very thing it resists and substitutes for…In distinguishing himself from his opposite, Thoth also imitates it, becomes its sign and representative, obeys it and conforms to it, replaces it, by violence if need be. He is thus the father's other, the father, and the subversive movement of replacement. The god of writing is thus at once his father, his son, and himself.[47]

Derrida here demonstrates the "usurpation" of writing through the mythical allusion of Thoth, who is both Ra's (the father's) opposition, and his supplement.

The Trinity thus becomes a "who came first" question—the father or the son? The chicken or the egg? Derrida would comment on this in his essay that:

> The configurative unity of these significations—the power of speech, the creation of being and life, the sun (which is also, as we shall see, the eye), the self-concealment—is conjugated in what could be called the history of the egg or the egg of history. The world came out of an egg. More precisely, the living creator of the life of the world came out of an egg: the sun, then, was at first carried in an eggshell. Which explains a number of Ammon-Ra's characteristics: he is also a bird, a falcon ("I am the great falcon, hatched from his egg"). But in his capacity as origin of everything, Ammon-Ra is also the origin of the egg. He is designated sometimes as the bird-sun horn from the primal egg, sometimes as the originary bird, carrier of the first egg.[48]

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[47] Derrida, *Dissemination*, 96.

[48] Ibid., 92.

Since speech (Ammon-Ra) is already a form of writing (Thoth) in the sense that both speech and writing are mediated, the father is endlessly supplemented by the son. Supplementarity thus signifies the problem of infinite regress and the lack of a point of absolute originality. It is the idea of "turtling all the way down," an inability to recover origins. It is what Derrida refers to as the "violent forgetting" of the original or source.[49] Stephen's allusion to Thoth as the "birdgod" then anticipates Derrida's critique of the *Phaedrus* and the Socratic notion of logocentrism.

The idea that the original is already a copy is echoed by Harold Bloom in his *Anxiety of Influence*. Bloom points out that aspiring artists often try to overcome the anxiety posed by the influence of their literary predecessors.[50] It is the feeling that everything that has been done before. According to Bloom, "influence-anxiety does not so much concern the forerunner but rather is an anxiety achieved in and by the story, novel, play, poem, or essay."[51] To combat such anxiety, Bloom introduces six "revisionary ratios" through which later writers can reinterpret or distort the works of their predecessors. These include *clinamen*, a deliberate deviation from the source text, and *apophrades*, a process which the artist makes the original appears as if it was already a copy.[52] Bloom's *apophrades* very much works in congruency with Derrida's notion of supplementarity and Joycean consubstantiality. Through the process of *apophrades*, *Ulysses* (the son) makes Homer's *Odyssey* (the father) into a copy. Of course, it is obvious that Joyce had no knowledge of Derrida's supplementarity nor Bloom's *apophrades*. And yet, it is clear in the final

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[49] See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

[50] Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*.

[51] Ibid., xxiii.

[52] Harold Bloom, *The Anatomy of Influence: Literature as a Way of Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 6.

analysis that Joyce very much anticipates their theories of origin/copy through the anesthetization of the Trinity.

The idea that the point of absolute originality is impossible to reach is also discussed in the "Proteus." When Stephen walks along Sandymount Strand, he imagines the woman he sees has in her bag a dead fetus, with umbilical cords that link all the way back to Adam and Eve like telephone cords: "Creation from nothing. What has she in the bag? A misbirth with a trailing navelcord, hushed in ruddy wool. The cords of all link back, strandentwining cable of all flesh... Hello! Kinch here. Put me on to Edenville. Aleph, alpha: nought, nought, one" (3.35-40). For Stephen, Eve seems to represent a point of originality: "Heva, naked Eve. She had no navel" (3.41-42). Yet, Stephen's search for originality is interrupted as he immediately remembers the notion of consubstantiality: "Is that then the divine substance wherein Father and Son are consubstantial?" (3.49-50). Indeed, there is no original or source in the Joycean sense of Catholicism, only supplementation.

The idea of supplementation and aestheticized Trinity could be best understood by Joyce's evocation of Giambattista Vico, who views history as a cycle that goes through four stages—The Age of Gods, The Age of Heros, The Age of Men, and, finally, a *Ricorso* which cycles the world back to the initial stage. In *Ulysses*, Vico is referenced as "Vico Road" (2.25), and his philosophy is noted by Stephen as "world without end." Richard Ellmann has documented Joyce's fascination with Vico's philosophy of history in his bibliography of Joyce:

> He admired also Vico's positive division of human history into recurring cycles, each set off by a thunderclap, of theocratic, aristocratic, and democratic ages, followed by a ricorso or return. Joyce did not share Vico's interest in these as literal chronological divisions of 'eternal idea l history,' but as psychological ones,

> ingredient s which kept combining and recombining in ways which seemed always to be *déjà vus*. 'I use his cycles as a trellis,' he told Padraic Colum later; he wrote Miss Weaver, 'I would not pay overmuch attention to these theories, beyond using them for all they are worth, but they have gradually forced themselves on me through circumstances of my own life.[53]

Vico's philosophy would later lay the groundwork for the entire structure of *Finnegans Wake*.[54] The entire text of the *Wake* is divided into four parts, each signifying a stage of Viconian history. Hence, the ending of the text is also the very beginning. What comes with this version of history is a sort of doubling—as Joyce puns it with "Dublin"—when the cycle of history simultaneously advances and regresses back to the first stage. In this process, Dublin is now not the capital city of Ireland, but a city in Laurens County, Georgia, USA: "nor had topsawyer's rocks by the stream Oconee exaggerated themslese to Laurens County's gorgios while they went doublin their mumper all the time"[55].

Joyce would even go as far as to disavow his own authorship. Jolas has documented that Joyce's has declared that Finnegans Wake is written by multiple authors: "'Really, it is not I who am writing this crazy book,' he said in his whimsical way one evening. 'It is you, and you, and you, and that man over there, and that girl at the next table.'"[56] By composing the *Wake*, Joyce

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[53] Ellman, James Joyce, 544.

[54] Ibid., 545.

[55] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 3.7-9 (Oxford World's Classics, 2012).

[56] Jolas, Eugene Jolas: Critical Writings, 1924-1951, ed. Klaus H. Kiefer and Rainer Rumold (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2009), p. 400. See also Catherine Flynn, "Finnegans Wake's 'Radio Montage: Man-Made Static, the Avant-Garde, and Collective Reading,'" *James Joyce Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2015): 287–88.

then announces his own supplementation. Thus, Joyce successfully anticipates Derrida's notion of supplementarity through his anesthetization of the trinity and his fascinations with Vico's philosophy of history. In Joyce view, however, Vico's cyclic history is "a positive division," implying that the "destinerrance" of the inability to reach the origin is ultimately comedic rather than tragic.[57]

Coda

What becomes clear through this investigation is that Joyce occupies a unique, perhaps even paradoxical position within the intellectual history of the last century. The post-structuralist turn opened up Joyce's *Ulysses* as an exemplary text of différance, supplementarity, and critique of presence. Yet the subsequent reactions against postmodern "skepticism," represented by the conventionalists like Wood and Wiedenfeld, have repositioned Joyce within a "post-deconstruction" milieu where objectivity and truth once again appear as urgent categories. To interpret Joyce today is therefore to situate oneself within this larger philosophical milieu, aware that each critical framework—whether deconstructive or universalist—risks not only reshaping Joyce but also reinscribing the very boundaries of contemporary theory.

What is at stake, then, is more than the question of whether Joyce "belongs" to universalism or anticipates postmodernism. What is at issue here is the intellectual orientation of literary criticism itself: whether meaning is indefinitely deferred, endlessly supplemented, or whether texts can in fact anchor universal claims about truth, presence, or language. Joyce,

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[57] Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Derrida's "destinerrance" is a pun combining destinataire (addressee) with errance (wandering/erring). This layers the meanings "destination" and "wandering."

whose writing thrives on paradox, parody, and play, continues to resist being pinned down by either camps. Interpreting Joyce thus becomes a paradigm for how we may begin to understand the relationship between literature and philosophy in the wake of a century-long struggle between post-structuralism and universalism. In that sense, Joyce remains our contemporary, precisely because he compels us to confront the stakes of interpretation itself.

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