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‘ERR’MENEUTIC OF THE “WORD” AND THE “WORLD”: CATEGORIZING/INTERPRETING ERRORS IN JAMES JOYCE’S ULYSSES

ABSTRACT: The errors in/of Ulysses are of a transgressively innovative high-modernist text which unsettles notions of correctness. This essay explores a hermeneutic that circles round the ‘sanctioned’ errors of Ulysses by examining their types and implications with reference to: i) the assumptions about fiction traversed by the errors, which are at the root of the tacit norms; and ii) the interpretive dynamics demanded by the text. The problems of interpretation partly stem from the generic ambiguity of the text. The text first foregrounds and then redefines the norm for each category of error (discrepancy between real and fictional worlds, internal inconsistency, disowned errors, and so on), and accommodates the errors based on the principles of compensation and fecundity. Joycean errancy manifests a hermeneutic self-consciousness. The errors dramatize both the text’s compositional modes and its anticipative engagement with the reader. They encourage readers to bring in their paradigms of pre-understanding, but compel them to revise the paradigms till they succumb to the alternative logic of the text, with its fleeting grounds of truth, propriety, and order. The variable distance between the arranger and the erring characters/voices is a potent device for the production of meaning. Joyce can afford to compromise normative perfection because he has structured Ulysses in such a way as to provide an alternative validity for its innate deviance. In the elaborate network of correspondences and motifs, errant elements have the potential to coalesce with other elements, which can validate them under a meaning-proliferating logic. This logic hinges on an exchange of effects between textual levels (thematic, narrative, etc.).

KEYWORDS: ontological commitment, overdetermined, metaleptic deviations, topographical realism, Bloomism, initial style, delegation of voice, narrative ventriloquism, disowning aesthetic, self-righting

0. INTRODUCTION

With the exception of Textual/Genetic Criticism, errors are hardly considered an analytical category in discussions of literary texts. The exploration of ‘errors’ in a fictional text is a radically problematic endeavour. If we define error as the violation of a norm (or, if the degree of consensus is low, a convention or an expectation), our enterprise has
to begin with the question “Does fiction have to follow any norms?”¹ If it does, what are these norms? Any response to these questions inevitably involves digging up and engaging assumptions which pertain to the nature of fiction, and its precise relationship with the world, or, what philosophers of literature call ‘ontological commitment.’ What is the nature of its ontological commitment? Some philosophers believe that literature has no ontological commitment at all. Others maintain that it has a limited ontological commitment. My position is that the kind of commitment varies from genre to genre. The ontological commitment of documentary fiction (also called non-fiction novel) is different from that of fantasy fiction. Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* has a different relation to reality from that of the Harry Potter series. The view that literature has no ontological commitment is based on the philosophy of possible worlds (derived from Gottfried Leibniz’s idea that God has created “the best of all possible worlds”). The model of literature which postulates that the world of a literary work is independent of the real world is called the “heterocosmic model,” one “in which each work constitutes a unique, coherent, and autonomous world. . . . [and] has reference only to the world that is established by that literary work” (Abrams 18). According to this model, the only criterion applicable to a literary work is that its “possible world” should be “compossible” (176). Its ‘truth condition’ is not correspondence to the real world, but internal coherence.

The concept of error is even more problematic for an avant-garde text such as James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. It might sound paradoxical to discuss errors in the work of a high-modernist author who extended the frontiers of writing with his experimental works. Joyce’s works violate or redefine most norms of writing (and of reading). Popular understanding of Joyce, the avant-garde writer, and relapsed Catholic, is that of a repudiator vis-à-vis norms and normativeness. The task of categorizing and interpreting errors in *Ulysses*, however, demands a more complex paradigm than envisaged by a repudiatory narrative aesthetic. As we shall see shortly, Joyce even sets up new norms in writing, and meticulously sticks to them as far as possible. He also problematizes any possible settled notion

¹Etymologically, the English word ‘error’ is derived from the Latin infinitive ‘errare,’ which means ‘to stray from the right course.’
of ‘correctness’ in the writing of fiction by playfully laying bare conventions and assumptions. Therefore, one approach to errors in a Joyce-text would be to locate them between the two poles of self-imposed meticulousness and self-conscious innovation. The fluidity of norms and the complexity of practice are not, in any way, a roadblock in the endeavour. On the contrary, Joyce’s errors are so fecund as to furnish a productive pretext and a challenging test-case for several popular notions and putative norms of fiction.

One comes across three main categories of errors in *Ulysses* – this is just an initial categorization, which I hope shall serve as a point of departure. The first category consists of errors which have crept into the text against Joyce’s intentions, which can be attributed to printers and proof readers. For instance, in the “Lestrygonians” episode, as part of his midday meal at Davy Byrne’s, Leopold Bloom, the protagonist, takes a Gorgonzola cheese sandwich, and playfully ruminates on the idea that cheese is in a sense the corpse of milk: “Cheese digests all but itself. Mity cheese” (*Ulysses* 8.755). But Maurice Darantière, the Dijon printer, missed the pun, and conveniently changed the ‘erroneous’ adjective ‘mity’ to the more conventional ‘mighty’! Joycean textual criticism has produced what can be called diachronic studies of such errors, and Hans Walter Gabler’s painstaking emendatory work has produced the monumental achievement called *Ulysses: A Critical and Synoptic Edition* (1984). I do not intend to discuss the category of errors which are the subject of textual/genetic criticism\(^2\). I base my observations on the errors sanctioned by the author – the wrongs which are rightly there. These ‘sanctioned errors’ can be further classified into two. The first sub-category comprises errors committed by characters, or mistakes within the fictional world. From the author’s point of view, these errors are not only sanctioned, but, most often, also purposeful. The second sub-category is that of errors or inaccuracies at the textual level, for which as well the author may be ‘held responsible,’ whether or not they are intentional. The sub-categories involve a distinction between errors in *Ulysses* and errors of *Ulysses*.

\(^2\) For instance, Roy Gottfried’s *Joyce’s Iritis and the Irritated Text: The Dis-Lexic Ulysses* reads the errors in *Ulysses* in conjunction with Joyce’s poor eyesight.
My attempt is to look at the last two categories – that is, errors within the fictional world and those at the textual level – of the world and the word – and see whether they yield a hermeneutic of errors – a general interpretive logic.

Like Freudian slips, Joycean errors are ‘overdetermined.’ They function differently in different contexts. Further, the term “error” could signify different textual phenomena depending upon our view of what kind of text *Ulysses* is. Is it a hyper-realistic depiction of the city of Dublin; a novel of psychological realism; a puzzlingly systematized network of motifs, correspondences, and symbols; or an intertextual parody? The functional heterogeneity of errors prompts us to put together an inventory of designations for the text of which they are a part. They also appeal to various strands of criticism – from mimetic analysis to postmodern relativism.

1. IF THE CITY SUDDENLY DISAPPEARED FROM THE EARTH

In my introduction I referred to Joyce’s self-imposed meticulousness with regard to his narrative intentions and aesthetic practice. Frank Budgen, sculptor and Joyce’s friend, tells us about the author’s search for the perfect order of words in a sentence, “an order in every way appropriate,” which would add the seduction motive from the “Lestrygonians” episode in the *Odyssey* to the scene where Bloom goes to lunch. The resultant sentences are: “Perfume of embraces all him assailed. With hungered flesh obscurely, he mutely craved to adore” (Budgen 20; *Ulysses* 8.638-9). Budgen also informs us that Joyce insisted not only on the most appropriate syntax but also on the vivid recreation of the time and place in which the book is set. When Joyce told Budgen that he “want [ed] to give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of [his] book” (Budgen 69), he was setting new standards of correctness in the writing of fiction, and giving the critic a category of errors which is not usually applied to fiction – I would call them “metaleptic deviations” (non-correspondence to ‘the world out there’). Metaleptic deviations
imply conformity to the real world of space and time, and events that unfold in historical time. Budgen adds: “Joyce wrote the ‘Wandering Rocks’ episode with a map of Dublin before him on which were traced in red ink the paths of the Earl of Dudley and Father Conmee whose journeys frame the occurrences of the episode. He calculated to a minute the time necessary for his characters to cover a given distance of the city” (124). In his letters to Aunt Josephine Murray, Joyce relentlessly asked such apparently banal questions as: “Is it possible for an ordinary person [such as Bloom] to climb over the area railings of no. 7 Eccles Street, either from the path or steps, lower himself from the lowest part of the railings till his feet are within 2 feet or 3 of the ground and drop unhurt?” (Letters I 175). Thus we have the norm of ‘topographical realism.’

Going by the above extra-textual evidence, we can discern that in Ulysses Joyce’s attempt is not to create a new fictional world, such as Marquez’s Macondo or Narayan’s Malgudi, but to recreate in all possible conformity, with microscopic exactitude, spatially and temporally, an existing state of affairs of verifiable order in Dublin, amid which he places his characters. Following the author’s own norm of topographical realism, we can expect in Ulysses a correspondence between the real and the fictional worlds, both being firmly anchored in space and time. That is why topographical guides to the Dublin of Ulysses have been helpful to the reader for decades. That is also why we refer to the Thom’s Dublin Directory (Bloom worked for it) for 1904, intending extra-textual verification. Richard. M. Kain discovered in Thom’s that on 16 June 1904 No. 7 Eccles Street was vacant so that Bloom and Molly could be tenants there (Joyce did not want to displace the real tenants!). As Don Gifford notes, when Bloom worked for Joseph Cuffe in the cattle market in 54, Prussia Street it was necessary for him to stay at City Arms Hotel, as he does in the book, because the Cattle Market opened at 2.00 am

3 In attempting the difficult, Joyce was, quite self-consciously and sometimes ironically, taking upon himself the challenge of the early writers of the English novel to convince the reader that what they were giving was ‘a true account.’ Daniel Defoe’s tendency to accumulate facts and a symbolism such as William Blake’s are widely considered the two poles of Joyce’s writing.
(Gifford 178). Topographical features, business concerns, participants in the Gold Cup run on Ascot Heath, London (not only the famed horses Sceptre and Throwaway), the clergymen in the mock-procession of “Cyclops” are all real. The real-life inventory of people includes, but is not restricted to, Chardenal, the author of the French Primer which Stephen’s sister Dilly buys; the Zulu King Lobongula, whose visit to Dublin is remembered; evangelist Alexander. J. Dowie; Prof. Charles Jasper Joly, the astronomer; and Robert Ball, director of observatory at Cambridge; Solicitor John Henry Menton; Alderman Hooper, who presented the Blooms with a stuffed owl for a wedding gift; and Joseph Dixon, to cite a few instances. In fact, in Gifford’s *Ulysses Annotated*, it is rare to find the entry “Apart from context, identity and significance unknown.” In an instance of analogous temporal realism, Stephen correctly remembers that 21 June (Tuesday) was the longest day of the year (3.491). The text also accurately records the sunset and sunrise for 16/17 June (at 8.27 pm and 3.33 am, respectively). But for the exuberance of language it would seem as if Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his early phase of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, were subtextually stating the case.

2. TOPOGRAPHICAL/TEMPORAL UNREALISM

Having set up his ‘realist’ norm – topographical and temporal – Joyce self-consciously plays with it, and frequently changes the criteria of error, as though to raise meta-literary questions surrounding fictional correctness. The result of this self-reflexive ludic exercise is various types of metaleptic errors – topographical errors, anachronisms, historical inaccuracies, and so on. In the opening episode of the book, the narrative mentions Stephen and Mulligan as having “halted, looking towards the blunt cape of Bray Head that lay on the water like the snout of a sleeping whale” (1.181-2). But Bray Head, the headland that rises 791 feet above the shoreline was approximately 7 miles south of, but not visible from the Martello tower at Sandycove, where Joyce’s duo stood (Gifford 17). Similarly, Stephen jocosely justifies his renunciation of regular bath saying that “All Ireland is washed by the gulfstream [sic]” (1.476). Technically, Ireland is not washed by the Gulf Stream but by the North
Atlantic Drift, into which the Gulf Stream disperses off Newfoundland. Such inaccuracies are not restricted to any one character. Bloom’s mental catalogue of his wife’s (real and presumed) lovers features “lieutenant Mulvey that kissed her under the Moorish wall beside the gardens fifteen she told me” (13.889-90). As a matter of fact, the Moorish wall was not located adjacent to the Alameda gardens. Molly’s own recollection of Gibraltar geography is strained. Contrary to her claim “the straits shining I could see over to Morocco almost the bay of Tangier white and the Atlas mountain with snow on it and the straits like a river” (18.859-61), Saharan Atlas Mountains in Algeria are 375 miles away, and clearly out of range. As is the case with Bray Head, the impersonal ‘arranger’ of the narrative himself appropriates such freedoms. For example, Section 19 of the “Wandering Rocks” episode has removed Poddle river “for convenience of fiction.” The river enters the Liffey from the south under Wellington Quay, 350 yards east of Dublin Corporation Cleansing Department in Wood Quay. But the episode describes the river as follows: “From its sluice in Wood quay wall under Tom Devan’s office Poddle river hung out in fealty a tongue of liquid sewage” (10.1196; Gifford 285).

Anachronisms appear alongside topographical displacements. In the “Nestor” episode, Mr Deasy, Stephen’s boss, seeks his subordinate’s assistance in getting his letter on the implementation of urgent solutions to the foot and mouth disease published. On the ‘factual’ side, there was no outbreak of foot and mouth disease till 1912. In 1912, Henry Blackwood Price corresponded with Joyce regarding the outbreak. In short, there was no real historical incident which would make Deasy write a letter to the newspaper for the “prompt ventilation of this allimportant question” [italics as in the source]” (2.305-6). On a similar note, the “Wandering Rocks” and “Sirens” episodes feature the Viceregal cavalcade on the occasion of the opening of the Mirus bazaar for charity. But Mirus bazaar opened on 31 May 1904, not 16 June, and as such there was no cavalcade on 16 June 1904. Similarly, justifying his transvestism and fetishism, Bloom tells the brothel mistress, Bella Cohen: “It was Gerald [who] converted me to be a true corsetlover when I was female impersonator in the High School play Vice Versa” (15.3010-11). Vice Versa: A Lesson to Fathers was a novel written by Thomas Anstey
Guthrie in 1882. A stage version of the novel was produced by Edward Rose in 1883, and another by Guthrie in 1910. As Gifford notes, Bloom could not have performed this play since he left the school in 1880 (504). But the anachronistic reference is significant as the theme of the father’s spirit inhabiting the son’s body, which characterizes Guthrie’s work, is vital to Joyce’s own theme of paternity, both human and divine, and of consubstantiality in the text’s network of meaning. In the textual cosmos of *Ulysses*, where there are no logical connections there are symbolic ones.

Joyce’s micro-history in *Ulysses* fails temporally on several other occasions. The model farm at Kinnereth was founded and advertised by Palestine Land Development Company on 8 June 1908 to train Jewish workers, and Bloom could not have got hold of the advertisement, which triggers his oriental fantasies, on 16 June 1904 (4.155). In the “Circe” episode, the chief Rabbi is present at Bloom’s mock-ascension to power. But the Chief Rabbinate was established only in 1919. Apart from the symbolic value of religious presence at the political ceremony, this is a case of writing time intruding into the narrated time, which is retrospectively set in the past. Events which happen during the historical time when Joyce was planning and writing *Ulysses* (1915-21) are transposed to the period about which he is writing. Of course, anything can be expected in “Circe” – a dramatization of the unconscious, where the real, the irreal and the fictional comingle, where it is impossible to distinguish between what happens in the characters’ minds and what occurs in the external world.

Errors and inaccuracies are common in the pub talk of characters, particularly in the Dubliners’ discussion of the Ascot Gold Cup Race run on Bloomsday. M’Coy asks: “Who is riding her [Sceptre].” Lenehan replies: “O. Madden.... And a game filly she is” (10.510). Sceptre was a colt, not a filly. Lenehan’s account of the performance later (14.1128) is not accurate either. Sceptre was not ahead from the beginning, as Lenehan claims. Throwaway, the competitor who eventually wins, kept good pace. Some such errors, both vocal and mental, are corrected by the characters later. For instance, Bloom erroneously recollects Mrs Cohen’s address as 81, Tyrone Street. Though the correct address was not 81, but 82, Bloom later corrects himself (15.1287).
3. THE TEMPORAL NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

Many so-called errors in Ulysses can be better categorized as statements that go against established traditions of knowledge – that is, knowledge as it is today. Science had not advanced enough in 1904 or 1916, to provide some of the scientific information that is easily available today. For example, Bloom’s oriental fantasies feature “Vulcanic lake, the dead sea [sic]” (4.219-20). According to Gifford, “In the mid-19th century the Dead Sea was assumed to occupy the giant crater of a dead or inactive volcano, but by 1903 the New International Encyclopaedia could announce that ... the region was not volcanic.” (75). Probably, Bloom has not heard about the 1903 emendation or is merely recollecting an old belief in the context of Old Testament cosmology. Similarly, while charitably feeding seagulls, he reflects that they spread foot and mouth disease (8.84-5). The disease is not spread by gulls, but by contact and infected water. Though most such pseudo-scientific recollections reflect the temporally changing character of knowledge, many other beliefs which the characters hold or allude to are popular superstitions or folk wisdom (e.g., the touch of a dead man’s hand cures warts; 15.2389). Bloom’s observation on Banton Lyons (“tight collar he’ll lose his hair”; 5.529) alludes to the popular belief that a tight collar resulted in loss of hair. Bloom’s ruminations on Prince Albert’s fertility ends with the speculation “Suppose he was consumptive” (8.380). The speculation that Prince Albert (who had many children) had tuberculosis is after the popular assumption that consumptives were sexually hyperactive. In reality, Albert died of typhoid fever. By showcasing the repertoire of such beliefs and superstitions, Joyce seems to be hinting at the social nature of errors in particular, and of ignorance in general.

Bloom is also wrong in thinking that Chloroform turns blue litmus red (5.481). It does not. Chloroform is inert. But Bloom’s ruminations are not conclusions but speculations. For example, he conjectures: “Wonder is it true if you clip them [a cat’s whiskers] they can’t mouse after. They shine in the dark, perhaps” (4.40). The first conjecture is not true, but whiskers do “act as feelers” (Gifford 70). But Bloom is right in thinking that cooking with soda depletes the vegetables of the vitamins (8.540), but this fact was not known until 1912. His errors are part of an
epistemological endeavour. The error is an initial hypothesis with which you begin an enquiry. Bloom’s is an enquiring mind, and his method parallels the trial-and-error method of discovery in science.

Another category of errors consists of confusions or lapses of memory. Bloom confuses sunspots (depressions on the sun’s surface) with prominences, eruptive jets of red Hydrogen flame that burst out from the sun’s surface (8.568-9). Such confusions and inaccuracies have given the critics a collection of what are called ‘Bloomisms.’ Bloomisms are facts which are scrupulously hankered after but inaccurately remembered. Some lapses of memory joco-seriously hint at the intertextual literary memory that is required to read *Ulysses*. In “Hades,” Bloom’s intertextual memory fumbles: “Eulogy in a country churchyard it ought to be that poem of whose is it Wordsworth or Thomas Campbell” (6.940). The work he has in mind is “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” by Thomas Gray. He also misquotes several times. Such lapses of memory and confusion of names dramatize the difficulty of the reader to remember the enormous, widely scattered, textual data. The text is again explicit about the difficulty: “Besides how could you remember everybody?” (6.962). Bloom is primarily referring to the dead buried in the Prospect Cemetery. But the question is also tantalizingly pertinent for the reader with regard to the dead and living authors who are cited in Joyce’s work, and whose corpuses he/she is challenged to recall in the act of reading.

If we add lapses of memory and confusions to errors, we get an altogether different hypothesis. The characters’ natural mistakes, their comic aspect notwithstanding, capture the texture of everyday inner life marked by inaccuracies, verbal slips, and lapses of memory, in short, fallibility of mental faculties. Here, generic perspectives and expectations determine the interpretation of errors. If *Ulysses* is seen as a physically realistic document of Dublin life, metaleptic errors violate the realist principle. But if the work is viewed as a psychological novel, errors may be seen as aiding attempts at realism. Errors become narrative assets rather than liabilities.
4. VENTRILOQUISM OF ERRORS

Non-authorial error has more to it than psychological realism. *Ulysses* is a mimicking text which refers to other voices and discourses. The text is a compilation of not only the characters’ statements and thoughts but also imitations of other discourses – of legal documents, parliamentary debates, theosophical discussions, medieval romances, journalistic clichés, and so on. As we move from the early chapters of *Ulysses*, written in the so-called initial style, to the book’s more formally complex chapters, we find that the narrative is increasingly marked by a delegation of voice. Consequently, there are more and more disowned voices. When Joyce resorts to inflated diction, the reader can reasonably infer that the practice is akin to placing the respective passage in quotation marks – or dashes in Joyce’s punctuation scheme (“perverted commas” were an “eye sore” to Joyce). Such narrative ventriloquism facilitates dissociation of errors as well, in the process enabling the author to make a point. When the disowned voice commits a slip, the author can make a comment on the discourse they either represent or allude to. Such ironic dissociation enables Joyce to say: ‘Hey, you are making a tall claim. But get your facts right.’ This dissociative, disowning aesthetic is more discernible in the case of characters than with impersonal discourses. Mr Deasy’s anti-Semitism is perhaps the first target of such a disowning aesthetic. With an ironic suspense, Mr Deasy claims to Stephen: “Ireland ... has the honour of being the only country which never persecuted the jews [sic]. ... do you know why? ... Because she never let them in” (2.437-42). Deasy is patently wrong. In fact, eleventh-century documents testify to the presence of Jews in Ireland. As Gifford notes, “Henry II acknowledged their presence and legitimised it by assigning custody of the king’s Judaism in Ireland to one of his lords in 1174. ... they were protected, their rights to free exercise of their religion guaranteed and their businesses as merchants and moneylenders relatively secure. Jews were expelled from Ireland, as from England, in 1290 and were resettled in both countries under [Oliver] Cromwell in the mid-seventeenth century. Thom’s 1904 reports in ‘Statistics of Ireland’ ... that there were 3,898 Jews resident in Ireland in 1901, an increase of 2,119 since 1891.” (Gifford 40).
In 1723 Jews were granted the right to give evidence in courts, in 1753 the right to naturalisation, and in 1830 right to membership in civil corporations. In 1833 they were given admission to the profession of advocates, and in 1845 admission to the offices of alderman and mayor. Deasy’s blatant historical error assumes significance within the context of the text’s critique of anti-Semitism, as evident in the ruffian ultranationalist, Citizen’s fullfledged attack on Bloom. The effect is greater than one would expect given that Deasy is ironically presented as a figure of worldly wisdom and guidance, the fictional reincarnation of Homer’s Nestor, who, as Athena announces to Telemachus, is the “reciter of history”: “He is the one who will tell history”! Mr Deasy not only makes a moralistic contrast between youth and age, but also gives a clichéd and misogynistic account of history. Ironically, Deasy is also presented as someone who literally (but not factually or ideologically) rectifies an error: “He peered from under his shaggy brows at the manuscript by his elbow and, muttering, began to prod the stiff buttons of the keyboard slowly, sometimes blowing as he screwed up the drum to erase an error” (2.296-8).

Errors in the Citizen’s nationalist discourse reveal Joyce’s own satirical position on the parochial and violent Irish patriotism. For example, the Citizen refers to the House of Lords as “the only hereditary chamber on the face of God’s earth” (12.1347). As a matter of fact, the House of Lords is not fully hereditary. Scottish and Irish peers were elected, and judicial members were appointed by the crown. Among the other contemporary national legislatures, the House of Peers of the Prussian Landstag and the House of Lords of the Austro-Hungarian Reichsrat were hereditary chambers.

Ulysses is deliberately replete with historical inaccuracies, particularly when idle Dubliners indulge themselves with their nostalgic patriotic reminiscences. The historical recollections in the newspaper office, the locus of everyday historiography, are a case in point. Myles Crawford, the editor, wrongly states 1881 for 1882 as the year of the Phoenix Park murders. Further, Crawford’s claims surrounding the scoop about the culprits (the Invincibles, a break-away group of the Irish Republican Brotherhood) are erroneous and exaggerated. In another instance, Father Conmee, the symbol of the Catholic Church, which Joyce held guilty of
having created a cult of political martyrdom in Ireland, recalls another episode from Irish history: “Lord Talbot de Malahide, immediate hereditary lord admiral of Malahide and the seas adjoining. Then came the call to arms and she was maid, wife and widow in one day” (10.156-8). However, a Talbott was not the principal of the story that Father Conmee recalls. The story is about one Hussy, the son of Lord Galtrim, and his betrothed, Maud, daughter of Lord Plunkett. Hussy was called from the altar to lead his troops, and was killed; thus the wife was maid, wife and widow in one day (Gifford 263). These passages point to Joyce’s critical take on Irish history. He presents historical memory as fallible, historical narratives as full of contradictions, and historical claims exaggerated and erroneous. But strangely, it is this fallible history which had served as the ideological source of life-destructive enterprises during the course of the seven-century-long struggle for independence from England.

5. CREDIBILITY AND CONSISTENCY

If state of affairs as we find in the world is the criterion for fictional correctness, many passages in *Ulysses* strain our credulity. Take for example, hearing the technical word “locomotor ataxy” (15.2592) from the mouth of a prostitute (Florry). Florry also speaks in scholastic aphorisms: “Dreams goes [sic] by contraries” (15.3928). On the other hand, if we assume the work as one of ontological self-sufficiency, we still find what may be called internal inconsistencies. For instance, Bloom regrets that he treated his father’s Jewish beliefs and practices with disrespect (17.1894-5). But he was only one year old at the time of his father’s conversion. Rudolf Bloom, the father, was converted to Christianity in 1865 by the Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews (17.1637-40). Again, in the “Circe” episode, Rudolf Virag asks his son: “Are you not my dear son Leopold who left the house of his father and left the god of his fathers Abraham and Jacob?” (15.261-2). Rudolf’s accusation sounds odd given the fact that he himself had converted from Judaism. But the odd accusation tells us that Joyce can strain our credulity a little to bring in a motif – here, the motif of exile and alienation.
6. A SELF-RIGHTING TEXT

Why would a meticulous writer let the textual errors remain where they are? I attribute the decision to a confidence that the erroneous elements will fit into the text’s ever-expanding network of meaning. *Ulysses* is an elaborate contrivance, an overstretched network of correspondences, motifs, and symbols – a network capable of expansion beyond any assumed authorial intention. Many textual elements which are inappropriate and deviant when the book is seen as a linear mimetic narrative attain validity when they are seen as part of a network of meaning. A textual element which is mistake of one kind or the other when seen in isolation proves not only appropriate but also essential in combination with other textual elements. Joyce makes explicit the capacity of textual elements to coalesce and cross-validate, in a conversation with Frank Budgen on the significance of the apparently erroneous use of the word “crosstree” in the “Proteus” episode of *Ulysses* (3.504):

> “You know, Joyce” [Budgen] said, “When Stephen sees that three-mastered schooner’s sails brailed up to her crosstrees”
> “Yes,” he said. “What about it?”
> “Only this. I sailed on schooners of that sort once and the only word we ever used for the spars to which the sails are bent was ‘yards.’ ‘Crosstrees’ were the lighter spars fixed near the lower masthead. Their function was to give purchase to the topmast standing rigging”
> “Thank you for pointing it out,” [Joyce] said. “There’s no sort of criticism I more value than that. But the word ‘crosstrees’ is essential. It comes in later on and I can’t change it. After all, a yard is also a crosstree for the onlooking landlubber.” (Budgen 57)

And crosstree does recur in the pattern of “Scylla and Charybdis” episode, where Stephen advances his Shakespeare theory: “Who put upon by His fiends, stripped and whipped, was nailed like bat to barndoor, starved on crosstree” (9.494–6). The passage is a parody of the Apostle Creed, and the erroneous usage is essential to the Christ-symbolism of the book, and to the theme of the Passion of the artist (both Shakespeare and Joyce).
The self-consciously anticipative hermeneutic of *Ulysses* prevents an invalid element from remaining invalid by hooking it elsewhere, thus providing an alternative validating logic. In a linear narrative, the elements follow one after the other (*nacheinander*). The reader needs to keep them mentally one next to the other (*nebeneinander*). In other words, the text is self-righting because it is self-writing. Owing to the intra-textual magnetism – the potential of the textual elements to club, to hook themselves elsewhere, and self-validate – we can say: ‘a text of genius makes no mistakes. Its errors are coalitional and are the portals of meaning’ (after Stephen’s psycho-biographical statement on Shakespeare: “A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery”; 9.228-9).

The error often reappears in a validated form in a different context. Martha Clifford makes a typographical error in her anonymous letter to Bloom. But Bloom stretches the implications of the error and pursues its possibilities to affirm the plenitude of the human world around in contrast to the poverty of the other world. She writes: “I called you naughty boy because *I do not like that other world* [instead of “word”; added emphasis]. Please tell me what is the real meaning of that word?” (5.244-6). The errors of *Ulysses* are meaning-wise ‘consequential.’ Bloom responds to the error several pages later in the Prospect Cemetery, ironically also conveying Joyce’s ‘this-worldly’ religion: “There is another world after death named hell. I do not like that other world she wrote. No more do I. Plenty to see and hear and feel yet. Feel live warm beings near you. Let them sleep in their maggoty beds. They are not going to get me this innings. Warm beds: warm fullblooded life” (6.1001-5). That a compensatory textual mechanism is at work in *Ulysses* is suggested by the balancing between the extra ‘l’ in Martha’s word ‘world’ and the missing ‘l’ in Bloom’s name in the newspaper report on Patrick Dignam’s funeral, though pages apart.

*Ulysses* is so large and has so many fragmentary elements, which are so scattered that it is mathematically possible for any error to enter a network of validating cross-references. In its world of endless hermeneutic possibilities errors cease to be errors. This is because *Ulysses* has a thematic level analogous to the mimetic level; lapses at the mimetic
level help at the thematic level. Put it algebraically, instead of ‘x’ you have ‘y.’ The text, when seen as a thematic network, can not only accommodate ‘y’ but demands ‘y.’ The anticipative hermeneutic of the text necessitates a productive movement between the levels.

As a heavily allusive text and an enormous archive of culture, *Ulysses* is capable of extending the reference of its textual elements beyond immediate mimetic limits, to the outside of the text, that will justify apparent errors. It might seem improbable to hear scholarly aphorisms or technical terms from the mouth of an undereducated Dublin prostitute, but this has an ancient Greek precedent in the Hetaeræ, the highly educated, cultivated, and sophisticated ‘companions.’ As opposed to *porne* (buyable women), the *hetaerae* (companions) were accomplished courtesans and more educated than respectable wives and daughters who were sequestered at home. They participated in symposia, philosophical and political discourses, and creative competitions. For example, Aspasia, companion to Pericles, was known for her intellect, vivacity, good education, and “spiritual cultivation” (Souli 45). Book XIII of *The Deipnosophists* (the Banquet of the Learned of Athens), relates the collected witty sayings (*Chreia*) of famous *hetaerae* – of Phryne in particular. Phryne was the mistress of Praxiteles, the famous sculptor, and served as the model for many of his works. She was accused of impiety but was defended by Hyperides, who was second only to Demosthenes as an orator, and acquitted. Given the pre-history of Florry’s superficial erudition, it might not be wrong to assume that Mulligan and Stephen seem to have collaborated to “Hellenise” Ireland (1.154-6), as Joyce, with Homer’s aid, did his fellow Dubliners.

7. THEMATIZING ERROR

The points where things go wrong in *Ulysses* are often also the text’s thematic loci. Molly Bloom’s mispronunciation of the word “metempsychosis” (“met him pike hoses”; 4.339-340) is a case in point.

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4 *The Letters of Alciphron, Aelian and Philostratus*, composed around 200 AD, compares the intellect of Socrates; Critias, the Sophist; and the Hetaeræ.
Apart from the erotic symbolism of “met him pike hoses,” more significantly, the concept of metempsychosis (transmigration of souls) is key to the whole project of rewriting Homer. In the tale of metempsychosis at the end of Plato’s *Republic*, Odysseus, convinced of the futility of heroic destinies, prefers to return to the earth as an ordinary man – “a private man who minds his own business” – although that was the only lot left for him (303). In 1922, through literary metempsychosis he appears in Joyce’s magnum opus as an advertising canvasser, and his wife, an adulterous soprano. Similarly, Bloom sees in the YMCA man’s “throwaway” (throwaway itself is a leitmotif in *Ulysses* and the focus of a lot of costly misunderstandings) letters similar to those of his name and errs initially: “Bloo ... Me. No. Blood of the Lamb” (8.8-9). The error is again part of the protagonist’s Christ-symbolism. Like repetition and periphrasis, errors serve as a tool to draw the reader’s attention, after Bloom, the advertisement canvasser, whose innovative advertising strategies aim at “magnetising efficacy to arrest involuntary attention, to interest, to convince, to decide” (17.581-3). Besides saving textual data from naturalized inattention, errors represent the modernist assault on the complacency of the reader. Misreaders Molly and Leopold Bloom are anticipative hermeneutic figures standing in for the reader. There is no reading of Joyce’s high-modernist texts without hitches. The errors therein expect the reader to be alert and to take notice. The appearance of the pork butcher with a polish Jewish name, Dlugacz (4.46), is a notable example5. As we know, Jewish dietary laws forbid the eating of pork. Similarly, when Joyce self-reflexively tells us that Father Cowley brushed his moustache (10.884), we are not only reminded that Roman Catholic priests did not have moustaches, but are also asked to dwell for a while on the problematics of the fact-fiction continuum. Errors in *Ulysses* are tokens of a larger scheme of dramatizing its own making, of its anticipative engagement with the reader.

Joyce extensively thematizes error (as he does repetition and substitution in *Ulysses*) throughout his oeuvre. A retrospective glance might tell us whether they reflect a philosophy of errors. Something or the other goes wrong in every story of *Dubliners*, Joyce’s first published prose work,

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5 Moses Dlugacz was a Jewish intellectual and ardent Zionist whom Joyce had known in Trieste.
where errors, follies, howlers, malfunctions, and mistakes are emblematic of the paralyzing milieu of Dublin. The stories present paralysis, the overarching theme of the collection, as a personal, collective, and circumstantial inability to get things right. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* presents errors as part of a would-be artist’s learning process as opposed to a sheltered existence of dogmatic perfection. Stephen realizes his dissatisfaction with the emotionally and imaginatively frigid way of life that an ecclesiastical career entails, and that he is made for a different destiny when he comes across a voluptuous half-naked girl wading on the beach: “Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call. To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life! A wild angel had appeared to him, the angel of mortal youth and beauty, an envoy from the fair courts of life, to throw open before him in an instant of ecstasy the gates of all the ways of error and glory” (172). Stephen associates error with untrodden paths of life, recreation of life and creation of art.

The maturer Joyce of *Ulysses* accepts mistakes as part and parcel of living in a contingent world. The advertisement of Plumtree’s potted meat may jarringly appear right under the obituaries, but is keeping in with psycho-textual free associations among food, sex, and death, particularly in the “Hades” episode. One may approach the boss at the wrong time, as Bloom does, and may get snubbed. Errors and failures manifest in various thematic forms in the text – the original sin, crime, personal awkwardness, lack of commercial success, and as nature’s error in the form of the misbirths carried by the two midwives in “Proteus” (and Bloom’s son, Rudy, who lived only for eleven days). As Stephen puts it, “nature ... abhors perfection” (9.870-1). The “Circe” episode mentions “the absentminded war under general Gough” (15.795). The Boer War, alluded to here, was generally considered a misadventure, and was one of the many errors of history. Failures of Bloomsday include the protagonist’s failure to get tea from Thomas Kernan’s, failure to obtain renewal of the Keyes advertisement, the scatological inability to see if statues of goddesses in the museum had excretory organs, and the failure to obtain a ticket to see Mrs Bandmann Palmer in the play *Leah the Forsaken*. Thematically, the catalogue also includes Moses’s personal failure to enter the promised land, frustration of the Dublin vestals in the Parable of the Plums, Bloom’s failed plot to cure Mrs Riordan’s nephew
of alcoholism, and locomotor ataxy. Characters are always apprehensive of something going wrong. Bloom imagines things going wrong even in the graveyard – the hearse capsizing and people being buried alive by mistake. But despite the minor disappointments and frustrations of the day, Bloom, reviewing the day, finds it altogether “perfect” (17.2071-80).

Despite his attempts at perfection (“He pulled the door to after him and slammed it twice till it shut tight”; 9.9-10), Bloom does not seem to suffer from an Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. On the contrary, he believes that failure to compromise is the result of an obsessive preoccupation with what is right and what is not. As Stephen demonstrates with his protracted guilt over his refusal to pray by his mother’s deathbed, mourning over past mistakes can be unhealthy. On the moral level, an ethos of tolerance, that forgives and condones, pervades the world of Ulysses. Bloom never condemns Molly for her affair with Hugh Boylan. He considers adultery “as natural as any and every natural act of nature” (17.2178), and adopts a laissez-faire policy towards the Molly-Boylan rendezvous on 16 June. In “Ithaca” he justifies his tolerant sentiments pondering the “variations of ethical codes” (17.2216-7). Not surprisingly, he quotes the aptest Biblical verse to an uncompromising Citizen: “Some people ... can see the mote in others’ eyes but they can’t see the beam in their own” (12.1237-8). When Bloom himself is arraigned, J.J.O’Molloy defends him, albeit joco-seriously: “My client, an innately bashful man, would be the last man in the world to do anything ungentlemanly ... or cast a stone at a girl who took the wrong turning” (15.976-8). Others share this ethos of tolerance and understanding. Stephen sympathetically overlooks Talbott furtively reading from the book. Corny Kelleher displays his understanding and tolerance towards follies of youth when he says “Boys will be boys” (15.4832). Similarly, Martin Cunningham suggests a tolerant view of suicides: “It is not for us to judge” (6.342). Those who do not share this ethos [such as Mr Deasy, Mrs Riordan, and Simon Dedalus] are treated ironically in Joyce’s fictional world. To a writer who had opened the doors of his artistic praxis to the contingencies of the world, professing infallibility might have seemed an act of bad faith.
REFERENCES


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