

*“Telemachising” the Poor Old Woman:
Cathleen ni Houlihan “Restaged” at the Martello Tower*

*“Telemaquizando” a Pobre Velha:
Cathleen ni Houlihan “reencenada” em Martello Tower*

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Abstract: *In 1904, Joyce launched his satirical broadside, “The Holy Office”, attacking the members of the Abbey Theatre. For the young Joyce, it appeared “that mumming company”, run by Yeats and Lady Gregory, had “surrendered to the popular will”. He craved to show how he had broken away from what he considered the folksy, pseudo Irishness of “gold-embroidered Celtic fringes” and those who in their “foolishness . . . sigh back for the good old times” (Occasional, Critical, and Political Writings 28) – times encapsulated, for him, in Cathleen ni Houlihan. Despite telling us that “Cathleen was received with rapturous applause”, Stanislaus Joyce stresses the fact that his brother “was scornful and indignant that Yeats should write such political and dramatic claptrap” (My Brother’s Keeper 187). In “Telemachus”, the more mature Joyce took the opportunity to put his art at the service of his taste for personal and literary revenge through incorporating a brief, parodic take on Yeats and Gregory’s play through the scene with the milk woman. By setting “Cathleen” before his “cracked lookingglass” (Ulysses 6), he was able not only to explore an ironic echo of various tensions between the colonised Irish and the colonising Englishman, but also to ridicule the romanticised view of Ireland presented by much Celtic Revival writing – including drama – at the time Ulysses was set, and that would extend well beyond the time in which it was written and published.*

Keywords: *Telemachus; Joyce; Yeats; Cathleen ni Houlihan; Parody.*

Resumo: *Em 1904, Joyce publicou “The Holy Office”, em que atacava os membros do Abbey Theatre. Para o jovem Joyce, parecia que “aquela companhia de saltimbancos”, administrada por Yeats e Lady Gregory, tinha “se rendido à vontade do populacho”. Seu desejo era mostrar que tinha se libertado daquilo que considerava ser a identidade pseudo-irlandesa, popularesca, das “franjas celtas*

bordadas a ouro” e daqueles que em sua “tolice . . . suspiram de saudade dos velhos tempos” (Occasional, Critical and Political Writings 28) — tempos que, para ele, ficavam perfeitamente representados por Cathleen ni Houlihan. Apesar de nos informar que “Cathleen . . . foi recebida por uma verdadeira ovação”, Stanislaus Joyce deixa bem claro que seu irmão “achou ridículo e revoltante Yeats ter escrito uma bobagem política e dramática como aquela” (My Brother’s Keeper 187). Em “Telêmaco”, um Joyce já mais maduro aproveitou para colocar seu gosto por vinganças pessoais e literárias a serviço de sua arte ao incorporar uma breve paródia da peça de Yeats e Gregory em sua cena com a leiteira. Ao colocar “Cathleen” diante de seu “espelho rachado” (Ulysses 6), ele conseguiu explorar um eco irônico de várias tensões entre os irlandeses colonizados e os colonizadores ingleses, mas também rir da visão romantizada da Irlanda que era apresentada por boa parte dos textos do Renascimento Celta – também no teatro – no momento em que se passava a ação do Ulysses, e que acabaria por se estender muito além da época em que o livro foi escrito e publicado.

Palavras-chave: *Telêmaco; Joyce; Yeats; Cathleen ni Houlihan; Paródia.*

It is not by chance that Stuart Gilbert’s introduction to “Telemachus” tells us that the “opening scene is enacted on the platform of the [Martello] tower” (94; my italics). In *Joyce’s Voices*, Hugh Kenner took Gilbert’s hint further in talking of “Joyce staging the first scene of *Ulysses* atop a tower” (ix) and arguing that “[t]he English novel’s heritage from the English stage is appreciable here . . . where everyone is acting: stage-Irishman, stage-Englishman, stage-poet” (69).¹ Fritz Senn, granting Buck Mulligan greater versatility than Hugh Kenner apparently did, has argued that *Ulysses* “begins like a play, with stage directions in the first paragraph and an opening speech” by a character “with a flair for imitation. . . . We first witness mimicry, mummery and mockery; the first voice we hear is put on and it continues to change” (125). Martin Puchner has also noted that the “choreography of the [opening chapter] represents isolated and identifiable gestures and movements that come close to stage directions” (98).

To speak about “Telemachus” in terms of theatre is, therefore, to join a well-established tradition. The chapter does indeed often read like a play on the page, with what frequently seem like set speeches, narrative information reading like stage directions and a sense that the three major figures spend much of the time “performing” their chosen characters. It would be patently ridiculous to suggest that a prose text becomes dramatic simply by employing adverbs. Nevertheless, the vast and seemingly excessive number of adverbs and adverbial phrases in the early pages of *Ulysses* suggest, as Karen Lawrence has

noted, that “something strange is taking place in the narrative” (45). From literally the very first word, the abundance of these parts of speech supports the idea of Joyce’s “narrative (young)” – as allocated to “Telemachus” in the *schema* Joyce provided for Gilbert –, suggesting a rather naïve or even insecure narrative voice that needs to spell everything out to the reader; and, by extension, gives us a wealth of what really seem like stage directions.

As by far the most active and “actorly” of the three men in the tower, most of this grammar attaches itself to Mulligan. Intent on dominating his audience, Mulligan seems to have succeeded in dominating the spotlight of the narrative voice as well, with little or nothing the Buck does being left in shadow. For instance, we are famously told that he enters “[s]tately”. Soon afterwards, he “called up coarsely”, “covered the bowl smartly”, “said sternly”, “added in a preacher’s tone” and “peered sideways up” (*Ulysses* 1). He then “cried briskly”, “looked gravely” although, “[m]ercurial Malachi” that he is, a “pleasant smile” also “broke quietly over his lips” and “he said gaily” and “pointed his finger in friendly jest”, “laid the brush aside and, laughing with delight”, “began to shave with care”, “he said frankly” (*Ulysses* 2), “shaved warily”, “began to search his trouser pockets hastily”, “cried thickly”, and “wiped the razorblade neatly” (*Ulysses* 3). Stephen, considerably less demonstrative, does things “quietly” and follows the Buck “wearily”; although he does, finally, speak “with energy” perhaps because of his “growing fear” (*Ulysses* 3).

The possibly baffling effect of the almost Cyclopean-like list I have just produced is not completely alien to the sense of strangeness created in the reader by this adverbial avalanche. Nowhere else in *Ulysses* (except perhaps for the exhausted “Eumaeus”) do we find such deliberately pedestrian usage. These adverbial stage directions can also expand into what Hugh Kenner called “a predilection for eloquent dumbshow” (69): “[s]olemnly he came forward and mounted the round gunrest. He faced about and blessed gravely thrice the tower” (*Ulysses* 1) and “Stephen suffered him to pull out and hold up on show by its corner a dirty crumpled handkerchief. Buck Mulligan wiped the razorblade neatly” (*Ulysses* 3).

With, therefore, almost every action, every speech provided with an adverb or adverbial phrase – in effect, a stage direction –, readers undergo a kind of transformation into spectators: watchers and listeners to what is paraded before us, high on the Martello stage. As in a play, we are shown what and how characters do things without full narrative explanation.

In 1912, Ezra Pound wrote to Harriet Monroe that “good art thrives in an atmosphere of parody” (13). Certainly, a major feature of Joyce’s mature prose was the seemingly compulsive need to adapt and parody the works of earlier authors. In writing

to George Antheil, on 3rd January 1931, Joyce claimed: “I am quite content to go down to posterity as a scissors and paste man, for that seems to me a harsh but not unjust description” (Joyce, *Letters I* 297). Shortly afterwards, on 16th Feb. 1931, he would complain to Harriet Shaw Weaver that “such an amount of reading seems to be necessary before my old flying machine grumbles up into the air” (Joyce, *Letters I* 300). This, in J. S. Atherton’s phrase,

shows Joyce’s own awareness of one of the salient oddities of his talent . . . he needed a basis of some other writer’s work on which to compose his own. He seems to have considered it as a sort of literary runway necessary to gain momentum before creative work could begin, and he always seems to have needed this stimulus” (72).

Although these letters were written in reference to *Finnegans Wake*, they could well be applied to other works.

In *Ulysses*, Joyce made use not only of dramatic techniques but also parody, both generally and of existing dramas as we see, most clearly, in “Circe”. In this paper, however, I shall focus on how Joyce did this in the opening episode of *Ulysses*, “Telemachus”, using a classic text from the Irish Literary Theatre (as from 1904, *The Abbey Theatre*) by Yeats and Lady Gregory.

A significant part of what we witness in “Telemachus” is the cross-fertilisation of genres still vying for supremacy within Joyce. In 1913, he was drafting notes for *Exiles*, shortly before beginning *Ulysses* (and he began with the first three chapters, the Telemachiad). He later suspended work on the novel in 1914 to complete his play; but when *Exiles* was completed, in 1915 *Ulysses* was already very much a work in progress (Litz 142). In other words, for a short but significant period, drama and narrative prose went hand in Joycean hand.

In *James Joyce: His First Forty Years*, Herbert S. Gorman argued that Joyce was “only secondarily a playwright” and that his “great function in letters [was] fictional narrative” but that it was “very plain to see that he [had] absorbed a deal of knowledge concerned with drama” (103-4) The implication here is that drama was a thing of the past. Joyce, however, was never a man to let the past go lightly, if ever, and the knowledge that he had “absorbed ... concerned with drama” would be put into practice, if only indirectly.

Gorman also noted “that Joyce could handle dramatic situations with a keen sense of affect. Certain scenes in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* proved this, as did some of the sketches in *Dubliners*” (106).² These earlier moments in Joyce’s work share the “Telemachus” air of performance.

When Mulligan murmurs “to himself” that Stephen is “a lovely mummer . . . the loveliest mummer of them all” (*Ulysses* 4), this stage aside “lancet” (*Ulysses* 6) is jabbing ironically at what he feels is Stephen’s performance of the mourner’s role rather than actually mourning.³ This strikes home more deeply, perhaps, than Mulligan realises, as Stephen’s unwillingness to pray, to perform the expected role in the ritual, even at his dying mother’s bedside, still haunts the young poet. Mulligan has chosen his word carefully – especially bearing in mind their tensely stilted conversation – in that traditionally and etymologically a mummer is an actor who communicates entirely by gesture and, when not masked, by facial expressions; never speaking.⁴ Mulligan, in fact, is only too willing to provide his “mummer” with any number of “masks” in this opening section: “fearful jesuit” (*U* 1), “an ancient Greek” (*Ulysses* 2); “jejune jesuit”, “my love” and someone with “the real Oxford manner” (*Ulysses* 3); “Kinch, the knife-blade”, “bard” and a “dreadful” one (*Ulysses* 5), “poor dogsbody” (*Ulysses* 5) and, finally, “impossible person” (*Ulysses* 9). In terms of the more current, looser definition of “mummer” – simply meaning an actor –, Mulligan, as he presents himself in his various fictions, is obviously more deserving of the title than Stephen.

In an episode whose final word is “usurper” (*Ulysses* 28), however, Mulligan’s comment also seems like a wink to the reader, a highly self-conscious acknowledgment of the dramatic usurpation of novelistic narrative that has threatened to take place on these pages.

After “Telemachus” begins the novel from the height of the Martello Tower, the scene changes and we descend to the interior, where the main characters in the chapter – Buck Mulligan, Stephen Dedalus and Haines, the English Hibernophile – eventually meet the old woman who brings them their daily supply of milk.⁵ It takes three pages for her to deliver and be (partially) paid for the milk. Why is this old woman given so much time and space?

The anticipation of her arrival certainly allows Mulligan to perform his “old mother Grogan” (*Ulysses* 13-14) which, like his “Ballad of Joking Jesus” later in the chapter, we suspect has become one of the Buck’s standard routines, possibly likewise performed “[t]hree times a day, after meals” (*Ulysses* 23):

Haines sat down to pour out the tea. . . . I say, Mulligan, you do make strong tea, don’t you?

Buck Mulligan, hewing thick slices from the loaf, said in an old woman’s wheedling voice:

— When I makes tea I makes tea, as old mother Grogan said. And when I makes water I makes water.

— By Jove, it is tea, Haines said.

Buck Mulligan went on hewing and wheedling:

— So I do, Mrs Cahill, says she. Begob, ma'am, says Mrs Cahill, God send you don't make them in the one pot (*Ulysses* 13-14).

At the mention of the old woman's approach, he has immediately moved into stage Irish mode (with the now habitual adverbial phrase in attendance): "The blessings of God on you, Buck Mulligan cried, jumping up from his chair." So the entrance of the woman who, like Cathleen ni Houlihan's, is much anticipated and bringing much needed sustenance to the inhabitants, is set up through parodic drama. Her arrival also brings Haines, the Irish speaking coloniser, into contact with the colonised native, who can't even recognise her own language (we might wonder how well Stephen and Mulligan speak it). The old woman obviously allows Joyce to contrast Mulligan's glittering verbal mummery with the apparent simplicity of the old woman. With stereotypical "peasant" craftiness, she can, nevertheless, rattle off exactly how much she is owed for her milk in a flash when asked about her bill:

Bill, sir? she said, halting. Well, it's seven mornings a pint at twopence is seven twos is a shilling and twopence over and these three mornings a quart at fourpence is three quarts is a shilling and one and two is two and two, sir.

Buck Mulligan sighed (*Ulysses* 17).

This is as fine a performance from a character as anything we have seen so far in what seems to be a chapter of performers. Firstly, there is the fake surprise at the notion of a bill to be paid, which interrupts her exit. There is a moment's apparent uncertainty, after which she produces the relatively complicated account without taking a breath. After "well", the next pause (or comma) she takes is before the mock humility of her "sir". No phrase is complete for her, it seems, without this punctuating "sir". Like Stephen, we are unsure whether she is there "[t]o serve or to upbraid" (*Ulysses* 15) silently. This supposed mark of respect is completely automatic and the more the word is repeated, of course, the emptier it becomes: this "Poor old woman" as Stephen calls her, has a role to play and dutifully performs it whilst, again like Cathleen, being perfectly well of and maintaining her own status.

The milk woman's performance, more rooted in everyday reality, serves to highlight the superficiality of Mulligan's "old mother Grogan"; just as the brief appearance of the rather timid priest at the end of the chapter⁶ serves as a counterpoint to the Buck's overblown religious theatricals as the novel begins.

Stephen, naturally, holds up his “cracked lookingglass” to the old woman and sees her reflected as a Mother Ireland figure: “Silk of the kine and poor old woman, names given her in old times. A wandering crone, lowly form of an immortal . . . a messenger from the secret morning” (*Ulysses* 15). This “wandering crone” leads us to Yeats. The poet has already been introduced by Buck Mulligan’s quoting “Who goes with Fergus now?” from *The Countess Cathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* (1892):⁷

And no more turn aside and brood
Upon love’s bitter mystery
For Fergus rules the brazen cars (*Ulysses* 9).

It was a poem that had a particular relevance for both Stephen and Joyce.⁸ When Stephen calls the milk woman, “the poor old woman”, he brings to mind Yeats’s other dramatic *Cathleen*. This is the translated title of the traditional Irish ballad, “The Shan Van Vocht” in which an anonymous old woman celebrates the coming of the French to help in the ultimately ill-fated Irish rebellion of 1798. This ballad served as the basis for Yeats and Lady Gregory’s *Cathleen ni Houlihan*.⁹

In *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, performed by the Irish National Dramatic Society in 1902, a “Poor Old Woman” arrives at the home of an Irish peasant family preparing for the marriage of their oldest son, Michael, to a neighbour, Delia. The mother, Bridget, is a highly superstitious country woman and the father, Peter, is obsessed with his future daughter-in-law’s hundred pound dowry. She tells the family her “four beautiful green fields” (Yeats, *Collected Plays* 81) have been taken from her,¹⁰ and also sings about Irish heroes that have given their lives for her. Ultimately, this strange figure persuades Michael to give up thoughts of marriage and join the rebellion against the English. After he has left with her, the younger son Patrick, who has just returned, tells the family that he saw no “old woman going down the path” but just “a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen” (Joyce, *Ulysses* 88). The certainty of Michael’s blood sacrifice has already rejuvenated the “Poor Old Woman”.¹¹ Despite telling us that *Cathleen* “was received with rapturous applause”, Stanislaus Joyce stresses the fact that James “was scornful and indignant that Yeats should write such political and dramatic claptrap” (Stanislaus Joyce 187).¹²

In 1901, in his paper “The Day of the Rabblement”, the young Joyce had burned with the desire to show how he had broken away from what he considered the folksy, pseudo-Irishness of “giddy dames’ frivolities” and “gold-embroidered Celtic fringes” (*Poems and Shorter Writings*: 97) and from those who in their “foolishness . . . sigh back for

the good old times” (*Occasional ... Writings* 28): those times, for him, being encapsulated in a play like *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. In 1904, he had also attacked the members of the Abbey Theatre in “The Holy Office”, a satirical broadside written around the time the theatre received its patent.

In “Telemachus”, a more mature and accomplished Joyce than he of the paper and poem, nevertheless took the opportunity to put his art at the service of his taste for personal and literary revenge through incorporating a brief, parodic take on Yeats and Gregory’s play within the framework of his novel. By setting “Cathleen” before his “cracked lookingglass” (*Ulysses* 6), he was able not only to explore an ironic echo of various tensions between the colonised Irish and the colonising Englishman; but also to ridicule the romanticised view of Ireland presented by much Celtic Revival writing – including drama – at the time *Ulysses* was set.¹³

In *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, there is much mystery and tension created by the knowledge that an old woman has been seen in the area. Joyce’s Cathleen is similarly given a rather ominous entrance as, with the three men in expectation, the “doorway was darkened by an entering form” (*Ulysses* 13). Instead of arriving to take the lifeblood of the countryside for the price of freedom, however, this “entering form” is simply bringing milk to sell for the tower dwellers’ tea. Unlike Cathleen, she seems pliant and is uncomplaining. So far from being the figure of Mother Ireland, she doesn’t recognise her own language and feels there is nothing unnatural in the fact (further irony lies in the fact that Joyce has her think that Haines was speaking French: another parodic link to Yeats and Gregory’s play). Mulligan’s obvious unwillingness to pay distortedly mirrors Peter’s obsession with the dowry (the “lookingglass” is “cracked”, let’s remember); and he is further linked to the father in *Cathleen* by offering the milk woman a cup of tea. This is pure gesturing on Mulligan’s part, of course; as he knows full well such socialising would probably only make her feel more uncomfortable. (*Ulysses* 14.)

In the play, it is Cathleen who makes the residents feel ill at ease.¹⁴ The old woman in “Telemachus” brings a kind of calm to the Martello tower, if only as a distraction, a different target for Mulligan and respite for Stephen and even Haines. A strained situation, tense with unnatural conversation, is briefly made more normal, more commonplace with the old woman’s entrance. Cathleen, on the other hand, disrupts a realistic setting¹⁵ and turns it into something otherworldly. When the otherworldly rises in “Telemachus”, it is either turned into something grotesque and terrifyingly accusatory:

In a dream, silently, she had come to him, her wasted body within its loose graveclothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath bent over him with mute secret words, a faint odour of wetted ashes.

Her glazing eyes, staring out of death, to shake and bend my soul. On me alone. The ghostcandle to light her agony. Ghostly light on the tortured face. Her hoarse loud breath rattling in horror, while all prayed on their knees. Her eyes on me to strike me down (*Ulysses* 10-11).

Or cheaply parodied:

Buck Mulligan brought up a florin, twisted it round in his fingers and cried:
— A miracle! (*Ulysses* 17).

In the original play, Peter tells his wife to “[g]ive [the old woman] a drink of milk, and a bit of the oaten bread” (*Collected Plays* 83) which, despite being more genuine than Mulligan’s “Would you like a cup, ma’am?”, similarly shows his being ill at ease with this strange visitor and wanting to maintain some distance from “Poor Old Woman” through the formality of social customs. When Cathleen is offered milk, she refuses (Yeats, *Collected Plays* 84). Milk is one thing, but although Peter is as reluctant as Mulligan to part with his money, his wife Bridget persuades him to offer the Poor Old Woman “a shilling” which Cathleen won’t accept either (*Collected Plays* 83-84) – the possible echo of “taking the king’s shilling”, meaning to enlist in the British army, not making it any more attractive. Cathleen ni Houlihan will strike no bargains, unlike the initially unlikely but ultimately business-like milk woman in “Telemachus”, though both are single-minded in their purpose.

For Mulligan, this “ma’am” (*Ulysses* 15-16) (repeatedly and exclusively used by Michael when addressing Cathleen (*Collected Plays* 82, 83 and 84)) is a source of condescending amusement. Only he calls her this (and her excessively reiterated ‘sir’ – by which she addresses them all – is a sly *touché* to him). For Haines, she is a specimen for his cultural studies. The Englishman is, of course, one of the “too many strangers in the house” Cathleen ni Houlihan talks of (*Collected Plays* 81), although all three men in the Martello “house” are, superficialities aside, essentially “strangers” to each other. Stephen (who barely speaks in this section) is the only one of the three who asks her a genuinely interested question after Haines has spoken Irish to her: “Do you understand what he says?”¹⁶ Furthermore, it is Stephen who actually lays Mulligan’s florin “passed along the table towards the old woman . . . in her uneager hand” (*Ulysses* 17).

Michael is spellbound by Cathleen, even though she treats him as a subject and commands or pronounces rather than ever speaking to him in a natural way. In contrast,

Stephen feels the milk woman “slights” him, possibly because unlike Mulligan (and Haines to a lesser extent), he does not command or pronounce. Perhaps like Haines (according to Mulligan) she thinks Stephen “is [therefore] not a gentleman” (*Ulysses* 2). He does not play the superior role she expects, he doesn’t speak in a “loud voice” (*Ulysses* 16) and is, therefore, somewhat dismissed. He, however, like Michael and the French in *Cathleen*, is drawn to her.¹⁷ Stephen has, after all, just “landed” from France and he’ll soon follow her out of this particular “house” forever. She however, unqueenly in her curtseying, will assuredly not be transforming into a young girl to lead him off to sacrificial glory.¹⁸

The old milk woman has neither the temperament nor time for “those big words” about symbols or causes “which make us so unhappy” (*Ulysses* 38). She stands at an ironic distance from both the Old Gummy Granny later conjured up in “Circe”, and Yeats’s dream-vision symbol. Although Stephen will later follow her literal trail, he rejects the symbolic path of the mythical figures she faintly shadows. No avatar of earlier uprisings, he does not go to put “strangers out” although he does suffer at the hands of the British military, in consistently parodic form, in “Circe” later in the day (*Ulysses* 696-7). In fact, it is the “stranger” Haines who is at least partly responsible for “putting [him] out” (*Collected Plays* 84).

This lack of complete, genuine resolution in terms of the stranger in the house motif is actually in keeping with *Cathleen ni Houlihan* as seen from Nicholas Grene’s perspective:

The stranger French are necessary catalysts for the expulsion of the stranger English. What then? The power of *Kathleen [sic] ni Houlihan* derives not only from the potency with which it imagines revolution as a miraculous transformation, but the skill with which it leaves unanswered the question of what is to follow the revolution (71-2).

Mulligan parallels, in his own mocking manner, Michael’s family in their vain attempts to stop him joining the French at Killala. Directly or indirectly, the Buck is continually disparaging Stephen’s French experience. When the “jejune jesuit” suggests drinking black tea with lemon, Mulligan snaps: “O, damn you and your Paris fads . . . I want Sandycove milk” (*Ulysses* 13). Later,

A limp black missile flew out of [Mulligan’s] talking hands.
And there’s your Latin Quarter hat, he said.
Stephen picked it up and put it on (*Ulysses* 19).

Furthermore, of course, Mulligan goes on – no doubt pointedly – to remind the assembled company that the tower they are in was built by “Billy Pitt . . . when the French were on the sea” (*Ulysses* 20).¹⁹ A line, of course, from “The Shan Van Vocht”.

As for settling the milk bill, it is Haines who brings it up and insists on Mulligan paying: anticipated proof of Deasy’s “I paid my way” being the “proudest boast” of the Englishman in the following chapter (*Ulysses* 37). The payment of the money, as we have seen above, reanimates the old milk woman; parodying the rejuvenating effect of Michael’s sacrifice on Cathleen. Having served these men, the milk woman receives her payment (less twopence and without, it seems, much enthusiasm for what she does get). Cathleen, in contrast, refuses “silver” (*Collected Plays* 84) and says the heroes who will die in serving her “will think they are well paid” (*Collected Plays* 86).

Both the milk woman and Cathleen leave on the theme of payment and to the sound of singing. Cathleen goes out proudly promising immortality to her heroes, as she sings:

They shall be remembered for ever,
They shall be alive for ever,
They shall be speaking for ever,
The people shall hear them for ever (*Collected Plays* 86, 88).

And, shortly afterwards, comes the famous line that Patrick saw no old woman but “a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen” (*Collected Plays* 88).²⁰ The milk woman even curtsies, heavily stressing her (possibly mock) subservience, and leaves quietly, still owed the twopence, but “followed by Buck Mulligan’s tender chant” of the *English* poet Swinburne’s:

Ask nothing more of me, sweet. All I can give you I give. . . .
Heart of my heart, were it more,
More would be laid at your feet (*Ulysses* 17).

Cathleen’s heroic Irish shall, according to her, give everything and consider that rich payment in itself, it seems. This modern day Cathleen’s Irishmen excuse themselves for leaving her short. No rejuvenating sacrifice for this “Poor Old Woman” and, for the time being, only their words follow her out the door.

The milk woman leaves, having unwittingly served Joyce’s efforts “to desecrate the pieties of Cathleen ni Houlihan” (Krause 399). Along with this resistance to potential

chauvinistic nationalism in favour of “the higher nationalism of artistic integrity” (Krause 399) Joyce has also transformed novelistic narration into a dramatic experience. Looking at the three pages involving the old woman, we also see that they would work perfectly well on stage with very little adaptation or dramatization: the dialogue and stage directions are clearly there.

Through the use of Yeats and Gregory’s *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, “Telemachus”, therefore, not only interweaves layers of the dramatic among the narrative but also aims to usurp the latter’s prominence. This allows Joyce to create other perspectives not only on the Irish nationalism and British colonialism of the time, to be developed as the novel continues, but also on another of *Ulysses*’ mythical worlds much closer to home.

Notes

¹ Kenner was probably using Wyndham Lewis’ dismissal of *Ulysses* against him here. This antagonism was based, at least partly, on the book’s theatrical undercurrent (although Lewis called it “a susceptibility” to “cliché”); as he had written of Joyce’s “stage Jew (Bloom), a stage Irishman (Mulligan), or a stage Anglo-Saxon (Haines)” (Lewis 90).

² Gorman was probably thinking of scenes such as the Christmas dinner (Joyce, *Portrait*, 28-37) and the retreat sermons (Joyce, *Portrait*, 100-103 and 108-114). In *Dubliners*, though considerably more than a “sketch,” much of the “Grace” text at Tom Kernan’s bedside (*Dubliners*, 145-157) works perfectly as dramatic dialogue and stage directions, as does – to perhaps an even greater degree – “Ivy Day in the Committee Room” (*Dubliners*, 108-124). The fact that Joyce wrote to Grant Richards, on 20th May 1906, that “Ivy Day” was the story that pleased him most may owe something to its dramatic quality (*Letters I*, 63).

³ In his musical version of *Ulysses*, *Blooms of Dublin*, Anthony Burgess picked up on this idea. After Stephen has ranted aloud to the ghost of his mother, Burgess impishly has Haines (of all people) ask him: “Amateur dramatics, eh? You rehearsing for something?” (Burgess 17).

⁴ The OED traces it to Middle English, from the Old French *momer*: to wear a mask, to mime.

⁵ Could there even be an early hint of the topsy-turvy parody to come in Haines announcing that the old woman is “coming up” (the stairs) (*Ulysses* 13); while in the Yeats, we hear of her “coming down” (the road) (*Collected Plays* 76; my italics).

- ⁶ As the “elderly man” who has just been swimming in the forty-foot passes, Mulligan identifies him as a priest by “glancing at Haines and Stephen” and crossing himself theatrically rather than “piously with his thumbnail at brow and lips and breastbone” (*Ulysses* 26). Shortly afterwards, Stephen sees “The priest’s grey nimbus in a niche where he dressed discreetly” (*Ulysses*, 28).
- ⁷ See Yeats’s *Collected Poems* (49 and 524).
- ⁸ In *Ulysses*, this is the song Stephen sang to his dying mother, as her phantom reminds him in “Circe”: “You sang that song to me. Love’s bitter mystery” (*Ulysses* 681), which haunts him throughout the day. According to his brother Stanislaus, Joyce had actually “sat down at the piano and sang the melancholy chant to which he had set the verses” to his dying brother George (Stanislaus Joyce 143).
- ⁹ Lady Gregory wrote “All this mine alone” on the earliest surviving draft, from the start up to Kathleen’s [sic] entrance (Greene 1999: 64). Yeats later acknowledged that the play was written “with Lady Gregory’s help” (*Autobiographies* 451).
- ¹⁰ While Stephen imagines this old woman “crouching” and milking in a “lush field” (*Ulysses* 15) rather than upright and proudly lamenting her loss of four.
- ¹¹ The motif of the puella senilis, of an old woman transformed into a young girl through such a blood sacrifice, has its source in Celtic myth. See Greene (63).
- ¹² In striking contrast, Joseph Holloway felt, in 1902, that “the piece was admirably played” and “made a deep impression. Most of the sayings of the mysterious “Cathleen” (a part realised with creepy realism by the tall and willowy Maud Gonne, who chanted her lines with rare musical effect, and crooned fascinatingly, if somewhat indistinctly, some lyrics) found ready and apt interpretation from the audience who understood that Erin spoke in “Cathleen”, and they applauded each red-hot patriotic sentiment right heartily, and enthusiastically called for the author at the end, and had their wish gratified” (Holloway 50-51).
- ¹³ Joyce, of course, was not alone in this. Such parody was another aspect of his rivalry with Synge. The *Playboy of the Western World* “is a devastating critique of the rural west that so many of the Revivalists idealised. It is as full of violence, illusion, futility and sexual frustration as any of Martin McDonagh’s wicked parodies of the traditional Irish play” (Eagleton 23).
- ¹⁴ “The matter-of-fact ways of the household and the weird, uncanny conduct of the strange visitor make a very agreeable concoction” (Holloway 17).
- ¹⁵ Nicholas Greene argues that the “representativeness of the Gillanes as a peasant family gives to the play its popular and populist quality” (Greene 70). By having his ‘Cathleen’

meet the highly unrepresentative Mulligan, Dedalus and Haines, Joyce turns this idea completely upside down.

- ¹⁶ Interestingly, the narrative ignores Haines' first attempt in Irish, possibly mirroring the woman's lack of comprehension. We only realise he has spoken through Stephen and the old woman's questions.
- ¹⁷ Clothes are a further link between the two young men: Mulligan's lending Stephen clothes and continued fussing over his rather shabby, mourning apparel parallels the concern in the Yeats over Michael's wedding clothes. "God, we'll simply have to dress the character", as Mulligan says (*Ulysses* 19).
- ¹⁸ In discussing Mangan and Joyce, C. P. Curran argues that "[f]or Mangan, a lover of death, Caitlin ni Houlihan [sic] is a queen, but for Joyce an abject queen upon whom also death is coming" (Curran 16). Mangan, of course, composed a highly political tribute to the "Poor Old Woman" in true aisling fashion. For example: "Think not her a ghastly hag, too hideous to be seen; / Call her not unseemly names, our matchless Kathaleen; / Young she is, and fair she is, and would be crowned a queen, / Were the king's son at home here with Kathaleen Ny-Houlahan." "Kathaleen Ny-Houlahan (*A Jacobite Relic* – from the Irish)" (Mangan 397).
- ¹⁹ Mulligan here is using the opening line of "The Shan Van Vocht" (O'Lochlainn 120).
- ²⁰ Carol Loeb Shloss quotes Patrick Collins' description of Lucia after she had been "tramping" around Dublin for 6 days (in 1935, when she was 28). She was a woman "of great scope" who had walked "as if she owned the whole bloody world" (349). This, naturally, is no more than an interesting coincidence; but one to which the older Joyce would probably have had an ambivalent reaction.

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