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***HIGH MODERNIST COLLECTIVE MEMORY
BOMBS AND BOOMS: THE WASTE LAND
AND ULYSSES AND THE INJUNCTION
“MAKE LOVE, NOT WAR!”***

Keywords: *epic; modern intelligence; urban crowds; narrative syntagmata; emplotment; portable monuments; postmemory*

Abstract: *The Waste Land and Ulysses recycle tradition in the present in stunningly intelligent imaginative ways. Eliot's text is conceived as a collective memory bomb in the wake of the First World War, Joyce's overlooks the World War (and the word "war"!) and ties its readers, like Ulysses in the encounter with the Sirens, to the necessary, epic and constructive screens of tradition, permeated by divine, domestic, erotic and more casual, modern forms of love. I build a collective and cultural memory case study for exploring the gap in the literary history horizon of the 1920s between lovelessness and love. I compare the narrative nuclei/ syntagmata of Eliot's disrupting dramatic monologues to the full emplotment of Joyce's labyrinthine, yet cohesive, narrative, eventually triumphing over traumatic adversities, as a bona fide epic. I explain the various speeds of high modernist cultural recollection with Denis Donoghue's connection between two typical reactions of modern intelligence to the presence of urban crowds: the retractile and communicative reaction, Eliot's and Joyce's attitudes, respectively. The writers disruptive and constructive returning to tradition, respectively, is the consequence of these two attitudes. Prompted by Ann Rigney's study of the literary text as a portable monument, I compare the briskly evocative force of the merely narrative nuclei, which serve the poetic principle of equivalence, in The Waste Land with the slower, full emplotment which structures the Ulysses narrative. I suggest that the dramatic and poetic communication of The Waste Land is readily accountable to postmemory, in Marianne Hirsch's sense, while the imposing cultural memory work underwriting Ulysses demonstrably remained opaque to English readers like Virginia Woolf. I measure Virginia Woolf's intra-generational distance from the two male modernists by invoking the dominance of the dramatic form in literature, which she may have slightly overlooked.*

As the jocose title suggests, the comparison was prompted by Joyce's unique book about making love in an age when everyone made war, or complained about it (as the counter-cultural slogan of the 1960s in protest to the Vietnam War also suggests). My paper has a polemic edge, too, in that it takes into account

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Virginia Woolf's complaint (in "Modern Fiction") about Joyce's book having a narrow range of interest: "something angular and isolated" and giving one (Virginia Woolf, *ie*) the "sense of being in a bright yet narrow room, confined and shut in, rather than enlarged and set free" (124) ¹. I wonder why Virginia Woolf felt so unsure about the cultural value of *Ulysses*. Did she simply voice the collective memory protocols of the 1920s (which had proscribed *Ulysses* in the English speaking world)? Unlike the general public, Virginia Woolf had, in her turn, dramatized the personal triumph of a life-loving woman, Clarissa Dalloway, over the dominant shell-shocked male mentality in *Mrs. Dalloway*. So why did she fail to respond to the male domestic triumphs fictionally built into *Ulysses*? Why did she refuse to play the game with the complete Homeric analogies proposed by the list of episode titles in the contents? Did she fall a prey to illusions about the sacredness of the stream of consciousness method, unable to make free with it, like Joyce? Was Woolf's partial misunderstanding of *Ulysses* caused by the absence of Joycean notes, which should have been provided (in verse perhaps?) to mediate or facilitate the face to face literary communication with his epic text (by analogy with Eliot's Notes to *The Waste Land* Was the English interpretive community simply unprepared for James Joyce's counter-cultural emancipatory game that made the epic tradition reach into the present?

In working with and working through the meaninglessness of the modern present, both *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* handled the raw material of collective memory very successfully as creators. They faced the task of giving form to first-hand (immediate) communication by resorting to cultural memory protocols. Eliot's cultural bomb has immediately observable postmemory features. Joyce's enticing labyrinth follows slower, twilight memory protocols. In "The Waste Land", the experience of war makes tradition hard to reach; it places the writer in a similar relationship with tradition as that "of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation" (Hirsch 22). There is a sense of "unbridgeable distance", which frames tradition as a conglomerate of "leftovers" and as "fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through with holes", as Marianne Hirsch describes the work of postmemory (23). Tradition is cast in *The Waste Land* as postmemory because, as Hirsch explains, "it is distinguished from memory by the generational distance and from history by deep personal connection". But Eliot finds a spectacular way of making contact with tradition in despite of the trauma, by creatively investing energy in the very space of discontinuity, "through an imaginative investment and creation" (22). Eliot's reports from the city-trenches compel civilization to gaze at its wounds through a very richly fraught lens of cultural refinement. By a comparison taken from organic life, it can be stated that the poet compels the gaze to hit the traumatic points and elicit meaning by cultural exudation: *memories are the exuded substance of cultural debris*. When the last

¹ To do her justice, Virginia Woolf complained of this after acknowledging the novel's masterpiece quality, owing to being so close to the quick of the mind and the "sudden lightning flashes of significance" ("Modern Fiction" 124) sincerely transcribed by Joyce in his book.

commemorative fragments or shrapnels of civilization have been reviewed, the maniac scattering dust (as Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (L) would propose that time was), asks the uselessly deliberative question – right before the end of the poem: Shall I at least set my lands in order?

Ulysses, on the other hand, effects precisely this. It is a heroic epic which boosts the moderns' faith in the individuals' power to set lands, whole lands!, in order, eventually by powerful, willed *acts of everyday life*, working through. Joyce's book acts through characters which are solidly built as heroes, by analogy with the Odyssean cast. But the reader must accept that their strength is mythical and submit to its growing power so that slowly and eventually tradition can take over the present, sublimating it.

The difference between the two epic texts, which are epics because they heroically contend with tradition, comes from the way they handle two faces of the same coin: (1) the scene of first-hand, face to face communication and (2) living with big city crowds. Eliot calls the latter "hordes" (by a neologism "that came into English sometime in the sixteenth century"... "from Turkey, Russia and Poland, and it means a tribe of Tartar or kindred Asiatic nomads", according to Denis Donoghue, in the opening essay titled after Poe's short story "The Man of the Crowd" (Donoghue 27)

So – Eliot says: "Who are those hooded hordes swarming/Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth" (lines 368-9)....

Eliot decides they make the City itself unreal. Or the world. There is fear of the disembodied, unhinging crowds in *The Waste Land*. The uncontrollable, invading crowds are behind the fact that Eliot's dramatic monologists are engaged in failed or contemptible acts of communication. It feels as if they stood with their backs to each other, or as if the conscience that rehearses their actions were with its back to them. One witnesses all this as the actress Fiona Shaw, in her 2010 Dublin production of *The Waste Land* is doing them all – doing them in, in different voices. Thanks to her, one also *sees* that modern public memory hurts. The TNT sites of cultural memory chosen by the reminiscing voice are in themselves tragic. They advance from the Christian Burial of the Dead and the Ecclesiastes to the rape of Philomel and the journey to the underworld oracles, with Tiresias, into the Chapel Perilous and on the plains swarming with First World War hordes of soldiers and Chaucerian pilgrims, in the cruelest month of April; they nearly reach to the brink of the world and almost spill over, spurted from the mouth of a giant of words – with the shuddering words of the thunder from above.

On the contrary, Joyce's use of the journey motif in the world of city-crowds is optimistically constructive in *Ulysses* since wandering precedes homecoming in the typically narrativistic emplotment. In the modern Odyssey, the people, all Irishmen who speak a lot and wittily, by national definition, are directed with a gentle cultural hand, which orients their actions to points of finality (mythical and personal finality); and to settlement (no matter how paradoxical the forms of settlement be). Mythically, the comparison sustains a sense that the terms which bring together beginning and end in persons' lives are reconcilable and still in place, somewhere there, in standby or sleep, but still open to a future of sorts. This is tantamount to saying in more recent, ecological terms, with Niklas Luhman, in

Observations on Modernity, that there is still propitious fate here, fate which completes itself in the future of the present in *Ulysses* (by contrast to fate seen to crush humanity with the future of the present in *The Waste Land*). Consequently, the “readers of the Joycean modernity” (in the plural, rather than man in the singular, as in Baudelaire’s “painter of modernity”) enjoy living in their city at large. The city is as large as the world on June 16th 1904, the World’s Alltag (the all-day of the world, as it was called by Wolfgang Iser). The dangers on the seas, treated in the *Odyssey* as if they were the modern ocean expanses, become the familiar risks of modern city-life. But epic heroes are, or they become, skilled skippers. Stephen Dedalus navigates in the modern city towards adulthood, like Telemachus in search of his father, and in preparation for the great purging deed required for the restitution of the home. We encounter Mr. Bloom setting sail from home, wandering because he is a man at sea, blooming with life and troubled by it next to an adulterous wife, with whom he has to cope like Odysseus with the sea – sometimes quite alone, though surrounded by so many comrades. Man and wife are, however, united by the irreversible factors of individuals’ lives and of modern life, which can be subjectively explained. The trauma of death experienced as the death of one’s child makes anyone’s innermost life unreal, just as the modern City bereaved of life in *The Waste Land*. Leopold Bloom lives with the phantom of himself as the father of a man-child. Wittily, the necessary encounter with the phantom – not of the dead father, as in *Hamlet*, but of the son – will occur at the end of the Joycean story. The implied author efficiently and spectacularly creates Shakespearian afterlife in a game with *Hamlet* masks – which is neither tragic, nor comic, but mixed, and very subtly ironic. Trauma is the pre-requisite of the Ulyssean story, the beginning of its plot. Stephen is mourning his mother in even more complex ways than Hamlet grieved. As for the other protagonists, the sense that there is death-in-life and life-in-death has been unleashed: the Blooms’ marriage has been turned into a Waste Land. But neither of Joyce’s two spouses sits down and weeps: they act. Leopold Bloom builds a blooming inner life permeated by a huge amount of modern intelligence that entertains us, readers, throughout his wanderings. Mrs. Marion Bloom reenacts the story of love with other men, whose faces matter less than the savour of love itself, leaving its fragrance behind on her body of thoughts. She is the feminine priestess to the altar of the libidinal factor in the home, while Mr. Bloom is its male priest, mostly outside the home. On the same scene of city-life, in *Ulysses* there move characters whose interior monologues enact postponement, then achievement of finality. Finality is forged from intimate people’s encounters in personally significant transactions. Life ticks while the characters on the stage of *Ulysses* demonstrate that a communicable sense of self-fulfilment need not be a matter of spectacular finality at all. Taking finality as a key word, young Stephen Dedalus acts on the stage of his conscience as another Hamlet in respect to clear finalities which he merely contemplates. But this Hamlet is not left to brood² on his own at the end of *Ulysses*: he is hosted and received into a home of two co-existing, though by this time quite centrifugally existing, finalities.

² Joyce’s Hamlet broods on love’s bitter mystery, like Yeats’s protagonist in the poem “Who Goes with Fergus”.

He is not put up for the night, appropriated, just hosted: a delicate, accommodating finality makes a sign in the book. Leopold Bloom befriends Stephen, protects and invites him to 7 Eccles Street, and succeeds in this as he did in so many other respects earlier in the book. Mr Bloom is cast as an astute Ulysses who can turn practically all the circumstantial obstacles in his favour through minute acts of will and self-fulfilment. Molly Bloom is a direct embodiment of finality since all the self-serving thoughts she has (after an equal number of self-serving actions!) declare her environmental triumph at every turn of the endless sentences in her monologue. She appropriates everything, seethingly, like the sea. But one cannot understand these without the Homeric lining of the rewriting subtleties, perused poetically, by the principle of analogy.

As regards face to face communication, it functions successfully in *Ulysses*, whether it is self-communing, or a means of successfully averting and saving one's face to defend privacy in every-day encounters and exchanges. Joyce's Odyssean sailors are Baudelairian flâneurs, by Donoghue's standards³. Eliot's main speaker, the creator of the social frame in his text, is afraid of the crowd and withdraws defeated from the trip through his cultural city, just as the protagonist of Poe's story "The Man of the Crowd". And it is worth recalling that Eliot saw the heads of the crowd as hooded hordes – in a military alignment of helmeted soldiers, like in a photograph, says Donoghue, in "one of the most dreadful images of anonymity" (*The Old Moderns* 27). The controlling conscience of *The Waste Land* (whether or not it is Tiresias, as Eliot claimed) acts just like Poe's protagonist who discovers how the individual finally dissolves into the crowd and gets lost. Eliot's is a humanity of hollow men and the mixed feelings towards them are the substance of *The Waste Land*. It reads like an ancient tragedy chorus of modern voices, an elegy – no, not for the canon! – but for the loss of ceremony. It feels just as in Yeats's lament: "the ceremony of innocence is drowned" (followed by "mere anarchy is loosed upon the world", in *The Second Coming*)⁴.

Summing up, in cultural memory terms, the observations made so far, it is fair to say that by tapping tradition, both Eliot and Joyce constructed its cultural afterlife. So many further generations of writers and critics, adopted the way both texts communicated from the present and made the chaotic present memorable: both the bomb of evil assumed modern meaning and the slowly emplotted and digested everyday evil, minced and kneaded in words, did.

But things are not half as smooth and simple as they appear when the historical narrative puts them together. We should wonder about the intra-generational communication in public of the high moderns as collective memory voices⁵ of the early twentieth century. Eliot commended Joyce at a time when

³ One dandy is masked as a very correctly dressed and externally conventional bourgeois Jew, the other dandy comes in the guise of a young, proud, though bereaved and rather destitute Irishman, set apart by his Jesuit education and irresistible in his very learned wit.

⁴ By contrast to Yeats's vision and prophesy, in *The Waste Land*, the lament for solemnity is enacted rather than pronounced and for this reason "reads" ironically.

⁵ The distinction between writers who speak as collective and as cultural memory voices corresponds to the distinction between the social and the historical frame of discourses, as in

everybody else doubted him (in “Ulysses, Order and Myth”, for giving shape and making significant the “immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history”); Woolf doubted Joyce; Joyce did not speak or do much for anybody else, because he lived a life of frustrations (all the time he wrote so masterfully about self-fulfilment). In “Modern Fiction”, after she acknowledged Joyce’s spirituality, sincerity and originality, Woolf finds fault with him because of:

...some limitation imposed by the method as well as by the mind. Is it the method that inhibits the creative power? Is it due to the method that we feel neither jovial nor magnanimous, but centred in a self which, in spite of its tremor of susceptibility, never embraces or creates what is outside itself and beyond? Does the emphasis laid, perhaps didactically, upon indecency, contribute to the effect of something angular and isolated? Or is it merely that in any effort of such originality it is much easier, for contemporaries especially, to feel what it lacks than to name what it gives? (...); did not the reading of Ulysses suggest how much of life is excluded or ignored? (49)

How could Woolf herself suggest that there was “much of life excluded or ignored” in *Ulysses*, one wonders. Maybe, as she did not take seriously Joyce’s table of contents, Woolf refused to play the intertextual, secondary literary game with public and collective memory proposed by the author. It cannot be that Woolf believed life should express more of the traumatic fear of the war-hordes invading peace and blowing fear upon the world - as in Romanian fairytales, where the character Gerilă (The Frost Man) comes on stage with his frost-bearing breath to congeal all, in the spirit that animated Eliot. In fact, Virginia Woolf herself created pertinent love encounters in counterpoint with war, and heroic death-defeating encounters throughout her fiction: between Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay or between Mrs. Ramsay and the later characters while actually on their way to the Lighthouse; in Clarissa Dalloway’s casual encounter with creatures that suddenly translated (to her) life in the plural more satisfactorily than individual people she had known all her life, but had grown into strangers together. Woolf knew as well as Eliot or Joyce that individuals become pertinent in literature when they turn into agents of collective and cultural memory.

How this happens was explained by Ann Rigney in her text about portable monuments and Jeanie Deans (“Portable Monuments” 362). When applying her model to the “Waste Land” composition, one can understand the power of cultural memory bombs of Eliot’s numerous, striking narrative nuclei. These dramatic monologue nuclei, called by Rigney narrative syntagmata, are traumatic chunks of post-memory. Contrasted to the full narrative emplotment in Joyce’s novel, they explain the differences in speed of the modernist cultural anamnesis. The logic of narrative emplotment is that of beginning, middle and end of actions and points to the whole of people’s lives – or, as I have partly demonstrated above, to finality. To

Maurice Halbwachs’s conception, when opposed to Jan Assman’s collective memory. The latter “is shared by a number of people and conveys to these people a collective, that is, cultural identity” and “is connected to traditions, transmissions, transferences” (“Communicative and Cultural Memory” 110).

make public and private fate or finality coincide, some intelligent modernists placed public, cultural fate first (the case of Eliot's private narrative nuclei articulated to create the public fate bomb), others required that the reader embark upon the epic task of slowly and intertextually changing the sense of the fate vectors from the private to the public significance. Ann Rigney gracefully demonstrates, for Walter Scott's fiction, the cooperation, in the collective memory field, of the principles of Jakobsonian poetics with those of Paul Ricoeur's emplotment. The same happens in the cultural memory epics of both Joyce and Eliot.

It is interesting, says Ann Rigney, how

memories may also be reorganized according to the eminently poetic principle of equivalence as described by Roman Jakobson (1960). It is the repetition of comparable events in the narrative syntagma, rather than the logic of the story, which endows otherwise disparate events with a mutually reinforcing meaning ("Portable Monuments" 378).

Rigney referred to Jeanie Deans in Scott's *Heart of Midlothian* to enumerate the memorability processes, namely (in my truncated quotation, *ie* adaptation of Rigney's page 374): combining "respectable" historical themes with elements from the popular...tradition"; "providing a virtual public sphere where private persons...found representations in the collective history" in "a channel for local memories"; "introducing ...obscure individual(s) into public memory"; creating "counterhistory" (in the sense of Victor Hugo's *Les misérables* (n.d. 282) by writing the "internal" history missed by historians, the history of the inside, of ordinary people, as they work, suffer and wait.; implicitly criticizing/eroding/correcting, with the literary "counterforce (in Geoffrey Hartman's sense (80)", "both official accounts of the past and inauthentic versions of the past circulated through the mass media"; articulating "composite memories into a story with a moral to it". Apart from the last of these – as here the comparison stops short after modern intelligence settled for anti-moralism with art for art's sake – all the other memorability mechanisms obviously apply to our two literary monuments. The "canny combination" of respectable with low-prestige cultural registers immediately calls to mind the infinitely seedy encounter of the young man carbuncular with the bored typist in the loveless encounter witnessed by Tiresias in "The Fire Sermon"; in this narrative syntagma, it comes side by side with all the Elizabethan reminiscences so dear to the British national memory in "The Fire Sermon". In *Ulysses*, practically each of the Bloom episodes has a very low register middle or ending: the jakes scene at the end of the episode "Calypso"; the public bath scene which concludes "Lotus Eaters", where one accompanies Bloom's eyes looking beyond his navel (rather than gazing *at* his own navel in some yogin posture!), to see "the dark tangled curls of his bush floating, floating hair of the stream around the limp father of thousands, a languid floating flower" (line 570 et seq.). Besides noticing that this culminates with the voyeuristic exercise of the same father of thousands on the Irish beaches of Onan in Ireland, in the episode "Nausicaa", and an episode where all the Odyssean linen brought by Alcinous's daughter to the beach become soiled on the Dublin day of June 16th, 1904 – Stephen

himself is shown sending “long lassoes from the Cock lake” and “covering greengoldenly lagoons of sand” on Sandymount beach, where he exercises his ashplant. When applying the principle of poetic equivalence to it, it may well become the textual correlative of Bloom’s “father of thousands”, since the quoted bits end with: “My ashplant will float away” (line 454). Secondly, for the transformation of Ann Rigney’s observations about portable monuments into a reading algorithm, it is true for both *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* that the public sphere plays host to private persons “who find representation in the collective history of the present thereby”. Thirdly, what can be more obvious (for literary history and theory alike, speaking of the location of culture) than that the literary works in question “work as a channel for local memories”? *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* create channels that internationalize the local, giving it a huge span in time and space. Do not the City of London and the Bloomsday Dublin become hubs of the modern world thanks to the memorability and counter-history woven from them by the portability of Eliot’s and Joyce’s monuments? *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* effect the encounter in the present of lives whose histories are as far-ranging as is the history of modern intelligence in its self-awareness. Modern intelligence, Denis Donoghue explains, “alludes nimbly to episodes in the culture of Latin and Greek, French and German, to literature and art, classical and modern” (Donoghue referred to Poe’s narrator in “The Man of the Crowd”, but the same intelligence, distinctly modern is central for Eliot and Joyce). Whether one calls it modern intelligence or modern cultural memory, it is immaterial, since what it does is create portable monuments. These were shown by Ann Rigney, in action, to constitute memorability by turning direct acts of commemoration into more lasting documents/monuments constitutive for memory and handled in the present, therefore portable.

What remains still to be assessed is the cause of the intra-generational misunderstandings signalled in connection with Virginia Woolf’s short-sightedness regarding *Ulysses*. This brings us to the link with drama of collective and cultural memory “on or about December 1910”, when, according to Virginia Woolf, “human character changed” – and when literature changed, in fact. One significant part of the change had to do with the imaginative texts’ becoming ultimately and hybridly dramatic texts. The dramatic character of *The Waste Land* became more poignant in Fiona Shaw’s performance of the text, in Dublin. She appeared on stage climbing the old Georgian house stairs typical for Dublin, and, unassumingly dressed in blue jeans, showing through her acting how a subtle voice and light-design could give prominence to parts of the text.

The dramatic form played a central role in Eliot’s creation, too, if he is understood to practice in *The Waste Land* what he theorized in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. Eliot uses the dramatic monologue, a very English tradition, to ventriloquize from behind so many past masks in the present, giving a dramatic texture to *The Waste Land*. *Ulysses*’s dramatic quality can also be sustained by an act of critical memory: one recalls that Stephen Dedalus had already set the Joycean dramatic desideratum clearly as a task for the sublime story-teller, in chapter V of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

art necessarily divides itself into three forms **progressing** (*our emphasis!*) from one to the next. These forms are: the lyrical form, the form wherein the artist presents his image in immediate relation to himself; the epical form, the form wherein he presents his image in mediate relation to himself and to others; the dramatic form, the form wherein he presents his image in immediate relation to others” (231-2).

Add to these instances the generalization in modernist fiction of the so-called dramatic method of narration, and the demonstration is complete.

Now the vested power of drama, its versatility, its toying with masks were plentifully used by Joyce in *Ulysses*, when he gave different values to the variables of the narrative method, moving beyond the limits of the stream of consciousness as a means of collective/cultural memory communication. Joyce’s impressionism was ironic, just as Eliot’s in *The Waste Land*, and the effect of this was to enrich the horizon of expectations of the modernist age and the range of modern literary intelligence. It was Virginia Woolf’s own problem (or her choice?) if she wished to remain stuck in the emancipatory pathos and subjectivism of the collective British spokesperson, unable or unwilling to witness the miraculous transformation around her of cultural memory bombs into collective memory booms and viceversa.

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