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Irish Dante

Yeats, Joyce, Beckett

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ABSTRACT: 'Dante and Ireland', or 'Dante and Irish Writers', is an extremely vast topic, and to cover it a book rather than an essay would be necessary. If the relationship between the poet and Ireland did not begin in the fourteenth century — when Dante himself may have had some knowledge of, and been inspired by, the Vision of Adamnán, the Vision of Tungdal, and the Tractatus de purgatorio Sancti Patricii — the story certainly had started by the eighteenth, when the Irish man of letters Henry Boyd was the first to produce a complete English translation of the Comedy, published in 1802. Even if one restricts the field to twentieth-century literature alone, which is my aim in the present piece, the list of authors who are influenced by Dante includes Yeats, Joyce, Beckett, and Heaney — that is to say, four of the major writers not only of Ireland, but of Europe and the entire West. To these should then be added other Irish poets of the first magnitude, such as Louis MacNeice, Ciaran Carson, Eiléan Ní Cuilleanáin, and Thomas Kinsella. I hope I will therefore be forgiven for treating this theme in a somewhat cursory manner, privileging the episodes I consider most relevant and the themes which I think form a coherent and intricate pattern of literary history, where every author is not only metamorphosing Dante but also rewriting his predecessor, or predecessors, who had rewritten Dante. Distinct from the English and American Dante of Pound and Eliot, an 'Irish Dante', whom Joyce was to call [...]

IRISH DANTE: YEATS, JOYCE, BECKETT

Piero Boitani

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The following points will emerge as most relevant from an examination of our three Irish authors: (1) the image of Dante that takes shape in twentieth-century Irish literature begins with an adaptation of *Vita nuova* episodes (itself a Rossetian legacy) in Yeats's poetry and in

Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; (2) Joyce had already tried a *structural* adaptation of the *Comedy* in *Dubliners*, and his endeavour in *Ulysses* is that of rewriting the *Odyssey* with the scope and ambition of a *Divine Comedy* (whereas an ironic treatment of Dante, on the other hand, links the *Portrait* and *Finnegans Wake*); (3) the Irish idea of Dante seems to centre on purgatory, which Joyce and Beckett (and Heaney) choose as their favourite dimension; (4) in both Joyce and Beckett a distinct anti-Ulysses (*Inf.* XXVI) position emerges.

From an ideal, if not chronological, point of view, the twentieth-century history of Dante in Ireland begins between the summer and the autumn of 1915, when William Butler Yeats composed 'Ego Dominus Tuus', a dialogue between a 'Hic' and an 'Ille' who discuss the problem of the quest for the self.³ This search is closely allied to the identification of a poetics, and to this end Yeats uses a series of allusions and quotations from Matthew Arnold, Wordsworth, Sappho, Guido Cavalcanti, and Keats. First and foremost, however, he refers to Dante, from whom he takes the title itself of his poem. In chapter III of the *Vita nuova* Dante had recounted a 'maravigliosa visione' in which, within a 'nebula di colore di fuoco', the 'figura d'uno signore di pauroso aspetto' had appeared to him and pronounced a few words taken from the opening of the Decalogue in Exodus: 'Ego dominus tuus', 'I am your Lord'.⁴ The figure clearly is that of Love, who holds in his arms the 'donna de la salute' and in one hand the poet's heart, which the lady subsequently eats.⁵ Yeats's Dantean allusion, then, points in the first place to the source itself of his inspiration, love, and to the vision-like fashion in which it comes to him. In sum, it is a Rossettian, Pre-Raphaelite type of reference.

But Dante is more deeply present in Yeats's thought and poetics. In his *Autobiographies*, he wrote that he had always believed that 'in man and race alike there is something called "Unity of Being", using that term as Dante used it when he compared beauty in the *Convivio* to a perfectly proportioned human body'.⁶ In its Dantean acceptation, 'unity of being' means the union in one 'form' of man's three natures (sensitive, vegetative, and rational), and hence the harmony of his form, his body. The passage to which Yeats refers, in *Convivio* III, presents Dante's commentary to the lines of 'Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona' in which the countenance of the Lady (Philosophy) is celebrated as paradisiacal: 'Cose appariscon ne lo suo aspetto, | che mostran de' piacer di Paradiso, | dico ne li occhi e nel suo dolce riso, | che le vi reca Amor

com'a suo loco'.⁷ In other words, Yeats seems now to go well beyond the Pre-Raphaelite reception of Dante.

'Ego Dominus Tuus' explores the subjective dimension of poetic inspiration. Is it better to pursue the quest for oneself or to discover the self through the quest for the other? Should the human being, the poet, look within himself, or should he instead prefer what is outside of him, projecting a fiction, a 'mask' of himself? Ille (who is also 'Willie', Yeats himself) would like, 'by the help of an image', to evoke his 'opposite', to summon all he has 'handled least, least looked upon'. Hic, on the other hand, aims at finding himself, 'and not an image'. Such, Ille replies, 'is our modern hope', by whose light 'we have hit upon the gentle, sensitive mind' and at the same time lost 'the old nonchalance of the hand', becoming mere critics, people who 'but half create, | Timid, entangled, empty and abashed'.⁸

Hic replies to this merciless portrait of poetic modernity with the example of Dante Alighieri, 'the chief imagination of Christendom'. Dante 'so utterly found himself | That he has made that hollow face of his | More plain to the mind's eye than any face | But that of Christ'.⁹ This is no longer the Dante of *Vita nuova* and *Convivio*, but the poet of the *Comedy*, who sings the 'Unity of Being' and who maintains he has lived through the 'moment of moments' in a beatific vision unparalleled either before or after him. It is, however, easy for 'Ille' to answer – and from the text of the *Comedy* itself – that perhaps Dante did not find himself, but that 'hollow' face of his was the product of hunger, 'a hunger', as Sappho sang, 'for the apple on the bough | Most out of reach'. That 'spectral image' is not 'the man that Lapo and Guido knew', but in fact an icon he created 'from his opposite'. 'Mocked by Guido for his lecherous life', 'driven out | To climb that stair and eat that bitter bread', Ille insists, quoting Cavalcanti's 'I' vegno 'l giorno a te infinite volte' and *Par.* XVII, that Dante 'found the unpersuadable justice, he found | The most exalted lady loved by a man'.¹⁰ In short, what Dante did in inventing Divine Justice and Beatrice, the two movers of his 'sacred poem', was to sublimate his desires and delusions.

The debate between the two characters on traditional models of poetry continues to the very end of 'Ego Dominus Tuus'. The poem is in fact a great piece of lyric writing, teaching how one can turn one's own thought, meditation, and poetics, into poetry; exploring with force and precision the two sides of the creative soul, tradition, and the poet's motivations; recording his dissipation, despair, and happiness; and

advocating his discipline, imitation, and vision – his mysterious and religious writing of symbols in the sand, the still small voice of poetry. In this lyric, Dante occupies the central place and is in a sense its pretext. He stands for two contrasting images of the poet, that which Hic sees grounded in self-assuredness, projecting a mythic and sacred profile, and that which grows, for Ille, out of uncertainty, need, and the sublimation produced by them.

In ‘Ego Dominus Tuus’ Dante is, then, a symbol of poetics, an *exemplum*. At the end of his life, after spending many years in conversation with Shakespeare and Michelangelo,¹¹ Yeats turned to Dante in much closer personal terms. He employs terza rima, for the first and only time in his career, in what appears to be his last poem, completed on 13 January 1939, two weeks before he died.¹² ‘Cuchulain Comforted’ is the supreme ‘phantasmagoria’, the description of the hero’s descent to the other world.¹³ ‘A man violent and famous’, with six mortal wounds on his body, strides among the dead, as their eyes fix him from between the branches and disappear. The Shades are, here, Shrouds, who come and go, muttering to each other. As Cuchulain leans against a tree, ‘as though to meditate on wounds and blood’, a Shroud ‘that seemed to have authority | Among those bird-like things’ comes close to the hero and lets fall a bundle of linen. Now the other Shrouds join in, while the first one addresses the dead man. He invites him to make a shroud, thus obeying their ancient rule and obtaining a ‘much sweeter’ life. They, he says, are ‘convicted cowards all, by kindred slain | Or driven from home and left to die in fear’. Threading the needles’ eyes, they must now sing, ‘and sing the best [they] can’. The Shrouds then begin to sing ‘in common’. But they have ‘nor human tunes nor words’, they have changed their throats and sing with ‘the throats of birds’.

This ‘ingressus in Inferos’ is a mysterious sequence, in which the hero of so many battles is welcomed by those who died of fear, as if Cuchulain had now no choice but to learn to surrender, to sew a shroud and become a Shroud like them. The descent to Hades finally forces him to meditate on his wounds, reliving them like Jacopo del Cassero who, in Dante’s *Purgatorio*, remembers ‘i profondi fori | ond’uscì ‘l sangue in sul quale [...] sedea’ (V, 73–74). It may well be that the Shrouds are the wise souls of Limbo, who have ‘occhi tardi e gravi’ and ‘grande autorità ne’ lor sembianti’ (*Inf.* IV, 112–13).¹⁴ What is certain is that Dante has now penetrated to the very bones of Yeats. There are odd Dantean reminiscences in the poem – the eyes spying Cuchulain’s arrival

like the Harpies of *Inferno* XIII, their threading of the needles' eyes 'come vecchio sartor fa nella cruna' in *Inf.* XV, 21. But the most important thing is the singular appropriateness of the Dantean context. Yeats is indeed sewing here his own shroud in what Seamus Heaney has called 'a strange ritual of surrender, a rite of passage from life to death, but a rite whose meaning is subsumed into song, into the otherness of art'.¹⁵ There also is another interesting coincidence, for if Yeats is preparing his descent among the shades, that is precisely where we will find him next, in another Dantean context and in another terza rima poem – T.S. Eliot's *Little Gidding*.

Things change quite dramatically with James Joyce, who was truly obsessed by Dante throughout his life. His first book, *Dubliners*, for instance, is framed by Dantean references. The first story, 'Sisters', begins with an echo of the inscription over the gate of hell, 'There was no hope', and 'The Dead', the last one, ends with a vision of frozen Ireland which metamorphoses Dante's Cocytus. Indeed, a Dantean design has been found in *Dubliners*, which covers the whole of hell, from the 'ignavi' of 'Eveline' to the traitors of 'The Dead'. Joyce's brother, Stanislaus, thought the arrangement of the collection 'an obvious touch of parody on the *Divine Comedy*' and said that the three parts of the story 'Grace' corresponded to the three *cantiche* of Dante's poem.¹⁶

In other words, from the very beginning Joyce struggled to appropriate the *structure* of the *Comedy* and, not unlike what Eliot would do in *The Waste Land*, to adapt it to a depiction of modern life. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* the attempt is, quite unexpectedly, different. Here we have a young Irish, Catholic intellectual, a post-Romantic, Decadent neo-Thomist, Stephen Daedalus, growing up, seeking himself, and struggling to find his way as a poet – which is of course what Dante had done in the *Vita nuova*. The *Portrait* is a *Bildungsroman* where Dante has a place that resembles that in Yeats' 'Ego Dominus Tuus'.¹⁷ The *Vita nuova* and the last cantos of *Paradiso* are now used by Joyce to frame Stephen's 'epiphanies'. The most momentous of the initial ones comes after Stephen, 'arisen from the grave of boyhood', starts walking barefoot in the water off the Dollymount beach and suddenly sees a girl standing before him 'in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea'. Enraptured, he contemplates her body, then her image passes into his soul 'for ever', no words breaking 'the holy silence of his ecstasy'. It is a 'wild angel, the angel of mortal youth and beauty'.

Stephen turns landward, runs towards the shore, feels 'above him the vast indifferent dome and the calm processes of the heavenly bodies' and beneath him the earth which had 'borne him' and 'taken him to her breast', and closes his eyes 'in the languor of sleep', his soul 'swooning into some new world, fantastic, dim, uncertain as under sea, traversed by cloudy shapes and beings'. The epiphany is complete:

A world, a glimmer or a flower? Glimmering and trembling, trembling and unfolding, a breaking light, an opening flower, it spread in endless succession to itself, breaking in full crimson and unfolding and fading to palest rose, leaf by leaf and wave of light by wave of light, flooding all the heavens with its soft flushes, every flush deeper than the other.¹⁸

This is Joyce's equivalent of *Par.* XXX, 94–117, when Dante sees 'li fiori e le faville', the 'grande lume' and the 'larghezza di questa rosa ne l'estreme foglie'. But even *Paradiso* XXXIII finds an equivalent in the *Portrait*, in a passage in which Stephen sees the whole world 'forming one vast symmetrical expression of God's power and love'.¹⁹ Later, Stephen's new epiphany, still revolving around his Beatrice, centres on inspiration. Here, Joyce is metamorphosing one of the central moments of *Vita nuova* III, the very passage Yeats was concentrating upon contemporaneously:

E pensando di lei mi soprugiunse uno soave sonno, ne lo quale m'apparve una meravigliosa visione, che me pareva vedere ne la mia camera una nebula di colore di fuoco, dentro a la quale io discerneva una figura d'uno signore di pauroso aspetto a chi la guardasse; e pareami con tanta letizia, quanto a sé, che mirabile cosa era; e ne le sue parole dicea molte cose, le quali io non intendea se non poche; tra le quali intendea queste: 'Ego dominus tuus'. [...] E ne l'una de le mani mi pareva che questi tenesse una cosa, la quale ardesse tutta; e pareami che mi dicesse queste parole: 'Vide cor tuum'. [...] Pensando io a ciò che m'era apparuto, propuosi di farlo sentire a molti, li quali erano famosi trovatori in quello tempo: e con ciò fosse cosa che io avesse già veduto per me medesimo l'arte del dire parole per rima, propuosi di fare uno sonetto, ne lo quale io salutasse tutti li fedeli d'Amore; e pregandoli che giudicassero la mia visione, scrissi a loro ciò che io avea nel mio sonno veduto. E cominciai allora questo sonetto, lo quale comincia: *A ciascun'alma presa.* (VN III, 3–9)

The imagery and the sequence are exactly the same in the *Portrait*, where Stephen, awakening in the morning, thinks back to the 'enchanted night' when, 'in a dream or vision', he 'had known the ecstasy of seraphic life'. For good measure, Joyce adds references to the

Prologue of John's Gospel, to the Annunciation and Holy Conception of God's Son, and, finally, to the mystical rose of Dante's Empyreum yet again:

The instant of inspiration seemed now to be reflected from all sides at once from a multitude of cloudy circumstances of what had happened or of what might have happened. The instant flashed forth like a point of light and now from cloud on cloud of vague circumstance confused form was veiling softly its afterglow. O! In the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made flesh. Gabriel the seraph had come to the virgin's chamber. An afterglow deepened within his spirit, whence the white flame had passed, deepening to a rose and ardent light. That rose and ardent light was her strange wilful heart, strange that no man had known or would know, wilful from before the beginning of the world; and lured by that ardent rose-like glow the choirs of the seraphim were falling from heaven.²⁰

Finally, still reclining on his bed, Stephen writes out a villanelle on 'the rough cardboard surface' of a cigarette packet. 'He had written verses for her again after ten years [...] Ten years from that wisdom of children to this folly' (p. 241).

But Joyce is not Yeats. On the very last page of the *Portrait*, just before Stephen goes off to Paris in the name of the 'old father, old artificer', the mythical Greek artist Daedalus, 'to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race', he notes in his diary that he has just met the girl again 'pointblank' in Grafton Street. Dante's *Vita nuova* is now fully evoked, but with a sardonic irony that completely destroys its 'body-denying platonic love':²¹

April 15. Met her today pointblank in Grafton Street. The crowd brought us together. We both stopped. She asked me why I never came, said she had heard all sorts of stories about me. This was only to gain time. Asked me, was I writing poems? About whom? I asked her. This confused her more and I felt sorry and mean. Turned off that valve at once and opened the spiritual-heroic refrigerating apparatus, invented and patented in all countries by Dante Alighieri. Talked rapidly of myself and my plans. In the midst of it unluckily I made a sudden gesture of a revolutionary nature. I must have looked like a fellow throwing a handful of peas into the air. People began to look at us. She shook hands a moment after and, in going away, said she hoped I would do what I said.²²

In Joyce's next book, *Ulysses*, Stephen has returned from Paris, his mind now impregnated with Dante. In the seventh section, 'Aeolus', for instance, he reminisces on 'Rhymes and Reasons', and sees them at first as 'two men dressed the same, looking the same, two by two'. '*La tua pace ... che parlar ti piace ... mentre che il vento, come fa, si tace*', his memory recites from *Inferno* V. Then, remembering *Inferno* V, *Paradiso* XXXI, and finally *Purgatorio* XXIX, he sees rhymes in terza-like succession, 'three by three, approaching girls, in green, in rose, in russet, entwining, *per l'aer perso* in mauve, in purple, *quella pacifica oriafiamma*, in gold of oriflamme, *di rimirar fé più ardenti*. But I old men, penitent, leadenfooted, underdarkneath the night: mouth south: tomb womb'.²³

Quotations and misquotations from Dante fill *Ulysses* to the brim, and there is even some reason to think that the most elusive, ever-recurring character in the book, Macintosh, 'that lankylooking galoot', might be Dante himself. What counts, however, is the overall para-Dantean texture of *Ulysses*. My impression of Joyce's endeavour in *Ulysses*, ever since I read it for the first time forty years ago, has been that Joyce was quite deliberately trying to rewrite the *Odyssey* in the shape and with the scope and ambition of a *Divine Comedy*. Years after the publication of *Ulysses*, Joyce came up with a declaration which seems obliquely to confirm this. He recalled his work on the book during the First World War years and said: 'Ah, how wonderful that was to get up in the morning ... and enter the misty regions of my emerging epic, as Dante once entered his selva oscura selva selvaggia. Words crackled in my head and a multitude of images crowded around, like those shades at the entrance to the Underworld when Ulysses stood there awaiting the spirit of Tiresias'.²⁴

The structure of *Ulysses* is decidedly Homeric, with one exception to which I will return presently. But Joyce stuffed that structure with an encyclopedia-like spirit certainly derived from Dante's *Comedy*, combining an immense range of coherent references to history, metaphysics, science, music, aesthetic, literary, and linguistic theory, classical and Biblical myth, and liturgy which turn this so-called 'novel' into what Franco Moretti has called an 'opera-mondo'.²⁵ In this context, the third general section of *Ulysses*, the one Joyce called 'Nostos' in his Gilbert and Linati schemata, comes closest to Dante's poem. The shade that emerges here is nothing less than Dante's Ulysses, a model otherwise left outside Joyce's Homeric epic. The shade surfaces first in 'Eumaeus',

on the lips of the red-haired, drunk, *soi-disant* sailor, W.B. Murphy. Murphy starts recounting fantastic adventures to Stephen and Bloom.²⁶ Trying to stop him, Bloom asks him if he has ever seen the Rock of Gibraltar, a place of personal interest to him. The man grimaces, chewing, 'in a way that might be read as yes, ay, or no'; then, when Bloom asks what year that would be and whether he can recall the boats, the drunkard munches heavily and replies: 'I'm tired of all them rocks in the sea ... and boats and ships. Salt junk all the time.'²⁷ At this point Bloom, 'perceiving that he [is] not likely to get a great deal of change out of such a wily old customer' falls, Joyce writes, 'to woolgathering on the enormous dimensions of the water about the globe. Suffice it to say that, as a casual glance at the map revealed, it covered fully three fourths of it and he fully realised accordingly what it meant, to rule the waves'.²⁸ Having thus paid his respects to the British Empire ('Britannia rules the waves'), Bloom recalls having more than once noticed, at Dollymount, on the northern side of Dublin Bay, 'a superannuated old salt, evidently derelict, seated habitually near the not particularly redolent sea on the wall, staring quite obliviously at it and it at him, dreaming of fresh woods and pastures new as someone somewhere sings'. The quotation from Milton's 'Lycidas' must not lead us astray.²⁹ The old salt is clearly dreaming of the 'nova terra' sighted by Dante's Ulysses. Bloom has often wondered why the man should contemplate the ocean with such intensity and dream of new worlds. He has repeatedly mused that 'possibly' the old salt

had tried to find out the secret for himself, floundering up and down the antipodes and all that sort of thing and over and under – well, not exactly under, tempting the fates. And the odds were twenty to nil there was really no secret about it at all. Nevertheless, without going into the minutiae of the business, the eloquent fact remained that the sea was there in all its glory and in the natural course of things somebody or other had to sail on it and fly in the face of providence though it merely went to show how people usually contrived to load that sort of onus on to the other fellow like the hell idea and the lottery and insurance, which were run on identically the same lines ...³⁰

The shade of Dante's Ulysses has taken its side next to that of Homer's Odysseus – indirectly and obliquely, as befits Joyce's 'order and myth' method, yet clearly.³¹ Bloom thinks the old salt might have tried to discover the 'secret' beyond the Pillars of Hercules, 'floundering up and down the antipodes' and 'tempting the fates'. However, he is no Roman-

tic. He believes there really is no secret and 'in the natural course of things' someone was bound to sail over that glorious sea and 'fly in the face of providence'. Joyce manages to combine the 'folle volo' with the notion of the hubris against God it implies and with the hell into which Dante's Ulysses was thrown after the shipwreck.

Yet the next time we meet the same shade, it is actually tempting Leopold Bloom himself. Here, we are in the penultimate section of *Ulysses*, 'Ithaca'. Bloom has finally returned home and recognizes in Stephen Dedalus his own Telemachus; he is also about to join his Penelope, the unfaithfully faithful Molly, in their marriage bed. Bloom is glancing with horror at his forthcoming senescence, to which he imagines two alternatives: decease and departure. He opts, of course, for the latter, as the 'line of least resistance'. He then sets off on a mental journey, which takes in first the whole of Ireland, following with extensions towards a number of significant places on a planetary scale: Ceylon, Jerusalem, the Straits of Gibraltar, the Parthenon, Wall Street, the Plaza de Toros at La Linea, in Spain, Niagara, the land of the Eskimos, 'the forbidden country of Tibet' ('from which no traveller returns'), the Bay of Naples ('to see which is to die'), and the Dead Sea.³² Bloom here takes on the universal binomial denominator of being and non-being, Everyman and Noman, travelling on and on:

Ever he would wander, selfcompelled, to the extreme limit of his cometary orbit, beyond the fixed stars and variable suns and telescopic planets, astronomical waifs and strays, to the extreme boundaries of space, passing from land to land, among peoples, amid events. Somewhere imperceptibly he would hear and somehow reluctantly, suncompelled, obey the summons of recall. Whence, disappearing from the constellation of the Northern Crown he would somehow reappear reborn above delta in the constellation of Cassiopeia and after incalculable eons of peregrination return an estranged avenger, a wrecker of justice on malefactors, a dark crusader, a sleeper awakened, with financial resources (by supposition) surpassing those of Rothschild or the silver king.³³

Shortly afterwards, however, Joyce's Homeric mind decides that Bloom's journey is out of the question, first of all because it envisages an irrational return, governed by an 'unsatisfactory equation between an exodus and return in time through reversible space and an exodus and return in space through irreversible time'.³⁴ But as a departure, too, it is undesirable, given the late hour, the darkness, the dangers, the need to rest, and above all given the proximity of an occupied bed,

the ‘anticipation of warmth (human) tempered with coolness (linen) obviating desire and rendering desirable; the statue of Narcissus, sound without echo, desired desire’.³⁵

Here, we note what this astonishing twentieth-century Homer-cum-Dante is doing with the myth: Bloom-Ulysses, old (as he thinks) and terrified by old age, wishes to return home and to ‘push off’ like Tennyson’s Ulysses; to sail, like Dante’s, towards the Pillars of Hercules; to visit the places of death (Tibet, defined by Hamlet’s tag; Naples, identified by the popular saying; the Dead Sea, a name itself eloquent), and, as both Everyman and Noman, to journey further and wander beyond stars, to the utmost bounds of space, ‘passing from land to land’ like Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner, but *among* peoples, *amid* events – in history – and to return, finally, like Odysseus, like a Crusader, like the Count of Montecristo.

Nocturnal wanderings towards death, beyond boundaries – like the wanderings of Dante’s Ulysses. A Biblical exodus, as well (Bloom would be following a ‘pillar of cloud’), and a mystic flight: transformation into comet, ascent beyond the fixed stars, Ascension to the Empyrean, rebirth and messianic Advent. A journey through history and through peoples: Homeric *nostos* and revenge à la Dumas. In one page Joyce moves backwards through what I have elsewhere called the ‘shadows’ of Ulysses, himself projecting new ones to create his own Ulyssean myth, at once a universal symbol of Everyman and Noman.

Dante’s Ulysses, the archetype of all centrifugal heroes of Western literature and history, offered Joyce the possibility of reaffirming, in contrast, his opposite, centripetal, Homeric choice –to return home and to Penelope. Thus, even though ‘Ithaca’ contains other significant Dantean allusions, it is fitting that *Ulysses* should end at the Pillars of Hercules. There Marion (Molly) Bloom, née Tweedy, was born and said yes to her first suitor, and there she returns with her memory in the last section of the book, ‘Penelope’. In the same episode she superimposes on Gibraltar Howth Head, the promontory on the north side of Dublin Bay where she accepted Leopold Bloom’s proposal. The very last Dantean echo in the novel, an allusion to the ‘candida rosa’ of *Par.* XXXI, 31–32, is heard in Molly’s climactic stream of consciousness as she asks herself, ‘shall I wear a white rose’.³⁶ But on the last page of *Ulysses*, Molly evokes Gibraltar with the same nostalgia Dante feels in describing his final vision, and there Molly’s question is picked up and completed: ‘or shall I wear a red’. There is a sense in which the concluding ‘Yes’ of

Ulysses signals the acceptance of others, of life, and of the universe in the same fashion as Dante's desire and will are moved, at the end, by the love that sets in motion the sun and the other stars. Molly begins – if that is the word – by celebrating nature, Creation, and God,³⁷ in other words, by looking both at the volume in which all is conflated and at 'ciò che per l'universo si squaderna'. She then moves on to Howth Head and the way she got Bloom to propose and to his understanding of women. Finally, she leaps on to the Rock of Gibraltar, the governor's house and the Spanish girls 'laughing in their shawls', and 'the Greeks the Jews and the Arabs and the devil knows who else from all the ends of Europe', the old castle, the handsome Moors, Ronda 'with the old windows of the posadas', the night 'we missed the boat at Algeciras the watchman going about serene with his lamp'. These are the 'accidenti e lor costume' of Dante's vision. But in the end come the 'sustanze', the substances: sensuous and immanent, yet framed by a crimson sea which recalls Dante's light glowing tawny in *Paradiso* XXXI. It is the sea that Ulysses crossed when he decided to sail beyond the sun – it is now the sea that envelops in its reddish halo Molly transfigured into a Flower of the Mountain and her first love-making, the ultimate ecstasy of *Ulysses*:

O and the sea the sea crimson sometimes like fire and the glorious sunsets and the figtrees in the Alameda gardens yes and all the queer little streets and pink and blue and yellow houses and the rosegardens and the jessamine and geraniums and cactuses and Gibraltar as a girl where I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes.³⁸

With *Finnegans Wake*, we enter a different dimension. On 9 February 1938 Joyce wrote to Ezra Pound apropos of the *Work in Progress* (later, *Finnegans Wake*) that he was completing, 'I don't think I ever worked so hard even at *Ulysses*. Galeotto è il libro e chi lo scrive.'³⁹ The use of the expression from Francesca's story in *Inferno* V is interesting here. Joyce knew quite well, of course, that what Dante meant was that the book of *Lancelot* and its author had the same function in bringing together Paolo and Francesca – and indeed in making him kiss her – that Galehaut had between Lancelot and Guinevere. He is obviously

using Dante's line to tell Pound that writing *Work in Progress* is an act of intermediation between literature and life, an act whereby literature prompts love and lust for itself. But another meaning is also conveyed by the word 'galeotto': prisoner. The writer of *Finnegans Wake* feels that he and his opus have been captives, galley-slaves, convicts: Joyce never worked so hard, he says, even at *Ulysses*.

The double-edged quality of this declaration is typical of the way Joyce dealt with Dante in *Finnegans Wake*. Later, he did in fact proclaim: 'May Father Dante forgive me, but I started from this technique of deformation to achieve a harmony that defeats our intelligence, as music does.'⁴⁰ Metamorphosis and distortion are the characteristics of his operation. In the *Wake*, he goes beyond *Ulysses*. He does not just imitate Dantean expressions, images, and scenes, as Pound and Eliot were doing; he mirrors and deforms Dante's poetics and linguistic theory, as Lucia Boldrini has shown. Beyond the 'anxiety of influence' that Dante undoubtedly produced in Joyce, a continuous dialogue is established between the two authors. For instance, Dante elaborates in the *Convivio*, and then again in the *Epistle to Cangrande*,⁴¹ a theory of allegory, the method of interpretation which is founded upon the 'polysemos', the stratification of the four literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical meanings. In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce invokes 'spreading in quadrilateral their azurespotted fine attractable nets',⁴² and maintains the possibility that every word 'will be bound over to carry three score and ten toptypical readings'.⁴³ He works by layers, piling different, often contrasting meanings on each single expression, name, scene, narrative sequence. The adjective 'toptypical' which is employed in this passage is modelled on 'top-secret' and contains 'top' (but also its opposite 'topsy-turvy'), besides 'optical', 'typical' (and probably 'typological'), 'psychical', 'physical' and perhaps even 'phthisical', i.e. subject to tuberculosis. 'If you can spot fifty', Joyce adds, 'I spy four more' – perhaps, indeed, Dante's four!⁴⁴ However, his purpose is basically different from Dante's. Dante's four meanings aim at giving a significant and ascending order to human experience. Joyce's 'polysemos' is the fruit of 'inclusion' and its end is disorder.⁴⁵

That is why Joyce picks up the circular pattern of hell, purgatory, and paradise, but turns it into a circular *structure* and *frame of mind*, relying, as Samuel Beckett was the first to point out, on Bruno and Vico. That is also why, as Beckett remarked, Joyce's *Work in Progress* is basically purgatorial:

Sin is an impediment to movement up the cone, and a condition of movement round the sphere. In what sense, then, is Mr Joyce's work purgatorial? In the absolute absence of the Absolute. Hell is the static lifelessness of unrelieved viciousness. Paradise the static lifelessness of unrelieved immaculation. Purgatory a flood of movement and vitality released by the conjunction of these two elements.⁴⁶

Joyce's reading of Dante in *Finnegans Wake* is, therefore, a 'raiding' whose model is Dante himself. 'The prouts who will invent a writing there', he says, 'ultimately is the poeta, still more learned, who discovered the raiding there originally.'⁴⁷ This explains why Dante appears on many pages with many different names subjected to irony, parody, and distortion. He is first and foremost one of the three-persons-in-one Trinity that Joyce would undoubtedly like to turn into a Cross by including himself – Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe: 'Which goathey and sheep-skeer they damnty well know'; 'that primed favourite continental poet, Daunty, Gouty, and Shopkeeper'.⁴⁸ But he is also a multitude of poetic personae and opera which all together incarnate Joyce's obsessive passion for the Florentine poet: 'Seudodanto'; 'And daunt you loagh if his vinesshanky's schwemmy'; 'Aleguerre comme alaguerre' (Alighieri); 'So as to be very dainty, if an isaspell, and so as to be verily dandy-dainty, if an ishibility'; 'Daintytrees, go dutch!'; 'turning up and fingering over the most dantellising peaches in the lingerous longerous book of the dark. Look at this passage about Galilleotto!'; 'Undante umoroso'; 'a daintical pair of accomplasses'; 'Donn Teague and Hurleg'; 'Smirky Dainty'; 'Skim over *Through Hell with the Papes* (mostly boys) by the divine comic Denti Alligator'; 'the tail, so mastrodantic, as you tell it'.⁴⁹

This is of course quite different from Yeats's 'chief imagination of Christendom' and Stephen Daedalus' early *Vita nuova*-like epiphanies. It is in a sense the (almost) inevitable conclusion in language-games of Stephen's own 'spiritual-heroic refrigerating apparatus, invented and patented in all countries by Dante Alighieri' at the *Portrait's* end. It offers us an image of Dante as 'divine comic', as the supreme 'Alligator' with 'mastrodantic tail' who keeps his jaws wide open to swallow the entire world and munch it with his immense 'denti', his fangs. But I have the impression that it is James Joyce himself, now, who identifies with Denti Alligator. At one point in the first episode of *Finnegans Wake's* Book III, Shaun proclaims:

my trifolium librotto, the authordux Book of Lief, would, if given to daylight, (I hold a most incredible faith about it) far exceed what that bogus bolshy of a shame, my soamheis brother, Gaoy Fecks, is conversant with in audible black and prink. Outragedy of poetscaids! *Acomedy of letters!* I have them all, tame, deep and harried, in my mine's I.⁵⁰

No question about the identity of the 'trifolium librotto', the Book of Life written by the 'orthodox' 'author' and 'dux' Dante: it is – 'outragedy of poetscaids!' – 'Acomedy of letters', the a-comical, letter-ridden *Comedy*. But Shaun has appropriated it (against his brother Shem, the artist) with 'a most incredible faith'. It is now his, and he has all its 'letters', 'tame, deep, and harried', in his 'mine's I'. Sixty pages later, Joyce is still musing about Dante and calls him 'the poeta, still more learned, who discovered the raiding there originally'.⁵¹ But shortly afterwards the scope of his personal ambition is revealed as fully as a hermetic book will allow. The oblique reference, here, is to the 'sesto tra cotanto senno' Dante uses to proclaim himself the only true 'poeta' after the great classical ones in *Inferno* IV:

what I (the person whomin I now am) did not do, how he to say essied anding how he was making errand andanding how he all locutey sunt, why did you, *my sexth best friend*, blabber always you would be so delated to back me, then *ersed irredent*, toppling Humphrey hugging Nephew, old beggelaut, designing such post sitting his night office?⁵²

A fucking irredentist, I would translate, but also an unredeemed asshole, an unsaved Irishman, and finally 'Irish Dante.' That is the title Joyce is now claiming for himself. Perhaps the last page of *Finnegans Wake* bears it out as in her final monologue Anna Livia Plurabelle evokes the leaves that have drifted from her, a pale shadow of the Sibyl's oracle lost in the wind, on the light leaves, in *Par.* XXXIII.⁵³

Samuel Beckett is reported as having said quite early on in his life: 'All I want to do is sit on my arse and fart and think about Dante.' I do not know how much of the two former occupations he pursued, but he was certainly, and constantly, engaged in the third during his entire career following what he called 'the Dante revelation' in his early twenties.⁵⁴ Having completed his studies in French, Italian, and English at Trinity College Dublin, Beckett worked for Joyce during the period when he was *lecteur d'anglais* at the École Normale in Paris. He was of course already familiar with Dante, but Joyce's obsession must have had an

effect on him. A poem of 1931, 'Text', shows this quite clearly. Its concluding fifteen lines are a rewriting of *Inf.* III, in a composition where the two central characters, Job and Tiresias, pronounce a *miserere* for the punishments they suffer. Beckett's Tiresias comes from *Inf.* XX, and one line towards the end of 'Text', 'pity is quick with death', contains an unmistakable echo of 'qui vive la pieta quand'è ben morta' of *Inf.* XX, 28. But halfway through the poem Beckett writes:

Shall I cease to lament
Being not as the flashsneezing
Non-suppliant airtight alligator?
Not so but perhaps
At the sight and the sound of
A screechy flatfooted Tuscany peacock's
Strauss fandango and recitative
Not forgetting
He stinks eternal.⁵⁵

Dante shows up first as the Alligator, one of Alighieri's personae in Joyce's *Work in Progress*, then as a peacock – the way he appeared in a dream, according to Boccaccio's *Trattatello*, to his own mother before he was born.⁵⁶ Beckett combines Joyce's inspiration with his own knowledge of Italian literature. In 1934, in a review of Papini's *Dante*, Beckett humorously remarked: 'who wants to love Dante? We want to READ Dante – for example, his imperishable reference (Paolo-Francesca episode) to the incompatibility of the two operations'.⁵⁷ In sum, there is no doubt that – with and without Joyce – he was thinking about the Tuscan peacock all the time.

Beckett's choice of purgatory as Joyce's dimension in the 1929 article, 'Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce', anticipates a similar choice of his own.⁵⁸ Not only 'in the absolute absence of the Absolute', but also in what Beckett calls the 'flux' – 'progression or retrogression, and an apparent consummation' – and the 'movement', 'non-directional' or 'multi-directional', where 'a step forward is, by definition, a step back'. 'On this earth that is Purgatory', Beckett says, purgatory appears as a 'flood of movement and vitality released by the conjunction of these two elements', 'the static lifelessness of unrelieved viciousness' that is hell, and 'the static lifelessness of unrelieved immaculation' that is Paradise.⁵⁹ Beckett's objective correlative for all this, the character from the *Comedy* that obsessively incarnates not so much the 'flood of movement'

as the 'static lifelessness', is Belacqua. His posture,⁶⁰ his *negligenza* and laziness, and his sceptical attitude towards the climbing of Mount Purgatory,⁶¹ recur in nearly all of Beckett's prose works⁶² and even in that modern – or postmodern – myth, *Waiting for Godot*.⁶³ But he appears most memorably (and most indirectly, of course) in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and in 'Dante and the Lobster', the first story of *More Pricks than Kicks* (itself extrapolated from the then unpublished *Dream*), where Belacqua is reincarnated as Belacqua Shuah, a Dublin student of Italian and of Dante, who muses on *Paradiso* II:

It was morning and Belacqua was stuck in the first of the canti in the moon. He was so bogged that he could move neither backward nor forward. Blissful Beatrice was there, Dante also, and she explained the spots on the moon to him. She shewed him in the first place where he was at fault, then she put up her own explanation. She had it from God, therefore he could rely on its being accurate in every particular. All he had to do was to follow her step by step. Part one, the refutation, was plain sailing. She made her point clearly, she said what she had to say without fuss or loss of time. But part two, the demonstration, was so dense that Belacqua could not make head or tail of it. The disproof, the reproof, that was patent. But then came the proof, a rapid shorthand of the real facts, and Belacqua was bogged indeed. Bored also, impatient to get on to Piccarda.⁶⁴

Beckett's knowledge of Dante is already quite detailed and possibly more advanced than Joyce's. In *Dream*, for instance, he clearly echoes both Benvenuto's and the Anonimo Fiorentino's comments on *Purgatorio* IV, as quoted by Paget Toynbee in his *Dictionary*.⁶⁵ Like Joyce, however, Beckett is metamorphosing Dante. His Belacqua is not simply a lazy, relaxed character, but rather a multifaceted modern version of the Dantean figure, not unlike the way in which T.S. Eliot's Prufrock is a modern reincarnation of Hamlet. On the existential and metaphysical level, Belacqua stands for sloth, melancholy, self-enclosure, indefinite waiting, and ever-procrastinating delay. In 'Dante and the Lobster', for example, he cannot bring himself to throw the lobster alive into the pot, but limits himself to thinking: 'Well ... it's a quick death, God help us all.' To which either he or the narrator adds the dreadful ending: 'It is not.'⁶⁶

In Beckett's imagination, all other Dantean characters – Virgil, Beatrice, Sordello, Tiresias – succumb to Belacqua. In the last story of *More Pricks than Kicks*, 'Draff', the Belacqua posture wins over both Malacoda's 'six cylinder hearse' and Ulysses' black 'cruiser'.⁶⁷ In fact, for

Beckett, Dante's Ulysses is, together with Dante himself as character, Belacqua's constant antagonist. In *Molloy*, for instance, Ulysses appears together with the seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher, Arnold Geulincx, one of the foremost exponents of Occasionalism:

I who had loved the image of old Geulincx, dead young, who left me free, on the black boat of Ulysses, to crawl towards the East, along the deck. That is a great measure of freedom, for him who has not the pioneering spirit. And from the poop, poring upon the wave, a sadly rejoicing slave, I follow with my eyes the proud and futile wave. Which, as it bears me from no fatherland away, bears me onward to no shipwreck.⁶⁸

The ferocious irony of this passage – which turns the strong geographical movement towards the West of *Inf.* XXVI eastward and denies both the flight from home and the final shipwreck – explodes the story of Dante's Ulysses. In *The Unnamable* the very same operation is performed on Ulysses by Belacqua. This time, the focus is the uncertain 'I' of the narrative. Belacqua comes first, with his posture:

I, of whom I know nothing. I know my eyes are open, because of the tears that pour from them unceasingly. I know I am seated, my hands on my knees, because of the pressure against my rump, against the soles of my feet, against the palms of my hands, against my knees. (Against my palms the pressure is of my knees, against my knees of my palms. But what is it that presses against my rump, against the soles of my feet? I don't know.)⁶⁹

There is absolutely nothing Ulysses can do against this. His position is one of pure gnoseological madness (not, it will be noted, ethical foolhardiness):

'I. Who might that be? The galley-man, bound for the Pillars of Hercules, who drops his sweep under cover of night and crawls between the thwarts, towards the rising sun, unseen by the guard, praying for storm? Except that I've stopped praying for anything. (No, no, I'm still a suppliant. I'll get over it, between now and the last voyage, on this leaden sea. It's like the other madness, the mad wish to know, to remember, one's transgressions.) I won't be caught at that again, I'll leave it to this year's damned.'⁷⁰

Molloy follows in Leopold Bloom's wake, but – so to speak – with Belacqua's spirit of delaying things: he will 'get over' Ulysses' enterprise, between now and that last voyage which is but death. He will 'leave' 'the other madness' 'to this year's damned'.

At times, reading Beckett is excruciating. A step forward always leads you a step back, as he said of Joyce's purgatorial movement. In *Textes pour rien*, for instance, we find ourselves confronted with the familiar Belacqua posture rather early on.⁷¹ Then, much later, we encounter a passage that comes as a surprise:

Et je suis tranquille, j'y irais, à l'issue, tôt ou tard, si je la disais là, quelque part, les autres mots me viendraient, tôt ou tard, et de quoi pouvoir y aller, et y aller, et passer à travers, et voir les belles choses que porte le ciel, et revoir les étoiles.⁷²

There is no doubt, in spite of the uncertainty with which this sentence is laden, that it contains, as its allusion to the last lines of *Inferno* indicates, some kind of hope, as the 'cose belle che porta 'l ciel' and the 'stelle' are now glimpsed. Yet we have to remember that the round hole through which Dante looks again at the night sky leads him but to purgatory – where, with Joyce and Beckett, we have always been. The sequence is exactly the same more than ten years later in *Le Dépeupleur*, which opens with Dante's smile at Belacqua and then goes on to evoke nothing less than the last line of the *Comedy*: 'Les autres rêvent d'une trappe dissimulée au centre du plafond donnant accès à une cheminée au bout de laquelle brilleraient encore le soleil et les autres étoiles.'⁷³ But the trap that should give access to a path at the end of which the sun and the other stars would shine forth is a mere dream. And besides, as Corinna Lonergan noted apropos of *Endgame*, 'there are no stars'.⁷⁴ Or perhaps, as Molloy would put it, 'And don't come talking at me of the stars, they look all the same to me, yes, I cannot read the stars, in spite of my astronomical studies'.⁷⁵

Yet Samuel Beckett kept a copy of Dante at hand next to what would become his deathbed in December 1989. It is a fitting conclusion to a century in which those Irish writers who became Western classics have confronted the greatest Italian poet.⁷

NOTES

- 1 A translation into Irish is now available: *An Choiméide Dhiaga Dainté Ailigiéirí*, trans. by Pádraig de Brún (Dublin: An Clóchomhar, 1997).
- 2 See David Wallace, 'Dante in English', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 281–304.

- 3 William Butler Yeats, 'Ego Dominus Tuus', in *The Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 180–83. The best edition now available, because of the commentary, is William Butler Yeats, *L'opera poetica*, ed. by Anthony L. Johnson, trans. by Ariodante Marianni, introduction and life by Piero Boitani (Milan: Mondadori, 2005). On Yeats and Dante, see Steve Ellis, *Dante and English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 140–70.
- 4 Exodus 20. 2.
- 5 Dante Alighieri, *Vita nuova*, III, 3–6, ed. by Domenico De Robertis (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1980), pp. 37–39.
- 6 William Butler Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 190.
- 7 Dante Alighieri, *Conv.* III, viii, 1–2, and 'Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona', 55–88. The edition quoted is that of Cesare Vasoli (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1988). See also *Conv.* IV, xx, 9, and Giorgio Melchiori, *The Whole Mystery of Art* (London: Routledge, 1960), p. 13.
- 8 Yeats, 'Ego Dominus Tuus', lines 11–17.
- 9 *Ibid.*, lines 19–22.
- 10 *Ibid.*, lines 39–40.
- 11 Shakespeare in *Lapis Lazuli*, *An Acre of Grass*, *Statues*, *Bronze Head*; Michelangelo in *An Acre of Grass* and *Under Ben Bulben*, IV.
- 12 Like Shelley in the unfinished *Triumph of Life*, and like Eliot in *Little Gidding* II.
- 13 Yeats, 'Cuchulain Comforted', in *Collected Poems*, pp. 395–96.
- 14 Yeats writes that the 'Shroud that seemed to have authority' let fall a bundle of linen: the phrase is close to *Inf.* IV, 113, but perhaps mediated by Chaucer, *House of Fame*, lines 2157–8: 'he semed for to be | A man of gret auctorite'.
- 15 Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), p. 113.
- 16 Stanislaus Joyce, 'The Background to *Dubliners*', *The Listener*, 25 March 1954, pp. 526–27. The best comprehensive work on Joyce and Dante is Mary T. Reynolds, *Joyce and Dante: The Shaping Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
- 17 The two works belong to the same years. The *Portrait* was composed in 1914–15 and published in 1916.
- 18 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. by Seamus Deane (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 187.
- 19 Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 162; *Par.* XXXIII, 133–36. The whole passage in the *Portrait* is worth quoting: 'But he could no longer disbelieve in the reality of love, since God Himself had loved his individual soul with divine love from all eternity. Gradually, as his soul was enriched with spiritual knowledge, he saw the whole world forming one vast symmetrical expression of God's power and love. Life became a divine gift for every moment and sensation of which, were it even the sight of a single leaf hanging on the twig of a tree, his soul should praise and thank the Giver. The world for all its solid substance and complexity no longer existed for his soul save as a theorem of divine power and love and universality. So entire and unquestionable was this sense of the divine meaning in all nature granted to his soul that he could scarcely under-

- stand why it was in any way necessary that he should continue to live. Yet that was part of the divine purpose and he dared not question its use, he above all others who had sinned so deeply and so foully against the divine purpose.' The edition of Dante's *Comedy* used in the present essay is that by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, 3 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1991–97).
- 20 Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, pp. 235–56.
 - 21 Seamus Deane in his commentary to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 329.
 - 22 Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, pp. 274–75.
 - 23 *Ulysses*, ed. by Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 133.
 - 24 Quoted by Mary T. Reynolds, *Joyce and Dante*, p. 208.
 - 25 Franco Moretti, *Opere Mondo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1994); in English, *Modern Epic: The World-Systems from Goethe to Garcia Marquez* (London: Verso, 1996).
 - 26 These should correspond to the 'false tales' Odysseus tells Eumaeus in *Odyssey* XIV, 134–547.
 - 27 Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 585.
 - 28 Ibid.
 - 29 Dante's Ulysses and Milton's Lycidas share at least the expression 'marin suolo', *Inf.* XXVI, 129: 'watery floor', 'Lycidas', line 167.
 - 30 Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 585.
 - 31 T.S. Eliot, 'Ulysses: Order and Myth', *The Dial*, 75 (1923), pp. 480–83.
 - 32 Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 670.
 - 33 Ibid., p. 680.
 - 34 Ibid.
 - 35 Ibid.
 - 36 Ibid., p. 731.
 - 37 Ibid.
 - 38 Ibid., p.732.
 - 39 *Letters of James Joyce*, ed. by Stuart Gilbert, Richard Ellmann, 3 vols (New York: Viking, 1966), III, p. 415.
 - 40 Quoted by Lucia Boldrini, *Joyce, Dante and the Poetics of Literary Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 3. Boldrini's book is the best work on the relationship between *Finnegans Wake* and Dante.
 - 41 With notable differences between the two works, and allowing that the *Epistle* is, as Joyce believed, authentic.
 - 42 James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 3rd edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 477, line 21 (from now on cited in the form 477: 21).
 - 43 Ibid., 20: 14–15.
 - 44 Ibid., 10: 31.
 - 45 See Boldrini, *Joyce, Dante and the Poetics of Literary Relations*, pp. 26–64.
 - 46 Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. by Ruby Cohn (New York: Grove Press, 1984), p. 33. Needless to say, this is a metaphorical view of purgatory, where (in the Catholic conception), the Absolute is very much present. The souls who purge themselves in Dante's purgatory,

- including Beckett's beloved Belacqua, are saved and destined to end up in Paradise.
- 47 Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 482: 31–32.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 344: 5 and 539: 5.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 47: 19; 229: 4; 233: 30; 238: 2–4; 244: 2; 251: 23–24; 269: 11; 295: 27; 337: 30; 360: 8; 440: 5–7; 510: 3.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 425: 20–25; italics mine.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 482: 32–33.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 484: 5–10, italics mine.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 628: 6.
- 54 The letter from Beckett to Roger Little in which he mentions the 'Dante revelation' is now deposited in Trinity College Library, Dublin. The best works on the Beckett/Dante relationship are Jean-Pierre Ferrini, *Dante et Beckett* (Paris: Hermann, 2003); Daniela Caselli, *Beckett's Dantes: Intertextuality in the Fiction and Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); John Fletcher, 'Beckett's Debt to Dante', *Nottingham French Studies*, 4.1 (1965), pp. 41–52; Michael Robinson, 'From Purgatory to Inferno: Beckett and Dante Revisited', *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 5 (1979), pp. 69–82; Wallace Fowlie, 'Dante and Beckett', in *Dante among the Moderns*, ed. by Stuart Y. McDougal (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), pp. 128–52; Gabriele Frasca, 'Dante in Beckett', in *Cascando: Tre studi su Samuel Beckett* (Naples: Liguori, 1988), pp. 11–39; Mary Bryden, 'No Stars Without Stripes: Beckett and Dante', *The Romanic Review*, 87.4 (1996), pp. 541–56; Corinna Salvadori Lonergan, "'E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle" – But There Are No Stars: Dante in Beckett's *Endgame*', *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies*, 5 (1997), pp. 277–91; Emilia Di Rocco, 'Beckett e Dante', *Strumenti critici*, 3 (2005), pp. 403–22.
- 55 Text in Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett, Poet & Critic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).
- 56 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Opere in versi, Corbaccio, Trattatello*, ed. by Pier Giorgio Ricci (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1965), p. 572.
- 57 Beckett, *Disjecta*, p. 81.
- 58 The rhythm of dots in the title is as significant as the essay itself. Critics have detected in Beckett's 'purgatory' a distinct infernal undertone. The question really hinges on whether there is ultimately any hope in Beckett's world. I have the impression that in his work nihilism is as uncertain as everything else.
- 59 Beckett, *Disjecta*, p. 33.
- 60 *Purg.* IV, 106–08: 'E un di lor, che mi sembiava lasso, l sedeva e abbracciava le ginocchia, l tenendo 'l viso giù tra esse basso'.
- 61 *Purg.* IV, 127: 'O frate, andar in su che porta?'
- 62 From *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932) to *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934), from *Murphy* (1938) to *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies* (1951), and *The Unnamable* (1953), all the way down to *Le Dépeupleur* (*The Lost Ones*, 1970–72) and *Company* (1980). See Jean-Pierre Ferrini, 'Inventaire des principaux emprunts de Beckett à Dante', in his *Dante et Beckett*, pp. 177–221.

- 63 Beckett, *En attendant Godot* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1973), p. 98 (the allusion is to Belacqua's posture). The French edition of 1948 preceded the English one.
- 64 Beckett, *More Pricks than Kicks* (London: Calder, 1993), p. 9.
- 65 Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, ed. by Eoin O'Brien and Edith Fournier (London: Calder, 1993), p. 122. See Ferrini, *Dante et Beckett*, pp. 192–93.
- 66 Beckett told B. MacGovern that the ending 'might read [...] more Dantesque as follows: "Well, thought Belacqua, it's a quick death, God help us all. Like hell it is"'. Quoted by Christopher Ricks, *Beckett's Dying Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 31.
- 67 Beckett, *More Pricks than Kicks*, p. 198.
- 68 Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, in *The Beckett Trilogy* (London: Pan, 1979), p. 48.
- 69 Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *The Beckett Trilogy*, p. 279.
- 70 *Ibid.*, p. 309.
- 71 Samuel Beckett, *Nouvelles et Textes pour rien* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1974), p. 122.
- 72 *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- 73 Samuel Beckett, *Le Dépeupleur* (Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1993), p. 17.
- 74 See Salvadori Lonergan, "E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle" (cited in note 54).
- 75 Beckett, *Molloy*, in *The Beckett Trilogy*, p. 56.
- 76 One would of course have to examine Seamus Heaney's relationship to Dante, poised between the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. I do so in the essay 'Ersed Irredent', forthcoming in a volume in honour of Amilcare Iannucci entitled *Dantesque Dialogues*.

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