

Writing in the Slipstream of the Wildean Trauma

JOYCE, BUCK MULLIGAN AND HOMOPHOBIA RECONSIDERED

Although Joyce was interested in broad

definitions of sexuality and in perverse sexuality (even relatively “normal” sexuality in Joyce borders on the “perverse”) (78-88), and made use of the more liberal sexological discourses available to him, especially in Havelock Ellis’s new enquiries into sexual perversity in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897), he nonetheless chose to work within the “compulsory heterosexuality” paradigm and to back away from a clear interest in homosexual expressions of sexuality. In Wilde’s terms, Joyce was a “mulierast,” though it is perhaps somewhat of an overstatement to claim, as Brivic does, that he was a “doctrinaire heterosexual” (Brivic 20). The abatement of homosexual panic I discern in the fiction has much to do with Joyce’s progressive understanding of the uses of carnival and performance for enacting joco-seriousness. This can be tracked via his representation of homosexuality and homosociality and through an analysis of how references to Wilde are deployed in *Ulysses*. These manoeuvres, far from being “marginal” to the fiction as David Norris claims (358), illustrate not just how careful Joyce was to protect himself from accusations of homosexuality, which, as Zack Bowen rightly points out, his Shakespeare theory in *Scylla and Charybdis* could seem to invite (113). I will also argue that although the dominant pattern in Joyce is that his representation of homosexuality almost always serves to reinscribe heterosexuality, nonetheless, his fictional sexology is broader in its conception and representation, more discriminating than Richard Brown’s treatment of perversity and limitation of it to Onanism would suggest (78-88), and operational less in the realms of hints, the oblique and paranoia than Lamos suggests (*Deviant Modernism: Sexual and Textual Errancy in T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust* 135-69). Further, I suggest that implicit in Joyce’s earliest references to Wilde in 1909 were the seeds of a more liberal understanding of what Wilde’s trial meant, and that this understanding plays out most sympathetically in the Circe chapter of *Ulysses* and perhaps implicitly in *Ithaca*.

In many ways Joyce, like Wilde, teased the censorship lobby and relished the opprobrium heaped upon him, spurred on by the support and tub-thumping of such as Ezra Pound. The *Little Review* pornography case over the relatively innocuous, indeed artful, *Nausicaa* episode in no way abated his intention to be published and to be read, nor did it stem the transgressive nature of what he was writing. The most sexually radical chapter was undoubtedly Circe

with its carnivalesque dramatization of gender inversion and the polymorphous perverse – from shoe, foot and posterior fetishism, which strategically stops just short of anal penetration (Lamos 346), passions for kid gloves, cross-dressing, coprophilia, various acts of sado-masochism (including being ridden, having one’s face sat upon, and tight-lacing). However, Circe, although it hints at sodomy, stops short of it: Bloom’s “anal, even sodomitic desires are always heterosexually framed” (Lamos, “Signatures of the Invisible: Homosexual Secrecy and Knowledge in *Ulysses*” 348). This omission of homosexual practices from the list of “perversions” is, I shall argue, significant.

Circe’s representations owe more to Krafft-Ebing’s catalogue of “degeneracy” in *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) than the more moderate, less pathological, normalizing account of Havelock Ellis’s *Sexual Inversion* (1896; 1897 in English) (Mondimore 34-51). To be writing in the wake of the Wilde trials, as he was, left discernible traces in a writer who on so many other fronts courageously rejoiced in transgression. So, the question to be answered is this: was the wilfully transgressive Joyce, writing in the wake of the Wilde trials of 1895 in fact seriously inhibited by them? I argue that the trauma of the trials left discernible traces in a writer who on so many other fronts courageously rejoiced in transgressions of all varieties. I further intend to argue that Joyce implicitly dialogued with Wilde throughout his writing life, not only in elaborating his theory of the relationship between biography and writing (in much the same way as he reconstructed the relationship between Shakespeare’s life and art, and his own life and art), but also in the way he plays with the notion of the dramatic/theatrical in his fiction. Between 1909 and 1922, one can discern an abatement of homosexual panic, but the case is necessarily a nuanced one.

Joyce’s 1909 essay on Wilde’s *Salomé* for *Il Piccolo della Sera* reveals both how attractive Wilde’s transgressive aesthetic was to Joyce, and how conflicted he was about Wilde. There is both admiration for his courage and a sense of his tragedy, but also pity and condescension, and perhaps moral judgment. Joyce is, however, careful to distance himself from the rabble’s “puritanical” “howl of joy” that greeted “his fall” (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 203). Curiously, for someone who so insistently critiqued both religion and nationalism, Joyce aligns Wilde with both Christ¹ and the Oscar of Irish legend (son of Ossian and nephew of Fingal) “who was

treacherously killed by the hand of his host as he sat at table” (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 203). What he admired about Wilde were his “partly original” theory of Beauty (which he claimed was derivative of Pater and Ruskin) and the “brilliant comedies” (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 203). His sense of outrage is directed more at those who brought him down than at Wilde for his behaviour. Implicitly, in Joyce’s essay, he is a figure of Christ crucified, a martyr for his art (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 205).

In Joyce’s mind, in this essay, Wilde’s behaviour, as distinct from his aesthetic, embodied an hereditary pathology: his was a “strange problem,” and he implies that “heredity” (the mother appears to be blamed² rather than the father) as well as “the epileptic tendency of his nervous system” (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 203) explained what was, for Joyce, a malady, an unhappy “mania” (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 202). Joyce does not name Wilde’s homosexuality as such (nor does he use the other possible “modern” psychological/medical label, “inversion”). Rather, he implies that it was an illness and the product of a social system, the “logical and inescapable product of the Anglo-Saxon college and university system” (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 204). This is in strong contrast to the press practices of the day which reviled Wilde for attempting to subvert the “wholesome, manly, simple ideals of English life” (Dollimore 240).

Like the most liberal sexology of his day (Ellis and Symonds), Joyce’s analysis is characteristically directed at a social system: homosexuality as a practice he saw as a specifically English institution (forget that he had experienced it at first hand in the Jesuit boarding school Clongowes). He implies that the “stone-throwers” (the language is intriguingly new-testament-inspired) were not “spotless” and that the social inability to name and deal with the practice is part of the pathology. One wonders if Joyce knew of the close proximity of Prime Minister Rosebery to the case, and the theory that Wilde was sacrificed to protect the Prime Minister’s closet life from the vengeful Marquess of Queensbury.

At other points in the essay, he condemns the terminology of Wilde’s accusers, in particular, the descriptor “perverted monster” (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 204); he refuses to judge whether Wilde was guilty or otherwise (but never actually charged with) of what he was accused of (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 203-4), and refers to him as a “scapegoat” (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 204), the figurehead of a movement numbering 20,000 in London alone (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 204).³ That the English educational establishment with its secrecy and restrictions was pathological (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 204) was a view propounded by sexologists of his own time, especially Ellis and Symonds (37, 36-103).

Joyce reads Wilde in terms of paradoxes which would do Wilde himself proud. Arguing that the English response to the trial bespeaks a troubled social conscience, that of England itself, he shifts the ground of the argument in the penultimate paragraph, no longer using arguments drawn from the medical paradigm:

... the pulse of Wilde’s art [is] ~ sin. He deceived himself into believing that he was the bearer of good news of neo-paganism to an enslaved people. His own distinctive qualities, the qualities perhaps

of his race – keenness, generosity, and a sexless intellect – he placed at the service of a theory of beauty which, according to him, was to bring back the Golden Age and the joy of the world’s youth. ... at its very base is the truth inherent in the soul of Catholicism: that man cannot reach the divine heart except through that sense of separation and loss called sin (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 204-5).

One can, I think, accuse Joyce of a measure of projection here (Deane pp.31-2), especially in relation to the claim about Wilde’s neo-pagan agenda. One would be less surprised if the claim had been that the sense of sin was the butt of Wilde’s satire rather than its driving force. The use of the term “sexless” is another marker of homosexual panic on Joyce’s part, as is his insistence that Wilde’s project was an exclusively aesthetic one, that he was “the singer of the divinity of joy” who “closed the book of his spirit’s rebellion with an act of spiritual dedication” (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 203). Joyce’s position is riven with contradictions as he talks of Wilde: he accuses him of not naming his project, but fails to do so himself. He rejects moral judgments of Wilde and yet his analysis moves inexorably from psycho/medical discourse into religious discourse and imagery. Joyce endorses with approbation Wilde’s rejoinder in the *Scots Observer* (12 July 1890): “What Dorian Gray’s sin was no one says and no one knows. Anyone who recognizes it has committed it” (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 203). The epistemological brinkmanship of his periphrasis, and refusal to name homosexuality, is breathtaking, and bespeaks, I suggest, Joyce’s sense of the danger of being open about homosexuality in the period after Wilde’s trial.

Whether Joyce disapproved of Wilde for his prison conversion (brutally exacted recantation?) or endorsed it is, in this essay, ambiguous: “In his last book, *De Profundis*, he kneels before a gnostic Christ, ... his true soul, trembling, timid, and saddened, through the mantle of Heliogabalus” (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 205). Joyce’s reference (following an allusion in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*), is to the Roman emperor, Elagabalus or Heliogabalus, also known as Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, a by-word for excess and debauchery, and in particular for his interest in young boys, in the late nineteenth century and the subject of many works of art by artists of the Decadent movement in the 1890s and first decade of twentieth century.⁴ Yeats’s account of Joyce’s discussion with him about Wilde’s deathbed conversion, however, if accurate, makes Joyce’s disappointment about Wilde’s capitulation to orthodoxy quite clear (Ellmann 102).

The Wilde trauma leaves clear traces in how Joyce links potentially homosexual behaviour with violence (M. Norris 29-30), and in the almost knee-jerk phobic prohibition of homosexuality in *Dubliners* and *Portrait*. The “queer old josser” from “An Encounter” fantasises in a voice that ambivalently mixes cajolery with sadism:

His mind, as if magnetised again by his speech, seemed to circle slowly round and round its new centre. He said that when boys were that kind they ought to be whipped and well whipped. When a boy was rough and unruly there was nothing would do him any good but a good sound whipping. A slap on the hand or a box on the ear was no good: what he wanted was to get a nice warm whipping. (*Dubliners* 19).

Similarly in recollecting the smuggling and pandybat incidents in *Portrait*, Stephen’s mind dwells obsessively on how

homosexuality is to be read, on his own impulses to same-sex desire, and its fear-filled association with punishment. His own misprision that the prefect of studies" firm touch signified friendly, even sensuous contact, but delivered violence, shocks his sensibility (Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* 52, 53) but not before it registers a "sexualized frisson" (Valente 174). More tellingly, though not coupled with violence, the naked bodies of the bathing boys of Ch. 4, for all their homosocial bravura, are described by Stephen as "corpse-like," "repellant," "characterless": "It was a pain to see them and a swordlike pain to see the signs of adolescence that made repellant their pitiable nakedness" (Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* 182).

The focaliser and owner of the male gaze for this un-erotic and quite threatening vision is, of course, a heavily ironised Stephen Daedalus, whose hydrophobia and inability to form relationships are comically neurotic. While it is an insistent manoeuvre on Joyce's part to have Stephen explore his troubling same-sex feelings, these scenes always cross-cut to heterosexual scenes. It is a repeated structural principle in both *Portrait* and *Ulysses*. The bathing boys scene is a good example of this: it is followed by the aestheticised vision of the bird-girl (*Portrait* 185-6). Joyce comically undermines the idealised and de-carnalised encounter with the bird-girl by having Stephen engage in ejaculatory emissions, both of a verbal and embodied kind (*Portrait* 187). Stephen's repression of latent homosexual impulses, and the pull to normative heterosexuality by Joyce, are undeniable and insistent structural features of this narrative and of *Ulysses*, but so is the irony, and it is intriguingly oblique in *Portrait*. Because of the decadent, Paterian (Riquelme 117) (dare I say Wildean?) prose, both in this episode and in the next, it is possible for readers not to notice the embodied nature of Stephen's sexuality. Joyce may signify Stephen's trajectory as heterosexual, but he comically reveals the limitations of Stephen's narcissism in his masturbatory act, which is rarely if ever noted as such by critics,⁵ perhaps because of its Paterian periphrases. Riquelme, for example, reads the passage innocently (117). Stephen's auto-eroticism is figured in images which avoid naming the activity in train and in language which would do a late nineteenth century decadent/symboliste proud. Similarly, his villanelle in Chapter 5 sublimates the wet dream inspired by jealousy over a female friend whom he perceives as flirting with a priest (*Portrait* 235). Joyce certainly did not apply the strictures he proffered in his article on *Salomé* to his own writing: sexuality, both heterosexuality and homosexuality, is a central subject in *Portrait* but is unspeakable. Joyce does not write about it plainly or realistically. Stephen's response to Cranly's "thrill[ing]" touch (Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* 269), and his intimacy and honesty with him (259-69), can also be read as an index of his character's latent homosocial and homosexual feelings. His rejection of friendship, even the prospect of "a friend, more even than the noblest and truest friend a man ever had" (presumably male rather than female) and assertion of the essential loneliness of his soul constitute effectively an unnatural flight from his own social nature. Sheldon Brivic, in connection with Athy's riddle (Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* 23), notes that such mysteries imply "Love that dare not speak its name,"

the circumlocution linked in Stephen's mind with Wilde, and it was, of course, notoriously used by the Marquess of Queensbury against Wilde (33).

If obliquity and homophobia are the hallmarks of the early fiction, the complex figure of Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses*, in so many ways identified with Wilde, marks a sea-change. Bowen identifies twenty references to Wilde in *Ulysses* (105), many linked with Buck Mulligan, and implicitly, there is engagement not only at the psychic and psychosexual level on Joyce's part but also an implicit debate with Wilde's gender and aesthetic program, especially around the narrowness of the aesthetes' notion of artifice. My argument is that Joyce's characterisation of Buck, a composite that owes as much to Oscar as to Oliver St. John Gogarty, liberates the comedian in Joyce and results in fascinating changes in the representation of homosociality.

Buck Mulligan bears more than a superficial resemblance to the Oscar Wilde: "[s]tately" and "plump," he shares not only his corpulence but also his taste in exotic colours and "dandified" (Weir 222) clothes. His dressing-gown is theatrically yellow, as is his primrose vest, Joyce being certainly aware of Wilde's cult of the sunflower (Joyce, *Critical Writings* 202). Buck also has a fine line in epigram and banter, a subversive wit, focussed on rejecting Irish nationalism, clericalism and Victorian prudery in matters of sexuality. These were also projects close to Joyce's (and Stephen's) heart, though enacted quite differently in his prose. Buck's self-mocking high-camp performance, "Tripping and sunny like the Buck himself" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 1.42),⁵ enables a reinscription of homosexual performance which is quite different from the darker version in *Portrait*. It is a discourse that may owe something to Ellis's and Symonds' depiction of, and indeed Wilde's enactment of, the hypersensitive, hyper-intelligent aesthetic homosexual with a "tendency to dramatic [and artistic] aptitude[s]" (Ellis and Symonds 123). This particular class of aesthete Ellis claims constituted 66% of his sample. However, his identification of the condition in congenital nervousness approaching that of hysterical women would seem more aptly applied to Stephen than Buck (Ellis and Symonds 122-3). It is perhaps worth noting in passing that even the extrovert Buck who is so closely aligned with homosexual performance is given a very different gender script in *Oxen of the Sun*: that of founder and chief provider of services at Omphalos, the "national fertilising farm" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 14.684-5). The question arises: is this stratagem an assertion of bisexuality, or the masquerade required of homosexuals post-Wilde?

How, then, is Buck different from Wilde? Less "hyperborean" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 1:92) than Wilde, the fictional Buck speaks in a language that owes more to Aristotle than Plato and that is morally toned. It is an utterly different lexicon. Joyce has him recycle the same telling accusations that Cranly makes in Chapter 5 of *Portrait*. In that scene, Stephen is momentarily erotically stirred by Cranly's touch ("thrilled by his touch"; *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* 269), but also challenged morally by his intense, hard-nosed interrogation of his behaviour towards this mother. By contrast with Cranly's approach, what Buck enables is an

effective unpicking of the Catholic bases of Stephen's guilt when he says with a brutality which owes nothing to Wilde and everything to Joyce's revolutionary modernist aesthetic of naming the reality in all its ordinariness and physicality:

You saw only your mother die. I see them pop off every day in the Mater and Richmond and cut up into tripes in the dissecting room. It's a beastly thing and nothing else. It simply doesn't matter. You wouldn't kneel down to pray for your mother on her deathbed when she asked you. Why? Because you have the cursed jesuit strain in you, only it's injected the wrong way.... Humour her till it's over. You crossed her last wish in death and yet you sulk with me because I don't whinge like some hired mute from Lalouette's. Absurd! I suppose I did say it. I didn't mean to offend the memory of your mother (Joyce, *Ulysses* 1.204-15).

This manoeuvre on Buck's part does not bear fruit until later in the day (in the Circe episode), but it is effective in achieving a transformation in Stephen's psyche because Buck's is an embodied way of looking at death, voiced by a character who is represented as a medical man in training. Buck's medical discourse enables Stephen to think in other than moral discourses, thereby overcoming his guilt and repelling his mother's ghost in Circe: "They say I killed you, mother. ... Cancer did it, not I. Destiny" (15. 4187-8). The dialogical collision between Stephen's agonised inner thoughts and Buck's essentially principled realist stance, which is simultaneously a game ("Why don't you play them as I do?"; 1.506) makes for high drama in Telemachus, with Buck being cast as jester, mocker and blasphemer who articulates psychic truths whereas Stephen is neutotic, introverted, misogynistic, living in an inner world which rarely corresponds with the performance he enacts in his social relations. Buck's homosociality is represented as far less threatening to Stephen than that of the young bathing boys in *Portrait*. Buck may say that he has escaped from, or in a punningly opposite sense, derives from the limitations of paradox ("We have grown out of Wilde and paradoxes"; 1.554), but this does not stop him from clowning theatrically and producing the epigrammatic utterances on which his performance as a wit depends. Subversive mockery, clowning theatricality, has its serious uses for Stephen, but also for Joyce.

Buck, the epitome of the wit, could almost have escaped from a comedy of manners by Wilde. But Joyce's narrative method is different from Wilde's: Joyce creates an illusion of "depth psychology" by contrasting the drama of social surfaces (what people say and do) with people's inner thoughts. This is even more potent in the dramatisation/characterisation of Stephen than in that of Bloom or Molly. The use of the narrative technique of free indirect discourse, by which an inner voice is created in the third person and using the colloquial structures and vocabulary of speech, is crucial to the following passage, and another in which I track Stephen's renegotiations of his same-sex feelings.

The representation of Buck's naked wet body⁶ stands in marked contrast to the bathing boys of *Portrait*: having exacted Stephen's key and a money for a pint, Buck engages in mock prayer:

Stephèn threw two pennies on the soft heap. Dressing, undressing. Buck Mulligan erect, with joined hands before him, said solemnly:
- He who stealeth from the poor lendeth to the Lord. Thus spake Zarathustra.
His plump body plunged.

...
A voice, sweettoned and sustained, called to him from the sea. Turning the curve he waved his hand. It called again. A sleek brown head, a seal's far out on the water, round. (1.725-9, 741-3).

Although Stephen is racked by ambivalence in relation to Buck, what is useful to Stephen is a new sense that he and Buck share a fellowship in intellectual and social outlawry, their mutual pride in apostasy (symbolised by the allusion to Nietzsche and by the mockery of religion). This sense of kinship serves to moderate Stephen's homosexual anxiety: Stephen experiences Buck's voice as "sweettoned and sustained," very different from those of the bathing boys of *Portrait*, with which it demands to be compared. Buck is as at home in the sea, as a seal. The sea is, of course, the element Stephen most fears, partly because of the associative links between watery urinals and smuggling boys and the ocean and its symbolic resonances with a mother who cannot be thought of by Stephen without guilt.

Buck, like Wilde, has a project. He expresses a desire to use Stephen to "Hellenise" the island,⁷ and an intention to use Stephen's literary abilities to achieve it. It is possible, as Seidman suggests, that he uses the term in Arnold's sense of de-Hebraise (to question the "habits and discipline" of a revealed dogmatic truth). Challenging Catholic hegemony is also a possible reading. However, the context (Stephen's memory of Cranly's arm, (1.169), an allusion to the episode discussed above, suggests the Decadents' and Aesthetes' mission to liberate a culture seen to be in thrall to Victorian morality and its repressions, both aesthetically and sensually. Joyce's project was, of course, a sympathetic one but not identical and what Stephen teaches himself in Chapter 9, by observing Buck's performance, is "[t]he light touch". The context here is a discussion of Wilde's essay on the identity of Shakespeare's patron, Mr. W. H. Again, the dynamic quality of the prose is noteworthy, its fluid movement from dialogue in the library to Stephen's interiority and the mismatch between the two. Stephen comments wryly to himself in an inner manoeuvre which manifests the opposite of his real feeling:

— The most brilliant of all is that story of Wilde's, Mr Best said, lifting his brilliant notebook. That Portrait of Mr W. H. where he proves that the sonnets were written by a Willie Hughes, a man all hues.

— For Willie Hughes, is it not? the quaker librarian asked. Or Hughie Wills? Mr William Himself. W. H.: who am I?

— I mean, for Willie Hughes, Mr Best said, amending his gloss easily. Of course it's all paradox, don't you know, Hughes and hues and hues and hues, the colour, but it's so typical the way he works it out. It's the very essence of Wilde, don't you know. The light touch. *His glance touched their faces lightly as he smiled, a blond ephèbe. Tame essence of Wilde [my emphasis]. You're darned witty. Three drams of usquebaugh you drank with Dan Deasy's ducats. How much did I spend? O, a few shillings. For a plump of pressmen. Humour wet and dry. Wit. You would give your five wits for youth's proud livery he pranks in. Lineaments of gratified desire. There be many mo. Take her for me. In pairing time. Jove, a cool ruttime send them. Yea, turtledove her. Eve. Naked wheatbellied sin. A snake coils her, fang in's kiss.*

—Do you think it is only a paradox? the quaker librarian was asking. The mocker is never taken seriously when he is most serious. They talked seriously of mocker's seriousness. (9. 516-44)

Stephen's narcissism here is palpable (the emphasis is mine), and it is curiously juxtaposed by a self-lacerating tribute to Wilde's subversiveness. Stephen has clearly not yet internalized the "light touch" and reproaches himself, though he is in performance mode. The conversation subsequently moves, as it must, to serious talk about the "mockery's seriousness". Curiously, this move signals itself as beyond mere paradox. In a pattern made familiar by *Portrait*, Stephen's discomfort at the role of *ephebe* (a youth just entering manhood, and often associated with military pursuits in a liminal realm; Kestner 233-43) registers as a rejection of Wilde's class and simultaneously a retreat from homosexual identity into heterosexuality. The "[l]ineaments of gratified desire" take on, not a homosexual caste, but a moral and heterosexual one, and return to Stephen's more usual neurotic and misogynistic consideration of Eve and sin. The Scylla and Charybdis episode does the work of enunciating Joyce's aesthetic, and offers insights into Joyce's own fictional practices, and it is at this point that Joyce's debt to Wilde and the ways in which he will move beyond Wilde's trademarks, "mockery" and paradoxes, are hinted at.

The predictable slide in the narrative, discussed earlier in relation to Chapter 4 of *Portrait*, also occurs here: from talk of Stephen (or maybe Buck?) as "a blonde ephebe" (a younger partner in a Greek homosexual pairing) into thoughts of heterosexual wooing, even of employing the confident Buck to do the wooing for him. A triangulation of two men and a woman is one which will emerge again in the penultimate chapter of *Ulysses*. It is worth pointing out, too, the moral paradigm which Stephen is burdened with, and Buck, Bloom and Molly are not: Stephen cannot think of woman without linking her mentally with Eve and sin, a marker of his neurotic sensibility.

But Buck, despite his function as a celebrant of the anarchic, is also dangerous and destructive for Stephen, but not for his homosexuality. Oddly, it is Buck himself who creates what is perhaps a diversion, or displacement (and not a joke, as Weir claims, 223) in suggesting to Stephen that the real danger to him comes not from Buck himself but from Bloom, the "wandering jew [sic]" who, he claims, "looked upon you to lust after you" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 9.1209). Stephen registers the implication of homosexual predatoriness mentally when he says "Manner of Oxenford" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 9.1209). But it is from Buck that the real danger emanates, not from the constitutionally passive Bloom, who, if he has homosexual fantasies as Boone argues, had fantasies of a transvestite nature and involve being penetrated by Miriam Dandrade's violators (Boone 161). Buck is not only a usurper but also potentially a destroyer because of his tendency to be a user and a reckless sponger, to entertain for the sake of it rather than to think, and his unwillingness to move beyond superficial, and irreducible epigrammatic jokes (Pine 288). Buck's antics in Nighttown expose Stephen to the risk of imprisonment, which Bloom rescues him from, perhaps another significant Wildean resonance.

The final image in Circe is one in which Bloom's memory of Stephen, "a fairy boy of eleven, a changeling, kidnapped, dressed in an Eton suit with glass shoes and a little bronze helmet" is conflated with his own dead son Rudy practising reading from a Jewish sacred text (Joyce,

Ulysses 15.4957-60). It could be read as having paederastic significance, and as exemplifying the ideal of "Greek love," what Valente refers to as "the so-called higher sodomy" (Valente 11) – tenderness between an older and a younger man, an *ephebe*, to use the terminology of Scylla and Charybdis. However, in the moment of imagining his vision of a longed-for living son, Joyce has Bloom negate such a meaning by interpreting Stephen's ravings as being expressions of heterosexual desire, and comments: "Some girl. Best thing that could happen to him" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 15.4950-1). One may read this as homosexual panic on Joyce's part, and maybe it is, but it can also be seen as part of a larger pattern in the novel which refuses homosexual normality, and moves inexorably towards a qualified heterosexuality.

Bloom's and Stephen's potential as a homosocial pairing is most obvious in the Ithaca chapter where Bloom and Stephen establish that mutual differences of education, religion, race, and class notwithstanding, they can enjoy long and deep discussion over a bewildering array of mutually significant topics. Critics, following pointers in the Scylla and Charybdis chapter, usually construe this meeting as a consummation of a paternal/filial relationship, but equally it could be thought of as potentially homosocial. However, whatever the lineaments of desire it encodes, there is even at this tender moment, and again in Ithaca and Penelope, yet another strategic reassertion of the primacy of the heterosexual: Bloom assumes Stephen needs a woman and takes the role of older mentor, and Molly's monologue confirms Bloom's perhaps unconscious assumption of the role of pimp (17.929-44) for her: Bloom intuitively accurately Molly's desire for more than poetry and Italian pronunciation lessons (18.1310-67; Valente 5).

Finally, a further effect of having created a Wildean character is that it enables Joyce to develop the idea of identity as a performance, a notion which proves highly generative in Circe. Cheryl Herr very usefully deploys deconstructive performativity theory to highlight the ways in which the Circe chapter employs the dramatic mode and in particular draws on the traditions of pantomime and vaudeville to enact the instabilities of gender categories and to demonstrate that "sexuality is sheer theatre" (Herr 154). In particular, she points to how the chapter enacts a cultural fear that *playing* a role and, especially a role that is constructed as deviant, may pass into *being* a role by one "very easy step" (Herr 153). I would add that Joyce's anxiety may owe something to the Wildean court cases. Buck in the persona of Dr Mulligan conducts a pseudo-medical examination on Bloom:

Dr Bloom is bisexually abnormal. He has recently escaped from Dr Eustace's private asylum for demented gentlemen. Born out of bedlock hereditary epilepsy is present, the consequence of unbridled lust. Traces of elephantiasis have been discovered among his ascendants. There are marked symptoms of chronic exhibitionism. Ambidexterity is also latent. He is prematurely bald from selfabuse, perversely idealistic in consequence, a reformed rake, and has metal teeth. In consequence of a family complex he has temporarily lost his memory and I believe him to be more sinned against than sinning. I have made a pervaginal examination and, after application of the acid test to 5427 anal, axillary, pectoral and pubic hairs, I declare him to be virgo intacta. (Joyce, *Ulysses* 15.1175-86)

This diagnosis of Bloom by Buck, though comedic in its mode and satiric at the expense of sexology (Lamos, *Deviant Modernism: Sexual and Textual Errancy in T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust* 154), adheres in its main claims to the one Joyce advanced in his 1909 essay on Wilde. But I would argue that its significance lies in the way in which it constitutes a playful displacement of the serious issues raised by Wilde's trial, and a covert explanation/defence of Wilde's theatricality, bisexuality and medical pathology. Its satire seems to be more directed at the medico/legal absurdity of the trial rather than the person under examination. A further curious point is the strategic inversion of the interrogation: instead of Buck, whose identification with Wilde has been underscored throughout the novel, being the accused, he is the one who accuses Bloom. It seems that there are no gender identity positions that are potentially closed to Bloom: he performs or is reported as performing the roles of virgin, rake, woman, mother, as well as his more conventional roles. Curiously, as Valente points out, the "similarly contingent and theatrical" nature of sexual preference (Valente 5), and specifically of homosexuality, is not part of the repertoire.

Joyce's transgressiveness, then, tended on the whole to confine itself to matters of heterosexuality and when it does probe homosexuality, Joyce works cautiously and habitually engages in deflection. It is one thing, as Dollimore points out to deconstruct the binaries, but it is quite another to

neutralise their effect in history and/or the here and now. ... Binaries remain fundamental to, and violently active within, social organization and discursive practices, more so than we usually realize as we live and suffer them daily ... the political effect of failing to invert the binary opposition, of trying simply to jump beyond it into a world free of it, is simply to leave the binary intact in the only world we have. (65-6)

Joyce certainly understood the unequal and essentially systemic forces against which Wilde struggled and failed, and for which he paid with his life. His own deconstructive strategies were fuelled by that awareness and perhaps influenced by it, but his project, in being confined to "mainstream" heterosexuality, turns its back on all but the theatricality of high camp performance. However, he does not fail to celebrate anarchy, deviance and performative excess for its own sake in both Circe and the representation of a high-camp Buck Mulligan, and homosociality in the abortive but sympathetic relationship between Stephen and Bloom in Ithaca. Joyce may have been a "mulierast" in Wilde's terms, though it is perhaps somewhat of an overstatement to claim, as Brivic does, that he was a "doctrinaire heterosexual" (Brivic 20). The abatement of homosexual panic I discern in the fiction between 1909 and 1922 has much to do with Joyce's progressive understanding of the uses of the role of court jester, of comedic excess, of carnival, and of performance for enacting joco-seriousness. Joyce makes clear in his fiction his familiarity with Wilde (Corballis), his plays, and performances as an extravagant bisexual man, and his debt to him.

Notes:

¹ Joyce (mis)quotes (possibly misremembers) a passage from the Vulgate (Psalms 21:19) which is frequently read as a foreshadowing of the crucified Christ.

² Lady Wilde is blamed for wanting a girl and being disappointed with a son and for raising her son in an "atmosphere of insecurity and prodigality" (*Critical Writings* 202); she is also described as having a "susceptible temperament" which may or may not be linked to her extreme nationalism: "under the pseudonym 'Speranza,' [she] incited the public, in her poems and articles, to seize Dublin Castle" (*Critical Writings* 201-2).

³ This figure was cited, according to Joyce, by "an employee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs" (*Critical Writings* 204) during Wilde's trial.

⁴ Many Victorian writers and painters were drawn to late Roman subjects, and some European writers and painters, among them Pre-Raphaelites and Decadents, most notoriously Swinburne, Alma-Tadema, Simeon Solomon and Stefan George, specifically reveled in the amoral aestheticism of Heliogabalus. It was not uncommon in British paintings for artists to render Romans as Britons, as did the Dutch-English Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema in his painting, "The Roses of Heliogabalus," 1888.

⁵ References throughout this paper to *Ulysses* are to section and line numbers in the the Gabler Corrected Text edition.

⁶ As Buck undresses, a priest (?) is described in these terms: "An elderly man shot up near the spur of rock a blowing red face. He scrambled up by the stones, water glistening on his pate and on its garland of grey hair, water rilling over his chest and paunch and spilling jets out of his black sagging loincloth" (Joyce, *Ulysses* 18: 687-91).

⁷ Curiously Pine suggests that Wilde imbibed his Hellenism (and its potential parallels with ancient Irish culture) from a most impeccable Dublin source, Professor John Pentland Mahaffy (1839-1919), Provost of Trinity College Dublin (Pine 123-7).

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