Literary Voices in *Dubliners*

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1 Critics have already pointed out the importance of Joyce's use of quotation, allusion and parody, especially in his later work. The names of Flaubert, Oscar Wilde and Shakespeare have long been associated with Joyce's writing. This is the type of literary association that places Joyce within "tradition" and "the historical sense" which involves, as T.S. Eliot explains, "a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence." Joyce's use of subtexts not only reveals his tendency to parody famous texts – a tendency which was to become a dominant feature in modern literature, but it also allows him to give voice to censored subjects that he didn't wish to write openly about.

2 In what follows I will re-examine three stories so as to bring meaning to some of Joyce's untold narratives in *Dubliners*. The first story under analysis is "The Sisters" and more precisely the way Father Flynn appears in the anonymous boy's dream - that is as a head that has been severed from the rest of the priest's body. The image of the severed head not only likens the priest to the Biblical John the Baptist, but also to Flaubert's John the Baptist that we encounter in the French writer's story "Hérodias". Whereas the second story, "An Encounter", will bring us back to Oscar Wilde and to homosexuality as a censored story, "Eveline" will offer another silent narrative, that of incest, as a precise passage from Shakespeare's *King Lear* will bring to light.

1. "The Sisters"

3 In the child's mind, the priest's face, which is perceived as a close-up, takes on such considerable proportions that it ends up scaring him. The vision becomes all the more frightening, as the priest's head, severed from the rest of his body, seems to lead a life of its own. It pursues the child, murmurs to him and desires to confess to him:

   In the dark of my room I imagined that I saw again the heavy grey face of the paralytic. I drew the blankets over my head and tried to think of Christmas. But the grey face still followed me. It murmured; and I understood that it desired to confess something. (Joyce, 1969, 11)
If in Ancient Greece the dead who wandered through Hell with their hooded heads were represented as being faceless, here on the contrary, the dead priest's body is reduced to a face, a mass of grey flesh. If death has not nullified the priest's face, it is because he remains a locus of identity for the young boy.

The motif of the severed head is reinforced in chapter V of *A Portrait* in the scene where Stephen can't bring himself to picture his friend Cranly other than beheaded:

Why was it when he thought of Cranly he could never raise before his mind the entire image of his body but only the image of the head and face? Even now against the grey curtain of the morning he saw it before him like the phantom of a dream, the face of a severed head or a deathmask, crowned on the brows by its stiff black upright hair as by an iron crown. It was a priestlike face, priestlike in its pallor, in the widewinged nose, in the shadowings below the eyes and along the jaws, priestlike in the lips that were long and bloodless and faintly smiling: and Stephen, remembering swiftly how he had told Cranly of all the tumults and unrest and longings in his soul, only to be answered by his friend's listening silence, would have told himself that it was the face of a guilty priest who heard confessions of those whom he had not power to absolve but that he felt again in memory the gaze of its dark womanish eyes. (Joyce, 1968, 178, my emphasis)

Cranly's severed head and his priest-like face that carries the signs of sin clearly recall the old paralytic's face, Joyce's first priest. More specifically, certain features in Cranly's face are to be found in Father Flynn's face, namely his "windwinged nose" and his "lips" which are "faintly smiling". Furthermore, the association between Cranly and St. John the Baptist on the one hand and Stephen and Christ on the other hand is already at work in "The Sisters", where the young narrator, a disembodied conscience, can be seen as a figure of the Word not yet made Flesh. In the same way as John the Baptist announced the coming of Christ by proclaiming that he must recede to allow Christ to grow: "He must increase, but I must decrease." (Jn, III, 30), in "The Sisters", the emergence of the artist obeys the same logic: the priest must lose his life, but his head too - physically and figuratively speaking - to allow the artist, the "priest of eternal imagination" (Joyce, 1968, 221) to develop. The young narrator is thus a disembodied character in contrast with the priest who is a mass of flesh. To paraphrase St John's words, the priest must decrease so that the child may increase.

The setting sun

If the priest's death is necessary to allow the artist to rise, just as St. John the Baptist's sacrifice was necessary for the coming of Christ, the priest, unlike the Biblical figure, seems to have put up some resistance for his face still preserves its vital force: "His face was very truculent" (Joyce, 1969, 14). The adjective "truculent" implies a certain sense of aggressiveness, which is reinforced by an almost superfluous "very".

Despite his resistance, the priest's reign has definitively come to an end as the references to the setting sun suggest. No radiance surrounds Father Flynn's head in contrast to St. John the Baptist's head in Gustave Moreau's painting "L'Apparition", which Flaubert had initially planned to "introduce in the last sentences" of his story "Hérodias" where the Saint's head was supposed to merge with the rising sun. On the contrary, in "The Sisters", the priest, whose body lies in a room "suffused with dusky golden light" (Joyce, 1969, 14), is associated with the setting sun. It is not the priest, but the child who is associated with
the rising sun when he is seen the next morning walking away from the priest's home on 
"the sunny side of the street" (Joyce, 1969, 12).

In reference to Moreau's painting, Flaubert finally decided to have John the Baptist's 
freshly cut head illuminated by light coming from candelabras as it lay on a platter:

La lame aiguë de l'instrument, glissant du haut en bas, avait entamé la mâchoire. 
Une convulsion tirait les coins de la bouche. Du sang, caillé déjà, parsemait la barbe. 
Les paupières closes étaient blêmes comme des coquilles ; et des candélabres à 
entour envoyaient des rayons. (Flaubert, 1986, 141)

In "The Sisters", the light coming from the candles which are set at Father Flynn's head 
("two candles must be set at the head of a corpse" (Joyce, 1969, 9) are far from being an 
indication of holiness. Not only is there no radiance in or around Father Flynn's face, but 
the candles, which are compared to "pale thin flames" seem to compete with the rays of 
the setting sun which are diffused throughout the dead priest's room: "The room through 
the lace end of the blind was suffused with dusky golden light amid which the candles 
looked like pale thin flames" (Joyce, 1969,14). The spiritual light, represented here by the 
two feeble candles, is surpassed by the light coming from outside, light which has a 
practical, material, even financial nature with its references to gold – "golden light" – and 
to money – "the tawny gold of a great bank of clouds" (Joyce, 1989, 14, my emphasis) - 
which are ultimately references to the sin of simony.

The voice of Flaubert

Apart from the analogy between the two beheaded characters – Father Flynn and St. John 
the Baptist – it is striking to notice that the beginning of the third part of "Hérodi"a"s" 
includes references to those three key words – "paralys"is", "gnomon", "simony" – that Joyce 
placed at the beginning of "The Sisters". In Flaubert's story, the guests first speak about a 
certain "Simon de Gittōï", Simon Magus, the Samaritan "magician" whose name is at the 
origin of the word "simony". This produces a first coincidence with Joyce's story. The 
discussion continues and there is talk about a miracle performed by Jesus, concerning the 
healing of a young girl which happens to be based on a miracle taken from the New 
Testament (Mt, VIII, 5), the healing of a paralytic slave – a second coincidence with Joyce's 
text. Finally, Flaubert indicates the precise moment when the miracle occurred: "Quand 
le gnomon du palais marquait la troisième heure", a third coincidence. Furthermore, the 
fact that the healing of the paralytic slave occurs at – "la troisième heure" – immediately 
brings to mind the opening sentence to Joyce's story, which, instead of announcing a 
miracle, announces the priest's damnation: "There was no hope for him this time: it was 
the third stroke". With the three essential notions that govern Dubliners – paralysis, 
gnomon and simony – gathered within the same passage in Flaubert's story, it is difficult to 
Imagine that this is pure coincidence. Joyce who admired Flaubert's writing must have 
had this passage from "Hérodi"a"s" in mind when he later added the opening paragraph to 
"The Sisters." 

Mutton dressed as lamb

We can take the Biblical parallel further by considering the mysterious leg of mutton that 
the uncle wants to get Mr Cotter to taste while the boy quietly sits by, eating his 
stirabout. Significantly, the boy's vision of the beheaded priest immediately follows the 
scene where his aunt presents the dish of mutton. It is then as though the dream were the
consequence of seeing the seemingly prosaic leg of mutton lying on the kitchen table. To me, this mutton is symbolically dressed as lamb.

13 If any type of meat could be defined as being liturgical, it would have to be lamb, the younger version of mutton. Lamb also happens to refer to John the Baptist who proclaimed the words "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (Jn, 1, 29). Joyce seems to be playfully intertwining references and subverting the values of the pervading Catholic atmosphere in the story. The mutton can be perceived as a counterpart to the dead priest. When the aunt asks: "But whydo you think it's not good for children, Mr Cotter?" (Joyce, 1969, 11, my emphasis), the adjective "good" is not only to be understood literally (as in good for the boy's health), but also from a moral point of view. We can wonder whether the invitation to "take a pick of that leg of mutton", that is cutting up and consuming this part of the animal, is not in the end a form of posthumous revenge, as the expression "to pick at" or "to pick on someone" may suggest.

14 At any rate, both the dead flesh of the priest and of the animal have been carefully prepared. Just as the piece of meat has been prepared and cooked by the aunt before being presented on a platter, the priest has undergone a similar treatment before being put on display in his coffin. Indeed, we are told that Father O'Rourke has "anointed him and prepared him and all", (Joyce, 1969, 15) and that there was "[all] the work we had," says Eliza, "she and me, getting in the woman to wash him and then laying him out and then the coffin [...]" (Joyce, 1969, 16). No different from a piece of meat. Father Flynn's body, is manipulated and embellished. The "leg of mutton", lying all by itself on the kitchen table, is a grotesque parody of "the Lamb of God", the name by which John the Baptist had designated Christ the Saviour. The words "The lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" are truly parodic in the context of this story given that sin – namely the sin of simony – is introduced by none other than the priest as the boy's dream implies.

2. "An Encounter"

A disquieting family resemblance

15 In the next short story, "An Encounter", Father Flynn symbolically rises from the dead and is transformed into the strange wanderer whom critics agree to call "the pervert". The pervert is, more precisely, a sort of photographic negative of the priest since whatever features they do have in common are reversed. Whereas the strange wanderer has "great gaps in his mouth" (Joyce, 1969, 25), the priest has "big discoloured teeth" (Joyce, 1969, 13). Secondly, whereas Father Flynn's "priestly garments" have a "green faded look" (Joyce, 1969, 12) on account of the fallen grains of snuff, the pervert is dressed in "a suit of greenish-black" (Joyce, 1969, 24). Thirdly, the grey colour of the priest's face is to be found in the pervert's moustache which is "ashen-grey", an adjective which links him to death, all the more so with the reference to "the ashpit" (Joyce, 1969, 21) where the boy has hidden his school books. Thus the pervert who seems to have risen from this ashpit is a ghostly counterpart to Father Flynn whose smiling face seems to pursue a life of its own in other places in the book.
The pervert from the Wild(e) West

16 The child in "An Encounter", like the one in "The Sisters", enjoys reading. If there is explicit mention of what the boys in the second story prefer to read – that is "The adventures related in the literature of the Wild West" and "American detective stories" (Joyce, 1969, 20) as well as explicit mention of what the pervert prefers to read – that is books by Sir Walter Scott and Lord Lytton (Joyce, 1969, 25) (Kershner, 1989) another literary presence can be felt in this story, a more implicit one, that of Oscar Wilde. A whole network of presumptions allows the reader to distinguish Wilde's shade lurking behind the anonymous individual that the children meet up with in the field - Wilde who, after his trial which took place in 1895, had become the epitome of perversion, the very embodiment of "English vice" as the French press had described him at the time (Vallet, 1997, 145).

17 When, in the story, the strange wanderer momentarily withdraws to accomplish some unidentified act, which, according to the children's reaction, is some kind of indecent act, this act evokes the charge held against Wilde who was known for having several young lovers. The way the wanderer is dressed (He is wearing "a suit of greenish black" and "a jerry hat with a high crown" [Joyce, 1989, 24]) and the way that he walks with "one hand upon his hip" and "a stick in the other one" (Joyce, 1969, 24) make him look like the figure of a shabby, battered and fallen dandy, thus ironically recalling the famous Irish dandy who was fond of green carnations. Furthermore, the strange atmosphere of fault and sin which is felt throughout Joyce's first two stories recall Wilde's fictive world. In his essay "Oscar Wilde: The Poet of 'Salomé'", Joyce had underlined that sin was precisely "the pulse of Wilde's art" (Joyce, 1969, 204).

18 The link with Wilde is reinforced when we take into account other textual details. First of all, 1895 which is the given narrative time in the first story, happens to be the year of Wilde's painful trials. It is also very tempting to bring together what the child calls "the literature of the Wild West" (Joyce, 1969, 19) and Wilde's name. Apart from the obvious homophonic pun on the writer's name (wild/e), the "Wild West" which, in the story, refers to the American West, can also refer to the "wild Irish" who inhabit the west of the green land of Erin. The fierceness that the boy is looking for in the American adventure stories that he reads and the "wild sensations" that seize his body are, according to received ideas, something fundamentally Irish, just as the green eyes that the boy hopes the foreign sailors have are to be found instead in the face of the Irish pervert.

19 Joyce begins his essay on Wilde with a commentary on his name: Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde:

    His name symbolizes him: Oscar, nephew of King Fingal and the only son of Ossian in the amorphous Celtic Odyssey., who was treacherously killed by the hand of his host as he sat at table. O'Flahertie, a savage Irish tribe whose destiny it was to assail the gates of medieval cities, a name that incited terror in peaceful men, who still recite, among the plagues, the anger of God. and the spirit of fornication, in the ancient litany of the saints: "from the wild O'Flaherties, libera nos Domine" (Joyce, 1969, 201)

20 Thus Wilde's name involves a history of savagery, terror and fornication, that is, the same elements of which the games inspired from the Wild West are made up and of which Joe Dillon is the expert player: "he played too fiercely for us (Joyce, 1969, 19) as well as the American detective stories that the young narrator prefers on account of the "unkempt
fierce and beautiful girls" (my emphasis, Joyce, 1969, 20). As for the pervert, his fierce nature is revealed as soon as he begins talking about "whipping" rough and unruly boys.

21 Mahony is the one that the pervert has just described as being "rough" ("He said that my friend was a very rough boy" [Joyce, 1969, 27]), this same boy in which he had previously detected his fondness of sports: "Ah, I can see you are a bookworm like myself. [...] He is different; he goes in for games" [Joyce, 1969, 25]). This distinction between intellectuals and sportsmen had already been made by the boy's uncle in "The Sisters": "That's what I'm always saying to that Rosicrucian there: take exercise. Why when I was a nipper every morning of my life I had a cold bath, winter and summer. And that's what stands to me now. Education is all very fine and large ..." (Joyce, 1969, 11). This distinction also recalls the two sides which opposed each other at Wilde's trial: on the one hand, the writer, and on the other, Queensbury, the inveterate sportsman and boxer.

22 The link with Wilde is further reinforced when words recalling passages from The Picture of Dorian Gray are put into the pervert's mouth. For instance, the first subject of conversation broached by the pervert concerns time going by: He said that the happiest time of one's life was undoubtedly one's schoolboy days and that he would give anything to be young again" (Joyce, 1969, 25, my emphasis). This desire to be young is typical of Wilde. In The Picture of Dorian Gray, Lord Henry exclaims "Youth! Youth! There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth!" (Wilde, ). When Dorian becomes aware that, unlike his portrait, he will grow old, he moans: "If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that - for that - I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give!" (Wilde, 49, my emphasis). Besides wanting to be young again, the pervert also has another desire which he confesses to the boy: "He described to me how he would whip such a boy as if he were unfolding some elaborate mystery. He would love that, he said, better than anything in this world " (Joyce, 1969, 27, my emphasis). Once again, the pervert's speech which is marked by emphasis and excitement echoes Lord Henry's words ("there's absolutely nothing in the world") and Dorian's ("there is nothing in the whole world I would not give"). The anonymous Joycean pervert can thus be seen as a sort of shabby Wildean spectre who keeps recycling the same desires and the same fantasies.

3. "Eveline"

23 If "The Sisters" was the very first story written and published (it appeared in The Irish Homestead on August 13, 1904, which was the first anniversary of Joyce's mother's death), "Eveline" was the second story to be written (it, too, appeared in The Irish Homestead, on September 10, 1904). If the first story offers the image of a dead father, the second one offers the image of a dead mother. Her mother being dead, Eveline is left in the house with her father. Literary allusions to the paternal theme in "Eveline" shed light on the daughter's obscure situation.

Lir and Lear

24 In "Eveline" there is an interesting association between two other stories: the Irish legend of "The Children of Lir" and the Shakespearian tragedy of "King Lear". Allusions to the Irish Lir, whom Joyce describes as being "the Celtic Neptune and the original of Shakespeare's King Lear" in a letter to Georgio (Scholes, 475), have already been explored,
namely by Coiilin Owens who explains that The Fate of the Children of Lit is "a story of incest, jealousy, political conflict, and heroic pagan filial loyalty transformed into Christian love" and "how the jealous wife of King Lir of the Hill of the White attempted to destroy his children by turning them into swans..." (Owens, 1993, 46-7). While the Irish legend of Lir has already been given some attention, not much has yet been given to Shakespeare's Lear.

In the notebook that he kept during his stay in Pola (from October 30th 1904 to the beginning of March 1905, thus one month before "Eveline" was published), Joyce had noted the line "That way madness lies", (III, 4, 21) taken form King Lear. It is Lear who pronounces these words after he has been sent away by his daughters, Goneril and Regan. The analogy with Joyce's story goes beyond the pervading theme of madness, especially when we consider the words in their context. Lear addresses his daughters and exclaims

O Regan! Goneril,
Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all –
O that way madness lies. Let me shun that.
No more of that. (11.19-22, my emphasis,)

What seems important here is the reference to the father's heart, the father who claims that he possesses a "frank heart" ("your old kind father whose frank heart gave all"). This reference creates an unhealthy association with Eveline's lover whose name is precisely Frank – Frank who, according to Eveline herself, is supposed to be "open-hearted", not to mention "kind" just like King Lear : "Frank was very kind, manly, open-hearted" (Joyce, 1969, 38, my emphasis,). Given the ambiguity between the figure of the father and that of the lover, one may wonder who is Eveline's real lover? The short story does pose the question, especially when we know that Eveline "sometimes felt herself in danger of her father's violence" (Joyce, 1969; 38). The theme of incest is thus reinforced, a theme which has already been brought to light by R.B. Kershner who explains that "the fight between her father and Frank is one for sexual possession: Frank needs her as the lass that loves a sailor, or at least the girl in his home port, while her father needs her as a replacement for his wife" (Kershner, 1989, 69).

These are the kind of literary voices, of hidden narratives which keep emerging from beneath the surface of the stories we are reading that make what we call "the early Joyce" the not so "easy Joyce" as Dubliners tends to be mistakenly considered. The words pronounced by Gabriel when he finally discovers Gretta's secret story about her former lover, "Perhaps she had not told him all the story." (Joyce, 1969, 222), perfectly apply to Joyce's writing in Dubliners for we are never quite sure whether we have been told all the stories that are to be told in Dubliners.
Works Cited


NOTES

1. In his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1917), T.S. Eliot defines the notion of tradition as follows: "[Tradition] cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within a feeling that the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. The historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity"(Kermode, 1975, 38).

2. This is the passage from Flaubert's story: On y causait de laokanann et des gens de son espèce ; Simon de Gittoï lavait les péchés avec du feu. Un certain Jésus...
- « Le pire de tous », s'écria Éléazar. « Quel infâme bateleur ! »

Derrière le Tétrarque, un homme se leva, pâle comme la bordure de sa chlamyde. Il descendit l'estrade, et, interpellant les Pharisiens :
- « Mensonge ! Jésus fait des miracles ! »

Antipas désirait en voir.
- « Tu aurais dû l'amener ! Renseigne-nous ! »

Alors il conta que lui, Jacob, ayant une fille malade, s'était rendu à Capharnatim, pour supplier le Maître de vouloir la guérir. Le Maître avait répondu : « Retourne chez toi, elle est guérie ! » Et il l'avait trouvée sur le seuil, étant sortie de sa couche quand le gnomon du palais marquait la troisième heure, l'instant même où il abordait Jésus. (Flaubert, 1986, 132-3)
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