

WHAT'S IN A MIRROR?

JAMES JOYCE'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF PERCEPTION

The mirror's ghost lies outside my body, and by the same token my own body's "invisibility" can invest the other bodies that I see. Hence my body can assume segments derived from the body of another, just as my substance passes into them; man is the mirror for man. The mirror itself is the instrument of a universal magic that changes things into a spectacle, spectacles into things, myself into another, and another into myself.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind"

Almost a half-century ago Hugh Kenner proposed that the basic unit of Joyce's fiction is the encounter, as in the *Dubliners* story of that name.¹ The most famous of these events is perhaps Stephen's "vision" of the birdlike girl on Sandymount strand, who is not likely to be the creature he thinks he sees—remember at this point in his life Stephen's eyes are rather more mirrors than windows of his soul (P185-86). And then there is the meeting of Stephen and Bloom in *Ulysses* "Silent, each contemplating the other in both mirrors of the reciprocal flesh of theirhisnothis fellowfaces" (U702) where the two are exact reversals of one another, as in a chiasmus, the symmetry of hydrophobe and hydrophile being only one of the more comic of their mirror-connections.²

I would like to propose that Joycean encounters are philosophically interesting because, in various literal or figurative ways, they are made of mirrors that defeat logical notions of identity ($I = I$) in favor of the idea that relations of self and image are unstable, excessive, and work more like breaks than links: "I am another now, and yet the same" (U11), says Stephen. But (at least in *Ulysses*) it is his otherness that Stephen mainly experiences, because this alterity keeps multiplying its forms, often before his very own eyes. Another way to put this is

to say that Joycean encounters are phenomenological rather than empirical, which means that what is seen, heard, or experienced is conditioned by the intentional horizons within which the encounter takes place. That is, experience is always experience of contexts, of which there is always more than one, so there is always more to people and things than meets the eye. In just this wise, Joyce's fiction shows how one's experiences are multiple, heterogeneous, overdetermined, and fraught with layers and fractures that overlap and interrupt one another in ways that it takes (readers like us) a lifetime of close reading and exertions of memory to sort out. In this respect we are very like Joyce's characters.

For example, I've always been drawn to those wonderful moments of self-encounter, as when, in "The Dead," Gabriel Conroy is captured like a snapshot by his mirror:

As he passed the way of the cheval-glass he caught sight of himself in full-length, his broad, well-filled shirt-front, the face whose expression always puzzled him when he saw it in a mirror and his glimmering gilt-rimmed eyeglasses. (D219-20)

The brute function of a mirror is to produce a likeness of what it sees. But what plainly interests Joyce is the way mirrors don't quite do this—the way they don't produce empirical mirror-images but, on the contrary, register multiple forms of alienation, difference, alternative identities, unauthorized or embellished versions of dubious originals, but also sometimes the fulfillment of a happy wish.³ All the while (as I will try to explain) mirrors always tell the truth, in the sense that some sense of fitness rules the encounter. It is the nature of mirrors to catch us off-guard, as if filling in blanks we can't (or don't want to) see. Imagine always being puzzled by the look on your face, as if you were the author of an expression that, try as you may, you will never understand (or forget). What is unsettling is not the shock, but the failure, or maybe fear, of recognition. The mirror tells a tale of self-estrangement where you encounter yourself as someone else, a lost or failed self, or at least someone sufficiently different so as to interrupt your self-possession. (The mirror as a medium of disillusionment is surely a major trope of naturalism.) So Gabriel had expected to see himself reflected in his wife's eyes, or in her memory, but instead he found Michael Furey there, a more memorable and romantic version of what he had hoped himself to be. Hence the famous tailspin:

Gabriel felt humiliated by the failure of his irony and by the evocation of this figure from the

dead, a boy in the gasworks. While he had been full of memories of their secret life together, full of tenderness and joy and desire, she had been comparing him in her mind with another. A shameful consciousness of his own person assailed him. He saw himself as a ludicrous figure, acting as a pennyboy for his aunts, a nervous, well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealizing his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror. (D221)

On the question of mirrors, Joyce may be compared with Yeats, who said that “Man is nothing until he is wedded to an image,” where image means not self-image but image or incarnation of another. A mirror in this case would produce, not a likeness of the original, but what the original secretly embodies: namely, an identity or meaning from another world. Yeats’s idea is that by itself the individual is a mere cipher, but when doubled via history a poet with Yeatsian eyes would be able to construe a true image and likeness Maud Gonne as Helen, and vice versa: or think of the girl in “Among School Children” who reincarnates the young Maud, with the poet’s memory invoking a Quattrocento portrait of a noblewoman in the bargain—“mirror on mirror mirroring all the show” (Hugh Kenner’s favorite Yeatsian line). Imagine a mirror that does not tell you what you look like but what you are (or were), or what you would be if only the times were in joint. In the Yeatsian system doubling is metaphorical rather than mimetic because it involves the turning of someone into something otherwise: a mask, an anti-self, an archetype. So much of Joyce’s work (as Kenner thought) seems a parody of Yeats’s theory, for example as laid out in Yeats’s “Ego Dominus Tuus.” Hence Bloom as Odysseus. But perhaps it is also an exploration of Yeats’s metaphysics from within the frame of everyday life, where counterparts run the gamut back-and-forth from the mythical-ironic to the trivial-heroic.

Possibly we can put this more simply. In Joyce doubling turns an image into something saturated with meanings, both divergent and convergent, as when Mulligan thrusts a mirror at Stephen in “Telemachus”:

Look at yourself, he said, you dreadful bard.

Stephen bent forward and peered at the mirror held out to him, cleft by the crooked crack, hair on end. As he and others see me. Who chose this face for me? The dogsbody rid of vermin....

Laughing again, he brought the mirror away from Stephen’s peering eyes.

–The rage of Caliban at not seeing his face in the mirror, he said. If Wilde were alive to see you. (U7)

You may recall from the *Portrait* what Stephen did after writing his first poem.

After this the letters L. D. S. were written at the foot of the page and, having hidden the book, he went into his mother's bedroom and gazed at his face for a long time in the mirror of her dressingtable. (P74)

We aren't told (here) how the young Stephen saw himself, but we can imagine what he's looking for—a change, at least, and even if possible a recognition (anyway it's an early self-portrait of the artist).⁴ For the crucial question in each moment of self-regard is not how accurately (much less empirically) the original has been reproduced but how to *take* the image that appears in its place, especially when there are, as in Stephen's case, a surplus of heterogeneous images, none of which is implausible on the face of it. Indeed, no one in Joyce's fiction is more haunted by images than Stephen. For example, of the image in the cracked lookingglass he says: "As he and others see me." The mirror does not give back an image of *Stephen's* Stephen but only Mulligan's Stephen, or someone else's ("If only Wilde were alive to see you"—and what would Wilde have seen? Possibly the lugubrious picture of an unwashed Dorian Gray for whom, however, there is no unafflicted counterpart).⁵ Stephen will spend the whole day encountering other people's Stephen. He has worked hard not to take his likeness from his surroundings, but (Dubliner that he is) to little avail: "Who chose this face for me?" he wonders, as if his likeness were only something to be put on like a mask, an unfitting image, the resemblance of a merely local progenitor. What Stephen wants to do is to produce, mirror-like, his own image—in fact this is just the expression that turns up in "Proteus," the episode that gives us a detailed montage of Stephen's self-experience. Musing, appropriately, upon disguises, he says: "I'll show you my likeness one day." (U43). But what would Stephen, one day, look like?⁶ He is, as he says, "Looking for something lost in a past life" (U46). Someone irrecoverable, as if the real question were whether there is any longer in Stephen any original that he could show us. Aging overlays or displaces originals, as any of us can testify. One could take this to be the point of Mulligan's remark about the rage of Caliban. It is not, in Stephen's case, that the mirror is merely empty, but only that the face he sees is never really his, so that self-regard more often than not is an experience of mistaken, received, or anyhow

unwanted identity and a corresponding experience of dispossession (the theme of “Telemachus”). “Who chose this face for me?” he wonders, and soon a line in “Proteus” answers: “You’re your father’s son” (U43), meaning in particular that eyes and voices twin Simon and Stephen both in their own eyes and in those of others. Consubstantial father and son, indeed (U38). It is not that Stephen is not what he appears to be; it is that he seems powerless to be anything else: call him a creature of saturated phenomena (a Proteus *malgre lui*). His desire is for self-creation—“The Father Who is Himself his own Son” (U208)—but instead, or so far, he is mostly someone in whom other people trace resemblances of their own imagining, as, famously, does Bloom:

Still, supposing he had his father’s gift, as he more than suspected, it opened up new vistas in his mind, such as Lady Fingall’s Irish industries concert on the preceding Monday, and aristocracy in general.

Exquisite variations he [Stephen] was now describing on an air *Youth here has an end* by Jans Pieter Sweelinck, a Dutchman of Amsterdam where the frows come from....

A phenomenally beautiful tenor voice like that, the rarest of boons, which Bloom appreciated at the very first note he got out, could easily, if properly handled by some recognized authority on voice production...command its own price where baritones were ten a penny and procure its fortunate possessor in the near future an *entrée* into fashionable houses in the best residential quarters, of financial magnates in a large way of business and titled people....
(U663)

Just so, as Molly says, Poldy “ought to get a leather medal with a putty rim for all the plans he invents.” (U765)

So perhaps we should speak of Stephen’s missing resemblance and the corresponding gap in their own lives that people use their experience of him to fill (“I suppose hes 20 or more Im not too old for him,” muses Molly [U775]). The question is: What is the status of this *other* who always takes the place of what one wants to see when one looks at oneself? What I want to say is that in Joyce’s fiction the mirror produces, not an image of what it sees, but a mis-resemblance that nevertheless attaches itself to the original (or stands in for it, possibly re-forming it) more or less permanently—call it a near-self, someone else whom you were or someone you could have been (in yours or someone’s eyes), or someone you might yet become or perhaps are destined but will fail

to be (“so grieved he also in no less measure for young Stephen for that he lived riotously with those wastrels and murdered his goods with whores” [U390-91]). The possibilities are endless, but inevitably an original of some (now indeterminate) sort is obscured, scattered, or merely replaced. It’s hard not to think here of Keats’s notion of the poet as someone who has no character, who is nothing in himself and is not to be found in any of his creations; rather, he is a pure power of impersonation, someone able to turn himself into anyone at all. Imagine the Keatsian poet turned into Joycean mirror-play, with Stephen as a poet no longer in control of his impersonations: someone himself turned into a mirror (“See me as others see me”).

Of course, Joyce does not mind reversing this state of affairs as often as he stages it. Recall Stephen’s face-to-face experience of the unfortunate Cyril Sargent, which is only one of multiple events in which others are Stephen’s mirror:

Like him was I, these sloping shoulders, this gracelessness. My childhood bends beside me. Too far for me to lay a hand there once or lightly. Mine is far and his secret as our eyes. Secrets, silent, stony sit in dark places of both our hearts: secrets weary of their tyranny: tyrants willing to be dethroned. (U28),

Better perhaps to say that at different moments different Joyce’s characters experience mirrors differently. Recall the end of “Nausicaa” when sated Bloom (after having—another mirror-event—just picked up Stephen’s abandoned scribblings—see “Proteus”) writes in the sand:

Mr Bloom with his stick vexed the thick sand at his foot. Write a message for her.
Might remain. What?

I.

Some flatfoot tramp on it in the morning. Useless. Washed away. Tide comes here a pool near her foot. Bend, see my face there, dark mirror, breathe on it, stirs. All these rocks with lines and scars and letters...

AM. A.

No room. Let it go.

Mr Bloom effaced the letters with his slow boot. Hopeless thing sand. (U381)

The word “efface” is interesting in this context. Instead of a missing resemblance—Caliban’s rage, etc.—we have a resemblance that is deleted: Bloom, seeing his face mirrored in a tidepool, breathes on it, and then wipes away his self-predication (“I. AM. A.”). This shutting down or repression of self-regard is, of course (if that is what it is), perfectly understandable, given Bloom’s self-weariness, which mirrors Stephen’s in the usual inverted way, since Stephen’s desire for self-regard is deflected by a series of defacements, whereas Bloom desires invisibility (“See not be seen” [U265]), and perhaps even non-identity (“No one is anything,” says the modern Nobodaddy [U164]). Effacement and defacement are, let us say, twin forms of alienated self-experience, one willed, the other suffered. Meanwhile Molly associates Stephen with Bloom’s statue of Narcissus, the beautiful young boy who sees—and desires—but does not recognize himself. Of course, Stephen’s narcissism is such that he is capable of recognizing himself in everyone.

Every life is many days, day after day. We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But always meeting ourselves. (U213)

Narcissism in this sense is a species of metempsychosis, which is what Joycean mirror-play parodies, as when life and language join in their respective “retrospective arrangements” in “Oxen of the Sun”:

What is the age of the soul of man? As she hath the virtue of the chameleon to change her hue at every new approach, to be gay with the merry and mournful with the downcast, so too is her age changeable as her mood. No longer is Leopold, as he sits there, ruminating, chewing the cud of reminiscence, that staid agent of publicity and holder of a modest substance in the funds. He is young Leopold, as in a retrospective arrangement, a mirror within a mirror (hey, presto!), he beholdeth himself. That young figure of then is seen, precociously manly, walking on a nipping morning from the old house in Clambrassil street to the high school, his book satchel on him bandolierwise, and in it a goodly hunk of wheaten loaf, a mother’s thought. Or it is the same figure, a year or so gone over, in his first hard hat (ah, that was a day!), already on the road, a full-fledged traveler for the family firm, equipped with an orderbook, a scented handkerchief (not for show only), his case of bright trinketware (alas, a thing now of the past!), and a quiverful of compliant smiles... (U413).

A “retrospective arrangement” indeed, but “hey, presto” the mirror is breathed on (as per U381) and “the young knighterrant recedes, shrivels, to a tiny speck in the mist. Now he is himself paternal and these about him [Stephen, Mulligan, Lynch, others] might be his sons. Who can say? “The wise father knows his own child” (U413). Suppose Bridie Kelly (“for a bare shilling”)?

Bridie! Bridie! He will never forget the name, ever remember the night, first night, the bridenight. They are entwined in nethermost darkness, the willer and the willed, and in an instant (*fiat!*) light shall flood the world. Did heart leap to heart? Nay, fair reader. In a breath, ‘twas done but—hold! Back! It must not be! In terror the poor girl flees away through the murk. She is the bride of darkness, a daughter of night. She dare not bear the sunnygolden babe of day. No Leopold! Name and memory solace thee not. That youthful illusion of thy strength was taken from thee and in vain. No son of thy loins is by thee. There is none now to be for Leopold, what Leopold was for Rudolph. (U413-14)

Of course, repression of self-regard is never the whole story, because whatever is repressed always returns—not *as itself*, to be sure, but *as something else*. This is what Paul Ricoeur means when he says in his book on Freud that “Metaphor is nothing other than repression, and vice versa.”⁷ Metaphor gives us in the language of words what repression gives us in the economy of desire, namely a distortion or substitution whereby that which is denied *as itself* makes its appearance under disguise, to everyone’s satisfaction. That which is separated in repression is always separated into a dynamic relationship—into a dialectic of departure and return that enables us to experience something forbidden, impossible, lost, out of the question, unthinkable, unlooked-for, but nevertheless devoutly wished.

Here is an example from the story “Clay” when Maria looks at herself in the mirror:

She went into her little bedroom and, remembering that the next morning was a mass morning, changed the hand of the alarm from seven to six. Then she took off her working skirt and her house-boots and laid her best skirt out on the bed and her tiny dress-boots beside the foot of the bed. She changed her blouse too and, as she stood before the mirror, she thought of how she used to dress for mass on Sunday morning when she was a young girl; and she looked with

quaint affection at the diminutive body, which she has so often adorned. In spite of its years she found it a nice tidy little body. (D101)

It is probably impossible for a reader not to look at Maria more clinically than she looks at herself, because, after all, there is little to see, at least from the outside. She is an old spinster the tip of whose nose nearly touches the tip of her chin, especially when she laughs. Moreover, I don't think Maria is in any way deceived about the fact that she is something of a crone, but her mirror doubles as a mirror of memory, allowing her to regard her small body as that of a young girl's. Think of her moment before the mirror as a moment of play that allows her to take pleasure in what she sees despite her years. Maria does not see herself as others see her, and that is the secret of her self-possession, even in her encounter with the clay. What is repressed in Maria's case is not the reality of her appearance—although she does not, you might notice, look at herself in the face; but perhaps empirically she is just invisible to herself. What is repressed, or anyhow never was, is a life of desire that her playful moment before the mirror allows her to experience and, in a sense, to fulfill. Real life provides no such moments of meaningful appearance. I take this sense of fulfillment to be artful and romantic. Standing before the mirror, Maria looks at herself with “quaint affection” as someone not merely to be dressed but to be adorned; standing before the mirror, she adorns herself as a young and royal beauty like the one she impersonates in her song:

*I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls
 With vassals and serfs at my side
 And of all who assembled within those walls
 That I was their hope and their pride.
 I had riches too great to count, could boast
 Of a high ancestral name,
 But I also dreamt, which pleased me most,
 That you loved me still the same. (D102)*

How different, at all events, from the poor Stephen-like boy in “Araby” (“Gazing up into the darkness, I saw myself as a creature driven and deluded by vanity” [D35]). But in either case self-encounter is a phenomenological experience. Meanings trump (or, no, determine) sensations.

I pause here for a brief digression on self-deception, as elucidated by the philosopher Amélie Rorty, who argues as follows:

Only a presumptively integrated person who interprets her system-of-relatively-independent-subsystems through the first *picture of the self*, only a person who treats the independence of her constituent subsystems as failures of integration, is capable of self-deception. Not everyone has the special talents and capacities for self-deception. It is a disease only the strong minded can suffer.⁸

In other words, only an especially strong-minded person—someone philosophically committed to the principle (and imaginative possibility) of self-integration—is capable of self-deception. Following this thesis, it might be possible to argue that Maria is perhaps the most self-conscious and internally coherent character in all of Joyce's fiction, precisely because she is able to experience herself as a whole person free of self-contradiction: in other words, an anti-Stephen. Imagine Stephen as inferior in imagination to Maria! One could say that he lacks the Nietzschean strength of self-creation that Michel Foucault championed in his later writings, and which Maria accomplishes before her mirror.

With this paradox in mind, it makes sense to speak of Gerty McDowell in connection with Maria. Gerty's daydreams are never to be realized, but she is at home with her mirror image, as when adorning herself with a certain hat as suggested by the *Lady Pictorial*: "She did it up all by herself and what joy was hers when she tried it on then, smiling at the lovely reflection which the mirror gave back to her!" (U350) But in "Nausicaa" Gerty is perhaps most fully herself (most fully integrated) in the reflection of Bloom's gaze. In Bloom Gerty can see herself, not as she is, but as she constructs herself, namely as a creature of seductive power despite every empirical obstacle that nature and culture have conspired to throw in her way. And so she strikes a pose before Bloom as before a portrait painter (of sorts):

She gazed out towards the distant sea. It was like the paintings that man used to do on the pavement with all the coloured chalks.... And while she gazed her heart went pitapat. Yes, it was her he was looking at and there was meaning in his look. His eyes burned into her as though they would search her through and through, read her very soul. Wonderful eyes they

were superbly expressive, but could you trust them? People were so queer. She could see at once by his dark eyes and his pale intellectual face that he was a foreigner, the image of the photo she had of Martin Harvey, the matinee idol...but she could not see whether he had an aquiline nose or a slightly *retroussé* from where he was sitting. He was in deep mourning, she could see that, and the story of a haunting sorrow was written on his face.... Here was that of which she had so often dreamed. (U357-58)

And as for Bloom:

When you feel like that you often meet what you feel. Liked me or what? Dress they look at... Saw something in me. Wonder what. Sooner have me as I am than some poet chap with bearsgrease, plastery hair lovelock over his dexter optic. To aid gentleman in literary. Ought to attend to my appearance at my age. Didn't let her see me in profile. (U369)

It is enough to say that Bloom and Gerty mirror one another, not as they are, but as mutual self-creations in behalf of impossible desires. "See her as she is spoil all" (U370), says Bloom. Reality makes little room for desire, but desire cannot bear too much reality anyway. Joyce's response seems to be: What's wrong with that? The category of *as is* is a category of repression, whereas the category of *as another* is the category of return. "Saw something in me," says Bloom. Just so. A merely empirical or literal reflection of himself as in the tidepool invites instinctive self-erasure. In Gerty's regard, however, Bloom is able to see a version of himself that he can bear: Gerty's eyes substitute for his own, as do Bloom's for hers, and this enables a visibility between them: "When you feel that," he says, thinking of people tossed aside for someone else, "you often meet what you feel." Meanwhile Bloom's regard expresses and confirms Gerty's ideal self-image:

That strained look on her face! A gnawing sorrow is there all the time. Her very soul is in her eyes and she would give worlds to be in the privacy of her own familiar chamber where, giving way to tears, she could have a good cry and relieve her pentup feelings. Though not too much because she knew how to cry nicely before the mirror. You are lovely, Gerty, it said. (U351)⁹

Or, to put it another way, "it was," Bloom says, "a kind of language between us" (U372): not real speech, of course, only a manner of speaking formed by a casual, tacit, improvised agreement to (what?) regard one

another mistakenly, under the cover of assumed or imagined identities. For Gerty, Bloom is the image of an image, that of a matinee idol; Bloom says: “Gerty they called her. Might be a false name however” (U372), like his “Henry Flower.” (The regulative question of “Nausicaa” is: “But who was Gerty?” [U348]. She is, like everyone in *Ulysses*, caught between the hyperbole of desire and the understatement of how things are. But of course this supposes that we, readers, know how things are—surely a premature judgment.) At least Gerty is able to lead a Henry Flower form of life, and she belongs for a while to Bloom’s Henry Flower life, where beautiful seaside girls entice.¹⁰ At least Bloom and Gerty release one another’s “pentup feelings.” Odysseus was never happier than during his encounter with Nausicaa. What if there were less irony in Joyce’s fiction than critical tradition has instructed us to believe?

One can cushion this question with a critical-formal gloss. As between Maria and her reflection in the mirror this language between Gerty and Bloom is metaphorical—a game that allows experience to occur in the absence of any warrant for it. The word “warrant” appears here by design (it is a legal term). The crucial relationship in metaphor is not (just) between differences but between authorized and unauthorized versions of whatever is the case. Recall the old rhetorician’s distinction between authority and license in the matter of poetic language. Poetic language is language that goes on despite its noticeable shortfall in matters of true or false—in contrast to a certain view of philosophical language (at least in its propositional form), which is authoritative for assertions that can be voted up or down. “The law is an ass” is not a legal proposition. Of course, neither are metaphorical statements outright lies; they are statements that can be seen to fit (or disclose) the world we inhabit without being logically true or false as a matter of fact. Metaphorical statements cannot stand by themselves or on their own authority; they cannot be taken as they stand but require a special construction to support them—a support language that need not be spelled out but can remain implicit like a context or background, without which we would never know what a nuance is. Recontextualization may be our only reliable source of intelligibility.

However, Joyce’s metaphors are more complex and interesting than any theory could be (theories of metaphor suffer uniformly from the poverty of their examples; the rule of metaphor is absurdly satisfied when the law is simply an ass). We are taught in school that a metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon, and it is, but not in the literal sense of having just to do with words and how we combine them (substitution versus contiguity). After all, so far I have not been talking about Joyce’s language but about his characters and how they regard themselves, or

are regarded, in certain situations of complexity. Imagine metaphor as a form of life rather than as a form of logic. The truth about metaphor that we can learn from Joyce is that it is a way of making sense of things (and people) at ground level—as they go by, for everything in Joyce’s fiction is in motion. Metaphor is perhaps just a way of dealing with the temporality of existence. It is more phenomenological than logical, rhetorical, or poetical. Joyce’s characters are metaphorical just in the sense that they experience themselves and others—and their world—now one way, now another, as situations change, with nothing ever settling fixedly into place. Joyce is perhaps more Ovid than Homer. The question that keeps turning up in his fiction is this: How do we take things when we are not in a position to take them as they are in themselves, or from a stable point of view? Our position, like that of Joyce’s characters, is always relative and contingent, subject to randomness relieved occasionally—or, if truth be told, repeatedly—by coincidence (or metaphor). Parallax defines Joyce’s ontology. One could say that Joyce’s view of things resembles that of a Nietzschean for whom human finitude is inescapable and transcendence inaccessible except to Yeatsians in their folly; but this does not mean that the human world is just chaotic and inscrutable, with nothing leading anywhere. Joyce’s world is notoriously over-determined, since everything in it (Nietzsche-like) is interpretable otherwise, depending on what pattern turns up, so that even when nothing is certain and nothing can be taken as it stands (since nothing stands still), Joyce’s characters are always making sense of things, unlike the poor creatures in Kafka’s fiction, surrounded and hounded as they are by unknowable laws.

It is possible to complicate these speculations by turning to “Eveline.” A moment ago I made (much too casual) use of the concept of the repressed and the metaphorical structure of its return. The story of Eveline shows this matter in a special way, as of someone caught in the infinite distance between two different mirrors. Recall that when Eveline looked at herself through her *mother’s eyes*—when “the pitiful vision of her mother’s life [laid] its spell on the very quick of her being—that life of commonplace sacrifices closing in final craziness”—she rose up “in a sudden impulse of terror. Escape! She must escape! Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love too” (D33); anyhow he would sweep her away to Buenos Ayres. However, at the critical moment her father’s perspective asserts itself. Her father, we can say, is someone who sees things as they are, or anyhow as they usually are said to be and how we have no reason to expect them to be otherwise: thus he, her father, just knows that Eveline’s young man Frank is another sailor (a mirror of sailors) who will do what sailors do, seduce

an Irish virgin and abandon her in Liverpool. And so she freezes in a kind of Kierkegaardian moment of infinite possibilities, where all is lost:

A bell clanged upon her heart. She felt him seize her hand:

Come!

All the seas of the world tumbled about her heart: he would drown her. She gripped with both hands at the iron railing.

Come!

No! No! No! It was impossible. Her hands clutched the iron in frenzy. Amid the seas she sent a cry of anguish!

Eveline! Evvy!

He rushed beyond the barrier and called her to follow. He was shouted at to go on but still he called to her. She set her white face to him, passive, like a helpless animal. Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition." (D34)

If you want to know what the world is like apart from the way we figure it, here you begin to get your answer: it would be as if the world were not there for us to experience it. We would look at it like Eveline at Frank with no sign of recognition in our eyes. Imagine Frank as, suddenly, an empty mirror—the mirror image of Eveline's eyes. A sign of recognition, however dubious, means taking something as something, not just as the resemblance of a brute object but as a passage through a lookingglass. (Escape: what every Dubliner desires. Alas, "Think you're escaping and run into yourself" [U377]). So who, or what, is Frank? We could say that it depends on who has eyes to see, which is perhaps what experts mean when they say that repression follows "the law of the father."

Freed of this law, we enter the "Circe" episode of *Ulysses*, in which everything is as it meets the eye and is not to be taken otherwise, in contrast to "Eumaeus," where every word produces a new discrepancy.¹¹ You might say that in "Circe" whatever can be put into language is the case, whereas in "Eumaeus" everything is at odds with itself, except occasionally to sidelong glances ("He looked sideways in a friendly fashion at the sideface of Stephen, image of his mother" [U663; cf. U609]). Imagine a distinction between true and false mirrors (but how would we know the difference?).

Here is a typical stage direction from "Circe":

(From left upper entrance with two sliding steps Henry Flower comes forward to left front centre. He wears a dark mantle and drooping plumed sombrero. He carries a silver stringed inlaid dulcimer and a longstemmed bamboo Jacob's pipe, its clay bowl fashioned as a female head. He wears dark velvet hose and silverbuckled pumps. He has the romantic Saviour's face with flowering locks, thin beard, and moustache. His spindlelegs and sparrow feet are those of the tenor Mario, prince of Candi. He settles down his goffered ruffs and moistens his lips with a passage of his amorous tongue.)

HENRY

(In a low dulcet voice, touching the strings of his guitar.)

There is a flower that bloometh. (U517)

To the great Joycean question, "What's in a name?" the "Circe" episode answers: "What's your pleasure?" What the name "Henry Flower" contains is everything, including what a Henry Flower would look like were all stops pulled, fulfilling and, in fact, surpassing our desire (and not just ours) to see what otherwise could never make its appearance, because, if truth be told, whatever cannot make its appearance does not exist (the moral of Caliban's rage). If Maria from "Clay" were to appear in "Circe," she would do so as a young beauty adorned for a client. If meanwhile a mirror appeared, as it does when Bloom looks through a keyhole at Molly and Boylan in their ecstasy

LYNCH

(Points.) The mirror up to nature. *(He laughs.)* Hu hu hu hu hu

hu hu.

(Stephen and Bloom gaze in the mirror. The face of William Shakespeare, beardless, appears there, rigid in facial paralysis, crowned by the reflection of the reindeer antlered hatrack in the hall.) (U567)

it would give us, of course, an excess of imagery: a Dublin paralytic, a portrait of the artist as a young man, and a poor cuckold; or, if you prefer, a portrait of three bards in one, duplicating the doctrine of the Trinity: Shakespeare, Stephen, Bloom (yes, three: see Bloom as Byron, as Molly once did [U774] when young Bloom dressed the

character). Meanwhile it seems in the nature of *Ulysses* that everyone has some connection to Shakespeare (the “universal man” in Joyce’s era, which is roughly what Stephen argues in “Scylla and Charybdis”).

In “Eumaeus,” however, nothing is anything, and the reason is given by Stephen:

Sounds are impostures, Stephen said after a pause of some little time. Like names, Cicero, Podmore, Napolean, Mr Goodbody, Jesus, Mr Doyle, Shakespeare. Shakespeares were as common as Murphy. What’s in a name?

Yes, to be sure, Mr Bloom unaffectedly concurred. Of course. Our name was changed too, he added, pushing the so-called roll across. (U622-23)

In “Circe” names are magical and can conjure whom or whatever is called—Henry Flower, Rudy Bloom, a bar of soap, a hand writing on the wall, dancing hours, Boylan’s boots. In “Eumaeus” names are misnomers, that is, they seem misapplied to the people who bear them: witness Simon Dedalus, who Murphy identifies as a sharpshooter in Hengler’s Circus. “Curious coincidence,” says Bloom, and so it is: misnomers rule in “Eumaeus” (but they seem to rule much of *Ulysses*: count the misnomers, not to mention the mirrors, in “Wandering Rocks,” starting with Bloom the dentist.) Meanwhile an alias, thinks Molly, is “a mendacious person mentioned in the sacred Scripture” (U686). In “Circe,” everything “comes to pass”; in “Eumaeus,” “egregious balderdash” sums it up (U641). No one can be sure of anything, so like Bloom we should be guided by the law of improbability, which “Circe” happily overturns, being a flawless execution of a Strindbergian dreamplay.¹²

And Molly? She has reached the age (33, going on 34) when mirrors can no longer be trusted (U69, U749). Fortunately, memory (like daydreams) is the better mirror:

he was watching me whenever he got an opportunity at the band on the Alameda esplanade when I was with father and Captain Grove I looked up at the church first and then at the windows then down and our eyes met I felt something go through me like all needles my eyes were dancing I remember after when I looked at myself in the glass hardly recognized myself the change I had a splendid skin from the sun and the excitement like a rose I didn’t get a wink of sleep (U756)

This is Molly in Gibraltar, at age 15—Milly’s age as of June 15, 1904. Just so, as Molly is the mirror of her mother,

Lunita Loredó (U761), so is Milly of Molly: “of course shes restless knowing shes pretty with her lips so red a pity they wont stay that way I was too” (U767): and likewise self-willed—“I was just like that myself they daren’t order me about the place” (U768):

her tongue is a bit too long for my taste your blouse is open too low she says to me the pan calling the kettle blackbottom and I had to tell her not to cock her legs up like that on show on the windowsill before all the people passing they all look at her like me when I was her age.
(U766-77)

And Milly?

O Milly Bloom, you are my darling.
You are my lookingglass from night to morning.
I’d rather have you without a farthing
Than Katey Keogh with her ass and garden. (U63)

Milly exists for us in the mirror of Bloom’s mind, where she is, among other things, the mirror image of Bloom’s cat (U694), but also inevitably a younger version of Molly, unfaithful to him (so he worries) with a “young student” who sings, of all things, “Boylan’s (I was on the pop of writing Blazes Boylan’s) song about those seaside girls.” (U66) Recall the ominous line in “Telemachus” that suggests that Milly has fallen into Mulligan’s world (“I got a card from Bannon. Says he found a sweet young thing down there. Photo girl he calls her” [U21]). But at day’s end it comes for Bloom down to teeth: “Very same teeth she has. What do they love? Another themselves?” (U379) *Ulysses* celebrates the reign of Narcissus.

Let me conclude by citing the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, whose essay, “Reality and Its Shadow” (1948), provides a nice gloss upon these proceedings:

Being is not only itself, it escapes itself. Here is a person who is what he is; but he does not make us forget, does not absorb, cover over entirely the objects he holds and the way he holds them, his gestures, limbs, gaze, thought, skin, which escape from under the identity of his substance, which like a torn sack is unable to contain them. Thus a person bears on his face, along side of its being with which he coincides, its own caricature, its picturesqueness....

There is a duality in this person...a duality in its being. It is what it is and it is a stranger to itself, and there is a relationship between these two moments....

It is an ambiguous commerce with reality in which reality does not refer to itself but to its reflection, its shadow....

A being is that which is, that which reveals itself in its truth, and, at the same time, it resembles itself, is its own image.¹³

We are, in other words, not at all subjects as philosophy traditionally pictures us—recall Descartes in the *Discourse on Method*: “I then examined closely what I was, and saw that I could imagine that I had no body, and that there was no world nor any place that I occupied, but that I could not imagine for a moment that I did not exist.” (Would he rage at not seeing himself in a mirror? No, demons rage, but not angels.)¹⁴ Or Kant, in whose anthropology we are disengaged punctual egos exercising rational control over whatever is presented to us, including ourselves, transcendental self-legislating agents that we are. Levinas is closer to Joyce than to his philosophical forebears. My face is not the locus of my self-identity: it is my shadow, a surplus me, an alter ego that exposes me to the world and to others in it just in the sense that, Stephen-like, I have little or no control over my image and resemblance, which is always in the world before me. Or, as Levinas sometimes has it, I am always a little bit behind myself, never quite all myself at once but always immersed in a state of reflection: I am a mirror of myself, a poor resemblance, but mine own. This explains why there is something cadaverous about me, since what I inhabit is the intransparent distance between reality and its shadow.

Likewise in Joyce's fiction everyone is in a mirror- or shadow-state in which “I” is never “I” but also “me,” where the relation between “I” and “me” is never a relation of sameness or identity, because the “me” is always in the condition of the accusative, the one to whom things happen—the one who is not a philosophical subject (the “I” of cognition) but is always subject to others: the “me” is one who is seen rather than the observer occupying the privileged seat of surveillance. “See not be seen,” says Bloom, who is always caught by someone's eye. Likewise one could say that Stephen is an “I” who repeatedly suffers the condition of a “me,” Bloom's quintessential mode of existence as the one to whom things happen, except when he acts under the pseudonym of “Henry Flower,” an alter ego imaginably self-possessed in a way that no singular human being could be.

(Endnotes)

¹ Many, many years ago I wrote a short paper (long since vanished) on Joyce's mirrors in a course taught by Hugh Kenner, whose *Dublin's Joyce* remarks in passing that the "generic Joycean plot" is that of "the encounter with the alter ego" (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), p. 123. I borrowed Kenner's thesis then, and I borrow it again now. This present essay is also a sequel of sorts to "Error and Figure in *Ulysses*," the final chapter of my *Inventions: Writing, Textuality, and Understanding in Literary History* (Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 160-74. That piece, like this one, was an attempt to square the metaphoricality of Joyce's fiction with his essential naturalism ("he is a very bold man to alter in the presentment, or to deform, whatever he has seen and heard"). The basic thesis was (and still is) that Joyce never gets his facts wrong, but his characters do, relentlessly so, but their mistakes and misapprehensions turn out to echo one another and so form patterns and motifs: people get things wrong, yes, but contexts form during the course of the novel that make them come out right.

² See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Intertwining—The Chiasm," *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), esp. 139.

³ On embellishment: there's Mulligan the dandy, dressing "the character," that is, readying himself for display (U17), like Tom Kernan in "Wandering Rocks":

Mr Kernan halted and preened himself before the sloping mirror of Peter Kennedy, hairdresser. Stylish coat, beyond doubt. Scott of Dawson street. Well worth the half sovereign I gave

Neary for it. Never built under three guineas. Fits me down to the ground. Some Kildare street club toff had it probably. John Mulligan, the manager of the Hibernian bank, gave me a very sharp eye yesterday on Carlisle bridge as if he remembered me.

Aham! Must dress the character for those fellows. (U240)

⁴ Cf. "Telemachus" (U40):

Reading two pages apiece of seven books every night, eh? I was young. You bowed to yourself in the mirror, stepping forward to applause earnestly, striking face. Hurray for the God-damned idiot! Hurray! No-one saw: tell no-one. Books you were going to write with letters for titles. Have you read his F? O yes, but I prefer Q. Yes, but W is wonderful. O yes, W. Remember your epiphanies on green oval leaves, deeply deep, copies to be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world, including Alexandria?

⁵ My thanks to Luke Gibbons for this suggestion.

⁶ Not surely like the one reflected momentarily in Mulligan's eyes, a figure he has been changed into, complete with borrowed clothes:

Buck Mulligan turned suddenly for an instant towards Stephen but did not speak. In the bright silent instant Stephen saw his own image in cheap dusty mourning between their gay attires. (U18)

⁷ *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 402.

⁸ Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, "The Deceptive Self: Liars, Layers, and Lairs," *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, eds. Brian P. McLaughlin and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 25.

⁹ Gerty would be someone to think about when confronting the fact that, by comparison with Joyce's other writings, there aren't many mirrors in *Finnegans Wake*, which is, after all, a kind of sound poem. But Issy or her namesake, Nuvoletta (or Lucia Joyce) takes up Gerty's mirror play in the Mookes and Gripes episode of the *Wake*, but without

Gerty's success:

Nuvoletta listened as she reflected herself, through the heavenly one with his constellatria and his emanations stood between, and she tries all she tried to make the Mookse look up at her (but *he* was fore too adiaptotously farseeing) and to make the Gripes hear how coy she could be (though he was much to schystimatically auricular about *his ens* to heed her) but it was all mild's vapour moist.... She tried all her winsome wonsome ways her four winds had taught her. She tossed her sfumastelliacious hair like *la princesse de la Petite Bretagne* and she rounded her mignons arms like Mrs Cornwallis-West and she smiled over herself like the beauty of the image of the image of the pose of the daughter of the queen of the Emperour of Irelande and she signed after herself as were she born to bride with Tristis Trisior Tristissimus. But, sweet madonine, she might fair as well have carried her daisy's worth to Florida. (FW157-58)

The Mookse and Gripes remain "pinefully obliviscent" to Nuvoletta's seductions. Shortly thereafter, interestingly, "a woman of no appearance" carries off the two of them (FW158). In despair, Nuvoletta throws herself into the river to the tune of Gerty's magazine idiom:

And into the river that had been a stream (for thousands of years had gone eon her and come on her and she was stout and struck on dancing and her muddied name was Missisiliffi) there fell a tear, a singulet tear, the loveliest of all tears (I mean for those crylove fables fans who are 'keen' on the pretty-pretty commonface sort of thing you meet by hope harrods) for it was a leaptear. (FW159)

¹⁰ Compare "Sirens," where Bloom admires Miss Douce's image in a mirror:

Bronze, listening by beerpull, gazed far away. Soulfully. Doesn't know I'm. Molly great dab at seeing anyone looking.

Bronze gazed far sideways. Mirror there. Is that best side of her face? They always know. Knock at the door. Last tip to titivate. (U284)

¹¹ My first published piece on Joyce was the chapter on "Eumaeus" in the volume of essays on *Ulysses* edited by Clive

Hart and David Hayman, who, as I remember being told, found it difficult to persuade anyone with a reputation to protect to write on “Eumaeus,” then and perhaps still considered the “dullest” episode in *Ulysses*. At the last moment I was, to my good fortune, recruited to fill in the blank. So naturally “Eumaeus” remains my favorite part of Joyce’s book.

¹² August Strindberg’s preface to his *A Dream Play* has always seemed to me a perfect gloss on “Circe”:

In this dream play the author has...attempted to imitate the inconsequent yet transparently logical shape of a dream. Everything can happen, everything is possible and probable. Time and place do not exist; on an insignificant basis of reality the imagination spins, weaving new patterns; a mixture of memories, experiences, free fancies, incongruities, and improvisations. The characters split, double, multiply, evaporate, condense, disperse, assemble. But one consciousness rules over them all, that of the dreamer [read: reader]; for him there are no secrets, no illogicalities, no scruples, no laws. He neither acquits nor condemns, but merely relates; and, just as a dream is more often painful than happy, so an undertone of melancholy and pity for all human beings accompanies this flickering tale.

Melancholy indeed: “Circe” ends with an eleven-year-old Rudy gazing unseeing into Bloom’s eyes. (U609)

¹³ *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971), p. 6

¹⁴ In “Eye and Mind” Merleau-Ponty writes: “A Cartesian does not see *himself* in the mirror; he sees a dummy, an ‘outside,’ which, he has every reason to believe, other people see in the very same way but which, no more for himself than for others, is not a body in the flesh. His ‘image’ in the mirror is an effect of the mechanics of things. If he recognizes himself in it, if he thinks it “looks like him,” it is his thought that weaves this connection. The mirror image is nothing that belongs to him.” Trans. Carleton Dallery, *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 170.