“Signs on a White Field:” James Joyce, *Ulysses*, and the Postcolonial Sublime

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“They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind – as is very proper for those who tackle darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter nose than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to….”

- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

“In anger at her words and fear no less, Goaded by both, that brutal despot drew His dangling sword and seized her by the hair, And forced her arms behind her back and bound Them fast; and Philomela, seeing the sword, Offered her throat and hoped she would have died. But as she fought, outraged, for words and called Her father’s name continually, he seized Her tongue with tongs and, with his brutal sword, Cut it away.”

- Ovid, *Metamorphosis, Book VI*

“Hugh: Yes, it is a rich language, Lieutenant, full of the mythologies of fantasy and hope and self-deception – a syntax opulent with tomorrows. It is our response to mud cabins and a diet of potatoes; our only method of replying to… inevitabilities.”

- Brian Friel, *Translations*
The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which James Joyce’s *Ulysses* is imbued with a kind of Postcolonial sublime. In doing so my hope is to prove that Joyce’s text is, in a way, a performance: through his wide-ranging use of distinct figures, tropes, and motifs, Joyce acts out and reconciles himself with the trauma of colonization. Most importantly, however, in *Ulysses* Joyce attempts to articulate the ontological status of a group – the colonized – that has heretofore gone radically unarticulated. “Nothing can describe well enough the extraordinary deficiency of the colonized,” Albert Memmi writes, pointing to the colonial subject’s under-representation; but in *Ulysses*, Joyce without question succeeds in figuring this “deficiency” by upending traditional notions of “text,” “identity,” and “language.”¹ In the end, Joyce subverts the very medium in which he writes: he appropriates the tongue of the colonizer in order to re-establish himself in the aftermath of colonization.

The first and second sections of this work will investigate “text,” or more specifically, the ways in which text falls short of its intended purpose in the Postcolonial world. Through the work of Roland Barthes and Maurice Blanchot a notion of text will be developed that is concerned with the ways in which meaning is assigned to text. At the heart of these sections exists this fundamental question: how does the Postcolonial figure situate himself vis-à-vis text? Does he have access to it? Can he use it? Through *Ulysses* we will find that “text” occupies a space of critical uncertainty for the Postcolonial author – it is a mode of representation shaped and defined by some Other, and it remains as such indefinitely.

¹ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (New York: The Orion Press), 80. Hereafter cited parenthetically as (Memmi, page #).
The third section, will examine the ways in which Joyce uses this problematic text as a means of self-representation. Through the characters of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, along with the profound matrix of intertextuality present within the work, it will be shown that the Postcolonial tongue is one that constantly reinvents itself; its stylistics are untraditional and its mission is seemingly impossible: to establish an audible language for those who are not heard – the “subaltern.” Finally, through the work of Jacques Lacan, we will see the Postcolonial sublime come to fruition. *Ulysses* will be shown to be a decidedly performative text: it not only acts out the trauma and irreparability of the colonial project, but it also succeeds in reaffirming the identity of the colonized. By locating, at least in part, what Stephen dubs “The word known to all men,” *Ulysses* is transformed from mere novel to ontological vehicle.

I. The Histrionics of Text: Gestures Toward Meaning

If text is, at its most base level, a physical thing – simple shapes inscribed on paper – then it is entirely justifiable to say that text is dead, or rather that its “thingness” occupies a literal and figurative space commensurate with the deceased. Apropos of this Blanchot writes:

> He who dies cannot tarry. The deceased, it is said, is no longer of this world; he has left it behind. But behind there is, precisely, this cadaver, which is not of the world either, even though it is here. Rather it is behind the world. It is that which the living person (and not the deceased) left behind him and which now affirms, from here, the possibility of a world behind the world, of a regression, an indefinite subsistence…

Thus the “cadaverous resemblance” exists as a kind of residue (Blanchot, 257). The lifeless body left behind functions as a two-fold symbol, on one hand physically

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demarcating the “thingness” of the human body, and, on the other, pointing towards some unknown, some “indefinite,” beyond the grasp of human cognition. In that way, then, the deceased is thrust into a certain state of flux; in its simultaneous attempt to remain grounded within the past – to function purely as “remains,” as it were – and to proleptically point to the “the possibility of a world behind the world,” the dead comes to occupy a space of both meaning and meaninglessness: futilely, it “establishes a relation between here and nowhere” (Blanchot, 256). And it is perhaps because of this indeterminacy, this certain uncanniness of the dead, that we inter the body. In a space “symbolically set apart,” the cadaver is physically laid to rest (Blanchot, 259). We assign to the ground an uneasy cathartic power in the hope that our symbolic burying of the dead will preclude death and its inherent uncertainty from ever regaining a foothold above the earth. It is a hollow exercise.

And as we read our eulogies, as we recite prayers over the bodies of the dearly departed we take part in the death of yet another entity: the death of text. Derrida notes that the “field” of language “is in effect that of play, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that it is to say, because instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitution.”3 Thus, like the cadaver, text and language function doubly. In the first act, text occupies its “finite” space: it is a physical thing, a written symbol, established and maintained by our desire to communicate some thought. In its second function, however, text, like the cadaver, points to some unknown, some “field of infinite substitutions.” And like the afterlife, this field is decidedly unknowable; it lacks any kind of “ground.”

any notion of “center” upon which we as readers can rest. Therefore, as we do with the
deceased, we bury text – we create for it a space of meaning, a falsified logos that keeps
text at a comfortable distance. Ironically, however, this space of “meaning” exists within
the reader.

Barthes offers an illuminating dimension to this conception of text when he writes:

> The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers
> of culture… a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures
> and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but
> there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the
> reader… The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up
> a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies
> not in its origin, but in its destination.

What we see in Barthes’ work, then, is an indication of how Derrida’s field of play
becomes falsely grounded through the act of reading. By taking away from the author a
certain measure of authority, text becomes only a matrix of cultural institutions –
“quotations,” “dialogue,” “parody,” etc. – captured and recapitulated. Therefore, when
the reader encounters the inherent uncertainty of the text, he is able to mediate it through
his own experience; he becomes a kind of interpreter. Like a wave, the text washes over
the reader, and in his attempt to keep his head above water, as it were, the text is redacted
into him: he decides which institutions he will and will not take from it. What gets lost in
the shuffle, then, is the true nature of text, its inherent “deadness.”

When Barthes writes that “a text’s unity lies… in its destination,” it is fair to say
that this unity is dubious at best. As each reader comes to each text with his own set of
knowledge, his own cultural predispositions and tendencies, the text’s unity becomes
variable, capable of being construed in any imaginable way. Thus like our burying of the

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dead, our grounding of text is inherently futile; we cannot assign to it any real *logos*, we cannot know its true “meaning,” and we cannot escape any future uncertainties. We can only use our language, our culture, and our own predispositions to find a kind of common ground amongst ourselves, however unstable that ground may be. Text, then, lives, but only as a self-contained entity, dependent upon some framework established and maintained, however unconsciously, by those who read it.

But what happens to those outside of these systems? Where does meaning lie for those who are permanently pushed into this same space of uncertainty? How does text function for he who has no culture, no “ground” upon which text can rest? In James Joyce’s *Ulysses* we come face to face with these questions.

II. **Usurper: The Postcolonial Crisis of Representation**

In this section we will attempt to reconcile our notion of text with Joyce’s Postcolonial world of Dublin. Through an analysis of the ways in which Joyce represents the textual experience of the Postcolonial figure – that is, the way in which his characters confront and are confronted by text – we shall find that for the colonized, text never attains the semblance of life we mentioned before; instead it remains in its cadaverous state, unfamiliar and unknowable. Through Stephen Dedalus’ (and Joyce’s) seemingly philosophical ruminations upon the nature of representation in the Irish world we shall find that for the colonized subject there is not even an illusory *logos*: the death of text is insured by the colonizer’s presence.

And that presence need not be physical. While we do at times catch glimpses of the English colonizing force – most noticeably in the “Cyclops” episode: “…old Troy of
the D.M.P. at the corner of Arbour hill... – for the most part colonization exists as a lingering presence or trace which can be located neither here nor there.\(^5\) Perhaps this is why Bloom’s sentiment of a nation being “the same people living in the same place” is so widely accepted by those in Barney Kiernan’s pub: for he who has come under the control of another there can be no assured sense of place, no concrete “nation,” as it were; there is only a potpourri of faces, a conglomeration of those the colonizer has chosen to leave behind (\(U\), 12.1422-1423). And this loss, this sense of dislocation haunts the colonized; for him nothing is stable.

Thus, the key issue for our study is the way in which the Postcolonial figure comes to terms with this inherent instability, especially in the context of representation. How can he figure his own existence if existence at a seemingly simple level – nations, countries, etc. – is in a state of flux? For an answer let us turn to Stephen Dedalus, Joyce’s young, disaffected academic, whose thoughts shed light on the struggle for representation and the ineffectiveness of text in the Postcolonial world. In the opening pages of \textit{Ulysses} Stephen converses at great length with Buck Mulligan, his medical student roommate. In one of Joyce’s most famous passages, Stephen and Buck have the following exchange:

\begin{quote}
- The rage of Caliban at not seeing his face in a mirror, he said. If Wilde were only alive to see you!
  Drawing back and pointing, Stephen said with bitterness:
  - It is a symbol of Irish art. The cracked lookingglass of a servant.
  Buck Mulligan suddenly linked his arm in Stephen’s and walked with him round the tower, his razor and mirror clacking in the pocket where he had thrust them. (\(U\), 1.143-149)
\end{quote}

Let us note primarily Joyce’s invocation of Caliban and Oscar Wilde. While they are without question two very recognizable literary figures, one fictitious and the other an

author, they exist within a definitively marginalized space. Caliban, the animal-like creature of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* is dismissed as uncivilized and inherently unimportant; Oscar Wilde, the playwright and scholar, remains within a precarious position in London high society, on the precipice between mainstream acceptance and alienation within “the closet.” And through the mentioning of these two figures Joyce subtly conflates Ireland and its citizenry with the outsider. The Irishman exists liminally, pushed to the edge of society, kept in the dark – the closet – and dismissed as irrelevant by his English master.

Thus, it makes sense that for Stephen “Irish art” is best likened to “the cracked lookingglass of a servant.” For the Irish subject, any attempt at self-expression is inherently problematic. His art (be it textual, pictorial, etc.), it seems, is always somehow interrupted – cracked – by the trauma of colonization; no matter what it strives to represent, it can only ever be the work of a “servant:” it will never occupy a space of authority. And this powerlessness is invoked in Stephen’s analogy of a lookingglass. Instead of Irish art attempting to create something new, it is always merely a tool of reproduction. As Buck Mulligan mimes the sacrament of the Eucharist on the opening pages of the novel, so the Irish artist is always functioning in a purely mimetic form: his art is a mirror – and a skewed one at that – of the space around him. But instead of realism the Postcolonial artist creates simulacrum; instead of a reflection of the self, he can only capture some uncanny image, some Caliban he believes to be himself.

Hence, when Albert Memmi proclaims that colonized art can undergo a radical kind of “depersonalization,” we understand what he means (Memmi, 140). For a character like Stephen, living in Dublin with the aftermath of the colonial experience, art,
text, representation – whatever we call it – comes to an endpoint. It reaches a certain representational limit that cannot be transgressed: the creator of the work cannot find himself within it. And the question is why? What precludes the Postcolonial figure from locating an adequate means of expression? Why must he make do with “the cracked looking glass of a servant?”

To paraphrase Stephen’s English roommate Haines, perhaps history is to blame. If Pierre Macherey, in his *A Theory of Literary Production*, is correct when he postulates that “…history is not in a simple external relation to the work: it is present in the work, in so far as the emergence of the work required this history,” then we must find the nature of history for the Postcolonial figure. For history, it seems, acts in a two fold manner: it is a locale from which representation emerges and a kind of bedrock upon which it can rest. As we alluded to earlier, it allows us to bury the text, to ground it within some past that we have come to accept and, in some way, understand. But what history does the Postcolonial author have? Where does he ground his work?

Memmi writes:

The colonized… is in no way a subject of history any more. Of course, he carries its burden, often more cruelly than others, but always as an object. He has forgotten how to participate actively in history and no longer even asks to do so. No matter how briefly colonization may have lasted, all memory of freedom seems distant; he forgets what it costs or else he no longer dares to pay the price for it. (Memmi, 92)

What we see here, then, is a kind of displacement in which the colonized subject is at one time made infinitely distant and uncomfortably close to his own history. On one had, the colonizer has, to use Stephen’s term, “usurped” the past of his subject; the colonial figure reaches a point at which he can no longer remember an independent past (*U*, 1.743). As a

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result, he comes to rely on the presence of the colonizer in order to identify himself. And therein lies the “burden” of which Memmi speaks. The colonized subject is forced to create an identity for himself out of difference; he cannot look back to his own past in order to locate a sense of self – that is an impossibility. Instead he must look back upon a kind of historicity, a past that begins when the colonizer appears. All else has been erased, made “distant,” like a hazy memory only half recalled, or a partial presence altered in the various shards of the “cracked lookingglass.”

Thus, we understand Stephen when he notes, “History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake” (U, 2.377). By conflating history with a nightmare, Stephen points to the problematic relationship the Postcolonial subject has with the past – it is a liminal, partial, entity, which resurfaces from time to time, but not in any consistent manner. History exists as a kind of afterthought, a subconscious trace that leaves its indelible mark upon the waking life of the Irish subject. Take, for example, a character like The Citizen in chapter twelve, “The Cyclops.” In his conjuring of images like Parnell, the great Irish patriot, and The Irish Independent, an apparently nationalist newspaper, The Citizen uses the past as a kind of rallying point: “To hell with them! The curse of a goodfornothing God light sideways on the bloody thicklugged sons of whores’ gets! No music and no art and no literature worthy of the name. Any civilization they have they stole from us,” he expounds, referring to the English (U, 12.219-220; 1197-1201).

And while this act of rebellious patriotism is indeed admirable, we cannot help but see how The Citizen’s concept of Irish history has become “objectified,” to use Memmi’s term. For The Citizen, and all of the nationalists we encounter in chapter twelve, Parnell is less an historical figure than a totemic artifact. His name, along with
all of Irish history, is being recalled, but only as a rebuttal to England’s presence within Ireland. In one way, then, Irish history takes the place of the Irish army; it is mustered up to face the “thickluged sons of whores” England has sent, and this time it cannot be defeated. But this use of history is decidedly futile, if not pathetic. Instead of it functioning as a kind of ontological mechanism, helping the Irish identify themselves vis-à-vis some past, it functions instead as tool for constructing what could have been; it creates a sense of the present, a sense of an Irish identity that does not and will not ever exist.

Thus, returning to Macherey, Irish textual representation is forced to find its emergence in something besides history. And Stephen at least partially finds this point of origin within the Irish subject himself. In his conversation with Mr. Deasy we note the following exchange (some of which we pointed to before):

- History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.
  From the playfield the boys raised a shout. A whirring whistle: goal.
  What is that nightmare gave you a back kick?
- The ways of the creator are not our ways, Mr Deasy said. All human history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God.
  Stephen jerked his thumb towards the window, saying:
  - That is God. (U, 2.377-383)

Here, in the face of Mr. Deasy, the English schoolmaster, Stephen calls into question the implicit authority of history. By assigning the ultimate power – the voice of God – to “a shout in the street,” Stephen, it seems, upends Macherey (U, 2.386). The Irish text need no longer be constitutive of history, but rather it can come from anywhere: the “Hooray! Ay! Whrrwhee!” of the boys outside the window can serve as a point of textual emergence for he who has no history (U, 2.384). Thus, the Postcolonial figure possesses a rather grandiose amount of textual freedom: as he is not bound by some definable history, then neither is his language.
And perhaps this is the out Joyce is looking for. Wittgenstein famously remarks, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.”7 What happens when the limits of language are thrown to the wayside? What we shall see is a dramatic opening up of the signifying field, in which the constraints of the colonizer are not only broken, but also radically re-appropriated by this liminal, Postcolonial figure. Lyotard writes: “Artists and writers must be brought back into the bosom of the community, or at least, if the latter is considered to be ill, they must be assigned the task of healing it.”8 In the end perhaps this is Joyce’s purpose after all.

III. “A Disappointed Bridge:” Language in the Postcolonial World

The third section of this study is dedicated to examining the ways in which the Postcolonial subject comes up against a kind of representational blockage in *Ulysses*. Initially we will find instances in the text where characters come face to face with the shortcomings of their representational modalities: both speech and text will fail. But in coming to terms with this inadequacy of language, we will see Joyce’s Postcolonial figures break through this barrier – meaningful communication occurs, but outside of linguistic systems. The Postcolonial figure himself becomes a representational mechanism. And in this breakthrough we will move into what can only be called the Postcolonial sublime. We will see the text of *Ulysses* transformed into a kind of ontological vehicle, a performative act in which the Postcolonial identity is made whole: text will transcend itself. But first things first…

How does language come into being? What monumental event, what pulsating urge to communicate forced the first man to utter the first word? Some believe that first word was given to Adam by God, a kind of linguistic hand-me-down from Father to son. Others see language as a natural occurrence, transmutations of the caveman’s grunt, appropriated and utilized by us in everyday speech acts. But regardless of where it comes from, regardless of its point of origin and ultimate destination, language, in any form, remains universally one thing: Other. Language, unlike many other cultural institutions, cannot be traced back to its beginning; the practice of etymology is useful, but, without question, indecisive. And this uncertainty about language exists in a decidedly exaggerated state for the Postcolonial figure. More so for him than any other, he has no access to his language’s initial locus.

Perhaps, then, we can understand Jacques Derrida when he states, “I only have one language; it is not mine.”9 For in this proposition, Derrida, himself a former subject of French colonization, articulates the inherent Otherness of language – indeed he can use it, but he never actually owns it. Functionality and utility obscure the alienating effects of language which Bhabha locates in what he calls “mimicry.” Through his interpolation of the colonizer’s language, the colonial subject reemerges as a “reformed, recognizable Other;” he assumes an identity that is not his own.10 Thus, the colonial subject begins to occupy an indeterminate space, as his “mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask;” he loses a certain ontological logos in his efforts to fit in (Bhabha, 88).11

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11 Bhabha, 88
But this theory presupposes a kind of ignorance on the part of the colonial subject. Is it not possible that he can see the problems of language? Does he automatically accept the colonizer’s linguistic authority? Derrida suggests just the opposite:

For contrary to what one is often most tempted to believe, the master is nothing. And he does not have exclusive possession of anything. Because the master does not possess exclusively, and naturally, what he calls his language… he cannot maintain any relations of property or identity that are natural, national, congenital, or ontological, with it… Because language is not his natural possession, he can, thanks to that very fact, pretend historically, through the rape of cultural usurpation, which always means colonial, to appropriate it in order to impose it as “his own.” (Derrida (ii), 23)

Here Derrida subverts the colonial project of translation by pointing toward the colonizer’s own linguistic instability. While “the rape of cultural usurpation” is indeed present, its existence can only be established through a process of historical revision. The colonizer must “pretend” into being the “naturalness” of his language so that he may “impose it as ‘his own’” upon the Other. And while that imposition is predicated upon a questionable measure of authority, it is, nevertheless, tangible. Consider the following passage from *Ulysses*, in which Stephen, Buck, and Haines converse with their elderly, Irish milkmaid:

- Do you understand what he says? Stephen asked her.
- Is it French you are talking, sir? the old woman said to Haines. Haines spoke to her again a longer speech, confidently.
- Irish, Buck Mulligan said. Is there Gaelic on you?
- I thought it was Irish, she said, by the sound of it. Are you from the west, sir?
- I am an Englishman, Haines answered.
- He’s English, Buck Mulligan said, and he thinks we ought to speak Irish in Ireland.
- Sure we ought to, the old woman said, and I’m ashamed I don’t speak the language myself. I’m told it’s a grand language by them that knows. (*U*, 1.424-434)

In this selection Joyce points toward the colonial usurpation of language. What is perhaps most interesting in this bit of dialogue is the fact that Haines, the Englishman, is the only character who knows Gaelic, the native Irish tongue; Buck Mulligan intimates a grasp of the language, but he makes no explicit reference to his understanding. In fact,
the language has become so foreign, so Other to those who once possessed it, that it can be mistaken for French – even the phonetics of Gaelic are no longer recognizable. And as a result, the language becomes ironically nostalgic, a tradition whose loss only the colonizer mourns – “he thinks we ought to speak Irish in Ireland.” And yet the old woman is content to keep her native tongue at a distance, absentmindedly dubbing it “a grand language.”

Yet, for Stephen, and perhaps for Joyce, this loss of language is more than an historical anecdote: it is a continuing trauma. When one looks upon the text of *Ulysses* one cannot help but see the deep impact of colonization; one cannot help but notice the profound way in which the colonizer has become imbedded within the “Irish identity” – after all, the novel, a book considered to be the high watermark of Irish literature, is written in English. Like the old milkmaid, “serving her conqueror,” Stephen, Bloom, Buck, and even Joyce are located within a wholly alien system of representation (*U*, 1.405). As Derrida notes that he has but one language and it is not his own, Joyce seems to imply the same through this scene: his Irish epic can only be written in a foreign language. In some other space, or perhaps more accurately, in some other time there exists a “them that knows” Gaelic; in the present, however, all access to that knowledge has been permanently cut off by the English colonizer, even after his departure. Haines’ knowledge of the language, then, only widens this gap: Gaelic can be learned, but only as a kind of lark. It has been redacted solely into the world of academia, isolated, it seems, from those to whom it rightfully belongs.

And Joyce subtly acknowledges this deficiency throughout *Ulysses*. In the opening paragraphs of chapter fourteen, “The Oxen of the Sun,” for example, we see
Joyce experimenting with the stylistics of various literary genres, including the English epic; in chapter eleven, “Sirens,” he creates a kind of musical text. As Blamires notes, “The introductory flourish has been said to represent the tuning up of an orchestra.” While this multiplicity of textual endeavors can be read as simply Joyce’s desire to explore and push the limits of the novel form, it can also be read as an allegory for the crisis of representation the Irish face. Joyce, it seems, is reluctant to locate himself within a defined writing style, preferring instead to oscillate among varying textual styles; in a way, he tiptoes through the words of his master, wary of imbedding himself within a language that is not his own.

Perhaps, then, this is why Stephen is so understanding when he discovers his sister, Dilly, purchasing “Chardenal’s French primer” at a bookstand: “Show no surprise. Quite natural,” Stephen thinks to himself (U, 10.867-871). For he, like Derrida and Joyce, has come to understand the position of the Postcolonial subject. For his sister there is no hope of ever recovering what the English took; there is no way to regain the lost language. Dilly’s attempt to learn French, then, can be read as a kind of rebellious, albeit naïve, effort to opt out of English altogether. And Dilly is not alone in this desire. In the following passage a measure of pathos is present within Bloom’s voice as he gazes upon the local newspaper’s printing press:

Slt. The nethermost deck of the first machine jogged forward its flyboard with slt the first batch of quirefolded papers. Slit. Almost human the way it slt to call attention. Doing its best to speak. That door too slt creaking, asking to be shut. Everything speaks in its own way. Slit. (U, 7.174-177)

It is almost as if Bloom locates the struggle of Irish representation wholly within these inanimate objects. His last thought – “Everything speaks in its own way” – could easily

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be followed by the sentiment, “except the Irishman.” Like the printing press and the open door, the Irish subject can do little more than “call attention” to himself with words that reach only those in his same powerless position. The “almost human” utterances of “sllt” and “creaking” mirror the profoundly inadequate language the Irish subject must use: English. The question, then, we are forced to ask is how does the Postcolonial subject communicate? If he has no real purchase upon the language he uses, then can he ever truly express himself? As Spivak queries, “can the subaltern speak?”

The answer Joyce provides is yes, but with one caveat: the mode of communication must be extra-linguistic in order to be effective. In other words, the colonized subject must opt out of his master’s language in order to fully express himself. What he is left with, then, is a decidedly body-based language; the corporeal presence of the colonial figure comes into a sphere defined by extensionality in which “body” becomes “signifier.” That is, the physicality of the human form undergoes a kind of metamorphosis in which it speaks, for lack of a better word. The most poignant example of this phenomenon is present in chapter thirteen, “Naussica,” in which Bloom and Gerty MacDowell have a kind of conversation without words across the beach. I have split this rather long episode into three segments that effectively highlight this Postcolonial extra-linguistic mode of communication.

... she just lifted her skirt a little but just enough and took good aim and gave the ball a jolly good kick and it went ever so far and the two twins after it down towards the shingle. Pure jealousy of course it was nothing else to draw attention on account of the gentleman opposite looking. She felt the warm flush, a danger signal always with Gerty MacDowell, surging and flaming into her cheeks. Till then they had only exchanged glances of the most casual but now under the brim of her new hat she ventured a look at him and the face that met her gaze there in the twilight, wan and strangely drawn, seemed to

Thus, Gerty’s act of kicking the soccer ball is precipitated by her desire to be noticed by Bloom, “the gentleman opposite looking.” And in doing so, she enters into an unspoken exchange with him. The “causal” “glances” they have traded before become full-on “looks,” “gazes,” which bespeak a rather eager wish to see and be seen. While the sexual undertones of this selection (and the two remaining ones) are palpable, we cannot help but notice a kind of pathos in this Gerty-Bloom dynamic. The “wan and strangely drawn” face of Bloom, coupled with Gerty’s feeling of him being “the saddest she had ever seen,” point toward a kind of emotional give and take that far exceeds base sexual desires. They are kindred spirits in a way, both marked by difference: Bloom, the Irish Jew, is the “rank outsider,” while Gerty, Joyce’s “jilted beauty,” is perpetually sidelined by her lame leg (U, 13.774). Hence, as their “conversation” continues, the gap between them slowly closes – and not a word is spoken.

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… He was in deep mourning, she could see that, and the story of a haunting sorrow was written on his face. She would have given worlds to know what it was. He was looking up so intently, so still, and he saw her kick the ball and perhaps he could see the bright steel buckles of her shoes if she swung them like that thoughtfully with the toes down. (U, 13.411-413; 421-425)

The textual terminology in this passage cannot be ignored. Bloom’s eyes “read her very soul;” “the story of a haunting sorrow was written on his face.” It seems, then, that these two Irish subjects have not only an emotional connection, but also a kind of psychic one: somehow Gerty takes from Bloom’s look “meaning.” The more physical (i.e. bodily) rhetoric of the previous passage is now giving way to a certain spiritual dialectic. The mentioning of Gerty’s “soul;” the “haunting” nature of Bloom’s look; the “thoughtful”
swinging of the young girl’s shoes indicates a movement into a psychological realm by both characters. We get the sense of some connectivity, some inherent link between these two people. As we move into our final selection, this link will become all the more apparent: their language reaches its apotheosis.

Gerty had an idea, one of love’s little ruses. She slipped a hand into her kerchief pocket and took out wadding and waved in reply of course without letting him and then slipped it back. Wonder if he’s too far to. She rose. Was it goodbye? No. She had to go but they would meet again, there and she would dream of that till then, tomorrow, of her dream of yester eve. She drew herself up to her full height. Their souls met in a last lingering glance and the eyes that reached her heart, full of strange shining, hung enraptured on her sweet flowerlike face. She half smiled at him wanly, a sweet forgiving smile, a smile that verged on tears, and they parted. (U, 13.757-765)

The “strange shining” of Bloom’s eyes is perhaps the most fitting trope Joyce employs in Ulysses. The eyes have become the central communicative tool in this dyad, as the “lingering glance” of the couple seems to say more than any number of words possibly could. And what is most important about this selection is Gerty’s notion that “She had to go but they would meet again;” for it is in this idea, this proleptic thought of a future meeting that not only could happen, but will happen, that an apparent bridge has been built between the two – a meeting of “souls” has taken place. But what we must note is that this connection has been established extra-linguistically. Instead of words, gesture and action (read: looking) have become signifying tools for these Postcolonial figures. In essence, they have opted out of language altogether, and entered into mode of being in which “meaning” need not be derived from what has and has not been said: Gerty’s wave takes on as much significance as any spoken sentiment ever could.

Thus, the Postcolonial figure has, by default, become his own signifier; his body, his action, it seems, takes on the role of text, clearly articulating that which the subject desires. Joyce, then, has provided the colonized with a certain degree of hope; after all,
if one can effectively communicate, can he not, then, identify himself? Know himself? Stabilize himself? Derrida points out, “when access to a language is forbidden, nothing – no gesture, no act – is forbidden. One forbids access to speech [au dire], that is all, a certain kind of speech” (Derrida (ii), 32). Hence, the deficiency of the Irish colonial subject does not extend past his alienation from English. Though he exists in a marginalized space, his position does not preclude the possibility of power, of rebellion, for lack of a better word. And we can perhaps read Bloom and Gerty’s “conversation” as a subversive act. They have thrown off the bonds of their captors – English – and engaged each other in a wholly meaningful and, more importantly, independent way. They no longer rely upon their master’s language in order to speak.

IV. “Language of the Outlaw:” Finding the Postcolonial Sublime

In the three previous sections of our study we have come to find that the Postcolonial figure has no concrete identity. Precluded from text and usurped by his master, the Irish subject is forced into a kind of ontological crisis. While Bloom and Gerty have shown us that communication is indeed possible, their extra-linguistic exchange does not wholly solidify a sense of self for the colonized. More so than ever, we see the Irish subject marked by difference and lack, as even his verbal utterances have reached a point of obsolescence. In this final section of our study, then, we will examine the ways in which Joyce’s *Ulysses* functions as an ontological vehicle for the Postcolonial figure: it reestablishes an identity that has been lost. In what we dub the Postcolonial sublime, *Ulysses* succeeds in transcending the bounds of text through a measure of extensionality to the reader. In short, *Ulysses* takes on an active role, as it
bridges the gap between “what I, the colonized, was” and “what I, the colonized, am now.” Joyce finds a space for the Postcolonial figure.

And ironically, this space comes into being through a certain measure of colonization by Joyce, a usurpation of the usurper. As we noted before, the Irish subject has no history, and as such he has no text – his ground has been stripped away by his master. Yet, as we noted before, with this cultural ambiguousness comes a great deal of freedom: Wittgensteinian notions of linguistic “limits” have been thrown to the wayside. What happens in *Ulysses*, then, is truly remarkable: Joyce appropriates and recapitulates English literary history within his own work. The result is a book of staggering intertextuality, which, as we shall see, places *Ulysses* within a realm of extensionality to the reader; an active relationship is established between author and audience.

One of Joyce’s most famous literary conquests comes in the opening pages of chapter fourteen, “The Oxen of the Sun,” in which the author stylistically navigates through the English literary canon:

> This meanwhile this good sister stood by the door and begged them at the reverence of Jesu our alther liege Lord to leave their wassailing for there was above one quick with child, a gentle dame, whose time hied fast. Sir Leopold heard on the upfloor cry on high and he wondered what cry that it was whether of child or woman and I marvel, said he, that it be not come or now. Meseems it dureth overlong. (*U*, 14.167-172)

Here Joyce is clearly writing within a kind of heroic form, reminiscent of Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur* (Blamires, 148). Bloom has become “Sir Leopold,” as Joyce inserts his own literary creations within a decidedly English textual form. And it is significant that Joyce chooses to appropriate the style of Malory, as the rhetoric of conquest and victory with which it is associated cannot be ignored. “Our national epic has yet to be written,” Dr Sigerson says in chapter nine of *Ulysses*; and what better way to point toward this
profound deficiency than to write within a tangibly epic form \((U, 9.309)\)? Joyce’s appropriation, then, functions doubly. On one hand it ironically, calls attention to the Irishman’s socio-political position through a textual inversion – he who has no epic is represented through its form. On the other, through a certain subversion of the English literary canon, Joyce’s use of this epic rhetoric succeeds in providing the text with a certain measure of stability. His mimesis creates an illusion of ground, as Malory’s form locates Joyce within a recognizable genre; we can almost picture the English colonizer appreciating Joyce’s adherence to such a venerable literary tradition. Thus, English culture has become a tool of the Irishman.

It makes sense, then, that \textit{Ulysses} is permeated with allusions to such works as Shakespeare’s \textit{Hamlet}: as “a lithe young man, clad in mourning,” Stephen takes up the role of the fatherless son, an “ineffectual dreamer who comes to grief against hard facts” \((U, 6.39-40; 9.9-10)\). As readers we form a picture of Stephen contingent upon an image we have already created within our minds – that of young Hamlet. And it is in this aspect of allusion – this associative, relatable nature – that Joyce succeeds in externalizing his work. Through his consistent appropriation and recapitulation of identifiable literary tropes and references, Joyce brings the reader into his work. But, of course, he cannot do so through an appeal to Irish cultural figures; these have been wiped out, erased from existence by the colonizer. So instead, Joyce calls upon his master’s history as a means of opening up his work to his audience. He assumes (and perhaps correctly) that those who are reading him now have read \textit{Hamlet} in the past; their predispositions and associations, then, actively complete Joyce’s text: he need only refer to Shakespeare’s description of Hamlet in order for us to fully see Stephen.
In a profound way, then, Joyce has called into question the stability of any cultural identity. After all, if Joyce, a defeated colonial subject, can call upon and flawlessly imitate the literary works of the colonizer, then we must place that dominant culture within a similar realm of indecisiveness. As Joyce continually operates within a modality designed – or at least thought to be designed – specifically for the English, he “disrupts its authority” (Bhabha, 88). The assumed concreteness of the colonizer’s identity is upended, and the result is an opening up of the signifying field. As Joyce shows us in *Ulysses* (and later to a greater effect in *Finnegan’s Wake*) the functional methods of representation available to the author are endless; text permanently enters into a groundless space, with no limits upon what can and cannot be said: Joyce is unafraid to rearrange “the norms of various styles and registers” throughout his work.14

And this break from tradition reaches a critical point in chapter seventeen, “Ithaca,” in which *Ulysses* undergoes a profound transformation in its purpose. In the earlier passages we have studied, Joyce has been articulating the plight of the Postcolonial figure; we have seen his loss of culture and his attempts to represent himself in a world to which he has no purchase. In “Ithaca,” however, Joyce overcomes the “deficiency” of the colonized, and creates an ontological vehicle through which his identity is reestablished. In the following passage I am concerned less with what is written than with how it is written. As we shall see, Joyce’s choice of format is paramount in “Ithaca’s” cathartic function.

*Was it there?*

*It was in the corresponding pocket of the trousers which he had worn on the day but one preceding.*

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Why was he doubly irritated?

Because he had forgotten and because he remembered that he had reminded himself twice not to forget.

What were then the alternatives before the, premeditatedly (respectively) and inadvertently, keyless couple?

To enter or not to enter. To knock or not to knock. (*U*, 74-82)

And the chapter continues like this for more than twenty-three hundred lines, asking and answering questions ranging from simple plot points to more abstract, philosophical issues. But notice the peculiar separation Joyce provides between question and answer. Physically, he seems to demarcate a space for the reader, a gap into which he could quite literally insert his own response. Much like Joyce’s use of allusion, this stylistic choice imbues *Ulysses* with a certain degree of extensionality: the reader is very much engaged in half-creating the finished text. Lyotard writes that in Joyce’s work “the whole range of available narrative and even stylistic operators is put into play without concern for the unity of the whole […]” (Lyotard, 80). In “Ithaca” such a notion is realized. Joyce is unafraid to leave a space for the reader; he is unafraid to subtly postulate that the responses he provides are only one set of available answers.

Thus, one’s “reading” of *Ulysses* is at its core a double-reading. On the primary level, the reader negotiates through Joyce’s text, coming face to face with the issues we have raised (and more) throughout this paper. On a second level, however, the reader also reads himself within the text, as he consciously notices the space Joyce has provided for him within the work. After all, Joyce’s “question/answer catechism” in “Ithaca,” and the rich confluence of sources throughout the book seem to presuppose the reader’s presence: Joyce willfully “leads the reader hopelessly astray,” confident that he will find

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*We would be remiss to not point out Joyce’s recapitulation of young Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” – yet another example of Joyce’s rich allusive texture.*
his way back, be it through his scholarship or his own self-knowledge. Like Bloom and Gerty on the beach, Joyce and his reader enter into a kind of unspoken reciprocity.

And this give-and-take functions on a profound level for the Postcolonial subject. Through Jacques Lacan we can see how the text of *Ulysses*, especially “Ithaca,” works to reestablish a lost identity. In his act of reading Joyce, the reader finds himself within a kind of formative space, an ontological point of departure in which Lacan’s “mirror stage” is figuratively revisited:

The child… can nevertheless recognize as such his own image in a mirror… This act, far from exhausting itself,… once the image has been mastered and found empty, immediately rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment… We have only to understand the mirror stage as an *identification*, in the full sense that the analyst gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image… [which] situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone… whatever the success of the dialectical synthesis by which he must resolve as I his discordance with his own reality.17

Thus, the “mirror stage” is essentially a reading of the self in which the child comes to see himself as an autonomous entity, capable of understanding “the relation between movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment.” And via this breakthrough, “the agency of the ego” is established: the child forms a sense of self outside of its forthcoming “social determination;” in other words, an “I qua I,” a decidedly essential self comes into being through this psychic process. For the Postcolonial figure, then, we can read “Ithaca” as a kind of mimetic mirror stage. As he reads through Joyce’s text and enters into the linguistic dyad demanded by the chapter, the Postcolonial figure begins to see himself within the gaps of the “Ithaca.” Through his

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provision of a space for the reader’s response, Joyce forces his audience to locate himself in relation to his novel; he demands reciprocity for his effort.

Essentially, then, Joyce’s text is an audience unto itself. It exists not as a free-floating work, but as a novel dependent upon interaction, dependent upon its reader’s willingness to enter into a kind of conversation. Through this peculiar positioning, then, Joyce is able to reestablish the lost identity of the colonized. If Memmi is correct when he notes that “he [the colonized] is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity,” then Joyce, through “Ithaca,” creates a realm of individualization for the Postcolonial figure (Memmi, 85). As Lacan’s mirror stage situates the child vis-à-vis himself in a radically independent space – “before its social determination” – Joyce’s “Ithaca” functions in a similar manner by allowing the Postcolonial figure to see himself within the text. In “Ithaca” the reader’s unspoken responses to Joyce’s queries double back on themselves and “reflect” a self that has heretofore gone unseen. And in his answers, in his self-created dialogue with Joyce, the reader must come to terms with himself in a radically independent and unfamiliar environment: the text of *Ulysses*.

The end result of this interactive gesture is an ontological breakthrough. Instead of seeing himself as plagued by some profound “deficiency,” the Postcolonial reader comes to see himself as a point of origin, a locus from which representation can emerge; he is fully capable of filling “Ithaca’s” gaps. In the final chapter of *Ulysses*, “Penelope,” Joyce makes this notion manifest. Through the character of Molly, a character doubly marked by difference on account of her Irish heritage and gender, Joyce shows the effect of “Ithaca.” As if responding to some unseen catalyst, Molly’s words spring forth in an “overflow of powerful feelings,” punctuated by her life affirming “Yes” which emerges
and reemerges throughout her interior monologue. In Molly’s “Yes” the identity of the colonized is reestablished once and for all. As Derrida hypothesizes, “Yes can only express *itself* by promising itself its own memory. The affirmation of the word *yes* is the affirmation of memory.” Hence, Molly’s “Yes” comes to signify an “affirmation” of self, an overcoming of colonization’s most traumatizing effect, the loss of identity.

Through its linkage to both past (“memory”) and future (“promise”), Molly’s “Yes” situates her within a kind of self-contained history. The result is a self separate from both historical erasure and contrived historicity. She exists in a present, a here and now independent of any cultural institution or predisposition: like the reader of “Ithaca,” she has gone through a process of radical self-realization and stability. Her inner-text has come to solidify her identity. And it is here, in this finding of self that the Postcolonial sublime exists. Through this act of self-reading and self-reevaluation, the Postcolonial figure is thrown into a state of flux. Unsure of where to go or what to do, he seeks an internal ground, an almost solipsistic realm in which the self can only encounter itself.

In “Ithaca” and “Penelope,” Joyce literally acts out this process: in the former, the reader finds this ground; in the latter, he (she) navigates through it until his (her) identity is realized.

Bhabha would take issue with our analysis, and he would perhaps be justified in doing so. For him, “identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a

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20 Here I paraphrase from Immanuel Kant’s Second Book (“Analytic of the Sublime”) of his *Critique of Judgment*: “We seek a ground external to ourselves for the beautiful of nature, but seek it for the sublime merely in ourselves and in our attitude of thought…”
self-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image” (Bhabha, 45). In other words, “identity” is achieved through performance, through a degree of conformity in which the subject “assumes” some given role. There is no essentialism for Bhabha; there is no self to be found. But Joyce refuses such notions in *Ulysses*, as Stephen’s lament to his dead mother in chapter fifteen, “Circe,” illustrates: “Tell me the word, mother, if you know now. The word known to all men” (*U*, 15.4192-4193). In this line Joyce articulates an ontological philosophy steeped in ideals of knowledge, unity, and universality; he gestures toward man’s desire and, more importantly, his unrealized potential to enter into a sphere of profound understanding – an ability to “see into the life of things,” for lack of a better phrase.21

Bhabha’s contention of a decidedly unknowable self cannot withstand this rhetoric of the sublime. Stephen’s smashing of the chandelier in “Circe” thus serves as a metaphor for Joyce’s own project: the destruction of Ireland’s “cracked lookingglass of a servant.” For it is in this act that Joyce proclaims his ultimate refusal to perform, to put on an identity established and maintained by the colonizer. Through *Ulysses* Joyce succeeds in reestablishing an independent Irish identity – and yet, to redact his work into an “Irish” framework is foolish. *Ulysses* exists as an ontological vehicle for all, a yet-to-be-had conversation between the reader and himself.

V. “Swimming in Roses:” Final Thoughts on the Text of *Ulysses*

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shadow from me, manshape ineluctable, call it back. Endless, would it be mine, form of my form? Who watches me here? Who ever anywhere will read these written words? Signs on a white field. Somewhere to someone in your flutiest voice. (U, 3.412-416)

Perhaps it is here, in Stephen’s thoughts from chapter three, “Proteus,” that Joyce articulates not only the “deficiency,” but also the anxiety of the colonized. The fear of not being heard; the dread of not being seen – these preoccupations haunt Postcolonial literature like the ghost of Hamlet’s father: they keep a kind of nightly vigil, constantly reminding he who has nothing of his loss.

But through *Ulysses* Joyce offers a certain mode of redemption, an avenue through which the reader can perhaps come to understand his own identity, triumph over his loss. In the gaps of “Ithaca” the reader sees himself. Interestingly enough, Joyce is famously noted as saying, “*Hoc est corpus meum*” (“This is my body”) when handed the first published copy of *Ulysses* in 1922.22 For him the book is an encapsulation of the self, an articulation of his own identity in his “flutiest voice.”

In the end, however, we are faced with the key question we raised at the beginning: is the text of *Ulysses* dead? Does it strive for and never reach the semblance of ground we alluded to earlier? Does it ultimately remain hollow, founded upon an unstable ground of readerly predispositions and cultural associations? The answers to all these questions are debatable. We cannot escape the space of literature. It exists within a sphere defined by ambiguity: true “meaning” can only be attained on a personal level. But *Ulysses* challenges the reader to rethink his notions of “meaning.” Through a kind of ontological sleight of hand, Joyce forces the reader into the position of text; he must enter

into a linguistic dyad with himself. The end result is an opening up of the self, a locating of identity through a process of self-reading.

And as this introspection takes place, the reader comes to see that the notions he takes as given – history, identity, nation – are merely linguistic constructs, games played by those looking for one defined “meaning.” The Postcolonial sublime of *Ulysses* makes this explicit: the self is not defined within the context of society, but within a wholly separate space of independence in which the colonizer and the colonized cannot be told apart. Thus, perhaps the only conclusive thing we can say about *Ulysses* is that it exists as a wide-open space, in which the only two definites are the mind and the body that come in contact with the text; everything else is contingent.