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Charades and Gossip: The Minimalist Theatre of Joyce's *Dubliners*

Valérie Bénéjam

- 1 Joyce wrote only one play, but theatricality is a recurrent and essential feature of his prose writing, emerging in close connection with many of the formal innovations for which he is renowned: dramatic narrative technique, for instance, is sometimes sustained to the point where the text turns into a theatre script, as in the “Circe” episode in *Ulysses* or the “Mutt and Jute” dialogue in *Finnegans Wake*; interior monologue, borrowed from Edouard Dujardin but greatly perfected with Molly Bloom’s unpunctuated sentences, owes much to the dramatic convention of the soliloquy and to the stage where, in point of fact, many actresses regularly return it. On Bloomsday, celebrating the anniversary of the 1904 fictional day of *Ulysses*, professional and amateur actors go on stage, as in New York, or take to the streets, as in Dublin, and each year they will play the parts of the characters in the novel. And all year round, all over the English-speaking world, reading groups will meet, sometimes just to hear the text read aloud, thus bringing renewed proof of an intrinsic bond between Joyce’s writing and the theatre. The recurrence of such oral reenactments of Joyce’s texts provides an eloquent illustration to his linguistic experiments, underlining the fascinating play on spoken word and written language that gradually unfolds throughout his work. In the later developments of *Ulysses* or in *Finnegans Wake*, what could have first been considered, in Bakhtinian terms, the polyphonic quality of the novel genre, has attained another dimension, combining gossip and acoustic experiments with the human voice in all languages with their expression in writing – a both chaotic and perfectly mastered, cacophonous language, for which critics had to coin a new term: “Wakese.”
- 2 Beginning with a broad presentation of the topic as it globally relates to Joyce’s work, I will soon narrow the angle to *Dubliners* and particularly to “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” which is the most evidently dramatic story in the collection. Making a detour through the first epiphanies written by the artist as a young man, I want to suggest

answers to the broader question of why Joyce used theatricality in his prose writing, and did so first in relation to the short story genre.

3

Scholars have often been puzzled by the distance between the radical formal innovations of Joyce's prose-fiction writing, and the relatively conventional quality of his play. Written from 1913 to 1915, *Exiles* falls between, on the one hand, the work on *Dubliners* (1904-1907) and on *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1907-1913), and on the other, the composition of *Ulysses* (1915-1922). The modernist scholar Hugh Kenner once suggested that, had Joyce disappeared after *Dubliners* and *A Portrait*, he probably would have been considered a very talented but fairly conventional writer. With the writing of *Ulysses* and the even more daunting *Finnegans Wake*, not only did he put himself into another class altogether, he also forced us to reconsider the complexity and subtleties of the earlier works: some of the stylistic choices or idiosyncratic turns of phrase, which could be deemed awkward, actually reveal depths of complexity which would never have been suspected had we not realized what Joyce was capable of in terms of linguistic mastery and irony in his last two books.¹ In retrospect, we are forced to understand the full dimension of the linguistic play and stylistic control deployed as early as *Dubliners*. Kenner goes on to examine *A Portrait* and even briefly alludes to *Stephen Hero*, but in spite of its strategic historical situation between the earlier prose writings and the much more ambitious *Ulysses*, *Exiles* is not mentioned. The play is evidently not as famous as the rest of Joyce's work, and its quality has even been questioned: turned down by both the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and the Stage Society in London, it was first performed in Munich in 1919, then in London in 1926. On both occasions, it was withdrawn and considered a flop. When Harold Pinter revived it in 1970, theatre critics claimed he was "lifting the veil" off a "floundering lost cause." Samuel Beckett even wrote to say, "You're a brave man to take on *Exiles*. I understand your excitement. I often wondered how it could be done."² Despite all the scholars and critics who had deemed the play uninteresting, impossible to produce, and an awkward imitation of Ibsen, Pinter's production drew general acclaim.³

4

However, if the value of modernism is to be assessed by the boldness of its formal experiments, *Exiles* pales not only in comparison with the innovations in Joyce's prose fiction, but also with the theatrical experiments of other modernists, to which Joyce seems to have been rather indifferent. Although he lived in Zurich during World War I, there is for instance no record of his attending the Dadaist performances at the Cabaret Voltaire. Its comic effect partly relying on the unlikely Zurich meeting between Tristan Tzara and James Joyce, Tom Stoppard's *Travesties* draws a puppet-like caricature of these two antithetical protagonists and underlines the actual historical lack of communication between them.⁴ The play also borrows its general plot and a few lines from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* – a hilarious comedy, but certainly no modernist paradigm – which was in fact produced in Zurich by the English Players, the amateur company with which Joyce was involved as business manager. Then when he spent the interwar years in Paris, a central figure of the modernist scene and in contact with many influential, informed personalities, he apparently never attended the Alfred Jarry Theatre or even discussed Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty. Whilst other bold scenographic experiments were taking place in Europe, such as Gordon Craig's work on stage design, lighting, masks and marionettes, Joyce seems to have shown no interest in such developments. As a playwright, amateur manager, or theatregoer, he remained

throughout his career strikingly indifferent to the modernist avant-garde of European theatre.

- 5 Having posited this paradox, I would now like to trace back Joyce's earlier years and show how dramatic techniques, albeit traditional ones, were nevertheless at the core of his first revolutionary experiments as a writer. There is in fact a history of Joyce's involvement with the theatre before he left Ireland. In his remarkable article on "Joycean Drama and the Remaking of Yeats's Irish Theatre in 'Ivy Day in the Committee Room,'" Ben Forkner envisages Joyce's writing of *Dubliners* in relation with Yeats's launching of a national theatre for Ireland.⁵ Forkner shows how closely Joyce followed Yeats's efforts, but also how disappointed he became when, in his view, Yeats betrayed Ibsen's model of dramatic realism for one of dramatic idealism, opting for a rural, nostalgic and parochial vision of Ireland instead of the modern, urban setting Joyce himself would eventually choose. Recognising the theatrical potential of Irish setting and conversations very early, Joyce nevertheless realised Irish audiences were not ready for the "nicely polished looking-glass" he planned to show them, whilst he himself was not prepared for the kind of compromise he considered Yeats had accepted for his own theatre.⁶ Joyce's disappointment with the Irish National Theatre may explain both his exile and his choice of a different medium, one that could reach an audience beyond Ireland, while retaining theatricality within its form. Hence a story like "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," which all takes place in one room, with characters entering and exiting, and a theatrical emphasis on props and lighting. Chiefly composed of dialogue and stage directions, the story reads almost like a play script, but remains within the boundaries of prose and of the short story genre.
- 6 Joyce's experiments with theatricality had in fact started earlier, and dramatic technique had been at the heart of Joyce's very first writings, with the strikingly brief texts he called his *epiphanies*.⁷ Out of the initial seventy-one, only forty remain, about half of which are usually termed "dramatic," whereas the other half are "lyrical." The dramatic epiphanies stand out as the very first instances of Joyce's inclusion of theatricality in his writing, in noticeable relation to an extremely short and fragmentary literary form. The term "epiphany" is often used in reference to the disillusioned or lyrical moments of revelation attained at the close of a story in *Dubliners* or of a chapter in *A Portrait*. Inspiration for these passages did originate in the first epiphanies, some of which were actually incorporated in books later on. However, the original epiphanies were texts in their own right. Considering, as Joyce scholars and editors often do, the epiphanies in terms of what they have subsequently become, we tend to forget what effect they were meant to produce when Joyce first wrote them – not as part of a larger narrative, nor necessarily with the intention of one day including them into one, but as brief, almost fleeting texts, of an inherently fragmentary nature. They appear as mere sketches of just a few lines, with a somehow jotted-down quality to them that may be deceptive. In *Stephen Hero*, Joyce defines an epiphany as "a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments."⁸ A short dialogue precedes this aesthetic pronouncement:

The Young Lady – (drawling discreetly) ... O, yes ... I was ... at the ... cha ... pel ...

The Young Gentleman – (inaudibly) ... I ... (again inaudibly) ... I ...

The Young Lady – (softly) ... O ... but you're ... ve ... ry ... wick ... ed ...

- 7 The typographical setting resembles that of a tiny play script, with character names before each utterance and stage directions between parentheses: as readers momentarily shift to the experience of reading a play, they take in this information, but mentally put it between brackets to concentrate on the dialogue. Perhaps because there is a tradition of reading theatre as well as of attending performances, they also tend to inwardly provide a voice and an intonation, refining the acoustic quality and resonance of what they are reading further than they would with conventional reported speech. The dialogue is still regarded as a written text, but it seems already on its way to becoming a living voice. It is both captured on the page and resonating out of it.

8

This minimalist notation of an overheard conversation is also extremely objective in its form and even deliberately incomplete, taking into account as it does the imperfect perception of the listener, both in the stage directions and the elliptic punctuation. To his brother, Joyce explained his aim was to collect “little errors and gestures – mere straws in the wind – by which people betrayed the very things they were most careful to conceal.”⁹ From the outset, the project is thus related to a dialectics of hiding and revealing: the text is here to expose what people would have kept concealed. The young lady and gentleman keep their voices down, hence the numerous ellipses, but it is also in these silences and what they reveal, in the pauses for thought which they allow for readers, that the “vulgarity of speech or of gesture” is exposed.¹⁰ At a further level of analysis, the question of interpretation is therefore already – and so early in Joyce’s career – of paramount, if implicit, importance. Readers are never told exactly what Stephen thinks of this dialogue, and their judgement and imagination are free to wander in the blank spaces between the elliptical dots. This is a very deliberate omission, revealing the fragmentary nature of epiphanies as deceptively hasty: the minimalist quality of the dialogue is not so much the result of acoustic deficiency as that of “extreme care,” its precision allowing to capture the “delicateness” and “evanescence” of the moment, but also to hint at the characters’ deeper motivations. In employing theatrical techniques in his prose writing, Joyce probably attempted to import the paradoxical strength of ephemerality which is conveyed by theatre – when it is good theatre of course – and its capacity to make the fleeting moment live and last, to impress its transience in the viewers’ memory. Theatre seems to be the very locus of ephemerality: the performance will never be exactly the same the next night, and what the audience have seen is gone forever, except for the memory they retain of it. The spectators’ awareness of this impermanence makes the experience of theatre-going more precious, and the value, the emotion thus conferred to the performance is probably part of what Joyce wanted to capture on the page. However, employing the linear presentation of a written text that is not meant to be acted, he retains the possibility of second reading and retrospective interpretation. It is a way for Joyce of eating his ephemeral cake and having the in-depth process of interpretation at the same time, of trying to capture the transience of the theatrical performance, while preserving the benefits of the traditional interaction between a reader and a book.¹¹

- 9 Another example would be the following dialogue, this time taken from the original epiphanies, and involving the young Joyce and his friend Skeffington shortly after the death of Joyce’s younger brother:

[Dublin: in the National Library]

Skeffington – I was sorry to hear of the death of your brother....sorry we didn't know in time.....to have been at the funeral.....

Joyce – O, he was very young....a boy....

Skeffington – Still.....it hurts....¹²

- 10 The minimalist, cryptic quality of the fragment underlines Skeffington's lack of feeling, or even vulgarity. It is both instantly perceived and yet requires to be pondered at length. Here again, the ellipses play an essential part. Made up of four, sometimes five, dots – therefore inordinately long, as if to further attract attention to themselves, their length and recurrence –, they render the rhythm, the hesitations and interruptions of the exchange, transcribing most realistically what has actually been heard. To the modern reader, this is reminiscent of contemporary film scripts or plays, such as David Mamet's for instance. Given the implicit, fragmentary nature of Joyce's epiphany, ellipses replace the missing explanations, and seem to leave room on the page for readers to think about the interaction: Skeffington has offered sympathy; Joyce answers by talking about the deceased brother; but probably because he insensitively interpreted Joyce's "O" as somehow dismissive, Skeffington callously presumes that Joyce's brother's youth could have moderated the family's grief. Therefore Skeffington has wrongly interpreted Joyce's words, and we in turn are driven to reflect on our own interpretation, of Skeffington's, and then of Joyce's words, in short on the hermeneutic process as a whole.

11

Five of the remaining epiphanies take place at the Sheehys', a family where Joyce was a regular visitor, participating in numerous parlour games. He seems to have been particularly appreciated for his witty contributions to charades, a game in which the audience would guess a word from an acted clue given either for the whole word or for separate syllables. For instance, asked to represent the word "sunset," Joyce sat in a rounded arm chair with just the top of his head showing over its top; or a group went on to collide and then escape to represent the word "kaleidoscope," the latter obviously announcing the later developments of Joyce's linguistic play.¹³ The parallel with his use of theatrical techniques is also striking, for in charades, an extremely brief theatrical performance is connected to the audience's effort to interpret what they are watching. The same applies to the ironic dramatic technique in Joyce's epiphanies: readers are prompted to reflect on what is vulgar or insensitive, to figure it out for themselves. The cryptic, minimal form will function like a riddle or charade: precisely because it is so short and implicit, the dialogue alerts readers to the existence of a hidden meaning.

12

Commercial imperatives probably played their part in Joyce's choice of the short story genre: a book of epiphanies would never have sold, if he could have secured a publisher for it in the first place.¹⁴ It turned out difficult enough to find one for his relatively more conventional short stories: completed in 1907, the collection did not find itself in print until 1914. However, the fragmentary, elliptic, and theatrical nature of the epiphanies could be worked into another brief literary form – the short story. The use of elliptical dialogues, in relation with the question of interpretation, is foregrounded from the outset in the first story in *Dubliners*, "The Sisters," which Joyce rewrote completely so that it would serve as a programmatic introduction to the whole collection. The story is centred on the enigmatic figure of a recently deceased old priest, who had been friends with the young boy-narrator. A man called old Cotter brings the news of his death to the child's uncle and aunt. As Cotter keeps hinting at something wrong with the old man, without ever revealing it, the child's perplexity mirrors our own, and his efforts at

deciphering the dialogue he overhears reflect our imperfect understanding of the one we are reading:

—No, I wouldn't say he was exactly ... but there was something queer ... there was something uncanny about him. I'll tell you my opinion ...

He began to puff at his pipe, no doubt arranging his opinion in his mind. Tiresome old fool!¹⁵

- 13 The elliptic punctuation is once again conspicuous, and at the very moment when one would expect Cotter's opinion, a cloud of smoke issues from his mouth instead. A few lines later, he resumes:

—I have my own theory about it, he said. I think it was one of those ... peculiar cases ... But it's hard to say ...

He began to puff again at his pipe without giving us his theory. (D 10)

- 14 When Cotter learns how close the child and the old priest used to be, he explicitly disapproves of their intimacy:

—I wouldn't like children of mine, he said, to have too much to say to a man like that.

—How do you mean, Mr Cotter? asked my aunt.

—What I mean is, said old Cotter, it's bad for children. My idea is: let a young lad run about and play with young lads of his own age and not be ... Am I right, Jack? (D 10)

- 15 Here again, the ellipses are not used as lavishly, but one appears at the essential moment when the clue to the mystery would finally be provided. The child is as curious as ever, but will not let show. His aunt on the other hand, will ask again just a few lines later:

—But why do you think it's not good for children, Mr Cotter? she asked.

—It's bad for children, said old Cotter, because their minds are so impressionable. When children see things like that, you know, it has an effect. ... (D 11)

- 16 Needless to say, nothing in the intervening lines has clarified what Cotter means by "things like that, you know", which we definitely do not know. The child's frustration is extreme:

I crammed my mouth with stirabout for fear I might give utterance to my anger. Tiresome old red-nosed imbecile!

It was late when I fell asleep. Though I was angry with old Cotter for alluding to me as a child I puzzled my head to extract meaning from his unfinished sentences. (D 11)

- 17 There is a manifest parallel between the child, "extracting meaning from ... unfinished sentences," and ourselves, reading this elliptic dialogue. In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce will teasingly demand "an ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia" (FW 120:13-14),¹⁶ revealing how the child's sleeplessness at the opening of *Dubliners* was but the dawn of a far more ambitious literary project. The rest of "The Sisters" will provide few additional revelations, apart from an incomplete story about the priest breaking a chalice and being found laughing in the confession-box. The priest's sister speaks the very last words:

—Wide-awake and laughing-like to himself. ... So then, of course, when they saw that, that made them think that there was something gone wrong with him. ... (D 18)

- 18 That "something" is left pending in yet another final ellipsis.¹⁷

- 19 I wish nevertheless to pursue the connection with endings, since they usually stand out as privileged moments of epiphanies.¹⁸ "Two Gallants" closes for instance on Lenehan's curiosity and Corley's gesture in response:

—Can't you tell us? he said. Did you try her?

Corley halted at the first lamp and stared grimly before him. Then with a grave gesture he extended a hand towards the light and, smiling, opened it slowly to the gaze of his disciple. A small gold coin shone in the palm. (D 60)

- 20 This is the sovereign which Corley has succeeded in securing, probably convincing a young slavey to steal it from the house where she works. However, this has never been explicitly denounced or even stated. The ending is composed like a moment of mock-revelation, complete with gazing disciple, symbolic lighting, and opening of “a” prophetic hand, onto a coin shining in “the” palm. By forfeiting the possessive articles, Joyce implies some transcendence has been attained. However, nothing is revealed but the dismal opportunism and cynicism of the two men. The staging works at a double level, implicitly targeting a double audience: Lenehan the mock disciple, but also readers, who are the real exegetes of Joyce’s revelation. And when Lenehan asks, “can you tell us,” the plural is both the Hiberno-English variant of a singular referring to Lenehan alone,¹⁹ and a cunning manner of including readers and their legitimate curiosity in the demand for information. What would pass for closure, and is an effective closing of the story, opens not only the hand, but a whole host of retrospective questionings about facts and ethics: where did the money come from? And who is responsible for turning this young woman into a thief, if that is indeed what she has become? The theatrical techniques inherited from the original epiphanies – cryptic and short dialogue, combined with the idea of revelation – serve both to highlight the words and gestures, and to expose the vulgarity that would be kept hidden. Transferring the minimalist form of the epiphanies to the endings of the short stories, often letting the characters’ words resonate or their gestures speak for themselves, thus alerting readers to the possibility of a hermeneutic problem, Joyce points to the refusal of providing an explanation: he closes to refuse closure.
- 21 The link between hermeneutics and theatricality may be further related to Joyce's specific typographical habits for dialogues – his spurning of inverted commas, which he jokingly called “perverted commas.”²⁰ In contrast to the traditional framing of each character’s words by inverted commas, Joyce’s disposal of them entails the threatening removal of a certain hierarchy of discourses: there no longer exists a master narrative, with a narrator in a position to quote other speakers and control their discourse.²¹ There is nothing but a juxtaposition of discourses, and a blurred distinction between written and spoken words, not even retaining the artificial but clear typographical division of written theatre whereby capitals or italics are reserved for character names and stage directions. Joyce’s move was actually such a bold one for his time that the London publisher, Grant Richards, refused to print *Dubliners* without inverted commas to present direct discourse.²² Richards believed readers would be confused without them, which indeed they should be: the play-writing technique of unquoted dialogue aims at unsettling readers.²³
- 22 Elliptic and unframed dialogue finally leads me to “Ivy Day in the Committee Room,” which is the most consistently dramatic short story in the collection, to concentrate on another shady priest figure. In the middle of “Ivy Day” comes a knock at the door:
- A person resembling a poor clergyman or a poor actor appeared in the doorway. His black clothes were tightly buttoned on his short body and it was impossible to say whether he wore a clergyman's collar or a layman's because the collar of his shabby frock-coat, the uncovered buttons of which reflected the candlelight, was turned up about his neck. He wore a round hat of hard black felt. His face, shining with raindrops, had the appearance of damp yellow cheese save where two rosy spots

indicated the cheekbones. He opened his very long mouth suddenly to express disappointment and at the same time opened wide his very bright blue eyes to express pleasure and surprise. (D 125)

- 23 With his tight black clothes, light-reflecting buttons, round hat and shining face with two rosy spots, this idiosyncratic character seems straight out of a pantomime or of some modern-day *commedia dell'arte*. The excessive yet contradictory expressions he conveys—opening wide his mouth for disappointment at not finding whom he is looking for, and wide his eyes for pleasure at finding whom he does find there—are very much those of a mime, and we would not be surprised to come across them in a Chaplin movie or a Beckett novel. The theatrical quality of the character is even explicitly announced: we are told he may be an “actor,” albeit a “poor” one, perhaps in both meanings of the word. An exclamation soon provides the character’s name:

—O, Father Keon! said Mr Henchy, jumping up from his chair. Is that you? Come in!
(D 126)

- 24 However, Father Keon does not identify himself as readily as could be expected: he replies, “O, no, no, no!” and the reader is left wondering whether he is answering the injunction to come in or the question about his identity.²⁴ The difficulty in confirming Keon's identity will in fact soon become central, leaving potentially open a whole range of possible identifications. If characters are only made of words on paper, in “Ivy Day” they are only made of oral language set down on paper: apart from very succinct descriptions – Keon’s is one of the longest –, all the information comes from their own words and the gossip about them. Henchy in particular is a dreadful gossip, always offering his “private and candid opinion” (D 124 and 125), which is rarely candid and certainly never kept private. As is often the case in the story, gossip will start immediately the person is out of the room. However, instead of bluntly asserting the most slanderous facts about Father Keon, as they are wont to do, Henchy and O'Connor are remarkably hesitant this time:

—Tell me, John, said Mr O'Connor, lighting his cigarette with another pasteboard card.
—Hm?
—What is he exactly?
—Ask me an easier one, said Mr Henchy. (D 126)

- 25 The question now reaches an ontological plane and may be interpreted beyond the explicit surface content of the man’s profession or source of income. The rest of the dialogue will present a succession of possible answers to the metaphysical question of *what* Father Keon may be, evolving towards less and less precision: “a priest at all?”, “a black sheep,” “an unfortunate man of some kind.”²⁵ The last identification is more equivocal still, or rather comes even lower on the ontological ladder: the men have been waiting for a basket of beers, which a boy has brought, and Henchy's last line about Father Keon is phrased most ambiguously: “God forgive me, [...] I thought he was the dozen of stout.” In the first description of the character, indeterminacy and ambiguity were already present: “resembling a poor clergyman or a poor actor,” “it was impossible to say *whether* he wore a clergyman's collar or a layman's.”²⁶ Is he a clergyman or a layman, a priest or an actor, or perhaps a poor actor playing the part of a poor priest? This either/or logic is eventually replaced by a both/and logic, when Keon succeeds in expressing in one single face two entirely contradictory feelings, his mouth rendering disappointment whilst his eyes convey pleasure and surprise. Further disrupting any

certainty, the characters are not the only ones baffled by who or what Father Keon may be: the narration itself is contaminated by indeterminacy.

26

There lies the full potential of inserting drama in fiction-writing: things and people may be left indefinite, undetermined, facts of rumour and hearsay, neither described precisely, nor embodied on stage by real actors. Paradoxically, theatricality does not flesh out the scene in "Ivy Day": on the contrary, it highlights its insubstantiality. There is no real action, just the petty opposition of gossipers, and with no *agon*, there are no real protagonists either, just unreliable speakers, the profusion of information only serving to heighten their unreliability and our doubts. "Ivy Day" stands out as a long epiphany of contradictory gossip. Forcing readers into doubt and interpretative questioning, Joyce's playwriting technique, through its minimalist transformation of the short story narrative, enhances the hermeneutic function in reading. Theatre has always offered an excellent model for the dramatic presentation of dialogical oppositions, setting forth contradictory truths and maintaining them as compelling, powerful truths nevertheless. I have already mentioned Mamet and Pinter, who are obvious examples for us today, but Joyce's model would have been Shakespeare, and particularly Shakespeare's histories, where opposite views are simultaneously put forward, and the audience presented with the problem of interpreting and judging a complex political situation without the support of a univocal, reliable master narrative. This would suit well the Ireland Joyce knew, and be particularly relevant to "Ivy Day" and its political content.²⁷ My tentative conclusion is therefore that, at an early stage in his writing, Joyce considered such theatrical refusal of closure was best worked into the shortest possible form. The epiphany was an exquisite formal achievement, but too unconventional and economically unviable. The short story was the next logical step in this evolution, fitting Joyce's project of capturing ephemeral moments and giving them dramatic intensity, as the micro-drama of both closing a narrative and refusing to close its meaning would be re-played for each story in the collection.

NOTES

1. Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (1980) 1987) 12.
2. Samuel Beckett, letter to Harold Pinter, 21 April 1969, personal archive (see Harold Pinter's official website, http://www.haroldpinter.org/directing/directing_exiles.shtml, accessed on 9 January 2008).
3. Several commentators actually consider it has considerably influenced his own work as a playwright.
4. Tom Stoppard, *Travesties* (London: Faber, 1975).
5. *JSE* 34 (Spring 2000): 89-108. The point I wish to make in this paper is both more formal and perhaps less historical than Forkner's. I present it as complementary—and complimentary—to the wealth of information and ground-breaking ideas in his article.
6. Letter to Grant Richards, June 23, 1906, in *Letters I*, 64. In context, the phrase actually refers to *Dubliners*.

7. *Poems and Shorter Writings, including Epiphanies, Giacomo Joyce and 'A Portrait of the Artist'*, eds. Richard Ellmann, A. Walton Litz, John Whittier-Ferguson (London: Faber, 1991).
8. James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. Theodore Spencer (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1963), 211. *Stephen Hero* is a first version of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and was first published posthumously in 1944.
9. Stanislaus Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper* (London: Faber, 1958) 134.
10. The term "triviality" is used in reference to the short dialogue: "This triviality made him think of collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies." (*Stephen Hero*, 211). As always very aware of the Latin etymology of his words, Joyce thus signals both the apparent unimportance of the exchange and its underlying vulgarity, *trivialis* also bearing the meaning of vulgar (literally found at the crossroads, or *tri-via*). Strictly speaking, the dialogue has in fact been overheard in the street. Vulgarity explains both why the speakers would rather keep it a secret of no importance, and why Joyce would take the pain to record such trifle.
11. Given the space, I would further argue that, when trying to capture the strength and instantaneousness of drama through theatrical techniques, Joyce is probably aiming at capturing the intensity and immediacy of real life, and that in that sense, the theatrical performance is only an ideal, concentrated version of real life. It is real life already artistically mediated, by the theatre, but not disembodied to the same extent as novels or short stories. Play scripts may look bare, but they call forth embodiment, destined as they are to be fleshed out on stage. From a practical perspective, theatre therefore provides the writer with a whole set of tried out techniques which have proven their efficiency in rendering that evanescent yet vivid feeling of real life. And the final twist of Joyce's cunning narration lies in this last paradox that it is through the detour of theatre's artificial reality that he manages to expose his characters' secret truth.
12. *Poems and Shorter Writings*, 182.
13. See Joyce's biography by Richard Ellmann: *James Joyce* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1959) 1982) 51-53. As Ellmann notes, the "kaleidoscope" charade was actually immortalized in *Finnegans Wake*.
14. Short stories were also easier to place in newspapers and journals: the first version of "The Sisters" appeared in the Dublin agricultural journal *The Irish Homestead* as its regular features ("Our Weekly Story") for the week of August 13, 1904 (D 233).
15. I am referring to the rarer, but precious Viking critical edition of *Dubliners* edited by Robert Scholes and Walton Litz (New York: Penguin Books, 1996) 9-10. Further references appear parenthetically in the text.
16. By convention, references to *Finnegans Wake* include the page number followed with line number.
17. Although he makes no connection with theatricality, this analysis of "The Sisters" and the rest of my interpretation of *Dubliners* owe much to Jean-Michel Rabaté's groundbreaking article, "Silence in *Dubliners*," *James Joyce: New Perspectives*, ed. Colin MacCabe (Hempstead: Harvester Press, 1982), 45-72.
18. This should also be related with the manifest emphasis on style and the particularly well-written quality of Joyce's endings: the closing of Molly Bloom's celebrated monologue at the end of *Ulysses*, Anna Livia Plurabelle's flowing return to her ocean father at the end of *Finnegans Wake*, and at the end of *Dubliners* the last page in *The Dead* which many consider one of the most beautiful pages ever written in English.
19. P. W. Joyce (no relation), *English As We Speak It In Ireland* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, (1910) 1991) 81.
20. Letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, 11 July 1924 (*Letters III*, 99-100).
21. Being French and therefore used to their near absence in dialogue, this is something I did not catch on immediately, but was alerted to by Colin McCabe's remarkable study: *James Joyce and the*

Revolution of the Word (London: Macmillan, 1979). In addition to its connection with the conventions of written theatre, Joyce's refusal of the traditional use of quotation marks was also influenced by nineteenth-century French novelists, and particularly Flaubert, whose work he knew extremely well.

22. See Robert Scholes, "A Note on the Text" (D 225-26).

23. Joyce also called them an "eyesore" which gave "an impression of unreality" (D 225), and lack of realism seems to have been Joyce's chief motivation in getting rid of inverted commas, but I would argue that the growing uncertainty achieved by their removal also mimics reality in that reading then resembles our habitual situation of hearing different opinions without being told what they are worth.

24. There is a similar effect in "Grace": the beginning of the story plays on the impossible identification of the main character, and when his name is eventually provided, it is actually mumbled: "I 'ery 'uch o'liged to you, sir. I hope we'll 'eet again. 'y na'e is Kernan" (D 153). The young man who has just saved him answers "Don't mention it," and here again it is difficult to decide whether he is responding to Kernan's thanks or to his self-introduction.

25. "—Fanning and himself seem to be very thick. They're often in Kavanagh together. Is he a priest at all?

—'Mmmyes, I believe so. . . . I think he's what you call a black sheep. We haven't many of them, thank God! but we have a few. . . . He's an unfortunate man of some kind. . . .

—And how does he knock it out? asked Mr O'Connor.

—That's another mystery.

—Is he attached to any chapel or church or institution or—

—No, said Mr Henchy, I think he's travelling on his own account. . . . God forgive me, he added, I thought he was the dozen of stout." (D 126-27)

26. Italicized by me. Even his "*frock-coat*" stands halfway between the priest's and the layman's costume.

27. In *A Portrait*, Joyce would choose a similar dramatic and dialogical presentation for most of the political material in the book, particularly with the Christmas dinner scene in which Stephen as a boy witnesses an argument over the role of the priests in Parnell's fall. From a different angle and with a completely distinct cast of characters, this is of course the very topic of "Ivy Day in the Committee Room."

ABSTRACTS

Cet essai s'interroge sur la place et la fonction de la théâtralité dans les premiers écrits de Joyce, en relation avec des formes courtes comme la nouvelle. Si l'œuvre de Joyce n'est pas particulièrement remarquable pour son théâtre, la théâtralité joue pourtant un rôle essentiel dans sa technique narrative et ses riches expériences formelles. L'écriture théâtrale lui fournit une forme elliptique et minimaliste (absence de narrateur et de guillemets, usage fréquent des points de suspension) qui, telle les charades de sa jeunesse, complique la tâche herméneutique des lecteurs-spectateurs tout en permettant à l'écrivain de travailler avec réalisme l'acoustique et les rythmes du dialogue. D'abord expérimentée dans ses premières épiphanies, cette technique est ensuite transférée au genre plus conventionnel et commercialisable de la nouvelle. Lui apportant l'unicité éphémère du spectacle vivant, le dialogue théâtral peut aussi se transformer, comme dans "Ivy Day dans la salle des commissions", en douteux commérages qui mettent en

cause la fiabilité de la transmission et l'interprétation de l'information. Tout en donnant vie au récit, la théâtralité joycienne laisse libre cours à l'indétermination et à la circulation du sens.

AUTHORS

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Valérie Bénéjam has been working at the Université de Nantes as a Maître de Conférences in English Literature since 1997. A former student of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, she wrote her PhD under the supervision of Jean-Michel Rabaté at the Université de Bourgogne ("*Cherchez la Femme*" dans *Ulysses: conceptions, reflets et réfractations de Molly Bloom*). She has written many articles about Joyce's work, which have appeared in *European Joyce Studies*, in various French journals (*Etudes Britanniques Contemporaines, Tropismes, etc.*) or have been published online (*Genetic Joyce Studies, Hypermedia Joyce Studies*). She is currently writing a book about *Ulysses*, tentatively entitled *All About Molly*, as well as co-editing a collection of articles on the issue of Joyce's representations, across his work, of spatiality and space. Her current research also investigates the connections between Joyce and Flaubert, as well as the rôle of theatre and playwriting in Joyce's fiction.