

The Maymeaming of Maimoomeinung

Dissemination of Meaning and Love in Derrida and Joyce

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At the Ninth International James Joyce Symposium, Jacques Derrida, the founder of deconstruction, is reported to have said that deconstruction would have been impossible without Joyce (Jones 1988: 77).¹ In addition, the French philosopher claims that Joyce has always haunted his work, and it is, indeed, a fact that Joyce occurs frequently in the works of Derrida. Derrida, whom the American critic Harold Bloom characterizes as *French Joyce* – where the adjective French indicates that the title is intended as utterly unloving! – does actually make the following confession himself: “So, yes (I’m replying to your suggestion), every time I write, and even in the most academic pieces of work, Joyce’s ghost is always coming on board” (Derrida 1984: 149). Joyce offers, according to Derrida a position, which is simultaneously unique and infinitely multifarious, thus illustrating the deconstructive perception of language:

The ‘power’ that language is capable of [...] is that a singular mark should also be repeatable, iterable, as mark [...]. It also formalizes or condenses history. A text by Joyce is simultaneously the condensation of a scarcely delimitable history. But this condensation of history, of language, of the encyclopedia, remains here indissociable from an absolutely singular event, an absolutely singular signature. (Derrida 1992: 42-43)

Joyce illustrates the actual force of language, which makes a condensation and concentration of the particular and the singular in the universal possible. In other words, Joyce seems to be posing the essential, linguistic question: “Are we speachin d’anglas landadge or are you sprakin sea Djoytsch?” (Joyce 1975: 485). There is a gap (*sprak*, inflected form of the Danish verb *sprække*: to crack or split) between the universality (*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*) and the singular reference of language (*Sprechen Sie Joyce?*), which is nevertheless bridged by Joyce’s literary achievements. In the works of Joyce, the singular and the signature (Joyce) are paradoxically maintained and concentrated in the encyclopedic universality of language, whose anonymous generality is defied – thus marking “un texte qui est à la fois très ressemblant et tout autre” (Derrida 1972: 12).

¹ The present contribution is a slightly reworked extract from Benjamin Boysen’s newly published book, *The Ethics of Love: an Essay on James Joyce* (University Press of Southern Denmark 2013), which is a full-scale reading and discussion of the question of love in all of Joyce’s published works (*Chamber Music*, *Dubliners*, *Exiles*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*).

In other words, Joyce bears witness to Derrida's contention that there is nothing outside the text: "il n'y a pas de hors-texte" (Derrida 1970a: 227). This does not mean that the creation of significance is not contextually determined – quite the opposite – but rather that there is no privileged or transcendental key of interpretation to decipher the meaning outside the plurality of references in which it is inscribed. Meaning is bound by context, but this does not mean that meaning can simply be controlled or translated to or by the context, because the latter is boundless or unfathomable: "This is my starting point: no meaning can be determined out of context, but no context permits saturation" (Derrida 1995b: 81). The same thought is formulated very concisely in an interview from 1988 where it says that: "I think that one cannot read without trying to reconstruct the historical context but history is not the last word, the final key, of reading" (Derrida 1988: 239). The problem of critical thought is therefore not the absence of contexts, but rather the complicated interconnected and unlimited nature of these. Consequently, meaning, significance, or the content is never entirely present for and in themselves, as they are all given as relations, traces, and references. This is equal to saying that the idea of the presence of presence must be abandoned in favor of the perception of presence as determined by absence – i.e. by what is alien to it, comes from the outside, or is non-identical.

Joyce illustrates this in his textual infinity of meaning-layers, which renders the notion of a monologic discourse impossible. The notion of the latter is instead replaced by the thousand tongues after the collapse of the Tower of Babel, where everything from now on receives meaning and significance from somewhere else. For this reason, the self-present voice of consciousness proves to be the voice of another, which is why the idea of the autonomous transcendence of the signified content behind the surface of the expression seems to be untenable: "Yet to concentrate solely on the literal sense or even the psychological content of any document to the sore neglect of the enveloping facts themselves circumstantiating it is [...] hurtful to sound sense" (Joyce 1975: 109). The signified – i.e. the content, the meaning, the author, the intention, or the subject – is never entirely present in the text, and the text is, furthermore, testamentary inasmuch as it is only available in delay after its time of production. Moreover, the absence of presence or the presence of absence is paradoxically the foundation for the production of signification, which is why Derrida claims that: "Le temps mort est à l'œuvre" (Derrida 1970a: 99).

It is, in other words, Derrida's assertion that there is no signified that is not already a signifier; he is hereby accentuating the metonymical sliding between the representations in the dynamics of the significance determined by this play of differences:

Le jeu des différences suppose en effet des synthèses et des renvois qui interdisent qu'à aucun moment, en aucun sens, un élément simple soit *présent* en lui-même et ne renvoie qu'à lui-même. Que ce soit dans l'ordre du discours parlé ou du discours écrit, aucun élément ne peut fonctionner comme signe sans renvoyer à un autre élément qui lui-même n'est pas simplement présent. Cet enchaînement fait que chaque 'élément' – phonème ou graphème – ce constitue à partir de la trace en lui des autres éléments de la chaîne ou du système. Cet enchaînement, ce tissu,

est le *texte* qui ne se produit que dans la transformation d'un autre texte. Rien, ni dans les éléments ni dans le système, n'est nulle part ni jamais simplement présent ou absent. Il n'y a, de part en part, que des différences et des traces de traces. (Derrida 1972: 37-38)

The production of significance initiated by the foundation of differences means that there are no semantic elements that dwell monadically in their own self-presence. Every element works as a sign in relationship with other elements, which are not entirely present either, but refer to other signs and so on. According to this theory, it is differences, references, and traces – i.e. what makes the thought of any autonomous and self-determined totality of significance impossible – which designate the actual meaning-content.

The creation of significance is therefore always dependent upon something else – what is not identical to itself, what excludes the yearning of classical metaphysics for the self-presence of identity, i.e. the heterogeneous or absent. It seems obvious that this logic is parallel to love's, for love is also determined by heterogeneity, as Fulke Greville (1554-1628) attests in his collection of poems, *Caelica*: "Love is a relative [a relative thing],/ Whose being only must on others be" (Greville 1968: LXX.5-6). In other words, the phenomenon of love and the philosophy of deconstruction have a certain heterogeneous economy in common inasmuch as they both emphasize the detour by the other as the precondition for the ego, meaning, and identity. It is, I argue, for this reason that Derrida simply identifies the explicit deconstructive topic as consisting in the analysis of the aporias of narcissism: "[le] concept même de narcissisme dont les apories sont, disons pour aller trop vite et faire l'économie de tant de références, le thème explicite de la déconstruction" (Derrida 1993: 161-62). When it is impossible for any elements to stand isolated, it is obviously the task for deconstruction to demonstrate how the Occidental metaphysics of presence – whose strivings seem narcissistic, because this tradition substantiates meaning and signification *without* reference to the heterogeneous – contradicts itself immanently: "c'est ce motif de l'homogénéité, motif théologique par excellence, qu'il faut décidément détruire" (Derrida 1972: 86).

When talking about deconstruction it is, however, paramount not to confuse the notion with a kind of destructive principle or movement (except, of course, in a Heideggerian sense), for deconstruction rather involves a careful laying bare of the hidden presuppositions guiding philosophy and metaphysics that always tend to express a historical and temporal dimension unspoken of by itself:

Here and there I have used the word deconstruction, which has nothing to do with destruction. That is to say, it is simply a question of (and this is a necessity of criticism in the classical sense of the word) being alert to the implications, to the historical sedimentation of the language which we use – and that is not destruction. (Derrida 1970b: 271)

In Derrida's own view on deconstruction, this critical movement is far from being negative (in any simple sense), since it implies giving careful attention to all of the semantic

elements at play in the text, i.e. to the elements otherwise hidden, unnoticed, neglected, or repressed. This heterogeneity of the text, of literature, philosophy, and of identity cannot be sublated fully or restlessly by a deconstructive manoeuvre; this means that deconstruction understands itself in parallel with the ethical situation as such, because it sees itself as a response to a call from a heterogeneity that needs to be addressed, yet cannot be exposed or enlightened fully. This respect for the heterogeneity of the other (of identity or subjectivity) means that the subject of deconstruction must be approached carefully and meticulously, since the presence of the other precedes deconstruction, philosophy, and genuine questioning. This is the positive and affirmative gesture of deconstruction:

I mean that deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates it. Deconstruction is therefore vocation – a response to a call. The other, as the other than self, the other that opposes self-identity, is not something that can be detected and disclosed within a philosophical space and with the aid of a philosophical lamp. The other precedes philosophy and necessarily invokes and provokes the subject before any genuine questioning can begin. It is in rapport with the other that affirmation expresses itself. (Derrida 1995a: 168)

In opposition to the narcissistic paradoxes and self-contradictions of the metaphysics of presence, Derrida points to the example of Joyce, who, by means of his ambivalent and polyphonic language, destroys narcissism and the dream of absolute self-presence.

In his introduction to his translation of Edmund Husserl's *L'origine de la géométrie* (1961), which is a meditation on the genesis of structures such as language and science, Derrida posits two modes of language or historicity. The first is represented by Edmund Husserl and is logocentric as it desires univocity, i.e. the idea of the possibility of a synchronic dimension in language that secures the prospect of intuiting an original and universal logic of emergence beneath or behind the contingent linguistic expression. This is equivalent with the idea of ultimate translatability. The other, by contrast, is represented by Joyce, who embodies a model of equivocity that strives to express language in its irreducible singularity and untranslatability (cf. the extreme example of *Finnegans Wake*). Therefore, Joyce comes to represent the exploration of the diachronic and poetical dimension of language, whereas Husserl discloses the synchronic and logical nature of language.

The philosopher and the poet are thus presenting us with “le choix entre deux tentatives” (Husserl 1974: 104) constitutive of language as such; one is the *iterative* view, belonging to Husserl, according to which sense-repetition demonstrates how sense returns to an origin that remains pure through time, so that history is a simple transmission of intelligible sense throughout time; however the *disseminative* view, belonging to Joyce, emphasizes that words function “dans un réseau de relations et d'oppositions linguistiques” (106), which has the consequence that the usage of words in the unforeseeable linguistic contexts instills the potential for equivocity in the sense of words. Nevertheless, and this must be stressed in opposition to those who target Derrida for

being relativistic, he also emphasizes how the disseminative perception of language, represented by Joyce, “ne pouvait réussir quand faisant sa part à l’univocité, soit qu’il puisât à l’univocité donnée, soit qu’il cherchât à en produire une autre. Sans cela le texte même de sa répétition eût été inintelligible” (105). There must therefore *both* be univocity and equivocity, argues Derrida; none of the linguistic dimensions can work unaffected by the other. *Absolute* univocity would preclude history, because it would make historical change impossible as it would “paralyser l’histoire dans l’indigence d’une iteration indéfinie” (104); whereas *absolute* equivocity would make intelligible sense impossible as it would be utterly bound to its historical time, making iteration impossible. Equivocity and univocity can, for this reason, only be relative and interdependent; radical equivocity would exclude history, since nothing could be identified (allowing for an iteration) in order to be transmitted, whereas radical univocity would similarly rule out the possibility of transmission of sense through time, since nothing could be reactivated in another linguistic or historical context. The same words can have different meanings – depending upon different contexts; the word has a different referent or meaning with each different utterance, yet there must be an iterative identity of meaning, that is, a universal sense-structure that makes the word available for different particularizations. One could, in defense of Joyce, say that Derrida gives a picture of Joyce that is not entirely loyal towards his art, which actually explores both of these linguistic and historical dimensions. His work is, namely, a “chaosmos” (Joyce 1975: 118), which is neither exclusively describing pure univocity (*cosmos*) nor pure equivocity (*chaos*), but both simultaneously. In addition, Joyce’s view of history does not testify to the idea of history as being either pure synchronic iteration or pure diachronic dissemination, since it contrarily expresses “history repeating itself with a difference” (Joyce 1986: 16.1525-26).

Derrida is of the opinion that Joyce’s Babylonian act of war is not only an efficient illustration of the way the production of significance is determined by the condensation of the plurality of references, but also demonstrates how Joyce additionally emphasizes love, choosing to do without the poverty of homogeneity in favor of the abundance of heterogeneity: “this act of war is not necessarily anything other than an election, an act of love” (Derrida 1984: 154).

Such a linguistic declaration of war, which is simultaneously a declaration of love, is eminently, I think, illustrated in a complex pun such as the following that talks of “the maymeaming of maimoomeining” (Joyce 1975: 267). Here we are presented with a good example of what Derrida claims to be Joyce’s special encyclopedic, but nevertheless absolutely singular signature. In addition, we are witnesses to an evident illustration of Derrida’s perception of language as being determined by play, difference, traces, weaving, context, and ambivalence. According to Roland McHugh – who in his *Annotations to Finnegans Wake* alludes to the linguistic and philosophical work by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), this is a work that supplements literature inasmuch as it aims at securing the unequivocal, clear, and transparent understanding of language, and whose most important objective is to get hold of the transcendental and self-present signifier (the meaning of meaning).

Joyce's familiarity with this work is clear from his letters (Joyce 1957: 279). The impressive linguistic and philosophical study of Ogden and Richards ends, by the way, with a conclusion that must have appealed greatly to the heterogeneous and pluralistic perception of language that Joyce tried to demonstrate by creating *Finnegans Wake*:

Proceeding on the same principles to 'meaning' itself, we find a widely divergent set of opinions in the writings of the best philosophers. [...] In fact, a careful study of the practice of prominent writers of all schools leads to the conclusion that in spite of a tacit assumption that the term is sufficiently understood, no principle governs its usage, nor does any technique exist whereby confusion may be avoided. (Ogden 1966: 248)

As regards Derrida's view of the meaning of meaning, he stresses the inclusive aspect in the sense of infinite differential and deferral work that perpetually inscribes meaning outside itself in a restless act of signification; this mutual and dynamic referral amongst the representations inherent in the erection of the meaning of meaning rather presupposes equivocalness than univocity: "Et si le sens du sens (au sens général de sens et non de signalisation), c'est l'implication infinie? Le renvoi indéfini de signifiant à signifiant? Si sa force est une certaine équivocité pure et infinie ne laissant aucun répit, aucun repos au sens signifié, l'engageant, en sa proper *économie*, à faire signe encore et à *différer*?" (Derrida 1967: 42).

The writer makes an enormous effort to defy all attempts to master the text; and in practice he questions the metaphysical endeavor to establish and concretize the meaning of meaning, which is disseminated throughout the infinite plurality of references that make up the production of signification. The irony here is concretely inscribed by the English auxiliary verb, *may* (*maymeaminning*), which – as a result of its literal hesitation towards definitive conclusions – compromises and weakens the metaphysical endeavors of the interpreter to master the meaning of the work. These ambitions are, furthermore, debilitated by the French conjunction, *mais* ('*mai[s]moomeinung*'), which adds another reservation towards the efforts to determine and master the meaning of meaning. In addition to this, we read the German word, *Meinung*, in the neologism. This has the consequence that the meaning of meaning is compromised by personal, subjective, and limited perspectives – cf. Hegel, who in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes* stresses how *Meinungen* are never able to surpass their own (*mein*) private perspective, so that their essence deserves no other characterization than "das Unwahre, Unvernünftige, bloß Gemeinte" (Hegel 1978: 92). The writer withstands and subverts the logo-centric ideals of truth, reason, and the absolute (the meaning of meaning), since these concepts are undermined by the semantic dissemination of subjectivity and singular being via the English 'am,' 'me,' 'mine,' and the Latin 'mea'.

The self-centered and narcissistic traits are, furthermore, conspicuous inasmuch as the long vowel, *oo*, emphasizes the infantile and regressive; this is, moreover, evident if we turn our attention to the onomatopoeic *moo*, which brings associations about babbling nursery rhymes to mind (cf. for example the one about the cow that jumped the moon). Taken together, these last characteristics of Joyce's neologism give rise to con-

notations of the source and the origin – and naturally also of the perception of the meaning of meaning as the *Ur-Grund* of existence – whose status is extremely ambivalent, because it oscillates between finitude (the vowels as two zeros) and infinity (the vowels as the sign of infinity, ∞).

This is likewise supported by the presence of the Gaelic *múineadh*, which signifies breeding. This points to the idea that sexuality, the animalistic, the joining and interaction of the sexes, are also vital elements in the understanding of the meaning of meaning – and this *means*, in other words, the perception of the biological source too. The explicit joy of eroticism, the regressive infantilism, and the iterated, but fragmented, subjectivity – all point towards the subversive force of poetic language, which possesses the power to dissolve the meaning of meaning – understood as the transcendental *Ur-Grund* of language and being – into an enormous and indeterminate plurality as “Multimimética” (Joyce 1975: 267). An unequivocal meaning content is no longer possible, but the text is for the selfsame reason endowed with signification in abundance. The transcendental meaning is, in this manner, injured or destroyed (*maimed*), because it has been multiplied and disseminated out into elements and traces that are each disloyal towards their original and unambiguous meaning content. When meaning and subjectivity are repeatedly cleaved off into alien elements, differences, and traces, it is no longer possible to speak with a unified voice or consciousness. This causes a certain implosion of meaning to occur; but this spreading and circulation of meaning results, however, also in an expansion and multiplication of identity and subjectivity. It is for this reason that the voice, consciousness, and the meaning of meaning – which are all determined by this plurality and diversity – are dumb and vociferous at one and the same time: “silents selfloud” (ibid.: 267).

The sentence is linked to the phenomenon of love inasmuch as it contains an echo of Thomas Moore’s (1779-1852) song, “The Young May Moon,” which goes like this:

The young May moon is beaming, love,
 The glow-worm’s lamp is gleaming, love,
 How sweet to rove
 Through Morna’s grove,
 When the drowsy world is dreaming, love!

Then awake! – the heavens look bright, my dear,
 ’Tis never too late for delight, my dear,
 And the best of all ways
 To lengthen our days,
 Is to steal a few hours from the night, my dear!

Now all the world is sleeping, love,
 But the Sage, his star-watch keeping, love,
 And I, whose star,
 More glorious far,
 Is the eye from that casement peeping, love.

Then awake! – till rise of sun, my dear,
 The Sage's glass we'll shun, my dear,
 Or, in watching the flight
 Of bodies of light,
 He might happen to take thee for one, my dear.

The above suggestions are some of the reasons why the *maymeamining of maimoo-meinung* is primarily a sentence that is centered on love (*Ger. Minne*), because it is through heterogeneity, temporality, the absent, and the other that we – by giving up the illusion of a narcissistic and ideal, unequivocal unity of meaning – receive subjectivity, meaning, and identity. It is through the renunciation (objectification) of oneself – in the medium of language or the other – that one gains love and oneself. This is why Joyce's linguistic declaration of war is an actual declaration of love, since the narcissistic and mute language of the monads is splintered in the doubling in the other. As a consequence, one has to pay special attention to the fact that Joyce's extreme surplus of signification, the extreme wealth of meaning in his work, bears witness to an amorous writing, which is guided by an acute sensitivity towards the other. Derrida, who summarizes our results as follows, has also noted this circumstance: "no my love that's my wake [...] l'uniquement chaque fois que j'aime: au-delà de tout ce qui est, tu es l'un – et donc l'autre" (Derrida 1980: 154-55).

In this manner, it is the division, the doubling, and the difference from oneself which cause Joyce to be congenial with deconstruction. This affinity is also due to his immense preoccupation with love – a phenomenon that he understood from principles similar to those of deconstruction. In other words, Joyce presents a kind of 'deconstructive' notion of love, for as Sheldon Brivic writes: "Joyce presents self-division as essential to love" (Brivic 1985: 11).

In this manner, Joyce and Derrida mirror each other in their persistent deconstruction of the aporias of narcissism as well as in their dissemination of meaning and love, which is the result of a careful attention paid to negativity and heterogeneity.

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