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In Pursuit of Fact: Joyce and Flaubert's Documentary Letter-Writing

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This essay is about the documentary passion writ large in Joyce and Flaubert's letters. It is about the part played in the genesis of their works by letters which, in each case, bespeak an acute punctiliousness regarding the inclusion of accurate factual and historical detail into their fictions. Such items of correspondence have a bearing on the familiar but labyrinthine question of 'realism' with which both authors are perennially associated. A notoriously nebulous term, intractably imprecise from the earliest days of its emergence into literary-critical discourse in the 1840s, it is one from which Flaubert sought ferociously to distance himself, as well as one which, in its abstract monumentality, is inadequate to the description of an oeuvre as formally various as Joyce's.¹ However, for all its simplifying generality, the word necessarily impinges on the discussion of both authors' near obsessive reliance on research in the genesis of their fictions. Shining a light on the marked similarities of form and tone between these subsets of each author's correspondence (whilst also drawing out the significant differences between them), this essay argues that the many affinities their works bear to each other in terms of their treatment of 'reality' are underpinned by their shared penchant for epistolary enquiry. To read each author's documentary letters is to peer into the collaborative histories of their works' much vaunted referential exactness, but also to realize how little each author's supposed espousal of a factual, 'realist' aesthetic conforms with any reductive understanding of that label.

A comparison of these documentary letters – letters, that is, in which each author requests items of factual information – is in part suggested by the observation that Joyce's best known novelistic allusion to Flaubert points not to his works, but to his correspondence. The reference in question is one of several embedded in the fifth chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.² Closely echoing a letter penned about *Madame Bovary* in 1857, Stephen decorates Flaubert's renowned doctrine of impersonality with some flamboyant flourishes of his own:

The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.³

¹ Pierre-Marc de Biasi, *Gustave Flaubert: Une manière spéciale de vivre* (Paris: Grasset, 2009), 337.

² For a full discussion of these allusions, and of the evidence of Joyce's reading of Flaubert's correspondence, see Scarlett Baron, *Strandentwining Cable: Joyce, Flaubert, and Intertextuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially Chapters 1 and 3.

³ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 181. The sentence is a rephrasing of Flaubert's assertion that 'The artist in his work must be like God in his creation – invisible and all-powerful: he must be everywhere felt, but never seen.' – Flaubert to Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie, 18 March 1857, *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert*, 2 vols, trans. Francis Steegmuller (London: Faber and Faber, 1981 and 1984), vol. 1, 230; the French original is published in Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*, 5 vols, ed. Jean Bruneau and Yvan Leclerc (Paris: Gallimard, 1973-2007) [hereafter *CI-5*], *C2*, 691. Flaubert

Although Stephen's use of Flaubert is unacknowledged, and therefore perhaps rather suspect (as the symptom, for example, of an influence concealed), Joyce's own commitment to impersonal truth-telling is apparent from his early correspondence. The letters written by the artist as a young man express virulent disgust at the 'lying drivel' and 'blatant lying' peddled by others; vaunt the 'style of scrupulous meanness' adopted in the *Dubliners* stories; and claim to have produced in them 'a nicely polished looking-glass' with which to shame the inhabitants of Dublin.⁴

Flaubert's correspondence is pertinent to Joyceans for reasons which go beyond its discreet cameo appearance in Joyce's first novel. For indeed Flaubert, like Joyce, was in the habit of using letters to despatch pressing appeals for information to a range of carefully chosen recipients. Whether Joyce's own practice was suggested by his acquaintance with Flaubert's letters, or whether he composed his own research missives independently of such a model – simply in answer to his own need for facts with which to undergird his fiction – the remarkable similarities between their documentary letter-writing index a shared investment in the assimilation of verifiable details of material reality. Some of the differences between them, meanwhile – Joyce's interest in some of his correspondents' perspectives on the information he seeks, Flaubert's belief in his own seer-like ability to 'predict' the facts he is after – comport with the widely divergent reading experiences afforded by their later works.

The Correspondences

The value of Joyce and Flaubert's letters to the understanding of their literary works is uncontroversial. In both cases, the gradual emergence into the public domain of vast swathes of correspondence has proved the more enlightening for providing information – as to intention, method, and sources – that the authors' commitment to impersonality forbade them to divulge.⁵

Flaubert's correspondence, by far the more 'literary' and memorable of the two, arouses almost as much passion as it conveys. A body of writing roughly equal in bulk to Flaubert's collected literary output, it 'has come to accrue the status of a work in

expressed the same view in similar terms in at least two other letters: to his lover Louise Colet in 1852 (*C2*, 204) and to George Sand in 1875 (*C4*, 1000).

4 Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 13 November 1906, *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1975) [hereafter *SL*], 129; Joyce to Grant Richards, 5 May 1906, *SL*, 83; Joyce to Grant Richards, 23 June 1906, *SL*, 90.

5 Flaubert forcefully rejected Sand's plea for him to express his views in his works: 'I'm only too full of convictions. I'm constantly bursting with suppressed anger and indignation. But my ideal of Art demands that the artist reveal none of this, and that he appear in his work no more than God in nature.' – 31 December 1875, *C4*, 1000. Joyce formulated a much attenuated variant of the same position in telling Frank Budgen (in connection with his work on the 'Lestrygonians' episode of *Ulysses*) that 'I want the reader to understand always through suggestion rather than direct statement.' – Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of 'Ulysses'* [1934] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 21.

and of itself”,⁶ its ‘overflowing personality’⁷ constituting a fascinating counterpart to the ‘enigmatic impersonality’ of his literary fictions. Mario Vargas Llosa calls the Flaubertian correspondence ‘the most lucid and profound treatise on narrative art ever to be written’.⁸ Henry James, an early reader of the letters, had a conspicuously more conflicted response, however. In an acidly back-handed review of the first edition,⁹ he deems Flaubert ‘a strong taste’. With exquisitely calculated ambivalence, he dubs him ‘the most expressive, the most vociferous, the most spontaneous of men’, dwelling, with a fascination tinged with revulsion, on his ‘extraordinary singleness of aim’.¹⁰ Although art was for Flaubert ‘the only thing worth living for’, notes James, it caused him ‘unetherised anguish’.¹¹ Flaubert emerges from James’s equivocal account as ‘almost insanely excessive’ – a ‘fanatic’, ‘monomaniac[al]’ artist ‘not only disinterested but absolutely dishumanised’.¹² Extensive as it is, James’s survey of Flaubert’s intensities makes no mention of those numerous documentary letters he despatched to a long list of correspondents variously singled out for their friendship, their specific expertise in one of the fields he was investigating, or – as in the cases of the Goncourt brothers, Sand, Sainte-Beuve, Maupassant, Turgenev, and many others – their own practice of the craft of literature.

Joyce’s letters do not give rise to such emphatic responses. Although Mary Reynolds goes too far in calling the correspondence ‘the *only* record, apart from his books, of the aesthetic theories that produced those books’, it is nevertheless a rare and crucial one – perhaps, indeed, ‘the *principal* evidence we have of his ideas’.¹³ Joyce was, in Reynolds’ fair appraisal, ‘a prolific rather than an elegant letter writer’.¹⁴ As Richard Ellmann states, Joyce in general ‘wrote sparsely and to the point’: the ‘prevailing tenor’ of his correspondence is ‘wry, tense, pressed down’.¹⁵ Melissa Banta, for her part, draws attention to the fact that the ‘sparse, unbeautiful messages’ Joyce sent to Sylvia Beach are often ‘no more than hieroglyphic notations’.¹⁶ A. Walton Litz similarly remarks that ‘with the exception of some letters to his brother Stanislaus and

6 Pierre-Marc de Biasi, ‘Correspondance et genèse. Indice épistolaire et lettre de travail: le cas Flaubert’, in *Genèse et correspondances*, ed. Françoise Leriche et Alain Pagès (Paris: Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2012), 71-108, 74.

7 De Biasi, ‘Correspondance et genèse’, 76.

8 Mario Vargas Llosa, ‘Flaubert, our contemporary’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Flaubert*, ed. Timothy Unwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 220-224, 222.

9 Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*, 4 vols (Paris: G. Charpentier, for vols 1, 2, and 3, and Paris: Charpentier and Fasquelle, for vol. 4: 1887-1893).

10 Henry James, ‘Gustave Flaubert’, *Macmillan’s Magazine*, vol. 67, no. 401 (March 1939), 332-43, 342, 334.

11 James, ‘Gustave Flaubert’, 340, 341.

12 James, ‘Gustave Flaubert’, 340, 333.

13 Mary T. Reynolds, ‘Joyce as a Letter Writer’, in *A Companion to Joyce Studies*, ed. Zack Bowen and James F. Carens (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1984), 39 (italics mine). Scholars are, after all, able to glean some insight about Joyce’s aesthetic theories from his essays, from memoirs written by friends such as Frank Budgen (*James Joyce and the Making of ‘Ulysses’*, 1934) and Constantine Curran (*James Joyce Remembered*, 1968), and from texts such as Herbert Gorman’s biography, *James Joyce: His First Forty Years* (1924), written with Joyce’s help and under his supervision, and Stuart Gilbert’s *James Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’: A Study* (1930), to which Joyce substantially contributed.

14 Reynolds, ‘Joyce as a Letter Writer’, 39.

15 Richard Ellmann, Introduction, *SL*, xi.

16 Melissa Banta, Preface, *James Joyce’s Letters to Sylvia Beach, 1921-1940*, ed. Melissa Banta and Oscar A. Silverman (Oxford and Saint-Cyprien: Plantin Publishers, 1987), x.

to his intimate friend Frank Budgen he preserved in his correspondence the same formality that marked his public conduct'.¹⁷ Joyce's 'demanding nature', evident in the assignment of so many errands, finds alternative expression in other letters which betray a longing for praise and support. His letters to his patron Harriet Shaw Weaver, for example, are in Reynolds' judgement 'a unique record of his need for encouragement and desire for her approval.'¹⁸ Despite their generally rather unendearing contexts, some of Joyce's epistolary pronouncements – his comments, for example, about 'the odour of ashpits and old weeds and offal' which suffuses *Dubliners*, about *Ulysses* as an 'epic of two races', about *Finnegans Wake*'s turn away from 'wideawake language, cuttandry grammar and goahead plot' – have proven so influential as to be treated by critics as virtually 'part of the text'.¹⁹

Working Letters and the Genetic Dossier

Before homing in on Joyce and Flaubert's working letters, a few words are in order about the place accorded to such documents by genetic critics. 'In terms of genetic orthodoxy', states Pierre-Marc de Biasi, letters fall outside the bounds of an author's *avant-textes*.²⁰ This is the case even when, as handwritten documents, they bear a strong resemblance to other manuscript items which do find a place in the dossier, and even when they testify to aspects of the compositional process and, as such, provide information crucial to the identification, dating, and ordering of the rest of an author's papers.²¹ However, having posited this general exclusion, De Biasi promptly outlines certain exceptions to it, drawing a distinction between letters expressly written to facilitate the writing of a work in hand, and others which ostensibly play no direct role in the genesis and revision of the work itself.²² De Biasi calls letters of the first kind – those designed to have an immediate impact on the makeup of a work in progress – authentic 'working letters'.²³ In the scientific terminology favoured by geneticists, they are 'operational instruments' warranting consideration as part of a work's *avant-textes*.²⁴

17 A. Walton Litz, Foreword, *James Joyce's Letters to Sylvia Beach, 1921-1940*, ed. Melissa Banta and Oscar A. Silverman (Oxford and Saint-Cyprien: Plantin Publishers, 1987), ix.

18 Reynolds, 'Joyce as a Letter Writer', 67, 65. While Reynolds is here commenting specifically on letters written during the composition of *Finnegans Wake*, the statement holds true of all of Joyce's correspondence with Weaver. Joyce is frequently candid about his gratitude and need for approval: 'More even than your gift (great as it is) seems to me the encouragement conveyed in the allusions to powerful and productive years...' – Joyce to Harriet Shaw Weaver, 29 August 1920, *Harriet Shaw Weaver Papers*, British Library, vol. 2, folio 13, quoted in Reynolds, 'Joyce as a Letter Writer', 64; 'I am rather discouraged about this as in such a vast and difficult enterprise I need encouragement.' – Joyce to Harriet Shaw Weaver, 1 February 1927, *SL*, 319.

19 Joyce to Grant Richards, 23 June 1906, *SL*, 89; Joyce to Carlo Linati, 21 September 1920, *SL*, 270-1; Joyce to Harriet Shaw Weaver, 24 November 1926, *SL*, 318; William S. Brockman, 'Letters', in *James Joyce in Context*, ed. John McCourt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 27-38, 29.

20 De Biasi, 'Correspondance et genèse', 93.

21 De Biasi, 'Correspondance et genèse', 72.

22 De Biasi, 'Correspondance et genèse', 92-3.

23 De Biasi, 'Correspondance et genèse', 92.

24 De Biasi, 'Correspondance et genèse', 97.

Letters as Vectors of Research

Joyce and Flaubert's correspondences comprise many such 'operational instruments', and are accordingly revealing about each author's propensity for extensive literary research. James was flabbergasted by the thoroughness of Flaubert's documentary foraging: '[t]he abyss of reading answered to the abyss of writing', he notes, and 'every subject that he treated required a rising flood of information. There are libraries of books behind his most innocent sentences.'²⁵ What might have been considered a virtue is turned by James into an impediment: Flaubert, he opines, was 'so omnivorous in research that the art of composition, with him, was still more impeded by knowledge than by taste'.²⁶ Flaubert himself frequently laments the toil involved in satisfying his own exigent standards. In matters of research as in matters of style, he would settle for nothing less than the absolute realization of his original conception: 'Happy are those not afflicted by the mania of Perfection!', he exclaimed in 1876, after searching through Normandy for the right setting for 'A Simple Heart' (1877).²⁷ Flaubert's working letters – featuring queries about, for instance, the precise location of National Guard posts during the 'June Days' of 1848, or the specific utensils used in a Parisian birth clinic – form part of the same uncompromising commitment to documentary accuracy.²⁸

Although Joyce was less prone than Flaubert to reflect explicitly on his aesthetics in writing, his own litany of enquiries – his demand that his aunt send him a gazette of police news, or that one of the Jesuit priests at his old school furnish him with information regarding the wife of the first Earl of Belvedere – constitutes one of the keynotes of his correspondence.²⁹ As Reynolds observes – and as source-hunters, genetic critics, and general scholars of Joyce's oeuvre have all found – the letters are a veritable catalogue of 'requests for minor errands to be run, books to be bought or sent, and similar favors'.³⁰ Joyce's focus on Dublin and Ireland in his writing, combined with his 'voluntary exile', itinerant lifestyle, and the disruptions wrought by two world wars, exacerbated his reliance on others for factual details, books, and other materials not locally accessible to him.³¹

Modes of Collaboration

An author's working letters are, by De Biasi's definition, appeals for assistance and – when the appeal is positively received – sites of cooperation. Although the collaborations set in train by Joyce and Flaubert present many arresting convergences, their letters also paint markedly contrasting pictures of their respective epistolary communities and idiosyncratic personal temperaments.

25 James, 'Gustave Flaubert', 341.

26 James, 'Gustave Flaubert', 340.

27 Flaubert to George Sand, 8 April 1876, *C5*, 33.

28 Flaubert to Ernest Feydeau, 27 October 1868, *C3*, 815; Flaubert to Jules Duplan, 10 January 1869, *C4*, 7.

29 Joyce to Mrs William Murray, 17 June 1920, *SL*, 255; Joyce's letter to Belvedere does not survive, but the reply it solicited does – see Reverend Charles Doyle, S.J. to James Joyce, 3 October 1921, *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 3, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 49.

30 Reynolds, 'Joyce as a Letter Writer', 43.

31 Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 28 February 1905, *SL*, 56.

The warmth that animates Flaubert's correspondence is a major point of difference. The collaborative intimacy it fosters, and the appreciative trust it conveys, clearly demarcates it from the standoffish formality of Joyce's letters. Flaubert's opening salutations, the piquant colloquial flavour of which is often untranslatable, immediately set the tone, whether the top note be one of respect ('Cher maître'), affection ('Mon bon vieux', 'Cher Vieux', 'Mon bon'), tenderness ('Mon chéri', 'Mon cher bonhomme', 'Mon Loulou'), or salacious humour ('Jeune Lubrique', 'Homme obscène et aimable').³² His signatures, likewise, are genial, self-deprecating, tongue-in-cheek. Flaubert takes his leave as, *inter alia*, 'Votre vieux féroce, LE VIEILLARD DE CRO-MAGNON', 'BOUVARD', 'Votre SAINT POLYCARPE',³³ 'Votre CRUCHARD de plus en plus rébarbaratif',³⁴ 'votre vieux troubadour qui vous aime'.³⁵

The host of affectionate nicknames which constellate Flaubert's epistolary universe belonged to a private sphere which he sought to shield from the public eye. When George Sand's son Maurice embarked on the project of editing her letters after her death in 1876, Flaubert sent him all those he had in his possession, but specifically requested that their intimate shorthand be protected:

Mon cher Maurice,
No: *omit* 'Cruchard' and 'Polycarp', and substitute for those names whichever others you please. The Public mustn't have our all. Let us keep some things to ourselves. [...]

32 Very approximately, these addresses can be rendered as, in the order of their appearance above: 'Dear master'; 'My dear old pal'; 'Dear chap'; 'My good fellow'; 'My dear'; 'My dear good fellow'; 'My Loulou' (exclusively used for his niece Caroline); 'Lubricious Young Thing'; 'Obscene and loveable man'. The examples above are drawn from letters to: George Sand, 29 May 1876, *C5*, 41; Edmond Laporte, 19 or 26 October 1878, *C5*, 447; Ernest Feydeau, 20 September 1867, *C3*, 688; Maupassant, 25 September 1877, *C5*, 300; Maupassant, 16 February 1880, *C5*, 835; Maupassant, 24-5 March 1880, *C5*, 867; Caroline de Commanville, 18 April 1880, *C5*, 884; Maupassant, 22 July 1877, *C5*, 262; Amédée Achard [?], 12 September 1867, *C3*, 686. (Although the last of these letters' addressees is hypothetically named as Paul de Saint-Victor in *C3*, De Biasi suggests Achard as its more likely recipient – see 'Correspondance et genèse', 98.)

33 'Saint Polycarp' became one of Flaubert's regular pseudonyms from 1853, when he explained the identification to his lover Louise Colet by stating that 'Saint Polycarp was in the habit, whilst putting his fingers in his ears and fleeing whatever he happened to find himself in, of repeating: "In what century, dear God, did you have me be born!"' – 21-2 August 1853, *C2*, 407. In later years, Flaubert was fêted by his friends on the saint's feast day.

34 'Cruchard', a nickname principally used in correspondence with Sand, is the abbreviated form of 'R.P. Cruchard of the Barnabites, Director of the Ladies of Disillusionment', a farcical figure of Flaubert's imagination, the undeveloped draft of whose burlesque adventures he sent to Sand in 1873 – see the signature to his letter of 24 April 1873, *C4*, 657.

35 Very approximately, these sign-offs can be rendered as, in the order of their appearance above: 'Your ferocious old thing, THE OLD MAN OF CRO-MAGNON'; 'BOUVARD'; 'Your SAINT POLYCARP'; 'Your more and more rebarbarative CRUCHARD'; 'your old troubadour who loves you'. These examples are drawn from letters to: Edmond Laporte, 16 December 1877, *C5*, 342; Edmond Laporte, 2 November 1877, *C5*, 316; Mme Brainne, 23 August 1877, *C5*, 280; George Sand, late December 1875, *C4*, 1001; George Sand, 16 December 1875, *C4*, 997. Lloyd and Barnes, among others, have commented on the variety of Flaubert's modes of address and signature – see Rosemary Lloyd, 'Flaubert's correspondence', in *The Cambridge Companion to Flaubert*, 67-84, 46; Julian Barnes, 'Drinking Ink', in *Something to Declare* (London: Picador, 2002), 193-208, 199-20; and Julian Barnes, 'Tail-Flaying', in *Something to Declare*, 233-249, 241.

I embrace you all, from the oldest man to the youngest girl.

CRUCHARD to you,
POLYCARP to the human race,
GUSTAVE FLAUBERT to Literature.³⁶

The camaraderie underpinning such epistolary hugs and handshakes is evident. Flaubert's 'interactive devices' – to use the analytical language of Françoise Leriche et Alain Pagès – situate him within a lively community of friends, portraying him as 'a man of dialogue, at ease among his clan, his circle'.³⁷ Literature emerges from Flaubert's exchanges as a group, almost a family, affair. When Flaubert embarked upon a new project, writes De Biasi, 'A whole tribe of people [was] involved'.³⁸ But the collaborative traffic among the members of this coterie ran in more than one direction: Flaubert made regular returns of favour, reading books and manuscripts and sending their authors encouraging, honest, and often detailed comments.³⁹

The impressions produced by Joyce's working letters are strikingly different. Certainly, Joyce's 'working letters' bear witness to his liberal sharing of those 'literary' tasks which could be shared. As Ellmann observes 'His friends were always finding him a book, or telephoning to someone, or reading proof, or looking up something.'⁴⁰ Indeed, as Nora once colourfully chided him, 'If God Almighty came down to earth, you'd have a job for him.'⁴¹ But in other regards, the divergences between the two authors are more apparent than the commonalities. For one thing, the working letters Joyce sent in the years following his departure from Ireland were addressed principally to family members based in Dublin, on whom he depended for information about the city he had left behind. In later years, when those links had been ruptured by death or weakened by disaffection and estrangement, he came to rely heavily on a small circle of supporters and patrons for information of a different order. With his Dublin sources running dry, he drew on other networks to secure alternative kinds of literary fodder, turning regularly to such acolytes as Sylvia Beach, Harriet Shaw Weaver, Frank Budgen, and John Quinn for assistance in satisfying his need for reading material.⁴²

Moreover, for Joyce, unlike for Flaubert, 'collaboration' was almost exclusively a one-way business. Stern, and by and large unleavened by any Flaubertian flashes of exuberance and intimacy, his epistolary dealings seem driven by the conviction that

36 Flaubert to Maurice Sand, 20 April 1880, *C5*, 887.

37 De Biasi, 'Correspondance et genèse', 100.

38 De Biasi, 'Correspondance et genèse', 100.

39 For example: Flaubert sent praise and reservations to Zola regarding his *Une Page d'amour* (*C5*, 378-9); sent Sand his warm compliments on *Cadio* (*C3*, 759); wrote to Daudet to express his appreciation of *Jack* (*C5*, 13); proclaimed Maupassant's *Boule de Suif* a masterpiece (*C5*, 887). Flaubert's correspondence with Louise Colet is full of long, detailed criticisms of her writing.

40 Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, revd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) [hereafter *JJ*], 699.

41 *JJ*, 699. As Ellmann's notes indicate, Nora's spirited scolding was remembered by Samuel Beckett in an interview conducted in 1953. – *JJ*, 808.

42 Joyce knew that male friendship was not one of his special talents. In a letter to Stanislaus, he remarks that 'it seems to me that my influence on male friends is provocative. They find it hard to understand me, and difficult to get on with me even when they seem well-equipped for these tasks'. – Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 6 September 1906, *SL*, 101.

‘his needs are trivial when weighed with his deserts’.⁴³ At his most informal – usually in letters to family members – Joyce allows himself only the casualness of departing as ‘Jim’. Exceptionally, as for example in response to a playful letter of Weaver’s about *Finnegans Wake*, he takes a bow as ‘M. M. Inkpen and Paperasses’, or, a week later, as a droll ‘Jeems Jokes’.⁴⁴ The comments of critics attest to a certain unease about the terseness of Joyce’s regular impositions on others. Banta acknowledges that Joyce’s letters to Beach paint a picture of a man ‘both calculating and unfeeling in regard to the many people who gave generously and unflinchingly to his own needs’.⁴⁵ For Litz, meanwhile, the letters tell ‘a tale of egoism and ingratitude’.⁴⁶

Joyce’s Working Letters

After his departure from Ireland in 1904, Joyce came to rely intensively on communication by letter to recreate the Dublin he had left. Among his family members, Joyce’s brother Stanislaus and aunt Josephine especially were bombarded – ‘plagued’, as Ellmann puts it – with exacting epistolary demands.⁴⁷ On the 24th September 1905, Joyce wrote to his brother with the following catalogue of fact-checking requests concerning four of the *Dubliners* stories:

Dear Stannie

Please send me the information I ask you for as follows:

The Sisters: Can a priest be buried in a habit?

Ivy Day in the Committee Room – Are Aungier St and Wicklow in the Royal Exchange Ward? Can a municipal election take place in October?

A Painful Case – Are the police at Sydney Parade of the D division? Would the city ambulance be called out to Sydney Parade for an accident? Would an accident at Sydney Parade be treated at Vincent’s Hospital?

After the Race – Are the police supplied with provisions by government or by private contracts?

Kindly answer these questions as quickly as possible.⁴⁸

Many features of this brisk opening – the prelude to a much longer letter – are typical of Joyce’s imperious, business-like approach to epistolary research. The absence of

43 Ellmann, Introduction, *SL*, xii, xi.

44 Joyce to Harriet Shaw Weaver, 8 and 15 November 1926, *SL*, 315-6. The letter which prompted such uncharacteristic epistolary frivolity was the one in which Weaver ‘ordered’ Joyce to write a piece inspired by a photograph of a megalithic tomb in Cornwall. In fact, Weaver’s ‘order’ had itself been emitted in answer to a request of Joyce’s: ‘A rather funny idea struck me that you might “order” a piece and I would do it. The gentlemen of the brush and hammer seem to have worked that way.’ – 24 September 1926, *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 1, ed. Stuart Gilbert (London: Faber and Faber, 1957) [hereafter *LJ*], 245.

45 Banta, Preface, *James Joyce’s Letters to Sylvia Beach*, xii.

46 Litz, Foreword, *James Joyce’s Letters to Sylvia Beach*, ix.

47 In Ellmann’s account, Joyce ‘kept plaguing Aunt Josephine, his only regular Dublin correspondent, for copies of everything to do with Ireland, particularly newspapers but also magazines and books.’ – *JJ*, 236.

48 Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, about 24 September 1905, *SL*, 75.

any courtesies or fraternal small-talk before the imperative injunction to ‘send [...] information’; the staccato listing of questions, rounded off by another imperative (‘answer these questions’); the use of bland, formal adverbs (‘Please’, ‘Kindly’) which if anything accentuate rather than soften the dominant tone of command: all these are characteristic of Joyce’s working letters. And lest Stanislaus should, by the end of the letter, have lost sight of the urgency of his documentary mission, Joyce concludes his despatch with a hectoring ‘PS’: ‘No letter from you again today. [...] What in the name of God are you at?’⁴⁹

Joyce knew that such punctilious factual enquiries superficially aligned him with the ‘realist’ school – or at least with that strand of ‘realist’ theory which valued referential accuracy as a key component of a successful work of art. That he was thinking about that label and what it entailed is clear from another task assigned to Stanislaus in the same letter:

Will you read some English ‘realists’ I see mentioned in the papers and see what they are like – Gissing, Arthur Morrison and a man named Keary. I can read very little and am as dumb as a stockfish.⁵⁰

It was in grandiloquent ‘realist’ terms that Joyce defended *Dubliners* to Grant Richards eight months later, and set out his refusal to countenance any changes to his ‘chapter of the moral history of [his] country’. To Richards’ concern about the offence the book would cause by adhering too closely to the minutiae of contemporary Dublin, Joyce responded by seizing the moral high ground of ‘realist’ truthfulness: ‘he is a very bold man who dares to alter in the presentment, still more to deform, whatever he has seen and heard.’⁵¹ In another letter sent to Stanislaus several months later, Joyce measured the success of another English writer in ‘realist’ terms – that is, by the degree of its anchoring in geographically and culturally specific material detail. He expresses admiration for writing which, like Rudyard Kipling’s *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888), bears the indubitable stamp of local knowledge: ‘If I knew Ireland as well as R.K. seems to know India’, he mused, ‘I fancy I could write something good.’⁵²

With Stanislaus’s move to Trieste in October 1905, the brothers’ Aunt Josephine became Joyce’s principal Dublin correspondent.⁵³ The wife of Joyce’s maternal uncle William, Josephine Murray is described by Ellmann as an ‘intelligent, resourceful, and unfailingly generous’ woman whom ‘all the Joyce children, including James, depended upon for help and advice’.⁵⁴ After his mother’s death, Josephine Murray remained a relative to whom Joyce felt able to write frankly – for example about his difficulties with Nora.⁵⁵ But she was more than just a trusted ‘wise woman’ and confidante: she was also a crucial source of local information and family history to a

49 Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, about 24 September 1905, *SL*, 78.

50 Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, about 24 September 1905, *SL*, 77.

51 Joyce to Grant Richards, 5 May 1905, *SL*, 83.

52 Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 10 January 1907, *SL*, 142.

53 *JJ*, 211.

54 *JJ*, 20.

55 Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 28 February 1905, *SL*, 56.

fledgling writer to whom exact detail, whether historical or linguistic, was a *sine qua non* of artistic success.⁵⁶

In a letter sent to Stanislaus from Rome in November 1906, Joyce reported having asked Josephine for a Christmas package of various items of what today's critical fashion would call 'material culture' – 'tram-tickets, advts, handbills, posters, papers, programmes &c' – adding that 'I would like to have a map of Dublin on my wall. I suppose I am becoming something of a maniac.'⁵⁷ Over the next seventeen years, Josephine would find herself in receipt of countless similar demands. On a postcard sent to her from Trieste in January 1920, Joyce appealed for another such despatch, this time of items both material and factual:

Thanks for card received. Will you please send me a bundle of other novelettes and any penny hymnbook you can find as I need them? All are well here except myself. Another thing I wanted to know is whether there are trees (and of what kind) behind the Star of the Sea church in Sandymount visible from the shore and also whether there are steps leading down at the side from Leahy's terrace. If you can find out these facts for me quickly I shall be glad.⁵⁸

The following month, another letter to Aunt Josephine begins by acknowledging her recent ill-health – a condition serious enough to warrant an operation – but swiftly moves on to enumerate a fresh catalogue of Joyce's wants:

Dear Aunt Josephine: I hope you are well and that the operation you spoke of went off successfully. Thanks for the journals. I want that information about the Star of the Sea Church, has it ivy on its seafront, are there trees in Leahy's terrace at the side or near, if so, what, are there steps leading down to the beach? I also want all the information you can give, tittle-tattle, facts etc about Hollis Street maternity hospital. Two chapters of my book remain unfinished till I have these so I shall feel very grateful if you will sacrifice a few hours of your time for me and write me a long letter with details.⁵⁹

'I want', 'I also want': such unapologetic demands are representative. Joyce, evidently, was unabashed by the likely inconvenience of his appeals. The flare of impatience nested in the demonstrative article ('*that* information') – a tacit rebuke to Josephine for her failure to respond to his earlier query – and the unembarrassed references to the 'sacrifices' of time and labour expected of his convalescent aunt, paint an unflattering picture. The brusqueness of this missive – at least to eyes not rendered indulgent by familial love – seems graceless at best. What Josephine Murray made of such tactless messages and the vein of irascible entitlement which runs

56 *JJ*, 20. Joyce persistently defended the details of his book against the changes sought by his prospective publisher, Grant Richards: 'These details may now seem unimportant but if I took them away *Dubliners* would seem to me like an egg without salt.' Four weeks later, he again argued for the legitimacy of the 'minute and necessary details' to which Richards had taken exception. – 5 May 1906, *SL*, 84 and 31 May 1906, *SL*, 86.

57 Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 6 November 1906, *SL*, 124.

58 Joyce to Mrs William Murray, 5 January 1920, *SL*, 247.

59 Joyce to Mrs William Murray, February 1920, *SL*, 248.

through them is not known. What is known is that her nephew did not desist. Another bulletin of wants, sent eighteen months later, shows Joyce to have been undeterred by his knowledge that tragedy had hit Josephine's family:

Dear Aunt Josephine:

[...] I want all the information, gossip or anything you remember about the Powells – chiefly mother and daughters. [...] Also any information you have about the Dillons? [...] Get an ordinary sheet of foolscap and a pencil and scribble any God damn drivel you may remember about these people.⁶⁰

The habitual forthright statement of desire ('I want'); the verbal imperatives ('Get an ordinary sheet of foolscap [...] and scribble'); the unapologetic use of a blasphemous collocation ('God damn drivel'); the edginess implied by the determiners and pronoun emphasizing the suitability of *whatever* material Josephine might choose to send ('*anything* you remember', '*any* information', '*any* God damn drivel'); the petulance perhaps faintly audible in the reference to the sheet of 'foolscap' she is to use:⁶¹ every clause exudes impatience. Fifteen years into his ever lengthening series of requests, Joyce's epistolary mode evinces no tonal mellowing.

It was to his aunt Josephine that Joyce would, in November 1921, send a list of urgent questions ('Do you know'; 'please let me know'; 'Do you remember'; 'I want to know'),⁶² including the query which has since become the emblematic example of his epistolary-documentary mode:

Is it possible for an ordinary person to climb over the area railings of no 7 Eccles street, either from the path or steps, lower himself from the lowest part of the railings till his feet are within 2 feet or 3 of the ground and drop unhurt. I saw it done myself but by a man of rather athletic build.⁶³

How Aunt Josephine (then aged 59) was to ascertain whether such a drop was viable and safe is not stated.⁶⁴ More generally, it seems clear, given the nature of some of his requests, that in writing home Joyce was often implicitly relying on the mobilization of a wider community of Dublin acquaintances who might help procure the highly

60 Joyce to Mrs William Murray, 14 October 1921, *SL*, 285-6. The exact nature of the 'tragedy' suffered by Aunt Josephine is not clear. Joyce's brisk allusion to it, at the end of the same letter, is opaque: 'I am sorry to hear you had that tragedy in your family too. In the circumstances it may be unreasonable to trouble you – but I need all this information and quickly.'

61 The suggestion is hesitantly advanced, and the intentions underlying the choice of the term as unknowable as the thoughts that arose from its reception, but it seems hard to imagine a writer such as Joyce not hearing in 'foolscap' a trace of the dunce's cap to which such sheets of paper visually referred when they first came into use. – *OED*.

62 'Do you know anything of Mat Dillon's daughter who was in Spain? If so, please let me know. Did any of your girl friends ever go there? [...] Do you remember the cold February of 1893. I think you were in Clanbrassil street. I want to know whether the canal was frozen and if there was any skating.' – Joyce to Mrs William Murray, 2 November 1921, *SL*, 286-7.

63 Joyce to Mrs William Murray, 2 November 1921, *SL*, 286.

64 Josephine Murray was born in 1862. – A. Nicholas Fagnoli and Michael Patrick Gillespie, *James Joyce A to Z: The Essential Reference to the Life and Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 155.

specific information he sought.

The relationship suffered a contretemps in 1922. Joyce, already riled by his aunt's silence about *Ulysses* and indirectly conveyed verdict that it was 'not fit to read',⁶⁵ angrily defended himself from reproaches levelled at him in what he called a 'very wrathful' letter.⁶⁶ Reconciliation was soon sealed, however, and a fortnight later Joyce placed a new order, more affectionately phrased, for 'any news you like, programmes, pawntickets, press cuttings, handbills'.⁶⁷ His next missive included an appeal, again uncharacteristically courteous in its formulation, for a whole notebook's worth of information about people belonging to the 'vanished world' of Joyce's childhood.⁶⁸

Though these types of 'factual' investigation were more frequent during the writing of *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*, they did not entirely peter out in the years that followed. In 1925, Joyce, then living in Paris, attended a rugby match between the French team and the New Zealand All Blacks at the Colombes Stadium. The latter team, having won every one of its games on a tour of France, Britain, Ireland, and Canada, subsequently became known as 'The Invincibles', a fact which chimed suggestively with the 'Phoenix Park Murders' of 1882 (committed as they were by the so-called 'Invincibles') that are referred to in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Sometime after watching the game, Joyce wrote to his sister, Margaret Alice (known within the family as 'Poppie'), who had left Ireland in 1909 to serve as a nun in New Zealand (where she assumed the name of 'Sister Mary Gertrude'), asking for details of the Haka he had witnessed.⁶⁹ A tribute published in *The New Zealand Tablet* at the time of her death in Christchurch in 1964, recalled that:

When the All Blacks first visited Paris, James Joyce attended the games and later requested that Sister Mary Gertrude send him the Maori words with translation and music of the Haka⁷⁰

The letter to Poppie testifies to both the breadth and the narrowness of Joyce's postal enquiries, acting as a reminder of the sheer range and quirkiness of some of his queries as well as of his preference for the targeting of family members.

65 Josephine's view, understandably withheld from her nephew, was elicited by Joyce from one of her daughters during a dinner in London in 1922. Joyce rejoindered that 'If *Ulysses* isn't fit to read, life isn't fit to live.' – *JJ*, 537.

66 Joyce to Mrs William Murray, 23 October 1922, *SL*, 290-3. Josephine was offended that Nora, Giorgio, and Lucia Joyce had come to Ireland without paying her a visit, and that the Joyces had failed to acknowledge an announcement of her daughter's forthcoming marriage.

67 Joyce to Mrs William Murray, 10 November 1922, *SL*, 294.

68 'I wonder if I sent you an exercise book with the names of these persons at the tops of the pages would be kind enough (whenever you have a spare moment and anything occurs to your mind) to scribble down in pencil or pen anything noteworthy, details of dress, defects, hobbies, appearance, manner of death, voice, where they lived, etc just as you did for the questions I sent you about Major Powell – in my book Major Tweedy, Mrs Bloom's father? They all belong to a vanished world and most of them seem to have been very curious types. I am in no hurry. You could send me back the book in six months if you like but I would feel greatly obliged if you could fill in any details for me as you are the only one who is likely to know about them.' – Joyce to Mrs William Murray, 21 December 1922, *SL*, 294.

69 See Clive Hart, 'A Haka', in *A Wake Digest*, ed. Clive Hart and Fritz Senn (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1968), 79.

70 Obituary, *The New Zealand Tablet* (1 April 1964), 38, quoted in Richard Corballis, 'The Provenance of Joyce's "Haka"', *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 1 (Fall 2006), 127-32, 128.

The highly distorted form in which the Haka and other references to New Zealand enter the *Wake* accords with the riddling, polyglot, allusive makeup of Joyce's final work.⁷¹ While his appetite for what genetic critics call 'exogenetic' material⁷² remained as strong as ever – in keeping with his stated ambition to write 'a history of the world' – both his letters and his treatment of documentary sources in the 1920s and 1930s betray a diminishing preoccupation with strictly factual detail.⁷³ If the inclusion of accurate local knowledge was central to Joyce's sense of the value of art during the composition of *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*, perhaps his outlook was bound to change in the crafting of a book whose geographical and historical ambit were infinite and which, moreover, he envisioned as a 'war' on language, or, mobilizing an alternative set of metaphors, as a 'writing of the night' composed to 'suit the esthetic of the dream'.⁷⁴ Moreover, by this stage Joyce's links to 'the vanished world' of 'dear dirty Dublin' were fewer than ever before.⁷⁵ With the death of Aunt Josephine in November 1924, Joyce had lost his principal source of information about the city and the increasingly shadowy world of his childhood.⁷⁶

Joyce tore through source materials and assailed correspondents with book orders with the same briskness as ever in this period, but both the *Wake* and the vast archive of its *avant-textes* reflect a different – in some senses, more superficial – mode of reading. Joyce's omnivorous consumption of texts in these years seems driven more by the will to appropriate than to understand, focusing on words rather than narratives, harvesting linguistic material for its connotative power rather than for its denotative function. With its thematic and formal preoccupation with rumour over fact, *Finnegans Wake* is the product of a shift in Joyce's documentary priorities – one which sees him privilege intertextual reference over 'realist' referentiality, approximation over replication, distortion over exactness.⁷⁷

71 See James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975) [hereafter *FW*], 335. Subsequent references will be given in the following form: *FW* page number: line number.

72 According to De Biasi, exogenetics 'designates any writing process devoted to research, selection, and incorporation, focused on information stemming from a source exterior to the writing. Handwritten or not, any documentary notes or copies, any quoted or intertextual matter, any results of inquiries or observations, any evidence of iconographic matter (that gives rise to a written transposition), and generally any written or image documentation, belongs by nature to the exogenetic category.' By contrast, endogenetics 'designates any writing process focusing on a reflexive or self-referential activity of elaborating pre-textual data, be it exploratory, conceptual, structuring, or textualizing work, and regardless of the nature or state of such an elaboration.' – Pierre-Marc de Biasi, 'What is a Literary Draft? Toward a Functional Typology of Genetic Documentation', trans. Ingrid Wassenaar, *Yale French Studies*, no. 89, *Drafts* (1996), 26-58, 42-3

73 *JJ*, 537. Joyce used the phrase in conversation with Harriet Shaw Weaver, as she told Ellmann in an interview held in 1956 – *JJ*, 793.

74 *JJ*, 581 and 546.

75 The phrase 'dear dirty Dublin' is used in 'A Little Cloud' and *Ulysses*, and alluded to in *Finnegans Wake – Dubliners*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 57; *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (New York: Random House, 1986) [hereafter *U*] episode 7, line 921 (subsequent references will be given in the following form: *U* episode number: line number); *FW* 7: 5-6.

76 Joyce's final letter to Aunt Josephine, sent after he had heard the news of her sudden ill health and fast approaching demise, was explicit about the key role she had played for him: 'Only yesterday morning I was going to write to you – as usual about some point in my childhood as you are one of the two persons in Ireland who could give me information about it.' – 2 November 1924, *SL*, 303.

77 For discussions of Joyce's radical intertextuality in *Finnegans Wake*, see *How Joyce Wrote 'Finnegans Wake': A Chapter-by-Chapter Genetic Guide*, ed. Luca Crispi and Sam Slotte

Joyce's embrace of the second-hand – already apparent in his request that Stanislaus read the 'English realists' for him and his reliance on information and materials retailed to him by Aunt Josephine – grows exponentially in the *Wake*, and is accompanied with the deliberate solicitation of perspectively inflected materials. Even during the writing of *Ulysses*, Joyce had known, of course, that some of the information obtained from Aunt Josephine would not be factual in a strict, encyclopedic sense. Items of bygone family lore, neighborhood gossip, and local news, would be true in the sense of being accurate to her point of view rather than in any objective sense. That Joyce was after information of precisely this kind is clear from his insistence that his aunt not enlist the help of others in answering his questions:

Also I forgot to ask what do you know about Hunter who lived in Clonliffe road and Alf Bergan etc etc. You needn't inquire from other people. I am writing to you. If you know or remember write what you can. I don't want the help of my countrymen, moral or material.⁷⁸

Such deliberately mediated enquiries are also a feature of Joyce's work on the *Wake*. His use of notes taken by Samuel Beckett to complement his own readings of the linguistic philosopher Fritz Mauthner and the Indologist Heinrich Zimmer illustrates a readiness to delegate even such seemingly personal creative tasks as reading and note-taking.⁷⁹ In 1937, Joyce extended the model beyond collaboration with trusted intimates by enrolling the help of a relatively distant family member, singled out specifically for the unique vantage point he could bring to his assigned task. He wrote to the eighteen-year old son of his daughter-in-law Helen Joyce (wife to his son Giorgio) to ask him to reread, summarize, and mark up a specially provided copy of *Huckleberry Finn*:

Dear David: [...]

(Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), and Scarlett Baron, *Strandentwining Cable*, Chapter 6.

78 Joyce to Josephine Murray, 14 October 1921, *SL*, 286. As De Biasi notes, Flaubert's own researches – perhaps especially those of his investigations which led him to travel 'on-site' – betray an investment in the incorporation of detail from a particular point of view. Journeying to specific locations in the final stages of a work's composition enabled him to consider the backdrop in question 'not with the illusory aim of collecting the neutral and objective information which would guarantee the referential accuracy' of his description, but, 'quite to the contrary', to depict it as though from the character's point of view, by 'getting under his or her skin'. – Pierre-Marc de Biasi, 'L'Esthétique référentielle: Remarques sur les *Carnets de travail* de Gustave Flaubert', in *Flaubert, l'autre: pour Jean Bruneau*, ed. François Lecercle and Simone Carpentari-Messina (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1989), 17-33, 29-30.

79 Dirk Van Hulle, 'Beckett – Mauthner – Zimmer – Joyce' – *Joyce Studies Annual*, ed. Thomas F. Staley (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 143-183; *JJ*, 648-9. A letter written to Frank Budgen in 1921 provides further evidence of Joyce's welcoming approach to the materials produced by the readings of others: 'Dear Budgen: [...] As regards that 60 pp book would it be too much to suggest to you the following: get an exercise book and detach the leaves of it. If you read rapidly through the book again you could jot down on the sheets anything *in the words of the book* you think interesting and a quick sketch of those views (not artistic I am not an artist). This plan you might follow with the other books and then simply put the sheets in an envelope and send them on to me.' – 16 August 1921, *LI*, 169-70.

I have sent you a registered book you will certainly have read as a young boy, probably more than once. I need to know something about it. I never read it and have nobody to read it to me and it takes too much time with all I am doing. Could you perhaps refresh your memory by a hasty glance through and then dictate to your mother [...] an account of the plot in general as if it were a new book the tale of which you had to narrate in a book review. After that I should like you to mark with blue pencil in the margin the most important passages of the plot itself and in red pencil here and there wherever the words of dialogue seem to call for the special attention of a European.⁸⁰

As Reynolds rightly comments, Joyce seems to have been intent on using the impressions of an American boy in dealing with a canonical text which is in part about American boyhood. And yet, as his summarizing and colour-coding instructions suggest, his request was even more particular than this. In addition to a young American's sense of the book's plot, Joyce, in a further demonstration of his investment in multiple perspectives, was after an *American's* best guess as to what a *European* might find noteworthy about its story and dialogue. In its emphasis on point of view, Joyce's appeal to Fleischmann is emblematic of the *Wake's* ambition to span centuries, continents, myths, cultures, languages and literatures, and also, intriguingly, reading experiences.

From Fact to Factification

'Realism' has accrued an unwieldy range of meanings, referring at times to a particular kind of subject matter (life 'as it really is', in all its harshness or depravity) and at others to a certain style of writing (a set of narrative and descriptive techniques for the faithful recording of life 'as it really is'). Joyce and Flaubert both evince a particular interest in factuality as a component of 'realism', and, moreover, as a yardstick of literary seriousness and a guarantor of truth. Yet for neither author is the preoccupation with exact information straightforward or constant, nor does it betoken any stable espousal of the tenets of a 'realist' aesthetic.

Considered in sequence, Joyce's works chart an evolution in his approach to the very notion of fact, and a corresponding move away from the practice of a narrow 'realism' defined by its commitment to the verifiability of every last detail. The vein of self-parody detectable in 'Ithaca's' catechistic technic, for example, suggests a certain scepticism about factuality. The episode's blunt interrogations and imperative verbal forms ('Catalogue these books?', 'Compile the budget for 16 June 1904', 'Which volume was the largest in bulk?')⁸¹, by shining a spotlight on a plethora of seemingly inconsequential details, echo Joyce's epistolary mode of enquiry. After all, Joyce's letters often seem, like 'Ithaca', to be committed to the acquisition of facts and knowledge 'in the baldest coldest way'.⁸² Elements of the book's genesis in Joyce's correspondence seem here to take on a fictional life of their own, as if the text's vast incorporative energies were being applied even to its own originally private documentary history.

⁸⁰ Joyce to David Fleischman, 8 August 1937, *SL*, 387.

⁸¹ *U* 17: 1361, 1455, and 1415.

⁸² Joyce to Frank Budgen, 28 February 1921, *SL*, 278.

Joyce's initial dedication to factuality is also counterpointed by his increasingly manifest deployment of error as a narrative strategy and his interrogation of the very meaning of fact. Though Joyce makes use of error in his works from the beginning of his writing career, deliberately strewing *Dubliners*, *A Portrait*, and *Ulysses* with mistakes as well as with facts,⁸³ in *Finnegans Wake* the quantitative relationship between the two categories is reversed, with the book's outlandish style, in which the polylingual portmanteau reigns supreme, making error the norm and fact anomalous, unrecognizable, and even, arguably, impossible. The habitually mutually exclusive definitions of fact and error are drastically brought into question by their treatment in Joyce's final work.⁸⁴

Yet *Ulysses* already bears significant intimations of this outlook. As well as abounding in errors which pertain to a 'realism' of contingency – dedicated to the representation of chance and failure – rather than of factuality, Joyce's book features many casual but cumulatively significant references to fact. Myriad idiomatic commonplaces ('Is that a fact?', 'Is that really a fact?', 'Isn't that a fact', 'Well, it's a fact', 'Authentic fact', 'Not a historical fact', 'the eloquent fact remained') discreetly portray life as an unfolding experience which is constantly recounted in language in terms of fact and unifact.⁸⁵ The term is sometimes encased in debunking stylistic contexts, as when the narrator of 'Eumaeus' announces that 'all agreed that that was a fact', or states, in conveying Bloom's musings about 'the halfcrazy faddist' O'Callaghan, that 'he was in the habit of ostentatiously sporting in public a suit of brown paper (a fact)'.⁸⁶ The compounded effect of such uses is to problematize the philosophical validity of the widespread conception of life as a series of reported events to be sorted into the categories of fact and unifact.

Finnegans Wake continues this sceptical interrogation of fact: 'Is it a factual fact', it asks.⁸⁷ Within its pages, 'truth', 'fact', 'fiction', and their distorted Wakean cognates circle each other in kaleidoscopic formations. In *Ulysses*, Bloom had mused, recycling a commonly heard cliché, that truth can seem 'stranger than fiction'⁸⁸; the *Wake*, as if in reply, inverts the saying, calling 'feminine fiction' 'stranger than the facts'.⁸⁹ But elsewhere truth – 'tough troth' – is judged 'stronger' than 'fortuitous fiction'.⁹⁰ Later still, truth, now associated with the dryness of drought, is opposed to both fact and fiction: 'Drouth is stronger than faction'.⁹¹ Law, in the *Wake*, turns 'jurisfiction'⁹², the Dreyfus case evokes 'potrifaction',⁹³ and even 'unfacts' are deemed, in an

83 The best known examples include Eliza's reference to carriages with 'rheumatic' wheels in 'The Sisters', and Stephen's memory of the misspelt telegram – 'Nother dying come home father' – by which he was summoned back to Dublin from Paris. – *Dubliners*, 9; *U* 3: 199.

84 On Joyce and error, see Tim Conley, *Joyces Mistakes: Problems of Intention, Irony, and Interpretation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) and *Errears and Erroriboose: Joyce and Error*, ed. Matthew Creasy, 'European Joyce Studies' (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).

85 *U* 8: 965 and 977, also *U* 11: 279 and 282; *U* 12: 887; *U* 12: 1623; *U* 12: 1586; *U* 11: 927; *U* 15: 2445; *U* 16: 638.

86 *U* 16: 994-5, 16: 1185-9.

87 *FW* 529: 31.

88 *U* 17: 323.

89 *FW* 109: 32.

90 *FW* 279: footnote 1, lines 34-5.

91 *FW* 336: 20.

92 *FW* 574: 34.

93 *FW* 78: 23.

accumulation of contradictions, to be all at once unavailable, scarce, and untrustworthy:

the unfacts, did we possess them, are too imprecisely few to warrant our certitude, the evidencegivers by legpoll too untrustworthily irreperible⁹⁴

New words are coined to evoke processes involving fact: there is ‘factitation’, and, more famously, ‘factification’, a word which only two letters set apart from ‘falsification’ and which appears in a phrase – ‘Your exagmination round his factification for incamination of a warping process’ – rendered famous for its use as the title of the first book of *Wake* criticism.⁹⁵ It might equally describe the making or enrichment of a thing out of facts, or, as the immediate context slightly intimates, a warped or incriminating construction. The seeming chasm between these two dichotomous connotations is collapsed, economically highlighting the awkward family likeness between factuality and factitiousness.

Such a plethora of linguistic and conceptual punning aligns Joyce’s final work with the sceptical thrust of Flaubert’s own last opus. In *Bouvard and Pécuchet* (1881), the two protagonists come, under the pressure of their encounters with innumerable scholarly contradictions, to feel justified in both their ‘carelessness about dates’ and their ‘contempt for facts’.⁹⁶ In summarizing Flaubert’s own position, Hugh Kenner writes that ‘nothing is more absurd than the very conception of a fact, an isolated datum of experience’.⁹⁷ In their early works, Joyce and Flaubert use fact to root plausible tales in verisimilar turf; in their later works, having become acutely conscious of the limitations of any single style, school, or ‘-ism’, and writing ‘under the sign of epistemological satire’, they expose ‘fact’ itself as a dubious philosophical concept.⁹⁸

Flaubert’s Working Letters

Like Joyce, Flaubert was a ‘maniac’⁹⁹ for fact, whose obsession with documentation and concomitant reliance on friends and acquaintances grew steadily throughout his life. His ‘cult of research’ had begun in relatively modest fashion.¹⁰⁰ For his first novel, *Madame Bovary* (1857), he had appealed to experts for help regarding the details of particular sections – Charles’s disastrous clubfoot operation, the agricultural fair, Emma’s suicide by arsenic poisoning.¹⁰¹

94 *FW* 57: 16.

95 *FW* 467: 26; *FW* 497: 3-4; *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress: A Symposium*, ed. Samuel Beckett (London: Faber and Faber, 1929).

96 Gustave Flaubert, *Bouvard and Pécuchet, with the Dictionary of Received Ideas*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) [hereafter *BP*], 122.

97 Hugh Kenner, *Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians* [1962] (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005), 24.

98 Hugh Kenner, *The Stoic Comedians*, 91.

99 Joyce to Stanislaus Joyce, 6 November 1906, *SL*, 124.

100 De Biasi, *Gustave Flaubert*, 427.

101 De Biasi, ‘Correspondance et genèse’, 103.

When he came to work on *Salammbô* (1862), Flaubert's need to verify his mental picture of Carthage led him to undertake a trip to the site of the ancient city between April and June 1858. With *A Sentimental Education* (1869), his third novel, and one set, like *Ulysses*, in the recent past of his country's capital city, Flaubert's appetite for facts became immense. While composition was underway in the late 1860s, Flaubert wrote regularly to friends for information. His working letters bear many similarities to Joyce's, as is apparent from this missive sent to his close friend and ever obliging acolyte Jules Duplan, in September 1868:

Cher Vieux,

Here's the thing.

I am telling, or rather, a cocotte in my book is telling the story of her childhood. She was the daughter of workers in Lyon. I need details about the homes of such people.

1. Sketch out in a few lines the living quarters of a family of Lyonnais workers.

2. The 'canuts' (as I think the silk weavers are called) work in very low-ceilinged rooms, do they not?

3. In their own homes?

4. Do the children work too?

I find the following in my notes: 'The weaver working at a Jacquard loom is continually struck in the stomach by the shaft of the *roller* on which the cloth is being wound as it is produced.'

5. Is it the roller itself that strikes him? Shed light on this sentence. [...]

It would be kind of you to send me this information right away. I need it.¹⁰²

The omission of preliminary niceties; the numbered listing of queries; the assurance of pressing need: all these are features which make this epistle a striking antecedent to Joyce's letters. However, Flaubert's reference to his own notes – his appeal for clarification of a description encountered during his reading – constitutes a point of difference. This need to understand a source in depth before making use of its textual elements – the need to *see* a scene in the mind before writing it up – and this willingness to enter into discussion of such details in a letter, have no counterpart in Joyce's correspondence.

Flaubert wrote to Duplan again a few days later, in the midst of what it is tempting to call a 'realist crisis'. One of his research trips had led to the discovery of a factual error in his depiction of the railway network as it had stood two decades before:

Cher Bon Vieux,

Here's the situation:

I had just made a return journey to Fontainebleau by rail, when I suddenly began to suspect – and I've now, alas! become convinced of the fact – that there was no railroad between Paris and Fontainebleau in 1848.

102 Flaubert to Jules Duplan, 27 August 1868, C3, 793-4.

Which means two passages have to be scrapped and begun again!

I see from *Paris-Guide* (vol. 2, p. 1660) that the line to Lyon only started running in 1849.

You cannot imagine what a nuisance this is! *So I need to know*: 1. how one got from Paris to Fontainebleau in June 1848 2. might part of the line have been already in use? 3. what kinds of carriage were in use? 4. and *where* was their terminus in Paris? [...]

Now you understand the matter as well as I do. Be a kind fellow. Try to find me definite information.¹⁰³

In both these letters, Duplan, like Joyce's documentary helpers, finds himself in receipt of a catalogue of urgent questions. He was not alone: 'How kind of you it would be to answer me *immediately* and with prolixity!', urges Flaubert in one letter. 'I demand *the immediate description of a priest's dining room!*', he exclaims in another.¹⁰⁴

Like Joyce, Flaubert appreciated the factual value of historical items of material culture, and like Joyce, albeit less abruptly, he sent reminders to those of his emissaries who were tardy in the fulfilment of their allotted tasks. In June 1867, he thrice asked Duplan to go to the Café Anglais in Paris to pick up a copy of a menu which the restaurant had offered two decades before and which he had, on a prior visit of his own, arranged for the owner to provide.¹⁰⁵ Like Joyce, Flaubert frequently emphasizes his incapacity to proceed in the absence of the requested information. As Joyce seeks to pressure his aunt by asserting that two chapters of his book remain incomplete without the facts he has asked for,¹⁰⁶ so Flaubert apprises his correspondents of the indispensability of their help. 'You see what trouble I'm in! send me as many details as you can', 'I'm stuck, with three pages remaining blank', and 'my good chap, you see what I need; help me!' are typical implorations.¹⁰⁷

There are some significant differences too. Firstly, Flaubert despatches a wider range of questions to a wider range of correspondents, often singled out specifically for their expertise. Examples include:

- the quizzing of writer-cum-stockbroker Ernest Feydeau about historical banking information relating to Frédéric Moreau's likely investments and losses in the summer of 1847¹⁰⁸

103 Flaubert to Jules Duplan, 2 September 1868, *C3*, 794-5.

104 Flaubert to Amédée Achard, 12 September 1867, *C3*, 686 (see note 32); Flaubert to Edmond Laporte, 16 December 1877, *C5*, 341.

105 Flaubert to Jules Duplan, 11, 12, and 20 June 1867, *C3*, 651, 652 and 657.

106 Joyce to Mrs William Murray, February 1920, *SL*, 248.

107 Flaubert to Ernest Feydeau, 27 October 1868, *C3*, 815; Flaubert to Jules Duplan, 10 January 1869, *C4*, 8; Flaubert to Guy de Maupassant, 7 November 1877, *C5*, 319.

108 Flaubert to Ernest Feydeau, late 1866-early 1867, *C3*, 583.

- an appeal to George Sand, asking her to establish at first-hand the truthfulness of reports that her friend, the dissident Republican Armand Barbès, had been grievously mistreated by the police in 1841¹⁰⁹
- a request to Sainte-Beuve, in March 1866, for reading recommendations regarding the neo-Catholic movement around 1840¹¹⁰
- an enquiry to the Goncourts about child portraiture, brought to a close with the assurance that ‘I can think of no one, my dear sirs, better qualified than yourselves.’¹¹¹

Another habit of Flaubert’s not shared by Joyce is that which led him to specify precisely how much space he had set aside for the material he commissioned. On some occasions, he even names the number of lines or sentences he requires. ‘Mon cher Ami’, he writes to Eudore Soulié, curator of the museum of Versailles, ‘Could you write me a note of five lines and bring it along to Magny’s next Monday?’¹¹² ‘I’d be very grateful’, he wrote to Ernest Feydeau, ‘if you would send me this information, which can take up no more than 6 or 7 lines in my book.’¹¹³ To the Goncourts, he indicated that: ‘I need four or five substantial lines.’¹¹⁴

In some cases, what at first appears to be a similarity between Joyce and Flaubert turns out, on closer consideration, to reflect quite different ‘realist’ positions. Both authors are seemingly alike, for instance, in refusing to countenance appeals for the names of their characters to be changed. Joyce famously fought Grant Richards’ insistence that the names of the real people and places in *Dubliners* be altered to protect his publishing house from prosecution on grounds of libel.¹¹⁵ In 1868, Flaubert faced a situation which was in some senses a mirror-image of Joyce’s later dealings with his prospective publisher. Before embarking on the composition of *A Sentimental Education*, Flaubert had, on the basis of specific preliminary enquiries, narrowed in on ‘Moreau’ as the surname he would bestow upon his protagonist Frédéric. He chose it for two reasons: on the one hand, the name, as he had carefully established, was not borne by anyone then living in Nogent (Frédéric’s hometown); on the other, it was a name characteristic of the region in question. When his attention was drawn, four years later, to the fact that a number of ‘Moreaus’ had materialized in Nogent, he asserted the impossibility of making any modification at this late stage in

109 Flaubert to George Sand, 24 September 1867, *C3*, 690.

110 Flaubert to Sainte-Beuve, 12 March 1866, *C3*, 484.

111 Flaubert to the Goncourts, 13 March 1869, *C4*, 30.

112 Flaubert to Eudore Soulié, 15 May 1866, *C3*, 499.

113 Flaubert to Ernest Feydeau, late 1866-early 1867, *C3*, 583.

114 Flaubert to the Goncourts, 13 March 1869, *C4*, 30.

115 The risk of libel cases being brought against the book was frequently invoked as an obstacle to the publication of *Dubliners* – see *JJ*, 311, 328-32. Joyce’s letter to Stanislaus of 23 August 1912 lists the nine arguments he made in a last-ditch attempt to persuade Grant Richards to publish the book. These included the major concession: ‘I said that I would put fictitious names for the few real ones but added that by so doing the selling value in Dublin of the book would go down.’ – *SL*, 205. When the prospect of Richards publishing the stories seemed to vanish entirely in 1912, Joyce bitterly derided his pusillanimity in the broadside he entitled ‘Gas from a Burner’ – *JJ*, 335-7.

his novel's life. Frédéric's name and character, he explained, had become indissolubly linked:

I cannot do as she [Flaubert's little cousin Emily] would wish, which is to change the name of the hero of my novel... You must remember, dear friend, that I asked you four years ago if there was still anyone by the name of Moreau living in Nogent? You told me that there was not, and you supplied me with several local names that I could use without any problem. Trusting in what you had told me I innocently went ahead. It is too late now for me to retrace my steps. A proper name is an extremely important thing in a novel, a *capital* thing. You can no more change a character's name than you can change his skin. It would be like trying to turn a negro white.

Never mind about anyone in Nogent called Moreau!

Besides they will have nothing to complain about. My Monsieur Moreau is a very stylish young man.¹¹⁶

Thus, both Joyce and Flaubert refuse to make onomastic alterations to their works, demanding that the integrity of their art, in all the detail of its relation to the 'real world', be respected. Whereas Flaubert began by finding a name which was simply plausible rather than choosing one which would tie his novel to the world in a binary relationship, the young Joyce tethers his Dubliners to their 'real-life' models in just such a tight referential bond (this binary connection, in keeping with the ebbing of Joyce's commitment to absolute 'realist' facticity, does not hold true in his later works).¹¹⁷ While Flaubert creates a strongly related but alternative world, the aspirant 'realist' of *Dubliners* seems intent on mapping the 'real', anchoring literature to the world from point to point.

Flaubert's 'Realism'

If Joyce's later works reflect a scepticism about fact, and, by extension, the possibility of any simple mirroring relationship between fiction and reality, Flaubert's letters make clear his own deep distrust of the shibboleth of 'realism'. Two of Flaubert's documentary exchanges are particularly revealing in this regard. Both took place during the writing of his final, unfinished novel, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, and both involved his 'adoptive son' and self-styled disciple, Guy de Maupassant.¹¹⁸

116 Flaubert to Louis Bonenfant, 13 August 1868, C3, 788; Gustave Flaubert, *Selected Letters*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997) [hereafter *Selected Letters*], 333. The Bonenfants were blood relations of the Flauberts'.

117 Although Joyce was able to tell Alf Bergan in 1932 that 'You are in this book by name with so many others of Pappie's friends', there are many counter-examples of Joyce's loosening adherence to the system of one-to-one correspondences predominantly favoured in *Dubliners*. They include the well-known cases of Oliver Gogarty and Matthew Kane, both of whom provide elements for the portrayal of more than one character in *Ulysses* (Gogarty in fact shaped the depiction of characters in Joyce's earlier works as well). – 5 August 1932, *SL*, 364-5; *JJ*, 133n, 219n, 274, 291, 356, 379; Chris Kane, 'James Joyce and Matthew Kane', *James Joyce Online Notes*, <http://www.jjon.org/jjoyce-s-people/kane> [accessed 21 October 2016].

118 For more on the Flaubert-Maupassant relationship, see Yvan Leclerc's Preface to *Gustave Flaubert-Guy de Maupassant: Correspondance*, ed. Yvan Leclerc (Paris: Flammarion, 1993) [hereafter *GF-GM*]; De Biasi, *Gustave Flaubert*, 459-468; Scarlett Baron, 'Joyce's "holiday wisdom": "Gustave Flaubert can rest having made me"', *Genetic Joyce Studies*, Issue 7 (Spring

1. 'Reality, for me, must only be a *springboard*'

Flaubert undertook fairly extensive searches to find backdrops appropriate to the various plot lines of his last novel. His failure to find exactly what he needed led him to turn to his literary protégé:

As I suppose you are not dead, because in brackets you are a nice pig for not sending me any news, could you please do me the following favour. Here's the thing.

I need a cliff that will give my two bonshommes *a fright*. [...] I have looked for it all afternoon this very day in the environs of Le Havre. But it's no good. I need sheer limestone like the cliffs at Fécamp and Étretat. [...]

You must know the area like the back of your hand. So give me a description of the whole coast from Bruneval to Étretat [...] I trust you, counting on *your immediate response*.¹¹⁹

The boisterous joshing and slangy language in no way detract from the seriousness of Flaubert's request – its importance is writ large in the precision of his stipulations, the vast amount of material demanded, and the repeated stress on the urgency of the problem. Maupassant's reply, sent three days later, ran to several pages, and included eight annotated sketches of the coastal area he had been asked to reconnoitre.¹²⁰

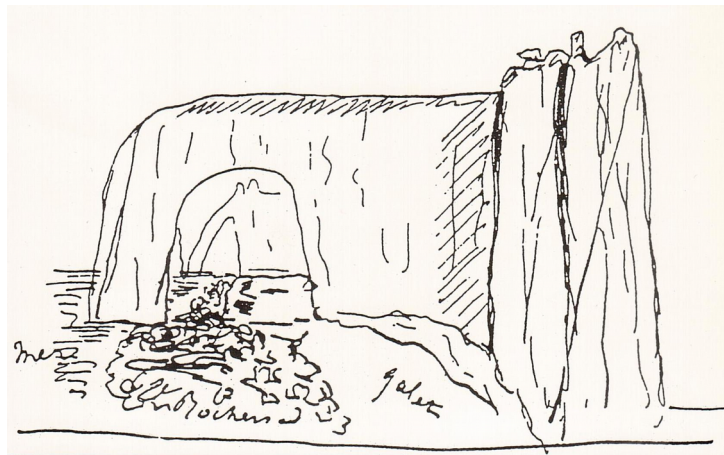


Fig. 1. the fourth of Maupassant's eight sketches¹²¹

Grateful as he was for Maupassant's extreme diligence, Flaubert was not satisfied with his suggested location, explaining his refusal to amend his initial plan by reference to the artistic primacy of imagination over 'nature':

Mon cher ami,

2007), <http://www.geneticjoycestudies.org/GJS7/GJS7baron.html> [accessed 21 October 2016].

119 Flaubert to Guy de Maupassant, 31 October 1877, *C5*, 314-5.

120 Maupassant to Gustave Flaubert, 3 November 1877, *GF-GM*, 121-7.

121 Maupassant to Gustave Flaubert, 3 November 1877, *GF-GM*, 124.

Your information is perfect. I understand the whole of the coast between the Cape of Antifer and Étretat as if it were before me. But it's too complicated. I need something simpler, or I'll be forever explaining. Remember that this whole passage must take up no more than three pages in my book, and two at least must be given over to dialogue and psychology.

This is my plan, which I cannot change. Nature must lend itself to it (the difficulty resides in not contradicting it, in not outraging those who will have seen the place).¹²²

Maupassant's second attempt to help his 'Maître', sent on the very next day, outlines 'the only thing which seems possible [...] given the limitations of [Flaubert's] plan'. But the proposal met only with another regretful Flaubertian rejection.¹²³ The problem this time, according to Flaubert, was that Maupassant's mooted location would, by virtue of its very specificity, not only demand more exposition than he had space to grant it, but also compromise the general impression he wished to conjure: 'The coast of Étretat is too *special* and would drag me into cumbersome explanations.'¹²⁴ His aim, as he had stated in his preceding letter, was to conjure the image of 'a Norman cliff in general'.¹²⁵

What Flaubert is after is a place in the real world conforming to the highly constraining dictates of his imagination. The coordinates and layout of the site he seeks were prescribed in advance by two interlocking sets of requirements. These were, on the one hand, that the site in question be actually extant and identifiable to locals, and, on the other, that it be representative, immediately recognizable to the rest of his audience as a particular instance of a general type. Thus poised between the concrete and the abstract, equally amenable to both mental induction and deduction, Flaubert's cliff is as ideal as it is real, as imaginary as it is 'realistic'. As he had remarked to his lover Louise Colet more than two decades before: 'Everything one invents is true, you may be sure of that. Poetry is as precise a thing as geometry. Induction is as good as deduction'.¹²⁶ In the same vein, Flaubert had explained during his work on *Salammbô* that his depiction of Carthage would

need to coincide with a *certain vague idea* of the thing people have. I have to find a middle ground between grandiloquence and reality.¹²⁷

Such comments bring into focus the difference between Flaubert's conception of the relationship between art and life and that of his 'realist' and 'naturalist' contemporaries. Flaubert denies the 'real' the priority accorded to it by such artists. His letters show him consciously flouting and indeed refuting the mirroring

122 Flaubert to Guy de Maupassant, 5 November 1877, *C5*, 318.

123 Maupassant to Gustave Flaubert, 6 November 1877, *GF-GM*, 128.

124 Flaubert to Guy de Maupassant, 7-8 November 1877, *C5*, 320.

125 Flaubert to Guy de Maupassant, 5 November 1877, *C5*, 319.

126 Flaubert to Louise Colet, 14 August 1853, *C2*, 392.

127 Flaubert to Ernest Feydeau, mid-October 1858, *C3*, 837. For all its ambivalence, James's review of Flaubert's letters is unambiguous in its praise of the finesse of Flaubert's negotiation between these two poles, hailing 'his extraordinary ingenuity in lifting without falsifying, finding a middle way into grandeur and edging off from the literal without forsaking truth'. – James, 'Gustave Flaubert', 341.

relationship posited by the ‘realists’ between ‘nature’ and its fictional representations, and replacing it by a mutual reshaping in which the imagination, if anything, takes precedence.

This aspect of Flaubert’s ‘theory’ of creation is of a piece with the importance he accorded to time spent ‘dreaming up’ characters and stories in the earliest stages of a project.¹²⁸ It also chimes with the experiences of his characters, whose lives often seem to be shaped by fantasies forged by their reading more than by their experience of ‘reality’. It was in recognition of this recurring pattern that the term ‘bovarism’ was coined to designate a psychological condition in which the subject holds ‘a romantic or unreal conception’ of him-or herself.¹²⁹ Emma Bovary and Frédéric Moreau are both prone to bovarism, measuring their own lives by yardsticks derived from their immersion in fictional worlds. In their vivid dramatization of the mutually determining relations between art and life, Flaubert’s novels ring in tune with Nabokov’s observation that ‘reality’ is ‘one of the few words which mean nothing without quotes’.¹³⁰

Flaubert’s disgruntlement with the simplifications implied by the very names of the ‘realist’ and ‘naturalist’ schools is evident from his rejection of the fetishization of the material ‘Real’ which he deems central to their enterprises. In a letter sent to Turgenev in 1877, a vituperative Flaubert set out his objections:

It’s not just a question of seeing. One has to arrange and fuse together what one has seen. Reality, for me, must only be a *springboard*. Our friends are convinced that it alone constitutes the whole of Art! Such materialism makes me indignant. [...] After the Realists, we have the Naturalists and the Impressionists – what progress! Bunch of jokers, wanting to make us believe they’ve discovered the Mediterranean!¹³¹

In this instance, Flaubert does not deny the part ‘Reality’ can play as a starting point, but insists on the need for such raw materials to be meaningfully styled. There is much more to art, he opines, than the mere mechanical transcription of ‘objective reality’. Such pronouncements tally with Vargas Llosa’s claim that

128 ‘A book is for me a special way of living. For the sake of a single word or idea I set off on research and I lose myself in endless reading and daydreaming’ – Flaubert to Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie, 18 December 1859, *C3*, 66; ‘I’m daydreaming about a lot of things, musing about a thousand projects. To write a book is for me a long journey’ – Flaubert to the Goncourts, 12 July 1862, *C3*, 230; ‘Do you feel as I do before embarking on a new work, a kind of religious terror and kind of anxiety about making a dent in the dream?’ – Flaubert to Louise Colet, 4 October 1846, *C1*, 375. As De Biasi points out, some of Flaubert’s less targeted reading was itself a form of ‘dreamwork’ [*travail du rêve*], conducive to the awakening of unforeseen curiosities and the assimilation of unexpected details. – ‘L’Esthétique référentielle’, 22.

129 *OED*. The term appears to have been coined by Barbey d’Aurevilly in 1862, and developed into a fully-fledged critical and psychological concept by the philosopher Jules Gaultier in *Le Bovarysme: la psychologie dans l’oeuvre de Flaubert* (1892) and *Le Bovarysme* (1902). See Stephen Heath, *Madame Bovary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 140.

130 Vladimir Nabokov, ‘On a Book Entitled *Lolita*’, in *Lolita* [1955] (London: Penguin, 2000), 312.

131 Flaubert to Ivan Turgenev, 8 December 1877, *C5*, 337.

Instead of ushering in ‘realism’ as the deep-rooted critical commonplace would have us believe, with *Madame Bovary* Flaubert revolutionised the traditional notion of ‘realism’ in literature as an imitation or a faithful reproduction of reality.¹³²

In De Biasi’s terms, Flaubert produces a world that is less an imitation than a ‘double’ of our own – a ‘possible world’ or ‘simulation’ of the ‘real’ world:

It is [...] by making external reality not the narrative’s referential basis but its formal analogue that Flaubert aspires to invest his ‘style’ with the pitiless precision of science. That the reader should feel disoriented by the resistance, opacity, or versatility of things and behaviours so strongly related to those of quotidian reality in all its roughness and recalcitrance is primarily an effect of this modelling relation: Flaubert’s realism is a realism of simulation.¹³³

Flaubert shared some of his contemporaries’ fascination with materiality, acknowledging the part of himself which ‘would like to make you feel almost *materially* the objects he reproduces’,¹³⁴ and relishing the prospect of having ‘created some written reality, which is rare’.¹³⁵ But his awareness of the complex structural and stylistic arrangements involved in imparting such a sense of ‘reality’ to a novelistic world,¹³⁶ along with his fierce individualism, led him to emit many a strongly-worded rejection of the literary movements with which he was associated. He set Sand straight on that score in a letter of 1875:

you talk of ‘my school’. But I wreck my constitution trying not to have a school. They are repellent, a priori. [...] I regard as very minor such matters as technical detail and local knowledge, the whole exact historical side of things. Above all I seek *beauty*, a notion which my associates do not take at all seriously.¹³⁷

The desire to disassociate himself from enslavement to the illusion of pure referentiality became a refrain of Flaubert’s in this late period. Before two months had elapsed, he asked Sand to ‘note that I loathe what it is conventional to call *realism*, even though I am regarded as one of its popes. Make of that what you will!’¹³⁸ Two years later, he was still railing against the tyranny of doctrinaire collectives:

132 Llosa, ‘Flaubert, our contemporary’, 222.

133 De Biasi, *Gustave Flaubert*, 360.

134 Flaubert to Louise Colet, 16 January 1852, C2, 30; *Selected Letters*, 170.

135 Flaubert to Louise Colet, 7 July 1853, C2, 376. If ‘realistic’ accomplishment played a role in the popular acclaim of *Madame Bovary*, the subsequent failure of *A Sentimental Education* led Flaubert to reflect that he had perhaps gone too far, been *too* ‘real’. As he wrote to Mme Roger des Genettes, ‘It is too true. And in aesthetic terms it lacks the necessary *falseness of perspective*.’ – 8 October 1879, C5, 720. In capturing the overwhelming contingency of life itself, he had, he surmised, broken too starkly with the hackneyed forms readers had come to expect even of ‘realistic’ novels. See Pierre-Marc de Biasi, *Gustave Flaubert*, 339-347.

136 As Flaubert states to Joris-Karl Huysmans in 1879, ‘Art is not reality. Whatever one does, one is obliged to choose between the elements it provides.’ – 7 March 1879, C5, 568.

137 Flaubert to George Sand, late December 1875, C4, 1000; *Selected Letters*, 401.

138 Flaubert to George Sand, 6 February 1876, C5, 12.

I don't like dogmatists of any kind. Down with all disciplinarians! Get ye hence all who claim to be realists, naturalists, impressionists. You bamboozlers, let us have a little less talk and a little more achievement.¹³⁹

2. 'The Real does not submit to the ideal but confirms it'

Another cluster of working letters bearing eloquent witness to Flaubert's aesthetic convictions is to be found in the archival records of his very final days.

Just as Joyce's works betray an ever greater scepticism about fact, so *Bouvard and Pécuchet* embodies a certain doubtfulness regarding the kinds of fact that are usually assumed to constitute knowledge (as it is set out in encyclopedias, textbooks, scholarly monographs, etc.). At the book's conceptual core lies Bouvard and Pécuchet's dumbfounded question in the face of the world's failure to behave according to the laws by which it is supposedly governed: 'Where is the rule then, and what hope can we have of success or profit?'¹⁴⁰ Time after time, Bouvard and Pécuchet's studies and experiments lead them to query the accuracy of their sources and to bring into question accepted wisdom. This iterating pattern of disillusionment dictated the shape of Flaubert's plot lines in advance: time after time, his protagonists would be brought to a standstill by the gap between theory and practice, reading and experience, norm and exception.

Whilst working on the section of *Bouvard* in which his two 'bonshommes'¹⁴¹ attempt to instruct their adopted children, Victor and Victorine, in the science of botany,¹⁴² Flaubert wrote to Frédéric Baudry to seek clarification about an axiom he had encountered in the course of his reading (Baudry, the third of Flaubert's correspondents to be consulted on the matter, had previously held the post of librarian at the Institute of Agronomy in Versailles). Having turned to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Lettres élémentaires sur la botanique* (1789) as the kind of text likely to fall into Bouvard and Pécuchet's own hands, Flaubert made a note of the following pronouncement: 'the calyx is lacking in most liliaceous plants such as the tulip, the hyacinth, the narcissus, the tuberose'.¹⁴³ It is the adjective 'most', here, which caught Flaubert's interest. Immediately below the excerpted sentence, he set himself a corresponding task: 'find a liliaceous plant with a calyx'. Having subsequently established that Rousseau was in fact mistaken in formulating this axiom, Flaubert asked Baudry for help in identifying a similar law which would serve his fictional purposes in the same way. What Flaubert required was a rule to which Bouvard and Pécuchet would accidentally discover a number of exceptions; to this group of

139 Flaubert to Camille Lemonnier, 3 June 1878, C5, 391; *Selected Letters*, 413-4.

140 *BP*, 56.

141 'Bonshommes', roughly meaning 'good fellows' or 'good chaps', is frequently used by Flaubert to refer to his characters in his correspondence, as well as in the book and its drafts.

142 *BP*, 265.

143 The underlining is Flaubert's. The manuscript page on which this note features, along with several transcriptions, appears on the site devoted to 'Les dossiers de *Bouvard et Pécuchet*': http://www.dossiers-flaubert.fr/cote-g226_2_f_174_r [accessed 21 October 2016]. Flaubert's source is Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettres élémentaires sur la botanique* (1789), vol. 1, 15, in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Poinçot, 1788-1793), 39 vols, vol. 5. Flaubert's copy of the book, now part of the collection held at the Mairie of Canteleu, bears many traces of his reading.

exceptions, they would, in turn, and to their even greater mystification, discover a further aberrant exception.¹⁴⁴ As Flaubert explained: '[t]he effectiveness of the passage depends wholly on the ending, I need a particular exception to a general exception.'¹⁴⁵

Though his petition may seem befuddling, Flaubert was confident the conundrum could be solved, and that Baudry was the man to solve it: 'I'm counting on you to get me out of this mess'.¹⁴⁶ Along with the outline of his desiderata, Flaubert enclosed his draft of the passage in question, along with a request for Baudry to mark it up with corrections and suggestions.¹⁴⁷ When it arrived, Baudry's dilatory response was singularly unhelpful. Indeed, Flaubert was rendered incandescent by his correspondent's combination of obtuseness and condescension. He replied, in a letter laced with irony ('Patriarch', it begins; 'O Patron', it continues), that he was 'certain of being on the side of *Truth*, literarily speaking'.¹⁴⁸ '[I]n a state of exasperation impossible to describe', he turned, once again, to Maupassant:

Mon chéri,

[...] Enclosed is my note on botany. I can assure you I would give 500 fr[ancs] for your naturalist to give me satisfaction, in order to be able to annoy the excellent Mr Baudry. It all comes down to two proper nouns, since I have already found two of the three exceptions I need. It seems to me impossible to be clearer than I am.¹⁴⁹

When Maupassant finally succeeded (after having received several reminders) in obtaining the information sought by his 'Maître', Flaubert was jubilant. He sent ecstatic news of his victory to his niece Caroline. His whole system of aesthetic beliefs, he explained, was validated by this 'triumph':

Guy has sent me *my* botanical fact. *I was right!* Down with Mr Baudry! I got my information from the Professor of Botany of the Jardin des Plantes.

And *I was right* because what is Aesthetic is True. And because at a certain intellectual level (when one's method is sound) one doesn't make mistakes. The Real does not submit to the ideal

144 'To summarize – I need 1) as general an axiom as possible, 2) three plants which give it the lie and 3) a plant which contradicts the exception to the exception.' – Flaubert to Frédéric Baudry, 29 March 1880, *C5*, 871. As Flaubert more succinctly put the matter to Maupassant: 'I *need an exception to the exception*' – 24 April 1880, *C5*, 890. For a fuller account of Flaubert's exchange with Baudry (and a transcription of his letter to him), see Max Brière, 'Une lettre inédite de Flaubert à Frédéric Baudry', *Les Amis de Flaubert*, Bulletin no. 48 (1976), 33 – http://www.amis-flaubert-maupassant.fr/article-bulletins/048_033/ [accessed 21 October 2016].

145 Flaubert to Frédéric Baudry, 29 March 1880, *C5*, 871.

146 Flaubert to Frédéric Baudry, 29 March 1880, *C5*, 871.

147 'Here is a text of mine which I'd like you to complete and correct. [...] Tear off the attached sheet of paper and send it back to me with your comments.' – Flaubert to Frédéric Baudry, 29 March 1880, *C5*, 871.

148 Flaubert to Frédéric Baudry, 8 April 1880, *C5*, 880.

149 Flaubert to Guy de Maupassant, 8 or 10 April 1880, *C5*, 881; and Flaubert to Guy de Maupassant, 16 April 1880, *C5*, 883.

but confirms it. It took me three trips to various regions, for *B[ouvard]* and *P[écuchet]*, to find their setting, a place suited to the plot. Ah! Ah! what a triumph! That's what I call a success! And one which flatters me.¹⁵⁰

Flaubert's delight at his masterstroke was evidently magnified by the smart of Baudry's dismissive put-down. But his glee had as much to do with the vindication of his intellectual and artistic convictions as with his private revenge. The exalting outcome of the 'botanical' episode testified to the infallible predictive power of his method, and thereby retrospectively guaranteed the absolute dependability of the approach he had advocated for years. Like a scientist (and Flaubert had long called for art to take on 'the precision of the physical sciences'), the writer knows how to posit hypotheses which 'the Real' will subsequently verify.¹⁵¹

Although Joyce and Flaubert had never been practitioners or advocates of any simplistically conceived factual 'realism', *Finnegans Wake* and *Bouvard and Pécuchet* see them assume markedly different final stances in relation to the 'real'. While Joyce wholly abandons his youthful insistence on the importance for the artist 'not to alter in the presentment, still [less] to deform, whatever he has seen and heard', Flaubert becomes ever more convinced of the artistic necessity of a form of imaginative power which enables him, as a novelist, to envision scenes which the facts – which he still felt the need to obtain – merely confirm.¹⁵²

Joyce and Flaubert's working letters show that both authors were precision workers, not only in terms of the meticulous attention each paid to stylistic minutiae, but also in terms of their exacting dedication to documentary research. In their commitment to literary truth-telling, both regularly turned to a circle of trusted acolytes to procure the facts which their perfectionism compelled them to seek. If Flaubert's 'encyclopedic ambition' and 'documentary realism' led him to try 'to rebuild a world from scratch' in *Salammbô*, Joyce, in a striking reversal, aspired 'to give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city one day suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of my book'.¹⁵³ This conceptual chiasmus, in its paradoxical combination of agreement and inversion, is emblematic of the profusion of positions encountered in this survey of Joyce and Flaubert's working letters.

Although both authors' copious correspondences shed welcome light on such intersections and divergences, the works are eloquent in themselves. Supersaturated with fact as they are, their books are 'factions'. The word is a Wakean coinage, but has since come to enjoy wider circulation, designating 'documentary fiction, a literary genre in which fictional narrative is developed from a basis of real events or

150 Flaubert to Caroline de Commanville, 2 May 1880, *C5*, 894.

151 Flaubert to Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie, 18 March 1857, *C2*, 691; *Selected Letters*, 248.

152 Joyce to Grant Richards, 5 May 1906, *SL*, 83.

153 De Biasi, 'L'Esthétique référentielle', 20 and 23; Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of 'Ulysses'*, 69. The phrase 'documentary realism' is of long standing in Flaubertian criticism. It was, most notably used by Descharmes in relation to *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, and by Cento about *A Sentimental Education*: René Descharmes, *Autour de 'Bouvard and Pécuchet'* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1921), 56; Alberto Cento, *Il Realismo documentario nell' 'Éducation sentimentale'* (Napoli: Liguori, 1967).

characters'.¹⁵⁴ If Joyce and Flaubert show that fictions can be 'factions', or perhaps, more double-edgedly, 'factifications', they also demonstrate that the obverse holds true: the factual world so assiduously contoured by certain 'realist' or 'naturalist' writers is, to resort to another Wakean pun, a 'fictionable world'.¹⁵⁵ And while both authors exploit the porous boundaries between fact and fiction, both also imply that factuality itself is a questionable concept, presenting the excessive 'realist' preoccupation with 'factification' as a warping process ridden with assumptions regarding the supposed primacy of life in relation to art.

Abbreviations

The abbreviations used in the footnotes – as indicated in each case at the point of a source's first appearance – are listed here for ease of reference:

- BP* Gustave Flaubert, *Bouvard and Pécuchet, with the Dictionary of Received Ideas*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).
- C1* Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ed. Jean Bruneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1973–2007), vol. 1 (1973).
- C2* Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ed. Jean Bruneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1973–2007), vol. 2 (1980).
- C3* Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ed. Jean Bruneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1973–2007), vol. 3 (1991).
- C4* Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ed. Jean Bruneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1973–2007), vol. 4 (1998).
- C5* Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ed. Jean Bruneau and Yvan Leclerc (Paris: Gallimard, 1973–2007), vol. 5 (2007).
- FW* James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975). References are given in the following form: *FW* page number: line number.
- GF-GM* *Gustave Flaubert-Guy de Maupassant: Correspondance*, ed. Yvan Leclerc (Paris: Flammarion, 1993).
- JJ* Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, revd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
- L1* *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. 1, ed. Stuart Gilbert (London: Faber and Faber, 1957).

154 'Drouth is stronger than faction' – *FW* 336: 22. The date of the *OED*'s first citation for 'faction' is 1967.

155 *FW* 345: 37.

- Selected Letters* Gustave Flaubert, *Selected Letters*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997).
- SL* *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1975).
- U* James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (New York: Random House, 1986). References are given in the following form: *U* episode number: line number.

Note on translations

Quotations from Flaubert's works and letters texts are given in translation, as are quotations from criticism written in French. Corresponding references indicate both the source of the French original and its translation. All translations for which no reference is given are my own.

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