FRENCH FEMINISTS AND ANGLO-IRISH MODERNISTS: CIXOUS, KRISTEVA, BECKETT AND JOYCE [1]

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Writing during a study visit to France which coincides with International Women's Day, I am struck once again by the radically different approaches of English and French feminists to cultural tradition. The present essay focuses on one area in which that difference has quite recently been highlighted. It had for some time been my intention to look more closely at the importance ascribed to the work of Samuel Beckett and James Joyce by two major French feminists: the philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva and the creative writer and philosopher Hélène Cixous. The stimulus to action came with the sharpening of the controversy in English Studies over the debt owed —or not—by modernist women's writing to the founding fathers of European modernism. What in the French academy seems to be relatively unproblematic is for colleagues in English a matter of major dispute. The present study will begin therefore by sketching briefly the nature of the current controversy; after which, I propose to move sharply to the French side of the line, where the view seems to be less contentious, and devote the bulk of my time to exploring one key intersection of French feminism with Anglo-Irish modernism.

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GENDER AND MODERNISM: AN ACADEMIC ISSUE

Feminist academics in English Studies have recently renewed the attack on what is seen as a significant over-emphasis on the work of the canonical male modernist writers, and are engaged on a major project to rediscover the women of early modernism. Such writers as Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, it is felt, have still to receive proper credit for helping formulate some of modernism's most significant ideas and forms. This theme was first developed in the 1970s, at the stage in Women's Studies when it was important to emphasise the marginalisation experienced by women writing and to insist that women's writing be given fair hearing. Its most provocative formulations appear in the work of the Americans Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who from the late 1980s have attacked wholesale the misogyny of modernism (Gilbert and Gubar 1988-94). Media interest fanned the flames in 1995 when Germaine Greer published her *Slipshod Sibyls,* raising the possibility that some "neglected" female writing reputations might now be receiving more celebration than they deserved.

In French Studies, the problem of neglect seems not to have arisen in the same form, at least as far as modernism is concerned. It is harder to neglect those who were not there in the first place, and the *fin de siècle* in France could number very few truly avant-garde women writers. As a consequence, contemporary French feminist writers and thinkers such as Kristeva and Cixous have not experienced the same inhibitions in acknowledging the work of male modernists. Some English academics have seen this as grounds for censure. Lyn Pykett, for example, in her recent book *Engendering Fictions: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century* (1995), has taken Cixous and Kristeva to task because they claimed to find in modernist male writing models that related to their own projects: signs of difference, of openness, of resistance to conventional ways of writing and thinking, challenges to the language of the Father and of Authority. Pykett argues that this position is a betrayal both of feminism and logic. She attacks contemporary critics such as Alice Jardine, Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Stephen Heath (the francophone and francophile Anglo-Americans) who, following the Kristevan line, describe the form of the modernist text, irrespective of the gender of its author, as anti-patriarchal, feminine and radical.

Some of Lyn Pykett's arguments are certainly cogent. For one thing, as she says, there is a real problem with criticism that, privileging form and textuality, separates "the 'verbal icon' from the complex social and cultural

world in which it is produced" (1995: 13). Though this is hardly the case for, say, Kristeva's texts of the *Tel Quel* period in the 1970s, from which much of the work of the francophile Anglo-Americans springs. *La Révolution du langage poétique,* for example, published in 1974, is actively concerned with the relationship between the language of the modernist Mallarmé and the political and socio-cultural conditions of its production.[2] The misogyny of much (though not all) of the Anglo-American modernist tradition is a real stumbling block. As Lyn Pykett says, "it is rather difficult to accommodate the Kristevan view of the language of modernism as a feminine language of flow and flux with the tendency of some important male modernists (Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, and D. H. Lawrence, for example) to castigate the offensiveness or incoherence of women and feminine language" (1995: 13).

What her argument does not sufficiently recognise is the difference of the French modernist tradition from the English tradition, which produces, politically, a very different spin. In both instances, of course, the modernist moment is a compound of authorial stances, ranging across the whole political spectrum from left to right, given its coherence by the common preoccupation with the desire to renew discursive form. The French tradition, beginning in the 1870s and 1880s, has its own conservatives (relatively speaking), traditionalists and misogynists—Remy de Gourmont, for example, whose work was much appreciated and promulgated by Eliot and Pound. But their influence has been more marked among their Anglo-American successors than within France itself. The French modernist tradition looks back far more to writers such as Lautréamont, Rimbaud and Mallarmé, all open to the revolutionary challenges posed by anarchist and feminist enterprise. Rimbaud's famous declaration is worth invoking here: the search for a new poetic language would, he claimed, be transformed if women broke from their servitude and sought their own ideas and forms.[3] When Kristeva's *La Révolution du langage poétique* turns to such poetry for instances of her thesis on the mark of avant-garde writing—its disruption of conventional syntax by the rhythms of the repressed maternal drives—the ideological contradictions are far fewer than if she were dealing with an Eliot or a Pound. And when Kristeva and Cixous look outside their national tradition for further illustrations of what radical writing should be, they turn to the anti-hierarchical, left-wing writers, such as Joyce and Beckett. The Anglo-Irish branch of "English" modernism is the one that French culture takes on board, leaving it to the English to define their tradition by its more authoritarian and misogynist strand.

In Joyce and Beckett, Cixous and Kristeva found modes of writing whose political usefulness manifested itself on a different level than the straight statement of a pro-feminist position. These writers offered imaginative mod-

els that developed their understanding of the socio-political structures that operate through the family and through language, through deep processes of repression, to construct individual subjects, male or female. They helped shape their perception of the extent to which patriarchy—the Law of the Father—is the organising structure of society and its language. And most of all, they stimulated reflection on the possibility of a language in which one might think and talk differently about such things, with the intention of changing them: a language that might subvert patriarchal discourse. It is particularly this shared ground of subversion that brings together Anglo-Irish modernists and French feminists, joined in the search for genuinely different ways of conceiving and articulating the world.

The rest of this study will be devoted to a detailed discussion of the French writers' responses to the work of Beckett and Joyce. In each case, I shall begin by saying briefly what kinds of things women writers generally have found in them to use—or abuse—before picking out the key points where Kristeva and Cixous engage with their work. One principal difference emerges in the way the two men are perceived. Beckett is seen to be offering a model of patriarchal discourse in all its negativity—an ironic representation of the inherited language of Western culture. Joyce, in contrast, while similarly exposing the limits of that inherited language, looks also for a new kind of writing, for which the feminine becomes his emblem.

BECKETT: THE FATHER'S TALE

Interest in Beckett's work by creative women writers was relatively slow to develop. From the 1970s, however, women authors in increasing numbers and of various nationalities began to draw on his innovatory dramatic models of the general (and ungendered) human situation for forms, themes and techniques which could be adapted to stage a distinctively feminine condition. One example here will do duty for many. Leslie Kane, writing on the American dramatist Marsha Norman, says that many critics have drawn parallels between Norman and Beckett because both of them talk "sensitively" about survival:

> Certainly, her focus on helplessness, autonomy, and isolation, as well as the predominance of waiting and the simplicity of dialogue, setting and structure, may remind us of the great Irish writer. Images of entrapment and sickness, the use of couples, humor—however bleak—to undercut and underscore pain are additional qualities we have come to associate with Beckett's work. (Kane 1989: 255-6)

For feminist academics too, Beckett's drama has been important, though less so, perhaps, than his prose.[4] Julia Kristeva's work in psycholinguistics has been invaluable for Beckett studies in general in providing new approaches to his writing. Kristeva has been concerned not with the thematic surface of Beckett's model of civilisation and the symptoms of its sickness, but rather with the workings of his discourse and what this can reveal about the psychological structures underpinning contemporary culture. These, she argues in her seminal essay of 1976, "Le Père, l'amour, l'exil," derive chiefly from that particular amalgam of Judaism and Catholicism which was developed in the Renaissance.[5]

Kristeva's essay focuses on the short single-voiced narrative prose *First Love* (*Premier Amour,* 1970; English version 1974) and the monologue drama *Not I* (1972; *Pas moi,* translated in 1973) which between them, she says, encapsulate Beckett's textual universe. Both, she argues, model and criticise the construction of modern identity within the limits set by the repressive Father. The opposite of Joyce, Beckett shows the negative, that which poetic language must seek to subvert: "the pillars of our imagination," the internalised ideology by which we maintain our confinement to a sterile universe. In both texts, the narrators are the products of patriarchal discourse. The repressed son of *First Love* and the old woman who speaks in *Not I* are "a fascinating and impossible couple . . . sustained, on both sides, by censorship of the maternal body."

In *First Love,* a son, who is a writer and a bachelor, narrates his reactions to his father's death and the birth of his own child. Until his father dies, he does not experience love. After his father's death, his first love is a prostitute, who forces herself onto him. Eventually she bears his child, and at that point he leaves her and his story stops. From this episode, Kristeva nominates four of the pillars of our father-constructed imaginations. The Father is identified with death, in that both circumscribe and define our experience. Love is identified with death, because love in a patriarchal universe is only experienced—and desired—in the form of negativity, exclusion, rejection and waste (excrement, she points out, is a key image in Beckett's text). The Father is perceived as immortal and is forever internalised and reproduced by the son, as a dead space, a void incapable of creating value. Finally, in this Father-limited world, the feminine is also invested with negativity. The prostitute-figure is seen by the son to be as

arid as the Father, and as soon as she creates the child he rejects her. A son's story has no room for the new possibilities represented by the maternal body.

The text of *Not I* is a dramatic monologue, which provides two elements for representation in the space of the stage: the constantly-moving mouth of the old woman who speaks, and a silent Auditor, of unknown sex, standing in the shadows, who contributes only four gestures. Kristeva's text makes no mention of the Auditor, whom I would identify, in terms of her argument, with her "He beyond communication," the dead father. The old woman, Kristeva says, speaks with a voice irrevocably shaped by patriarchal discourse, "pursuing a paternal shadow binding her to the body and to language" (1980e: 154). She is incapable of producing speech as an autonomous subject, in forms generated by her feminine difference. Merging the discourses of female intellectual and sexual pleasure and production, Kristeva focuses her argument in metaphor. For the "forbidden" vagina, the old woman substitutes a mouth, through which, in the madness induced by repression, she pours out the flood of waste, fragmented language which is her perverted form of creative pleasure: "She experiences jouissance in nonsense through repression" (1980e: 154).

The "Religion of the Father," Kristeva asserts, characterises our culture, and is the source of the absurdity and waste figured everywhere in Beckett's texts. Beckett speaks of sons eternally fascinated and terrified by the power of the Father, a power

> which continues to infuse meaning, dispersed as it might be, into their absurd existence as wastrels. The only possible community [in Beckett's work] is . . . centred in a ritual of decay, of ruin, the corpse-universe of Molloy, Watt, and the rest of their company, who nonetheless continue their most 'Beckettian' of activites: questioning and waiting. Will he come? Of course not! But just the same, let us ask for Godot, this Father, this God, as omnipresent as he is incredible.
>
> There probably never has been a keener eye directed at paternal Death and the way it determines the son, our monotheistic civilization, and maybe even all granting of meaning: saying, writing, and doing. (Kristeva 1980e: 155)

She concludes however on a positive note, pointing out that the one element Beckett's texts leave untouched is "the jubilant serenity of the unapproached, avoided mother" (the prostitute with child of *First Love* is a figure on whom the son simply closes his door). Against predecessors such as Proust and Kafka, "the militant bachelors of the early twentieth century"

(1980e: 154), Beckett establishes love, the feminine and the (hetero)sexual act, as the foundation of creative production—while emphasising equally the "impossible" nature of such love in twentieth-century culture, inscribed in paternal meaning. His writing models a devastated world in which traces of the repressed feminine still occasionally emerge, pointing mutely to the possibility of an alternative "beyond the debris . . . the last myth of modern times, the myth of the feminine" (1980e: 158). Such traces, she argues, were first made explicit in the early Renaissance, with its brief rediscovery of the pagan force of the body: Bellini painted those traces in the eyes of his Madonnas. In the avant-garde writing of the twentieth century, they have finally surfaced again:

> It was not until the end of the nineteenth century and Joyce, even more than Freud, that this repression of motherhood and incest was affirmed as risky and unsettling in one's very flesh and sex. Not until then did it, by means of a language that 'musicates through letters,' resume within discourse the rhythms, intonations and echolalias of the mother-infant symbiosis—intense, pre-Oedipal, predating the father. . . . (1980e: 157)

Beckett's deliberately austere language mimes in its self-conscious self-denials the repressions by which the Father maintains his empire. But beyond Beckett, opening up a more disorderly domain, or at least, one that liberates a very different body of Law, is the work of his mentor, Joyce.

JOYCE: TRACING THE MOTHER

The tale of Joyce and the feminine is a larger, more diverse, more positive and much-narrated story.[6] From the very start of his writing career, Joyce's work, with its foregrounding of women, captured the interest and the active support of Anglo-American women publishers and women intellectuals: in London, Harriet Shaw Weaver, editor of the journal *The Egoist;* in Paris, Sylvia Beach, of the bookshop Shakespeare and Company; and in the United States, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, the American publishers of *Ulysses.* In the 1920s and 1930s, Joyce was a frequent point of reference for women writers engaged in modernist experiment. The poet Mina Loy, in her poem "Joyce's Ulysses," pastiched many of the features that would later attract Hélène Cixous: the disruption of syntactical order, throwing binary opposites into productive conflict ("Hurricanes / of reasoned music"), wild punning, and especially the fascination with the exchanges of language and desire

and the astute symbolisation of masculine erotic fantasy and its versions of the female: "The word made flesh / and feeding upon itself / with erudite fangs / The sanguine introspection of the womb // Don Juan / of Judea / upon a pilgrimage / to the Libido."[7]

Virginia Woolf found "undoubted occasional beauty" in the poetic phrases of *Ulysses,* though she was more irritated by what she saw as a lack of coherence in Joyce's writing ("interesting perhaps to doctors") and her own "quite unjust sense that he's doing it on purpose to show off." This would seem to have been a problem of national and class prejudice; Woolf confesses she is "bewildered, befogged. We don't pretend to say what he's trying to do. We know so little about the people" (in Scott 1990: 642-5). The novelist Dorothy Richardson responded more warmly to Joyce's formal experiments. She was fascinated by the narrative processes of *Finnegans Wake,* writing in 1939 of the difficulty but also the "sheer delight" of the semantic, syntactical and rhythmical innovation in a text that "releases consciousness from literary preoccupations and prejudices, from the self-imposed task of searching for superficial sequences in stretches of statement regarded horizontally" (Richardson 1939, rpt. in Scott 1990: 425-9).

Writing in the Autumn of 1949, in the aftermath of the second World War, Storm Jameson, antagonistic to modernist experiment, attacked Joyce as an "anti-humanist in language," one of the "desperate stylists" who "distort[s] reality to verbal ends." She rejected "the paradox of a work drilling deeper and deeper into reality, in order to petrify it," and drew a political moral:

> Writers, novelists, who devote themselves to the disintegration of language, may be innocent of the impulse that destroyed in a few days all the great libraries of Warsaw. But its roots stretch a long way, as far as it is from burning libraries to the concentration camps where men are burned. (Jameson 1949: 54-56)

Jameson was fairly isolated. But in the 1970s, more sustained negative criticism, from a very different angle, came from Anglo-American feminists, criticising in particular the negative stereotypes of women in Joyce's work. Marilyn French, for example, was quick to point out that Molly Bloom was the woman of male fantasy. Mary Ellmann, impressed by the "curiosity" Joyce showed for "becoming as well as judging the other" sex, was not pleased by his presentation through Molly of the "liquidity" of the female mind.[8] In the 1980s, the essays collected by Suzette Henke and Elaine Unkeless (1982) bore witness to the broad range of possible critical responses to Joyce's representation of women and acknowledged the

legitimacy of his interest in figuring the mystified feminine self-consciousness of a particular historical period. The conflict intensified between those who preferred to dismiss him as an arrogant misogynist (Gilbert and Gubar) and those who, following the French, admired him for his "feminine" discourse.

In France, Julia Kristeva struck her first distinctive pro-Joycean note in the second half of the 1960s, in the essay now familiar to English-speaking readers as "Word, Dialogue and Novel."[9] Kristeva presented Joyce as one of the creators (with Rabelais, Cervantes, Swift, Sade, Balzac, Lautréamont, Dostoevsky and Kafka) of the modern polyphonic novel, which she saw as the inheritor of the tradition of the Menippean carnivalesque structure analysed by Bakhtin. She characterises this mode of writing as dialogical in nature, existing only as a game of relationships, analogies and non-exclusive oppositions, and simultaneously representative and non-representative. It produces a text that thrives by exteriorising and parodying its own productive processes and by exploring and transgressing the forbidden frontiers of sexuality and death which constitute it, operating through a collocation of conflicting discourses which challenges both logical and representational language and the authorities (God and social law) which that language sustains. Carnivalesque discourse is a deeply subversive political form:

> [It] breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and at the same time is a social and political protest. There is no equivalence, but rather identity between challenging official linguistic codes and challenging the law. (1980e: 65)

Kristeva's work in the 1970s, though referring only briefly to Joyce, nevertheless helped guarantee his place in the pantheon established by *Tel Quel* as one of the handful of significant avant-garde writers credited with forging a new discourse, a new human subject and a new ideology to set against a crumbling bourgeois liberalism:

> As capitalist society is being economically and politically choked to death, discourse is wearing thin and heading for collapse at a more rapid rate than ever before. . . . Only one language grows more and more contemporary: the equivalent, beyond a span of thirty years, of the language of *Finnegans Wake.* ("How Does One Speak to Literature?" in Kristeva 1980e: 92)

This innovative writing is explicitly identified with the feminine. In *La Révolution du langage poétique,* Joyce is held to be the first to bring light

into the mystery of the family, articulating through his writing the repressed element of feminine sexual pleasure which, by the fact of its repression, constitutes the family structure and, in consequence, all contemporary hierarchy and the authority of the State:

> Sans cette *découverte de la génitalité,* sans sa mise en relation avec le discours et la situation de la femme (Molly dans *Ulysses*) et sans son exposition à travers le texte musiqué de *Finnegans Wake* comme économie sémiotique attribuable à tout sujet mâle ou femelle, le mystère persiste et les critiques fétichistes de la famille restent solidaires de son ordre.[10]

"From One Identity to An Other" (written in 1975) links Joyce, Céline and Artaud as creators of "poetic language," inventors of rhythms and sentence structures which reactivate the repressed, instinctive maternal element (Kristeva's "semiotic") by which language constitutes itself as a symbolic function, and which produce a discordance, unsettling the conventional subject and generating in its place a modern "subject-in-process" (Kristeva 1980b). The Joycean mode is characterised as an incestuous investment in daughters and mothers; in "The Father, Love and Banishment," Kristeva speaks of his "joyous and insane, incestuous plunge summed up in Molly's jouissance or the paternal baby talk in *Finnegans Wake.*"[11]

Kristeva never devoted a whole work to Joyce. Hélène Cixous, on the other hand, devoted several, and spelled out in some detail what he could offer as regards the remaking of language, which could be joined to rethinking gender roles. The last section of this essay will consider three of Cixous's texts all or partly devoted to Joyce: her thesis, published in 1968, sections of *La Jeune Née* (1975) [*The Newly Born Woman*], a key study of woman's voice, and the essay of 1976, "La Missexualité."[12]

Cixous's thesis, *L'Exil de James Joyce ou l'art du remplacement,*[13] supervised by the important Joyce scholar Jean-Jacques Mayoux, was the first big academic book on Joyce to appear in France and is still one of the biggest ever written by a single author. It emphasises three major points: Joyce's account of the relationship between writer, language and history; his account of the family; the structure of his work and its poetic language. The emphasis on Joyce's language represents Cixous's original contribution to Joyce studies; the only French scholar to invoke this aspect previously was Michel Butor, who noted its relation to the language of dream (Lernout 1990: 35). All three areas are ones which are of major importance in Cixous's own subsequent work as a creative writer, and in her own intellectual history, Joyce could well be said to play the Father to her

daughter-role. The difficult relationship between father and daughter, on the ground of writing, is the subject of much of her early prose. *Angst,* for example (1977), or *With ou l'art de l'innocence* (1981) both dramatise the anguish of a daughter who is shaped by the discourses she inherits, could not possibly speak without them—and feels she cannot speak *for herself* because of them.

The relationship of writer, language and history, clearly crucial for Joyce, is equally fundamental to the whole project of modernism. Cixous's thesis traces through his work the development of a consciousness that invents itself in the intersections of art and history. She discusses Joyce as both artist and Dubliner, tracing how his self-knowledge grows as he understands more about the history of an Ireland dominated by the English, which has pushed his own culture to the margins and denied him his own language. Joyce is shown to feel with increasing intensity the anguish of that marginalisation, and to pass through a period of radical doubt as to his own ability to come to terms with his history. In the end, he transcends the anguish, finding techniques of writing that release the repressed energies of frozen history and frozen culture, and turn a dead and deadly inheritance into a process of new becoming. In the Joycean work of art, Cixous explains, History—the real—is transformed from the source of anguish into the materials for new speech.

Cixous's own prose narratives subsequently work through the same pattern, which she presents as the archetypal pattern of experience for the female subject, who is as marginal in her society as Joyce was in his and, like him, is exiled from a language of her own. Particularly, this is Cixous's own trajectory from the pain of the triple marginalisation she attributes to herself: as woman and Jew, born in the colonies (Algeria), she escaped by inventing a way of a way of writing that could establish her artist's Dream of history in place of the real.

"Joyce's Dream" is the title of her thesis's Conclusion, in which she attributes to Joyce the ambition to produce "a written work which is to escape all the laws and metamorphoses which history imposes upon reality and to build itself up as a universe of its own, obeying its own linguistic laws" (Cixous 1968b: 729). The dream was achieved, she says, not so much in *Ulysses* as in *Finnegans Wake,* which she calls an ark of a text (1968b: 18) in which Joyce gathered up all the world's symbols, notations and cultural patterns in order to save them, and to draw out of them and through them the structuring elements of what it is to be human: "Joyce . . . was detaching himself from reality in order to understand life from the standpoint of those ageless human problems whose shadow, projected through Time, may be

mistaken for History" (1968b:14). Cixous's own later version of this historico-cultural compendium is her prose fiction *Le Livre de Promethea* (1983), [*The Book of Promethea*] which represents woman's discovery of herself as artist and subject, in the writing process. This finding of an individual self is linked with the exploration of the cultural history of humanity—the Noah's Ark of modes, symbols, and cultural patterns—through which the female writer finally constructs her own place and voice.

In her analysis of the Joycean family, Cixous displays considerable interest in Joyce's own difficulties with his father, and with his wife, at the level of biography. But she is most interested in deciphering the operations of the Law of the Father in Joyce's texts. She notes Joyce's emphasis on the family as an obstacle to Stephen's development as an artist, the importance he attributes to Stephen's recognition of and resistance to paternal authority ("the misrule and confusion of his father's house," 1968b: 11), and Joyce's negative representation of the mother as collusive with authority (that of the father and, especially, of the Church) in the repression of her son. This version of the family romance carries over into Cixous's own work, where the impetus is to resist the patterns the Father seeks to impose.

Finally, as regards the aesthetics of the Joycean text, Cixous appreciates the different levels of meaning at which *Ulysses* functions, the musicality of its discourse, and its consequent mobility and fluidity. Language, she says, loosens up in Joyce, and becomes open not to just one but to several interpretations. This openness, and the associated ambivalence, plurivalence and proliferation of meaning, will be one of the characteristics of Cixous's own future texts, and one she will nominate as basic to *écriture féminine*. Like Kristeva, she comments that *"Finnegans Wake* is a work of fatherhood and incest, whose language echoes that of the daughter" (1968b: 66). She also picks out Joyce's use of puns, parody and irony to accentuate the doubleness—or, indeed, plurality—of meaning (1968b: 724). Her own seminal text on women's writing, "Le Rire de la Méduse," (1975; "The Laughter of Medusa," trans. 1980), identifies subversive laughter as a key marker of feminine writing, and the Joycean influence on her work is perhaps most strongly marked by her own use of parody and puns.

Quite strikingly, there is little attempt in the thesis to assess Joyce's treatment of women from a feminist perspective. The same is true of the essays collected in *Prénoms de Personne* (1974), where her main interest is in Joyce's contribution to the discrediting of the traditional essentialist subject.[14] Things are very different though in *La Jeune Née* (1975, English trans. 1986), where Cixous engages with Catherine Clément in a key debate

on the nature of women's voice for which Joyce is a frequent point of reference—less as Father, interestingly, than as revolutionary brother.

This is the first of Cixous's texts to register the importance for feminist thinking of Molly Bloom. *Ulysses* is said to trace woman's trajectory in life, passing from bed to bed: bridebed, childbed, deathbed (in Cixous and Clément 1986: 66). Molly Bloom, lying dreaming on her bed, is drawn by Joyce as primarily a body and reduced to a reproductive function, "destined," says Cixous, like all women, "to be the nonsocial, nonpolitical, nonhuman half of the living structure." This is not an attack on Joyce, whom Cixous obviously reads as having written a conscious characterisation of woman constituted under patriarchy, constructed in the image of male desire. *Angst* uses the same figure of woman as shackled to the bed—birthbed, marriagebed, deathbed—and reduced to passive sexual object. Life's drama, for the woman in this text, consists in getting herself off the bed and finding a way to write herself into an active, independent thinking body.

Cixous latches on to Molly's dreaming, and the space Joyce gives to her imagination (in Cixous and Clément 1986: 85) and picks up Molly's famous "yes," and the stream of affirmation that concludes Joyce's text. Joyce, she asserts, here perceives something new, a dream not of masculine but of *feminine* desire, and Molly "carr[ies] *Ulysses* with her in the direction of a new writing." Molly is then the starting inspiration for a long development in Cixous's text characterising feminine desire and creativity as vast, vertiginous, open and affirmative—the opposite of the "litany of castration" which is masculine desire. The same features mark feminine writing which, like Joyce's Molly, is marked by the immediacy of its voice and its delight in the feminine body (in Cixous and Clément 1986: 94).

La Jeune Née nominates writing as the place *par excellence* to resist and subvert the Law of the Father. Cixous quotes *Ulysses* against the misogynist Freud, and especially against Freud's argument in *Moses and Monotheism* that the great step forward in culture came when matriarchy was replaced by patriarchy—a victory of spirituality over the senses. Stephen declares that paternal authority, on which all social authority is founded, is a tremendous confidence trick:

> Fatherhood, in the sense of conscious begetting, is unknown to man. It is a mystical estate, an apostolic succession, from only begetter to only begotten. On that mystery and not on the madonna which the cunning Italian intellect flung to the mob of Europe the church is founded and refounded irremovably because founded like the world, macro- and microcosm, upon the void. Upon uncertitude, upon unlikelihood. *Amor matris*, subjective and

> objective genitive, may be the only true thing in life. (*Ulysses* 204).

She immediately adds her own comment:

> What is a father? 'Fatherhood is [sic] a legal fiction,' said Joyce. Paternity, which is a fiction, is fiction passing off itself as truth. Paternity is the lack of being which is called God. Men's cleverness was in passing themselves off as fathers and 'repatriating' women's fruits as their own. A naming trick. (In Cixous and Clément 1986: 100)

The point recurs in "Freincipe de plaisir ou paradoxe perdu" (1983, rpt. 1986c), where Cixous considers *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Finnegans Wake*. In *Portrait*, she takes the primitive scene of the confrontation of the son, and budding artist, with the Law of Father. Joyce is seen to say that the artist needs to know that that Law exists, because art comes through its transgression: "L'artiste a besoin de la Loi, mais c'est pour mieux la frauder" (1986c: 103). For Joyce, she argues, the whole of art resides in the use of language to thwart the authority of the Father. Hence the importance in his work of language-play in the form of puns, irony, parody and pastiche, which recognise the rule of Law in discourse only in order to knock it down.

Cixous's perception of the new vital force in Joyce's writing has arguably its best representation in her twenty-page essay on *Finnegans Wake*, "La Missexualité: où jouis-je?" ["Missexuality: Where's my Pleasure?"], published in *Poétique* in 1976.[15] It begins with an epigraph which claims Joyce as both the great innovator in the art of modern prose and the first to come out on the side of the feminine in writing and, by extension, in cultural and sexual politics. Joyce is responsible, she says, in a double pun, for "la mise à n'oeuf des genres." Joyce has renewed genders and genres, and into the new ("neuf"), he has slipped the Egg ("oeuf"). Joyce puts writing back to its origins, the female egg where everything starts. The epigraph also tells us, in another pun, that Joyce "nous fait (t)ordre de lire." He orders us to read; he makes us writhe ("tordre") with laughter (a play on on "lire"/"rire") as we do so. That is, he exploits and subverts the authority of the Father, writing in a way that makes it possible for readers to experience the unrepressed pleasure of the text. Between the two puns, the meaning is clear. Joyce liberates language, and his liberating of language goes hand-in-hand with his liberation of the feminine.

Joyce liberates language through the poetic mode in which he writes. In place of authoritarian rationalist prose, which produces a single reductive meaning by repressing alternatives, he offers poetry, a mode of writing that recovers the chaotic origins of discourse and generates significance by proliferation, multiplication of connections and associations. He liberates the feminine similarly by expanding its conventional meaning. In place of the traditional figuration of the female as a passive body, the non-creative negative object that sustains the male subject, he offers a figure that, like his writing, bubbles over with sexual and intellectual creative energy. Joyce's idea of the feminine is the counterpart and the emblem of Joyce's idea of writing: plural, proliferating, expanding. And both are emblems of Joyce's modern—and modernist—concept of life as a process of artistic becoming.

Cixous sees this double innovation figured in the dairymaid M—a new Miss, and also a new Miss Sexuality.[16] The key to Joyce's text, she turns up just when he needs a focus to connect together all its signifying elements—not in order to finalise it, and fix it in a message, but to provide a form that will maintain those elements in movement, streaming along like milk, enabling the reader to experience the pleasure of the process of production.

> [A]nd looking wantingly around our undistributed middle between males we feel we must waistfully woent a female to focus and on this stage there pleasantly appears the cowrymaid M. who we shall often meet below who introduces herself upon us at some precise hour which we shall again agree to call absolute zero or the babbling pump of platinism. (cit. Cixous 1986c: 79)

The most cursory literary-critical glance indicates immediately what would attract Cixous in this text. Puns and innuendoes play the expected notes of desire for the female as sexual object ("undistributed middle," "waistfully woent," etc). But this cowrymaid (a coined word resonating with echoes of the female as animal, new-born Venus, means of exchange between males) appears bringing with her not just sensuality but a cornucopia of intellectual possibilities, "the babbling pump of platinism." Most of all, she appears of her own accord, introducing herself. The cowrymaid, Cixous notes, is responsible for producing the milk of inspiration, from which the artist makes the butter. She is the origin, matter and medium of the "masculine" text:

> Son arrivée provoque des cristallisations de rapports, de mises en chaîne de systèmes de figures: figures de transformation, figures de

> culture, de fabulation, tout un travail où se rencontrent et s'interrogent, s'échangent l'économie politique, l'économie libidinale, et l'économie biologique. Question, donc, de régimes.[17]

In a final move, Cixous introduces herself into Joyce's text and claims the right to play the patriarchal naming game. The maid is called Marge, which is short for Marjorie and also margarine. Marge, traditionally, is only a second-best, a substitute for butter. And marge also means margin, or edge, which stands, traditionally, for women's place. But Cixous offers an alternative. Marge-rine sounds out *marga reyna*, the marginalised Queen, Cleopatra, who is the centre and ruler of all desire. The true feminine is not the marginal, repressed element in the text, but the centre of production. And margarine, Cixous, concludes, is the perfect emblem of artistic production and the creative process, being both natural and artificial, as also is the feminine. Woman is both natural and social being, both body and intellect.

These jokes work better in the flow and tumult of the text, modelling the Joycean movement. But they do work; and ultimately, through her wordgames, and through Joyce and his wordgames, Cixous finds the language to stage the abolition of old linguistic categories, gender roles and reductive orders of thought. In their place emerges a new image of the feminine, of masculine and feminine exchanges, and of art and language. The old fixities are displaced by concepts of non-repressive process, exchange and change. This is the key contribution Joyce makes for feminist thinking, through the French writers, and it has to be recognised as a major one: he gives inspiration, space and the elements of a language in which to revise, radically, the limits of the feminine situation.

NOTES

1. This article is a revised version of a Public Lecture delivered at the University of Zaragoza at the kind invitation of Professor Susana Onega, and with the help of funding from the University of Zaragoza and the British Council, for which I should like here to express my thanks.

2. The English version of this text, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, leaves out the two-thirds of the book which contains Kristeva's actual discussion of texts, and retains only the theoretical elements.

3. Letter to Paul Démeny, 15 May 1871, in Rimbaud 1966: 221-2.

4. Beckett's negotiations with gender now constitute a sub-set of their own within Beckett studies. See for example Ben-Zvi (1990) and Bryden (1993).

5. Kristeva 1980a. There is an interesting contrast here with Cixous, whose own less-studied essay on Beckett in the same volume of *Cahiers de l'Herne* identifies capital, not religion, as prime source of the discourse of which his work provides the ironic model; see Cixous 1976b.

6. A useful short account is Bonnie Kime Scott's Introduction to the section on Joyce in her excellent critical anthology, *The Gender of Modernism* (1990: 196-204). For an extended analysis, see Bonnie Kime Scott, (1984, 1987); Alan Roughley (1991), especially chs. 3 and 4 on Anglo-American and French feminist approaches to Joyce.

7. Mina Loy, "Joyce's Ulysses," rpt. in Scott 1990: 248-9.

8. Scott 1990: 198, citing French (1975) and Ellman (1968).

9. On Kristeva and Joyce see Roughley 1991, especially 67-73, 159-64, 209-12.

10. Kristeva 1974: 494. ["Without this discovery of genitality, its setting in relation to women's discourse and situation (Molly in *Ulysses*) and its exposition through the musical text of *Finnegans Wake* as the semiotic economy to be attributed to all subjects, male or female, the mystery continues and the fetishistic critics of the family remain wedded to its order"—my translation.]

11. Kristeva 1980a: 151. See Roughley (1991: 211-12) for an interesting account of Kristeva's association of Molly with the concept of the Abject in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (Kristeva 1980f).

12. Cixous also discusses Joyce at length in *Prénoms de personne* (1974). See the excellent study of Cixous and Joyce in Lernout (1990: esp. 41-56).

13. Cixous 1968a. Some of the material in the thesis had already been published in article form in 1964 and 1965, under Cixous's former name of Berger. See Lernout (1990: 41), and his Bibliography, under Berger and Cixous.

14. See the useful discussion of these texts and bibliographical endnote in Schiach (1991: 42-44, 140).

15. Cixous 1986b. The essay was based on two papers read by Cixous at the 1975 Joyce Symposium in Paris, which she chaired.

16. For a very different reading to mine, see Schiach (1991: 44-6).

17. Cixous 1986c: 80. "'Her arrival is the catalyst for the crystallisation of relationships, the interconnecting of figurative systems: figures of transformation, figures of culture, narrative figures, a whole operation in which political, libidinal and biological economies meet in a process of interrogation and exchange. It's all a question of regimes"—my translation.

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