

**Montage and Self-Reflexivity in the
"Wandering Rocks" Episode of *Ulysses***

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"Wandering Rocks," the tenth section of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, opens at Dillon's auction rooms with the auction "lacquey" staring into a mirror (Joyce 195). Like the text itself, "Wandering Rocks" is a kind of mirror, one that reflects the many different angles from which the world can be refracted. As a self-reflexive metonymic sign, the mirror represents the way that the chapter comments upon itself and also the central position the reader occupies while reading the chapter, poised in front of small pieces of glass, shifting from angle to angle to construct an accurate depiction of what takes place. The suggestive power of opening with a mirror illustrates how this passage will apply to other sections in "Wandering Rocks." The simultaneous action in this chapter is refracted in the many different characters the reader encounters, who appear in a seemingly random order, all with different gestures, words, and actions, and each containing a limited perspective. I have chosen an associational method of interpretation to chronicle the junction of these elements which may be likened to the montage technique popularized in early twentieth-century cinema. Using montage as interpretive strategy in *Ulysses* allows the reader to disengage from the successive constraints of the text and form organizational schemes that operate in terms of non-

linear associations; the use of montage allows configuration to act as a mode of description and renders the play of conformity and disruption in the text.

"Wandering Rocks" is comprised of several characters who act and think simultaneously: Corny Kelleher as he talks with a police constable; a lone-legged sailor crossing the street and passing underneath the window of Leopold Bloom's house just one hour before Bloom's wife is to be cuckolded; the children of Simon Daedelus as they eat pea soup in their tenement building, and a host of other characters, including the man to cuckold Leopold Bloom: Blazes Boylan. These characters cycle through the chapter, each associated with specific scenes, dialogues, gestures, sounds that barrage the reader. Joyce provides a narrative thread but draws on the reader to weave the narrative together. Throughout the chapter, the reader encounters repeated images and places. Each time the reader engages these aspects of the text, they acquire different shades of meaning based on the context in which they appear. Fragmentary networks within the text subvert the linearity of the reading experience, creating a system in which the reader must reinvigorate the value of previous textual associations in order to posit meaning, or construct the "where" of his reading experience. In spite of its reconciliatory tone, the conclusion of *Ulysses* does not synthesize the work's progress; therefore, the reader's discretion is paramount in developing meaning. The treatment of the text as a system of associations may work in a twofold manner: the reader must

engage the text in succession, yet in order to construct networks of association, he must occasionally halt to account for oncoming traffic as well as return to previous destinations. The reader is forced to consider the trace of previous associations as well as the disparity involved in new couplings. The technique discussed so far amounts to the idea of parallax, a dominant theme in the novel, or the displacement of meaning based on a change in perspective.

The sheer volume and depth of Joyce studies suggests a sort of literary quicksand. Arguments are nebulous and even the most obscure have earned lifetimes of development. The paths of contemporary debate have been forged by some of the greatest twentieth-century minds. If one does not admit *Ulysses* as the quintessential twentieth-century work, the profound collection of criticism following its publication demands attention from the student of literature. Many critiques of the text emphasize *Ulysses'* associative structure and repetition. W. Iser asserts, "(In *Ulysses*) the fragmentation of the familiar narrative patterns leads to such an intensive shifting of viewpoints that the reader cannot work out any central focus" (Iser 207). The absence of objective meaning in *Ulysses* implicates the reader, or the performance of reading, in evaluating the text; Iser's theory emphasizes process rather than outcome. Iser's criticism redirects attention from the author to the reader. His method corresponds with the influx of deconstructive technique that began to surface in the middle of the

twentieth century. Deconstructive reading elucidates limitations in the text and implies that the reader must exercise a performative strategy in developing meaning. Frederic Jameson cites,

I believe that today, whatever our own aesthetic faults or blinkers, we have learned that any art which practices symbolism is already discredited and worthless before the fact. A long experience of the classical modernisms has finally taught us the bankruptcy of the symbolic in literature; we demand something more from artists than this facile affirmation that the existent also means, that things are also symbols (Jameson 148)."

The breakdown of meaning and disavowal of stasis in *Ulysses* represents a twentieth-century departure from canonistic ideas on meaning and textual symmetry.

The anatomy of *Ulysses* subjects the reader to continual breakdown and consequent reevaluation, the process of unweaving and weaving the text. Elements of the text play out in juxtapositional schemes not bound to logical determination; each element is continually refreshed by appearing in association with disparate counterparts. Jennifer Levine describes this phenomenon in her essay on repetition in Joyce,

The difficulty of Joyce's language in *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*—in effect, its un-naturalness—confronts readers and forces them into a certain

relationship to the words. It is not just a case of trying harder, of making that Olympian effort to match Joyce's own effort in the writing. It is, rather, a case of recognizing altered relationships between language and meaning, between the word as that which it refers to and the word as an element *within a* particular set of oppositions, within the particular structure that is language (Levine 106).

This recognition of fluidity in evaluation substantiates the idea that the reader confronts his psyche, or his own method of creating opposition, while engaging the text.

The oppositional strategy that Levine cites in her essay proves fundamental for much late twentieth-century criticism of *Ulysses* that considers the text as cinematic analogue. Harry Levin asserts, "*Ulysses* has more in common with the cinema than with other fiction. The movement of Joyce's style, the thought of his characters, is like unreeling film; his method of construction, the arrangement of this raw material, involves the crucial operation of *montage*" (Levin 88). The term montage refers to the cinematic practice of compressing narrative into shorter components meant to suggest a certain theme without respective linear development. The term montage applied to cinema implies production of a rapid succession of images, meant to illustrate an association of ideas. Viewing the text of *Ulysses* as montage (or meaning created utilizing serial juxtapositions) enables the reader to tap the various networks of

association that exist in the text. The absence of any formidable resolution guarantees that these networks can be assembled and dismantled infinitely.

This strategy allows the reader freedom to interpret using both the successive constraints of the text and the often oblique patterns of non-linear associations; the use of montage allows textual design to facilitate the development of meaning and expose the constant play of involved in the reading process, one based in affinity and dissolution. In his essay, "Montage of Attractions," Sergei Eisenstein says of the development of meaning in narrative, "It is not in a (revelation) of the playwright's purpose, or the "correct interpretation of the author," that a production can base itself. The only true and solid base for the action of a production can be found in attractions and in a system of attractions" (Eisenstein 232). A film production creates value in the juxtaposition of attractive elements, the attraction between passages of text that occurs in *Ulysses* determines how the reader perceives the text. In his essay, "Beyond the Shot" he cites, "the degree of incongruity determines the intensity of impression (Eisenstein 234)." Eisenstein illustrates a powerful dialectical approach to interpretation; however, Eisenstein's cultish mentality on the role of the artist is problematic. He insists that objects are passive until the artist reinvigorates them and that all elements in the world of that artist are interrelational. To understand reality only in terms of the author is a limiting interpretive strategy that denies the reader or viewer any assignment of

meaning. In reading *Ulysses*, It is important to consider an implied textual system of attraction, but the role of the reader in developing this system cannot be discounted.

Let us modify the idea of attraction to incorporate recent theoretical discourse on signification; attractions rely on referential configuration, so textual signification operates in a similar fashion. Ferdinand de Saussure envisions text as a kind of episodic pairing; no one term in a series presents a positive value. All components in a series acquire meaning only in opposition to other terms. Each term, or signifier, cannot be considered in isolation, lest we undergo a process of endless deferment. Each signifier leads to another. For Saussure, tension within the text can only be resolved when one considers the culmination of these networks of signification. Saussure's thinking provides a fundamental logic for many postmodern thinkers, but his methodology is often criticized for emphasizing resolution rather than a boundless system of determination (Saussure). This debate among twentieth-century critics informs the study of textual configuration, or montage, in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

In his essay, "Montage of Attractions", Sergei Eisenstein says of the development of meaning in narrative, "It is not in a (revelation) of the playwright's purpose, or the "correct interpretation of the author", that a production can base itself. The only true and solid base for the action of a production can be found in attractions and in a system of attractions" (Eisenstein 232). Just as a film production creates value in the

juxtaposition of attractive elements, the attraction between passages of text that occurs in *Ulysses* inevitably determines how the reader perceives the text. The current issue of *James Joyce Quarterly* presents two articles that examine the development of montage theory in early twentieth-century Russian filmmaking.

Thomas Sheehan, in his essay "Montage Joyce", uses Dziga Vertov's work in film theory to deconstruct Eisenstein's practice of unifying text through associative methodology. Sheehan cites, "Vertov's individualist anarchist tendencies, like Joyce's, are opposed to Eisenstein's more orthodox Marxist ones, which demand a synthetic reunification of montage's fragmentation on a higher plane. Vertov's theory and practice of the "kino-eye", in fact, has many parallels with Joyce's *Ulysses*, not least their common basis in an antirealist paradigm (Sheehan 70)." Kino-eye refers to the independent movement and perception of the camera apparatus (and interestingly, one of the reappearing advertising motifs in *Ulysses*). The existence of the camera foils the idea of artistic autonomy. The camera does not encompass the film reel it produces, nor does it embody the auteur's direction. This material realization proves an effective analogy for the associative text: the reader provides a dynamic third term in textual appraisal. The reader, like the machine, processes text rather than assimilating it. Though the city of Dublin may be visualized as paralytic, the body of the text exists in dynamic form. It emphasizes anatomical function: characters eat, digest...discard.

Many critics of *Ulysses* are concerned with the idea of textual/readerly constitution. Johanna Garvey describes Ulysses' Dublin, "(it) is encoded and enclosed, full of bodies, voices, texts composing a massive "sprawl" and display over which the narrative exerts control, despite the seemingly labyrinthine complexity (Garvey 108)." If we strip this excerpt of literary parlance, the structure could be "refleshed" to describe microconstituents that comprise the human anatomy. Garvey argues that Joyce intended to voice concerns on masculine urban space, thus encouraging a countertextual reading that, "incorporates the feminine into what remains a predominately masculine vision of the modern city (Garvey 119)." The "labyrinthine" construction of *Ulysses* draws attention to dividing lines; however, the reader becomes aware that the boundaries are "perceived" and subject to change. *Ulysses* functions like the mirror at the auction house: disinterested, dependant on movement or change in perspective, much like composition in the work of John Cage.

Michael O' Driscoll's article, "Silent Texts and Empty Words: Structure and Intention in the Writings of John Cage" provides a discursive example from Joyce's earlier work in *Portrait of the Artist*. Stephen Dedalus converses with his classmate Lynch on aesthetics behind Sir Patrick Dun's hospital. Their conference on aesthetics is disrupted by "A long dray laden with old iron" that "covers Stephen's speech with the harsh roar of jangled and rattling metal (O' Driscoll 617)." The elevated conversation is

reduced to vulgar expatriation as Lynch becomes enraged and begins mouthing obscenities. The roar of this ambient composition catalogues a response, but its certainty is disavowed by the play of high minded aesthetics and vulgar recitation within identical systems of interpretation. In this scene, Noise compounds and layers, resulting in "a reduction of language to inarticulate protest, confounding the careful construction of Stephen's aesthetic thesis (O' Driscoll 617)." Stephen's distinctive aesthetic sense would illegitimately separate his thoughts from the action of the world, his is all situated within a discussion on what should be designated art-all of which perverted throughout *Ulysses*, -the auctioneer, the artist, the Simony savorance-No Simon. No Silence.

Cage's fear is that in non-positive, relational systems of difference, the luminous details of the world (sounds, words, people) are void of any conceptual political status and so vulnerable to exploitation. Hence, "unimpededness" is necessary to social freedom. At the same time, such unimpeded, autonomous units do exist in a kind of community, textual or social (O' Driscoll 629).

Like Eisenstein, Cage is concerned with tensions between individualism and plurality.

Where Eisenstein seems determined to convey a penultimate coherence between the

two based in the skill of the sender, Cage attempts to illuminate two factors always at work in dialogue, causality and chance.

John Cage rejects expressive systems in favor of "indicative systems of reference, the process of re-presenting (O' Driscoll 621)." His textual assemblage attempts to create a gulf between signification and meaning production. His texts inspire doubt in the legitimacy of privileging causality over chance. He does not attempt to eradicate one or the other, merely to indicate that they exist in concert with one another. "He attempts to preclude the possibility of discovering, or disturb our conventional reliance on, deep structures in our encounters with the world of things and our representations of those encounters (O' Driscoll 622)." Cage uses the word "silence" to represent the ambient space that seems to lack positive identity or definite articulation. The word Silence is irremediable, not admitting its need to be cured, positioned or placed. The auction-house scene in "Wandering Rocks" exemplifies this phenomenon. Simon and Dilly are arguing in the midst of the auction and at one point, the auction lacquey interprets Simon's wailing as a bid. The meaning of the wail is dissolved and reappropriated because of its existence within an ambient space. Despite Simon's intention, the message is obscured and reformed. The confusion that Simon's wail generates sets up a convergence: Simon and Dilly's ongoing conflict and the framework of the auction. The first item sold in the auction is a set of curtains; curtains are appropriate because of

Simon's wish to keep Dilly from knowing just what he has in his pocket. The curtains are sold for five shillings, which is the amount that Dilly presses Simon for when he arrives. Immediately Simon begins attacking Dilly's physical disposition, almost as if she were being prepped for display, "Stand up straight girl, he said. You'll get curvature of the spine. Do you know what you look like?" (Joyce 195). Dilly continues to barter with Simon; after he grants her a shilling, she presses for more, "I suppose you got five.. Give me more than that" (Joyce 195). Simon finally loses a violent outburst which the lacquey interprets as a bid for merchandise. Simon and Dilly have become part of the auction; Simon eventually secures a temporary resolution for the situation by allowing Dilly two shillings. Simon effectively barter for some momentary piece of mind, thus the action of the auction and that between he and Dilly is not dissimilar. This situation illuminates the juxtapositional style of the text; however, it also provides a thematic parallel between Simon Dedalus and Father Conmee. Both Simon and Conmee personify the "absent father"; The death of Paddy Dignam and his son's persistent wandering mirror this interior phenomenon. In *Montage In James Joyce's Ulysses*, Craig Barrow cites, "Master Dignam seems better off without a father than the Dedalus children who have one" (Barrow 105). Conmee manifests the paternity of the Catholic Church, yet the absence of charity revealed in his person makes him a poor father figure. As Simon is a patron of the Church, his intolerance and general familial

apathy seem derivative of this community base. Conmee's character reveals itself in juxtaposition between interior monologue and his movement through the city. Just as montage demands constant reassessment from the viewer, the text requires vigilance as configuration of character becomes the operative style of the text.

In spite of its reconciliatory tone, the conclusion of *Ulysses* does not synthesize the work's progress; therefore, the reader's discretion is paramount in developing meaning. A placard that appears in section two of *Ulysses* bears the inscription "Unfurnished Apartments"; the card slips from the sash of the window when a figure within drops a coin for a one-legged sailor. The placard becomes part of a charitable act involving not a definite character, but a "plump bare generous arm"(Joyce 185). Because this caricature is so ambivalent, the charitable idea it represents is faint: inclusive in a remembrance of the episode, but bereft from real character association. As Lenehan and McCoy discuss the dynamics of Molly and Bloom, the card reappears in the window sash. The reader is forced to consider the trace of the previous association between the card and the charitable act, but the disparity involved in the new association prevents it from becoming immediately appropriated to apply in the same way to its new environment. The motif remains essentially "unfurnished", save the reader's ability to develop meaning for it in its new context. The text illuminates this relationship between itself and the reader through various self-reflexive motifs.

The exploration of portable language, or the repetition and consequent reevaluation of certain passages throughout the text, can offer a valuable means to understand the associative nature of the text. Daniel Gunn examines the idea of the portable motif in his essay, "Beware of Imitations"; his commentary illuminates advertising motif as a form of self-reflexivity throughout *Ulysses*. He asserts, "Advertising images are by their nature portable, rather than fixed; they move from place to place, either in the same form or with slight variations, now there, now someplace else, repeating themselves again and again" (Gunn 484). The H.E. L.Y/s "sandwichmen" (Joyce 188) that move through Dublin in much of the "Wandering Rocks" exemplify Gunn's idea of the portable motif; they are a successive formation, yet they are subject to the trappings of the landscape. On reaching a street where the viceregal cavalcade passes, the narrator reveals, "At Ponsonby's corner a jaded white flagon H. halted and four tallhatted white flagons halted behind him, E. L. Y.'s, while outriders pranced past and carriages" (Joyce 208). The sandwichmen are subject to the laws of the street, yet undoubtedly they must still operate in succession for efficacy. The treatment of the text as a system of juxtapositions works in a twofold manner; the reader must engage the text in succession, yet halt to account for oncoming traffic as well as return to previous destinations. The concept of association is revealed as, "Five tallwhitehatted sandwichmen between Monypeny's corner and the slab where Wolfe

Tone's statue was not, eeled themselves turning H. E. L. Y/s and plodded back as they had come" (Joyce 188). In order to render the motif into a significant event that at once corresponds with its current position and its previous spatial designations, it must be viewed in an associative framework. The construction of H. E. L. Y/s admits to the necessity of its successive structure, yet allows for textual deviation to occur. Gunn cites, "motif is a good place to begin, since it refers us to a distinctive aspect of Joyce's narrative practice in *Ulysses*: the detachment of words and phrases from their customary narrative homes and their more or less open transportation from place to place" (Gunn 484). This transportation builds segues and connects different sections of the text to build associative networks.

In sections five and six of "Wandering Rocks", H. E. L. Y/s connects Molly Bloom with Boylan's secretary, Miss Dunne. In section five, Leo Bloom's image, "A darkbacked figure" (Joyce 187), exists with H. E. L. Y/s in a binodal interpolation that interrupts an exchange between Boylan and a cashier at a flower shop. The image of Bloom begets the association of Molly-Boylan-Bloom, while the sandwichmen connect the whole dynamic to the next section. As Miss Dunne sits at her desk wondering about a romance novel hidden in her desk, the sandwichmen pass in the street. They "eel themselves" in the other direction, mirroring the exchange between sections five and six and the likeness manifest in comparing Miss Dunne with Molly Bloom. Like Molly,

Miss Dunne is "waiting" for Boylan; she stares at a Marie Kendall poster on the wall and wonders, "She's not nice looking, is she?" (Joyce 189). Miss Dunne's parodic interaction with a showgirl poster illuminates the sort of visceral cat and mouse game that Molly and Boylan have been playing with one another. In addition to this play on Molly, the fragment, "disk shot down the groove, wobbled a while, ceased and ogled them: six" (Joyce 188) plays on an image of Molly yet to come. This fragment foreshadows the action or juxtaposition of elements in section eight. As mentioned previously, this section illuminates the distinctively uncharitable fellows, McCoy and Lenehan. Previous to their conversation on Molly and Bloom, they observe a new contraption meant to indicate to the arriving bar patrons the number of the musical act performing (Joyce 191). The mention of this device is relative to talk of Molly's tall appetite for lovers. If the use of this element in section six is considered foreshadowing, the text seems to demand an approach which entails reevaluation in order to access these patterns of association. The sandwichmen create a linear textual link between both sections, but the thematic relations stem from a nonlinear connectedness.

"Wandering Rocks" begins with two patches of narrative; one describes "A one-legged sailor", the other the "superior, the very reverend John Conmee S. J." (Joyce 180). These two persons frame the charitable theme of "Wandering Rocks", yet Conmee's interaction with the one-legged sailor affords no glimpse of generosity.

Conmee "blessed him in the sun"; the wording implies an audience that the light of day permits. Conmee's generosity seems contrived, especially when his one opportunity to bestow charity on his flock is handled with a blessing instead of a donation, "(The sailor) jerked short before the convent of the sisters of charity and held out a peaked cap for alms towards the very reverend John Conmee S. J. Father Conmee blessed him in the sun for his purse held, he knew, one silver crown" (Joyce 180). Conmee continues on his walk, continually revealing more about his lack of care. Conmee muses on the disaster of the *General Slocum* in New York, then thinks of Africans not exposed to the idea of Christian salvation as a waste; however, they are "created by God in His Own Likeness" (Joyce 182). Conmee believes that though the souls were created as gods, they will perish for not being able to articulate the name of Christ. Conmee creates his God to be as pathetic as he, one that determines salvation by a system of geographical determination. The passage sandwiched in between Conmee's thoughts on NY and Africa personifies the conductor as a godlike figure; like Conmee's God, he would eject a passenger for "carelessly (throwing) away the ticket." Despite Conmee's grave concerns for the millions of souls lost, he will always favor a "cheerful decorum." He observes, "The solemnity of the occupants of the car seemed.. .excessive for a journey so short and cheap". Conmee "cheapens" the journey of life with his rendering of not an impersonal, but a careless God. Of all the passengers of the tram, Conmee knowing the

grave fate of millions of sinners would seem to preclude any cheerful decorum. In this sense, He seems an outsider devoid of sympathy.

Though "Wandering Rocks" provides a broad canvas for this examination, additional episodes, especially Episode Three, "Proteus," comment upon the serial organization of the text. For example, This process is mirrored or "mired" in the closing moments of "Proteus," "A point, live dog, grew into sight running across the sweep of sand...From farther away, walking shoreward across from the crested tide, figures, two. The two maries." (3.37). From a distance, the two figures are judged in the subspace of Stephen's interior; the identity of the figures transforms as they near him. The live dog acts as a liaison between the figures and Stephen's perception of them. Stephen's perspective continues to metamorphose in accord with the dog's exploration of the beach, "Their dog ambled about a bank of dwindling sand, trotting, sniffing on all sides. Looking for something lost in a past life. Suddenly he made off like a bounding hare, ears flung back, chasing the shadow of a lowskimming gull" (3.38). The dog may represent the reader's inquiry, and Stephen the reader's appropriation of meaning as the details of inquiry are sorted through. This corresponds well with the movement of montage throughout the text; the reader is constantly sorting, as if through varied lifetimes, to attain a convergent meaning that must constantly shift in accord with new textual inquiry and association.

James Joyce's *Ulysses*, with its experimental techniques, attempts to render human consciousness, the associational way we think and process reality. Although readers crave a linear story line to follow, *Ulysses* often foils our attempts to extract an easy-to-follow order. Thus, one can analyze the text with various non-discursive methods. One such method, and the one I have chosen for my thesis, deals with following the associational structure of the "Wandering Rocks" episode and incorporating a theoretical framework that can be applied to many different art forms. Often critics refer to such techniques as "montage;" the current academic discourse dealing with Joyce has just begun to explore the idea of "sampling" to understand the radical techniques Joyce employs. The term "montage" applied to cinema implies production of a rapid succession of images meant to illustrate an association of ideas. Viewing the text of *Ulysses* as montage (or meaning created with serial juxtapositions) enables the reader to tap the various networks of associations that exist in the text. The absence of any formidable resolution guarantees that these networks can be assembled and dismantled infinitely. A reader presented with a fixed conclusion discards inventive exploration of the text and begins to consider "how" or "why" things ended the way they did; the reader of *Ulysses* finds that in the conclusion there is only affirmation of the endless range of interpretive possibilities.

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