

Mrs Gamp in Dublin: Dickensian Joyce

They came down the steps from Leahy's terrace prudently, *Frauenzimmer*: and down the shelving shore flabbily their spayed feet sinking in the silted sand... Number one swung lourdily her midwife's bag, the other's gamp poked in the beach. From the liberties, out for the day: Mrs. Florence McCabe, relict of the late Patk MacCabe, deeply lamented, of Bride Street. One of her sisterhood lugged me squealing into life. Creation from nothing: What has she in the bag? A misbirth with a trailing navel cord hushed into ruddy wool. ¹ (*Proteus*, p. 43)

Florence MacCabe is the first Joycean figure in *Ulysses* modelled on a Dickensian character that of the buoyant, vigorous Mrs Gamp, nurse and midwife of many resources and not many virtues in Martin *Chuzzlewit*, famous for carrying a gig umbrella, eventually called gamp after her. By the time Joyce was writing, gamp had been transferred to current language and would not by itself evoke a Dickensian reminiscence were it not sustained by farther similarities. Both are middle-aged widows, rather fond of food and drink, both are supplied with a female companion in their adventures. Moreover they share an interest in childbirth. Gamp is a nurse and a midwife, so is Florence, or rather so she appears to Stephen. The Dickensian flavour is enforced by Stephen's tale of Florence and her friend Ann going on an outing to Nelson's pillar in “The Parable of the Plums” in *Aeolus*, that echoes the episode of the gentleman and his wife who paid a visit to the Monument in London in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. ²

Dickensian implications scattered throughout the novel were detected almost immediately after *Ulysses* publication, as Whyndham Lewis's remarks in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) prove. In his monographic study on Joyce (1941), Harry Levin noticed a Dickensian touch in the depiction of urban life, in the search of the father, in the disarticulation of discourse. In 1968 comparing Flora Finching's disconnected logorrheic speech in *Little Dorrit* to Molly Bloom's soliloquy, Fred Kaplan supplied a rich bibliography of a growing interest in the Dickensian legacy in *Ulysses*. ³ Still the cryptic quality of several allusions and the limited knowledge about Joyce's familiarity with Dickens combined to slow down the process of identification of some of the sources and As Clayton reminds us, Joyce was always good at hiding the influences that matter most. ⁴ for several years the Dickensian contributions lay dormant. Kaplan mentioned only two overt references to Dickens: a letter to Stanislaus of April 25, 1912, and the allusion to Dickensian landladies in his

¹ All quotations from are from J. Joyce *Ulysses*, London, Penguin 1977.

² C. Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, London, Penguin p.

³ Fred Kaplan, “Dickens' Flora Finching and Joyce's Molly Bloom”, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 23, n. 3 December 1968, 343-346.

⁴ Jay Clayton, “Londublin: Dickens's London in Joyce's Dublin”, *Novel: a forum on fiction*, vol.28, n.3, Spring 1995.

review of T. Baron Russell's *Borlese and Son*. The situation entirely changed after the publication in 1976 of Joyce's paper on the Charles Dickens's centenary, written for the exam he took in Padua when trying to enter the Italian State schools in 1912 and till then laying unread among his papers, edited by Louis Berrone.⁵ The five-pages essay revealed not only his thorough knowledge of the major novels, but also the high opinion he held of him despite the chasm in their conception of art. What Joyce admired was Dickens's portrayal of urban life and his masterly command of the linguistic mean that made him "second only to Shakespeare on his influence on spoken language."⁶

If Dickens is to move you, you must not allow him to stray out of hearing of the chimes of Bow Bells. There he is on his native heath and there are his kingdom and his power. The life of London is the breath of his nostrils: he felt it as no writer since or before his time has felt it. The colours, the familiar noises, the very odours of the great metropolis unite in his work as in a mighty symphony wherein humour and pathos, life and death, hope and despair, are inextricably interwoven.

In his excellent study on "Leopold Bloom as Jewish Pickwick: a New Dickensian Perspective", published in 1979 Mark Spilka outlined the intrinsic empathy between the two writers. In 1995 Joy Clayton investigating the unacknowledged sources of some topical scenes in *Ulysses* in "Londublin: Dickens's London in Joyce's Dublin" came to the conclusion that the works of Dickens represented a more important intertext for Joyce than those of any other British nineteenth-century novelist, an opinion by now widely accepted.⁷

Like Joyce who "began *Ulysses* in naturalism and ended it in parody"⁸, Dickens combined domestic realism and satirical burlesque. And it is this mix that makes his influence much more relevant than that of say Thackeray or George Eliot. As Mark Spilka has pointed out "Dickens' urban grotesque comedies provided Joyce models of middle-class decency".

[Dickens had] a few (if any) equals in the art of presenting a character, fundamentally natural and probable with just one strange, wilful, wayward moral or physical deformity which upsets the equipoise and bears off the character from the world of tiresome reality and as far as the borderland of the fantastic.⁹

Joyce's attitude was all together double-faced, combining scorn and admiration. Of course Dickens's narrative contained themes he heartily disliked, above all sentimentality and do-good

⁵ Cited in M. Spilka, "Leopold Bloom as Jewish Pickwick: a New Dickensian Perspective", *Novel*, Fall 1979, p. 123; see also Louis Berrone, *James Joyce in Padua*, New York, Random House 1977.

⁶ Fred Kaplan, p. 34 3.

⁷ Jay Clayton, "Londublin: Dickens's London in Joyce's Dublin", p. 328. Some critics consider David Copperfield as a model of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. See Michael Patrick Gillespie, *Inverted Volumes Improperly Arranged: James Joyce and his Trieste Library*, Ann Arbor UMI, 1983.

⁸ Hugh Kenner *Joyce's Voices*, Berkeley- Los Angeles- London, University of California Press, 1979, p. ix.

⁹ Cited in Spilka, p. 123-124.

social reformism. On November 6, 1906 he wrote to his brother about his irritation “with the moralizing he perceived in the oratory of so many well-meaning Victorian social reformers: I am nauseated by their lying drivel”.¹⁰ And lying drivel must have appeared to him most of Dickens’s moralism that stood up for all the things Joyce did not care about. His dislike of melodramatic sensibility informs the pathetic episode of the birth of a new child to the Purefoy family, a fierce parody of *David Copperfield* in the *Oxen of the Sun*. The usage of proper names in the passage discloses its source: the imaginary protagonist of the episode is called Doady, Dora’s nickname for David, while the children of the family are named after Charles Dickens’s. David Copperfield crops up again as an object of derision in *Finnegan Wake* where Shawn is alluded to as Doveyed Covetfilles.

Dickens’s mawkish sensibility had its counterbalance in the satirical rendering of society, which offered a disenchanting perspective of life proving him to be at the same time the defender of Victorian morality and the denouncer of its hypocrisies and misdemeanour. In his work Joyce revealed the hidden nature of middle-class respectability, as much as Dickens had done a few decades earlier, especially in the so-called dark novels *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*.

The Dickensian presence operates on two different levels: that of intertextual citations and paracitations, easily referable to the original sources and that of a translitteral reworking of representational models, more difficult to uncover but far more rewarding, as they work as promoters of sense and producers of parodic effects in the Joycean discourse. On the surface we find sentimental Dickens often turned into an object of caricature and disrespect; under the surface Dickensian linguistic patterns operate as the matrix of verbal play.

Of the several intertextual echoes scattered throughout the text, some were no longer particularly Dickensian, for by then they formed part of a common repertoire having gained a place in ordinary language, such as “circumlocution departments”, a satirical hint to red tape bureaucracy modelled on *Little Dorrit*’s “circumlocution office”,¹¹ and the above mentioned gamp; others derived from popular culture such as “prunes and prisms” a traditional utterance in elocution lessons expanded in *Little Dorrit* when Amy is taught how to speak properly in society, and alluded to in *Nausicaa*.¹² *The Sirens* opens with “Imperthnthnthnthnthn” a clear echo from “Let me alone imperence, said the young lady,” in *Pickwick Papers* (p. 257) There are also direct references to *Our Mutual Friend*, the most experimental novel Dickens ever wrote and the closest to Joycean

¹⁰ T. T. Schwarze, *Joyce and The Victorians*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2002, p.96.

¹¹ C. Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, London, Penguin 1994, chapter X, pp.104-123. “Also, without being actually positive, it struck him a great field was to be opened up in the line of opening up new routes to keep pace with the times apropos of the Fishguard-Rosslare route which, it was mooted, was once more on the tapis in the circumlocution departments with the usual quantity of red tape and dillydallying of effete fogeedom and dunderheads generally” (*Eumaeus*, pp. 547-48).

¹² *Ulysses*, “Say prunes and prisms forty times every morning, cure for fat lips.” C. Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, London, Penguin Books, 1994, “Mostly, Prunes and Prisms”, pp.503-513.

techniques.¹³ Dickens seems to have been also a possible font for some allusions to English folklore in *Circe*.¹⁴ Some citations may have escaped attention but the ones so far identified supply evidence enough of the writer's familiarity with the novelist.

More significant, and far more difficult to identify are Dickens's hidden influences. Entering the vague field of reverberations one treads on treacherous ground. The unsolved question is how much these reverberations are direct filiations from the generating text and how much they come from *l'air du temps*? As Clayton puts it "if one is interested in connecting literary history with social, economic or sexual conditions in the period than one must develop models of literary relations that are not restricted to textual exchanges."¹⁵ To do so one must stop and consider what the two writers had in common, no matter how far apart their artistic practice was. As already mentioned, Joyce and Dickens shared an interest in the commonplace: they were both attracted by the exploitation of platitudes and they revelled in popular culture they gave voice to in their extraordinary recreation of orality. Both knew how to deal sympathetically with middle-class habits whenever they felt in tune with their protagonists; they also shared a profound sense of belonging reflected in the love-hatred relationship with their native cities.

Elective affinities are not enough to prove a direct connection. Take, for instance, a theme attributed by several critics to a Dickensian source of inspiration, that of the putative father as opposed to the biological parent, a leit motiv in Dickens's major writings, the homely, happy family being a dream rather than a reality in an urban setting, where the natural father is more often than not either absent or dead, and when present proves to be selfish, mean, unreliable, or, even worst, turns out a wilful, despotic tyrant. Very rarely the natural family corresponded to the Victorian ideal of responsible parenthood. Dickens's novels are peopled by elective fathers: Magwitch in *Great Expectations*, Wickfield in *David Copperfield*, Brownstone in *Oliver Twist*, Jarndyce in *Bleak House*. As the theme was very popular in nineteenth-century narrative, from George Eliot's *Silas Mariner* to Hector Malot's *Sans famille*, it is almost impossible to attribute it to Dickens. So that rather than trying to trace a direct derivation, I'll concentrate on potential affinities that mark the actual changing path of narrative discourse from Victorian domestic realism to Modernist fantasy, reaching beyond objectivity.

In the great tradition of urban fiction, Dickens and Joyce stand out for their mastery in capturing the complexity of contemporary conurbation. They sensed their native town as a physical place and as a state of mind. Both were obsessed with topographical accuracy as if supplying

¹³ "Our mutual friend's stories are like himself" (p. 556); "After the burial of a mutual friend" (p.575), *Eumaeus*.

¹⁴ "Joyce displays all these items at the beginning of *Circe* where picture of Nelson, the story of Dick Whittington, the chimes of Blow bells, and a line from 'The Death of Nelson' appear in the same scene," J. Clayton, p.338.

¹⁵ Jay Clayton, p. 133.

historical evidence would add a down-to-earth touch in portraying the nightmarish reality of the modern city. The nineteenth-century metropolis involved “in literary terms what Marx and Engels had taken up in economic terms; the land question; the displacement of a peasant class; the entrapment of a commercial class in a new kind of city controlled by money and commodity relationships; the breakdown of the family as the young leave the land; the effect of this type of transformation on women, the rise of the criminal as an urban type; the rise of urban institutions like the boarding house, which in the city substitutes for the nuclear family; the effect on human consciousness of the expanding city; the city as a maze, seemingly beyond human scale.”¹⁶ Dickens was among the first to depict the new industrial city in great figurative language. The flourishing of his style, and the dynamics of his imaginative humour vitalised the accuracy of representation. Attractions and repulsion move his descriptions, animating the inanimate and de-humanising the human.

On their pages Victorian London and Edwardian Dublin appear as a labyrinthine place that possessed the greatness of the metropolis and the cosiness of a small village. For both of them the two capitals preserved some characters of small town life where one could still feel at home.

The affinities between the two writers extend to the choice of representational details. In Stephen and his fellow students walking through Dublin streets Joyce recaptures the juvenile atmosphere of the Dickensian flaneurs, Nicholas Nickleby, Mortimer Lightwood, Eugene Wrayburn, wandering about London endlessly debating everlasting questions and waiting for something to happen.

They are both masters in the chronicle of the ordinary. The fast growing city is for Dickens a place of estrangement, inhumanly cold and heartless and at the same time is the palpitating scene of suffering lives. He preserves the familial atmosphere of places where people may encounter people they know, talk and gossip. In so doing Dickens liked to linger on those aspects of material life that make up our quotidian: the boarding house, the pubs, the offices are the scenes of encounters portrayed with a minute detailed accuracy.

Joyce himself moved along the same lines for, as Lehan suggested, he never went beyond the commercial, industrial city. The majority of characters one comes across in London and Dublin belong to the lower and middle class, engaged in commercial and manual activities. In the proliferation of small talk their colourful manner of speech mimics local brogue, the cockney and the Irish, betraying in their voices their social extraction. In portraying the life of urban middle classes both were moved by a compassionate *vis comica*. (That’s why Dickens so important in *Ulysses* is only a minor presence in *The Portrait* and *Dubliners*.) In *Ulysses* the humour is largely at

¹⁶ R. Lehan, in *The city in literature*, California University Press, 1998, p.107.

the expense of the protagonist, in Dickens it is usually reserved to potentially minor characters, adding to the humanity of sympathetic figures.

As John Henry Raleigh had argued in 1958 and Mark Spilka upheld,¹⁷ Joyce advanced the bourgeois line in fiction, bringing to its final stage Victorian literary domesticity satirising its earnest, deeply set sentimentality and subverting its spatio-temporal logic. Dickens, who remained fundamentally conventional in his approach to the novel, disrupted some basic features of mimetic realism in his paradoxical uses of language. His works present a patchwork between traditional forms of representations and imaginative transgressions. His innovations never went so far as to subvert the progress of the story in time and space: the experimental passages in his narrative were made up of digressions and accretions not essential to the main plot development. While Dickens is effusive and systematic in building up themes and characters, hence making his intentions patent and thus leading his audience through the story, Joyce moves by leaps and bounds parcelling his tale and challenging the reader's abilities to discover intertextual connections.

In *Ulysses* Dickens's presence is more directly felt in the first six parts of the novel where Edwardian Dublin reverberates Victorian London. *Wandering Rocks*, for instance, combines both the amiable representation of gentle creatures peopling the city and of the grotesque and deformed. It opens with father Conmee walking along the street showing a warm-hearted regard to the small society surrounding him. The Dickensian touch is present not only in the affable tone towards the people he is bumping into, but also in the introduction of the one-legged sailor, a poor beggar trying to catch people's attention by singing an old popular patriotic song. The invalid veteran from earlier wars was a characteristic figure in British narrative, reflecting the high grade of poverty among the outcasts. Joyce could have drawn him from anywhere but for the episode containing some remarkable similarities leading to Silas Wegg in *Our Mutual Friend*.¹⁸ Wegg is a good specimen of Dickensian exploitation of the grotesque of the body, a feature that much attracted Joyce.

In Dickens Joyce admired the "human fantastic" that gave life to warm blooded-figures: Micawber, Pumblechoof, Peggotty, Sam Weller and his father, Sara Gamp, Joe Gargery, all mentioned in the centenary essay and who play secondary roles in the novels - that is to say they are highly typified figurants and not the actual heroes and heroines of the Dickensian tales. Breaking into the fantastic was brought about through the exploration of the bizarre in the materiality of the body as a starting point for a fuller representation of man, injecting sound realism into recurrent clichés, paradoxically adding to reality by abandoning mimetic narrative conventions of the period.

¹⁷ J. H. Raleigh, "Victorian morals and the modern novel", *Partisan Review*, N. 25, Spring 1958, pp. 2431-264. See also Spilka.

¹⁸ C. Dickens *Our Mutual Friend*, p.336

In his representation of mankind Joyce went well beyond the Dickensian experiment, enclosing all sorts of human weaknesses in his hero Leopold Bloom and in Stephen Dedalus, while Dickens usually left his heroes and heroines untouched of unbecoming gestures and words with the result that more often than not they are idealised in their high seriousness and stereotyped in their manners. In analysing the body and its functions Joyce did away once and for all with Victorian prudishness. Dickens stands in an intermediate position: the censure of the period precluded overt references to sexuality and scatology, but apart from that, the body prevails as a mode of defining a collective way of being, from natural actions such as eating, belching, spitting, heavy breathing, heartburn, choking, to unpleasant acquired habits, nail biting, nose picking, scratching, unwashing of the body, cracking fingers. Moreover several of his characters are somewhat disabled: lame, deaf, crippled, affected by polio and deficiencies of all sorts. Often physical deformity stresses their intellectual limitations, but it is not always so. Jenny Wren in *Our Mutual Friend* moving about on crutches is one of the most gifted speakers in the novel. Though the primary source of Gertie's episode lies in the popular press of a later period, her limping figure brings to mind Jenny and her handicapped sisters Dickens distributed in his novels in the sympathetic ambience that surrounds physical malformation in the young.

People moving along London streets are sketched in their attractions and repulsions. Like Joyce, Dickens disseminates a distinctive gesture, a mannerism picked up now and again through a verbal process much akin to what Fritz Senn has defined as dislocation, in a prelude to the extended metaphor technique. Typically Dickensian clues in *Ulysses* are Simon Dedalus's repeatedly alluded-to biting his nails (*The Sirens*), that reverberated Pank's obsessive nail biting in *Little Dorrit*; Stephen picking his nose and his uncleanness of the body that found good companions in *Snagby* and *Smallweed* in *Bleak House*.

The deformed bodies and the jerky movements find their objective correlative in the grotesque representation of the city likened to a living organism, as we see in *Our Mutual Friend* where the thick, unhealthy, polluted atmosphere is rendered through a prosopopeia:

Animate London, with smarting eyes and irritated lungs, was blinking, wheezing and choking; inanimate London was a sooty spectre, divided in purpose between being visible and invisible, and so being wholly neither.

The whole metropolis was a heap of vapour charged with muffled sound of wheels, and enfolding a gigantic catarrh (p. 479)

Animating the inanimate, a typical Dickensian device, returns in the summer fog that comes up more than once in *Ulysses*, a clear echo of the autumnal opening of *Bleak House*, imprinting an animal image on the city that of the dinosaur in London and of the snake in Dublin.

Fog everywhere. Fog from up the river, where it flows among green airs and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty city).... fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering 'little 'prentice boy on the deck. (p.13)¹⁹

Snakes of river fog creep slowly. From drains clefts, cesspools, middens arise on all side's stagnant fumes (*Circe*, p. 428)

Bleak House looms in the background of the trial scene in *Circe* where the presentation of the jury box offers an exemplary summing up of the fog and justice metaphor investing Chancery Court.

A panel of fog rolls back rapidly, reveals rapidly in the jurybox the faces of Martin Cunningham, foreman silkhatted, Jack Power, Simon Dedalus, Tom Kernan, Ned Lambert, John Henry Menton, Myles Crawford, Lenehan, Paddy Leonard, Nosey Flynn, M'Coy and the featureless face of a Nameless One. (*Circe* p.450)

Hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery. ...with a foggy glory round his head, softly fenced in with crimson cloth and curtains, addressed by a large advocate with great whiskers, a little voice, and an interminable brief (*Bleak House*, p. 14),

In *Ulysses* the smells of food and sickness, the polluted river, the stinking public houses draw “dear dirty Dublin” close to “dirty London”. Decomposition and decay point to a sense of an ending, casting a dark shadow on the two capitals, where death constitutes a central object of attention. In representing death in the city, one of the major themes in his fiction, Dickens moves between the extremes of a melodramatic, sentimental participation, full of tears and a detailed, description showing a morbid complaisance in the repulsive aspects of a lifeless body. In some cases only - the ones that most encountered nineteenth-century sensibility and have long since been the most popular with a large audience – death was portrayed in pathetic scenes of heart-rending effusions of sorrow and deep emotions pervaded by an inner spiritual dignity, such as Little Nell's much lamented death, Jo's melodramatic demise in *Bleak House* and little Johnny's serene surrendering of his life in *Our Mutual Friend*. Elsewhere the passing away was conveyed as a palpable phenomenon of physical sufferings that did not spare the reader the horror of a violent end and the repulsive vision of putrefying flesh of the corpses fished out of the Thames in *Our Mutual Friend*. Occasionally death is analysed in an aseptic, scientific attention and considered with the cold detached curiosity of a dispassionate observer, that can be noticed in little Pip in *Great Expectations* while perusing his family's tombstones. Dickensian implications come to mind in

¹⁹ All references are to C. Dickens, *Bleak House*, London, Penguin 1996.

reading Bloom's reflections on the decomposition of the body in the churchyard at Patrick Dingham's funeral, and in Stephen's musing on the drowned.

The beginning of life and the physical torments that accompany the lying-in labour was an object of inquiry for Dickens as much as it for the heartless clinical staff in the maternity ward in *Ulysses*. The episode of the medical students in *Pickwick Papers* and the story of Venus, "the articulator of the human bones", in *Our Mutual Friend* revolve around the macabre comic vein of the skeleton and its bones. In Venus's rags and bones shop among an exhibit of a most fanciful set of odd second-hand objects and of animal and human remnants for the collector to pick up and for the man of science to put to use, there stands "a Hindoo baby in a bottle, curved up with his big head tucked under him, as he would instantly throw summersault if the bottle were large enough." (p.123) Dickens always showed a morbid concern in childbirth and the risks it involved for the mothers, so many of them dying just after giving life to their children. David Copperfield born with a caul, Oliver Twist who almost choked for lack of breath, ailing Paul Dombey all were orphaned in their early days. He was equally interested in the decomposition of the body, as can be observed in the description of the drowned in the Thames in *Our Mutual Friend*, Captain Hawdon, the unfortunate Esther Summerson's father whose corpse bears the signs of his death by an opium overdose and Krook's charred remains after combustion in *Bleak House*. Drowning whether real or faked, a major theme in *Our Mutual Friend*, was very much on the mind of the modernists in their fear of death by the water.²⁰ In *Ulysses* it is a leit motiv that haunts Stephen's mind.

In the world of the living in Dickens the awkwardness of the body often accompanies the disarticulation of discourse, each character developing an individual idiolect, unmistakably marked by a series of paradoxical idiotisms and rhetorical devices of fragmentation, much like the jerky movements that typified deformity.

Disarticulation of discourse that is to say the ways in which he started to play about with the signifier, departing from set rules and expanding the semantic field by exploiting phonic and lexical associations, is the element that most joins Dickens to Joyce's linguistic experimentation. Brought in at first as an attempt to mimic spoken language Dickens's disruption of logical discourse was eventually put to intense dramatic effects creating a new and unheard of prototype of discourse.

In his own days his stylistic extravagances gained him some very harsh criticisms, the diction of *Our Mutual Friend* especially came under severe scrutiny by Henry James. It was not until fairly recently that by applying the tools of Joycean scholarship to a textual analysis of his discourse, we have witnessed a serious reevaluation of his linguistic strategies, by now thought of as far more artistically and intellectually stimulating than earlier commentators first asserted. Moving

²⁰ T.S.Eliot was reading *Our Mutual Friend* while composing the *Waste Land*. See

retrospectively it has become quite common to look at Dickens as if he were paradoxically Joyce's disciple. In effect Dickensian scholars learnt from the Joyceans how to explore Dickens's peculiar diction. Joycean scholarship has supplied the required tools to explore the complexity of a writer so fascinating and so contradictory as Dickens is. His creative fury Joyce paid homage drew vigour from the blurring of the boundaries of traditional linguistic decorum and the introduction of ungrammatical clauses whenever he tried to recreate actual speech on paper.²¹

Dickens shares with Joyce an extraordinary lexical creativity, founded on similar devices, such as exploiting the literariness of the expression, breaking syntactical logic, altering the flow of discourse by either removing or overcharging punctuation. Stylistic interlace, variations, alliterations and assonances, sound patterns, distinctive rhythms, free associations, broken syntax, which are the marks of oral literature, abound whenever Dickens leaves the traditional flow of narration of the past to enter the dramatised orality of present.²² In Dickens the frequent introduction of elliptical sentences, staccato phrases and occasional extended metaphors mark the most innovative passages. In earlier works, such as *Pickwick Papers*, deviation from ordinary discourse order was employed as a comic device, closer to farce than to humour and satire and usually confined to the dialogues as we can see in Jingle's disconnected phrasing, where all coordination and subordination have been suppressed.

Capital game – well played – some strokes admirable... warm - red hot – friend the Colonel – Sir Thomas Blazo – who should get the greatest number of runs – Won the toss – first innings – seven o'clock a.m. six native to look out (PP 166)

In his mature works, especially in *Our Mutual Friend*, broken sentences go well beyond the limited capacity of communication we find in so many of his comic characters. Dickens perfected his art of renovating speech, investing in psychological construction. Mispronunciation, misunderstanding, malapropism, unexpected phonic and graphic associations enrich the semantic density of discourse, extending the literal meaning of single words and expression and generating new meanings and new words. Twisting the tongue does not only apply to the private language of the single characters – something widely practised from Jingle's days in *Pickwick Papers*, - but also to that of the narrator. Like Carlyle, Carroll and Ruskin Dickens entered in open conflict with the rhetoric of positivistic diction and he was the most outreaching in his results, through a pulverisation and dissemination of words and bits of words.

²¹ Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, new and revised edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1982, pp.320- 321 Joyce's ambivalent attitude to Dickens as a great creator of characters and a weak artist is best summed up in Ellman's words, Dickens's distinction as being second only to Shakespeare to his influence upon the spoken language. On the other hand, while admitting 'creative fury', he regretted a deficiency in art. As to Dickens's touted 'greatness of soul,' Joyce said the compliment was just as misguided as was the accusation of 'clap-trap.'

²² K. Wales, *The Language of James Joyce*, London, Macmillan 1992.

I shall quote only one or two examples of Dickens's closeness to Joyce's verbal creativity in *Ulysses*. The first comes from Garrett Stewart's exploration of Dickens's linguistic density. Arguing that his fiction entails a more radical reading practice than criticism ordinarily presupposes, Stewart moves on to prove his point by reading "Harmony", the name of the late John Harmon's residence in *Our Mutual Friend*, as a combination of harm and money, a pristine example of a *porte-manteaux* word. The verbal play originates in "Silas Wegg's disarticulation of the name of the place, when for the first time he is being conveyed there "and- why-did-they callitharm-Ony?... Harm and money imbricated within a single phonemic span, encode the paired sins that at one and the same time cannot be simultaneously verbalized ." ²³

The second example, which comes from *Little Dorrit*, shows how far the rhetoric of the "seamless-hypotactic narrative" has progressed from *Pickwick*'s day to the meandering speech by the not too young and no longer attractive widow Flora Finching. ²⁴

"In Italy is she really?", said Flora, " with the grapes and the figs growing everywhere and lava necklaces and bracelets too that land of poetry with burning mountains picturesque beyond belief though if the organ boys come away from the neighbourhood not to be scorched nobody can wonder being so young and bringing their white mice with them most humane, and is she really in that favoured land with nothing but blue about her and dying gladiators and Belvederas throughout though Mr F himself did not believe for his objection when in spirit was that images could not be true there being no medium between expensive quantities of linen badly got up and in all creases and none whatever...

"Venice preserved too" said she" I think you have been there is it well or ill preserved for people differ so and macaroni if they really eat it like the conjurors why not cut it shorter, you are acquainted Arthur – dear Doyce and Clenman at least not dear and assuredly not Doyce... (pp.535-36)

Comparing Flora's speech Molly's monologue, after all, as Burgess suggests, may be not so original as it looks. ²⁵

Dickens's linguistic experiments originated in the forms of the popular theatre he was a great fan of and a faithful follower. In his novels he introduced amusing dramatic sequences by joining speeches together through a series of short connecting links modelled on stage instructions in a script, thus suddenly breaking the narrative flow to be resumed with an equally abrupt transition of style a few

²³ Nicholas Royall, "Our Mutual Friend," in *Dickens Refigured. Bodies, desires and other histories*, ed. John Schad, Manchester University Press, 1996, p.42, citing Garrett Stewart, *Reading Voices: literature and the phonotext*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990

²⁴ See Robert Golding, *Idiolects in Dickens*, London, Macmillan 1985.

²⁵ Anthony Burgess, *Joyprick*, Andre Deutsch, London 1973, p. 59-61, see also Katheyn Wales, "Dickens and interior monologue, *Language and Style*, 1984

pages after. Absorbing a different genre technique implied abandoning the reassuring past tense of the narrating voice for the uncertainty of the present:

'We are all very much interested in the man from Somewhere,'
Veneering observes.
Then the four Buffers, taking heart of grace all four at once, say:
'Deeply interested!'
'Quite excited!'
'Dramatic!'
'Man from Nowhere, perhaps!' (*Our Mutual Friend* p.55)

'Madness and moonshine,' is then the compressed verdict of the
Genius. 'A man may do anything lawful, for money. But for no
money!--Bosh!'
What does Boots say? Boots says he wouldn't have done it under twenty thousand pounds.
What does Brewer say?
Brewer says what Boots says.
What does Buffer say?
Buffer says he knows a man who married a bathing-woman, and bolted. (*Our Mutual Friend* p.891)

Implications of Dickensian dramatization of the scene occur even in *Circe* one of the most experimental parts of *Ulysses*, construed around devices and jargon drawn from the music-hall and the vaudeville.

Another favourite trick was playing about with names of people. Most of their characters are defined in several manners, their appellatives are mutable and unstable. In Dickens the protagonists are often designated by different names, David Copperfield is also Doady, Daisy, Trotwood, Trot, Esther Summerson Dame Duden, Little woman; some are defined by attributes of all sorts, the fat boy, the Golden dustman, the analytical chemist, the wandering Chairman; others by metonymy Wooden Leg for Silas Wegg, Boots for Weller. All designations thrive on iterations and distortions. So what's most Dickensian then that Bloom, Bloomenfield, Blumenfeld, Henry Flower and "To the door of the dining room came bald Pat, came bothered Pat, came Pat, waiter of Ormond." (*The Sirens*, 266)

Proper names can also generate lexical extensions with social and political implications raising secondary characters to imaginary higher social roles in setting the pace of life. Podsnappian, Podsnappery from Podsnap, Pecksniffian from Pecksniff satirise dreams of greatness in ordinary people as much as Bloom and Bloomites do.

In playing about with names Dickens stopped short at nothing. In *Pickwick* he almost touched blasphemy in disrespectfully addressing religion when Sam Weller's father gibes at a quack preacher, deriding his empty sermonizing as mere clap-trap about Saint Simon Within and Saint

Walker Without, a jest that, says Spilka, “anticipates Joyce’s Saint Anonymus and saint Pseudonymous in the encyclopaedic listings of *The Cyclops* chapter.”²⁶

A favourite target in his satire were the upper classes, as shown in the burlesque listing of members of the House of Lords plotting the political future of the country at Lord Dedlock’s, a ghost-like figure of the past outside the pale of contemporary political contest.

[Lord Boodle] perceives with astonishment that supposing the present government to be overthrown, the limited choice of the Crown, in the formation of a new ministry, would lie between Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle—supposing it to be impossible for the Duke of Foodle to act with Goodle, which may be assumed to be the case in consequence of the breach arising out of that affair with Hoodle. Then, giving the Home Department and the leadership of the House of Commons to Joodle, the Exchequer to Koodle, the Colonies to Loodle, and the Foreign Office to Moodle, what are you to do with Noodle? You can’t offer him the Presidency of the Council; that is reserved for Poodle. You can’t put him in the Woods and Forests; that is hardly good enough for Quoodle. What follows? That the country is shipwrecked, lost, and gone to pieces (as is made manifest to the patriotism of Sir Leicester Dedlock) because you can’t provide for Noodle! (p.190)

Joyce moved along the same line in listing the members of a mock fashionable world in *The Cyclops*:

The fashionable international world attended *en masse* this afternoon at the wedding of the chevalier Jean Wyse de Neaulan, grand high chief ranger of the Irish National Foresters, with Miss Fir Conifer of Pine Valley, Lady Sylvester Elmshade, Mrs Barbara Lovebirch, Miss Polly Ash, Miss Holly Hazeleyes, Miss Daphne Bays, Miss Dorothy Canebreak ... (p.325)

In several epigrammatic sentences Dickens was no doubt a precursor of Joyce in exploiting what Jacques Aubert has called the “material accidental meaningless aspects of language.” Paradoxical lexical and phonetic associations run smoothly in apparently logically convincing statements, as can be seen in the following examples, bordering on nonsense, taken respectively from *Dombey and Son* and *Ulysses*.²⁷

Major Bagstock took his lobster-eyes and his apoplexy to the club.²⁸

Provost’s House: The Reverend Salmon: tinned salmon. Well tinned in there (*Circe*, 496)

²⁶ Spilka, p. 127.

²⁷ A. Burgess, p.51

²⁸ C. Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, London, Penguin 1990; see also Garrett Stewart, “ Dickens and language” in *Charles Dickens*, ed. by John O’ Jordan, Cambridge University Press 2001.

Taking language at its literally value is often exploited to create a grotesque representation of characters and situations, as we find in the conjugal dialogues of an unhappily-married couple of two swindlers, the Lammlers in *Our Mutual Friend*, where “the skeleton in the cupboard” comes out of the cupboard and performs as an actor.

They never addressed each other, but always some invisible presence that appeared to take a station about midway between them. Perhaps the skeleton on the cupboard comes out to be talked to, on such domestic occasions?

‘I have never seen any money in the house,’ said Mrs Lammler to the skeleton, ‘except my own annuity. That I swear.’

‘You needn’t take the trouble of swearing,’ said Mr Lammler to the skeleton; ‘once more, it doesn’t matter. You never turned your annuity to so good an account.’

‘Good an account! In what way?’ asked Mrs Lammler.

‘In the way of getting credit, and living well,’ said Mr Lammler.

Perhaps the skeleton laughed scornfully on being entrusted with this question and this answer; certainly Mrs Lammler did, and Mr Lammler did.

‘And what is to happen next?’ asked Mrs Lammler of the skeleton.

‘Smash is to happen next,’ said Mr Lammler to the same authority.

After this, Mrs Lammler looked disdainfully at the skeleton—but without carrying the look on to Mr Lammler—and drooped her eyes.

After that, Mr Lammler did exactly the same thing, and drooped his eyes. A servant then entering with toast, the skeleton retired into the closet, and shut itself up. (p. 619)

Joyce’s borrowings from Dickens are extremely significant in their selective partiality as a key to his evaluation of Victorian culture. In Dickens linguistic experimentation, although it occupies a considerable space, remains a sideline in the general economy of his work. At heart he was a conservative: for him as for most Victorians the novel needed not be a perfect specimen of verbal skill, but a mimetic representation of actual life, appealing more to the psychology of the reader than to his aesthetic perception. The modern critical consciousness of the literary artefact did not come unto his compass. He did not feel the stringent need for “the literary artist to be a scholar.”²⁹

Equally deficient was Dickens’s grounding in philological and linguistic studies. While Joyce, and before him Ruskin, Pater and Carroll embedded their theories in the text, Dickens enacted the conflicting roles of verbal communication in a pragmatic way. Right from the start he

²⁹ Walter Pater, “Style” in *Literary Appreciations*, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1987, p. 12. “The literary artist is of necessity a scholar, and in what he proposes to do will have in mind, first of all, the scholar and the scholarly conscience. “

exploited misapprehension as an explosive mine of verbal fantasy into an otherwise traditional narrative, a line that derived more from a natural flair for language than from a deliberate design.

Dickens opened his career at the age of twenty-four with a book centred on an inner debate on language, empirically staged around incommunicability.³⁰ In *Pickwick Papers* he had Pickwick playing the believer in the absolute value of words, Jingle the master of syllepsis and ambiguity, Sam Weller the supporter of contextualized speech. By trial and error Pickwick discovers verbal polysemy and the deceitfulness of the human tongue. At the end of the journey maturity comes to Pickwick from experiencing the impenetrability and ambiguity of words once removed from their context. Coming to terms with the changeableness of language meant coming to terms with time and history.

In his earlier writings the exploitation of malapropism, false friends, phonic associations and accidental connections in disjointed speeches, modelled on the popular theatre of the period, was introduced to a comic end. Eventually Dickens applied the rhetoric of dissociation inherent in such technique to a wider verbal domain no longer confined to satire. Such process originated a semantic web of affinities overlapping through interacting linguistic patterns.

Dickens often broke the linguistic decorum, not only in the dialogues, mimicking spoken English within a wide range of social registers, but also in the authorial commentary, a practice he started at the time of *Sketches by Boz* and brought to perfection in the later novels and in the some of the tales: *Boots*, *Nobody's Luggage* and *Dr Marigold* all offer a pre taste of the stream of consciousness technique.

Usually Dickens employs such devices as part of a character's externalization, very rarely he makes them an instrument of internal exploration. The loose syntactical structure, the erratic use of the punctuation, and the free association technique all offer an innovative strategy in the rendering of human language. Jingle's jerky manner of speech mimicked theatrical devices used in farcical pieces and preserves a certain mechanic quality. Later the same strategy was extended to free indirect speech. The disjointed manner acquired a psychological quality in characters' construction and eventually turned into a reinforcement of linguistic possibilities stretching meanings into new verbal implications. The apparent incongruity of several speeches obeys to an inner subverbal congruity.

Of course the Dickens we've been talking about represents specific areas within his narrative, the ones that interested Joyce most. The overall frame remains highly traditional in its respect of a consequential order in the telling of the story. Leaving the structure of the novel untouched he infused new life into it by discarding the boundaries of linear language in mimetic realism through

³⁰ James E. Marlow, "Pickwick's writing: propriety and language"

an exercise that having started in jest, became the propeller of a renovated speech, carried away by the hidden magic of the evocative power of the word.

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