

## Innards and Titbits:

### Joyce's Digestive Revolution in the Novel

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Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls. He liked thick giblet soup, nutty gizzards, a stuffed roast heart, liverslices fried with crustcrumbs, fried hencods' roes. Most of all he liked grilled mutton kidneys which gave to his palate a fine tang of faintly scented urine. (*U* 4.1–5)<sup>1</sup>

Such is the startling and very first presentation of Joyce's main character in *Ulysses*, situated at the beginning of the fourth episode in the novel—an eccentric, not to say slightly off-putting, taste for innards, which is posited from the start as if it were Bloom's definition or operating principle. Many scholars have commented upon this unconventional beginning, but few have considered it as purposefully connecting the digestive process with Joyce's modernist aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, while modernist explorations of subjectivity have followed a wide array of stylistic and narrative experiments, they have usually presented readers with the delicate rendering of subtle sensations and perceptions coming from the outside world, most of them visual, and most of the time remaining on the threshold of good taste, or even of what tastes good. Whenever food is mentioned, its flavour tends to be a lot more conventional than “a fine tang of faintly scented urine,” and the prevalence of symbolic significance often ensures that we probe no further into the materiality of the ingestive and digestive

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<sup>1</sup> All references to *Ulysses* are to the Penguin's corrected edition by Hans Walter Gabler (Penguin, 1986). They are cited parenthetically in the text, the first number referring to the episode in the book and the second number to the lines in the episode.

<sup>2</sup> David Trotter, in his article on “The Modernist Novel,” considers that the June 1918 issue of the *Little Review*, which included the first publication of the “Calypso” episode beginning with these four lines, marked a mythical moment of origin for Anglo-Saxon Modernism. However, although he mentions “the moment when those inner organs appeared” and Bloom's “idiosyncratic palate,” he does not make anything more of this peculiarity nor does he see the wider critical questions it might pose (*Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, edited by Michael Levenson, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 83). Hugh Kenner also saw in this passage a typical example of Joyce's “extreme specificity,” but again without linking this phenomenon to the writing of the body's inner functioning (Hugh Kenner, “Joyce and Modernism,” *James Joyce*, Harold Bloom ed., Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003, p. 98). A similar point is made by Sean Latham in *Joyce's Modernism* (Dublin: The National Library of Ireland Joyce Studies 17, February 2005, p. 13).

processes at work.<sup>3</sup> Rarely have texts passed that last frontier of novelistic realism—beyond a character's palate and down inside his digestive track. Bloom's introduction, through its allusion to taste and palate, but mainly with its mention of numerous inner organs, draws a new line and collapses ingestion with the very end of the digestive process. Joyce thus presents a strikingly condensed vision of the alimentary cycle, with his main character as an essential stage in its progression, thus bearing the promise of a radically different perspective on such matters. Bloom's famous defecation at the end of the "Calypso" episode will only confirm this digestive revolution in the novel. The larger critical questions posed by this revolution, and their implications for Joyce's modernist aesthetics and literary creation as a whole, is what I want to examine here.

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Regarding this famous introduction to Leopold Bloom, David Trotter notes that, until it appears in the beginning of the "Calypso" episode, *Ulysses* could be construed as a sequel to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.<sup>4</sup> The first three chapters in the novel are, like *A Portrait*, entirely dominated by the character of Stephen Dedalus. The Linati Schema circulated by Joyce to explain the structure of his book also reveals that, unlike all the other episodes in *Ulysses*, these first three chapters have no body part attached to them: in the column for "Organ," Joyce has written "Telemaco non soffre ancora il corpo."<sup>5</sup> The column for "Time" further reveals that, although the first three episodes of the Telemachiad have carried us from 8 to 11 am, the clock seems suddenly rewound and the fourth episode begins the day anew at 8 in the morning, this time from Bloom's perspective. From the fourth chapter on, Joyce seems to have resolved to rewrite his novel as Bloom's day, and June 16th 1904 clearly becomes what it has often been called since—"Bloomsday." In other words, *Ulysses* only begins to construct—and even reconstruct—itself as a body with the arrival of Leopold Bloom.

The absence of a body for the book in the Telemachiad does not mean that there are no allusions to the body or to bodily processes in these first three episodes. In fact, just like Bloom, Stephen in Martello Tower begins the day with

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<sup>3</sup> This is for instance the case with the famous tea taken by Miss Kilman and Elizabeth in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, where a running parallel associates Miss Kilman's consummation of the sugared cakes—and particularly chocolate éclairs—with her ambiguous friendship with Clarissa's daughter and failure to take possession of her. The only phrase related to digestion in the scene appears in the end, with Elizabeth's departure "drawing out, so Miss Kilman felt, the very entrails in her body, stretching them as she crossed the room..." Clearly this mention counts for its symbolic and psychological significance rather than as specific description of a bodily process, Woolf having further chosen the traditional term ("entrails"), rather than a medical, scientific term (such as Joyce's "peristalsis," which appears in the Linati schema, see further).

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> "Telemachus does not yet bear a body." Copies of the Linati Schema and Gorman and Gilbert Plan for *Ulysses* can be found in many scholarly books about *Ulysses*. Richard Ellmann's *Ulysses on the Liffey* has them clearly displayed and compared in appendix (London: Faber, 1972, p. 187 sq.).

breakfast. In this case, however, the materiality and sustaining quality of this nourishment are subsumed by its symbolic significance. The whole meal seems a continuation of the mock mass on the parapet which opens *Ulysses*: Buck Mulligan's priestly figure is moving around the hearth in its long gown, the decor described as if it were an altar, complete with cross, incense and light from Heaven:

In the gloomy livingroom of the tower Buck Mulligan's gowned form moved briskly to and fro about the hearth, hiding and revealing its yellow glow. Two shafts of soft daylight fell across the flagged floor from the high barbacans: and at the meeting of their rays a cloud of coalsmoke and fumes of fired grease floated, turning. (1.313–17)

Stephen is reduced to playing the part of Mulligan's altar boy, laying down the shaving bowl, being ordered round to fetch bread, butter and honey, while his friend serves the eggs and tea as if they were the body and blood of Christ, and lavishes his blessings on the assembly.

Beyond this parody of the Catholic ritual, which is the continuation of Mulligan's joke, we sense that Stephen has a different understanding of the scene. As he is wont, he is driven to interpret his surroundings as a series of symbols or as a message to be deciphered ("signatures of all things I am here to read" 3.2).<sup>6</sup> This is especially true in the end of the breakfast scene, with the arrival of the old milkwoman. As she appears, he muses: "Old and secret she had entered from a morning world, maybe a messenger" (1.399–400), an intuition which presently gets refined into another, full-blown identification of her true meaning: "A wandering crone, lowly form of an immortal serving her conqueror and her gay betrayer, their common cuckquean, a messenger from the secret morning" (1.404–6). Stephen's breakfast as a whole is not appreciated for the nourishment and sustenance it brings, but as a system of signs addressed to him in particular, a significant symbolic construction designed to be hermeneutically decoded, and ultimately interpreted as a statement about the treason of his friends and his own place in Ireland.

There is in the first chapter, however, a first intimation of the kind of reversed outlook on food that will be found later on in *Ulysses*, or rather of the striking condensation of the digestive process as Bloom illustrates it in the beginning of "Calypso." As Haines the Englishman is pouring out the tea, he complains about the excessive strength of Mulligan's brewing, and the latter answers with the following quip:

— When I makes tea I makes tea, as old mother Grogan said. And when I makes water, I makes water.

— By Jove, it is tea. Haines said.

Buck Mulligan went on hewing and wheedling:

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<sup>6</sup> This is an allusion to the German mystic Jakob Boehme (1575–1629) and to his book *Signatura Rerum* (*The Signature of all Things*), which posits that things only exist and are intelligible through their opposites—their true substances and spiritual identities. Their sensory experiences are but signatures to be deciphered and transcended. (See Don Gifford, *Ulysses Annotated*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, p. 44).

*So I do, Mrs Cahill, says she. Begob, ma'am, says Mrs Cahill, God send you don't make them in the one pot. (1.357–62)*

Interestingly, it is in Mulligan's mouth that we find the first signs of this connection between ingestion and digestion, which later appears as the specific trait of Bloom's character. However, Mulligan's style differs from Bloom's, and his parodic intent is clearly perceptible, be it only in the transformation of dialogue into mock dialect: Mulligan speaks in a voice not his own, as confirmed by Joyce's use of italics. Besides, he insists on urine, that is on the output and end-product of micturation rather than on the digestive process as a whole, as Bloom does. Mulligan's joke is in fact well inscribed within a certain type of low comedy, traditionally reversing ingested food and excreted matter, a carnivalesque mode that Bloom does not necessarily master or even enjoy.

A similar joke presents itself just a few pages later in the middle of Buck Mulligan's "Ballad of Joking Jesus":

*If anyone thinks that I amn't divine  
He'll get no free drinks when I'm making the wine  
But have to drink water and wish it were plain  
That I make when the wine becomes water again. (1.589–92)*

Similarly, the humour stems here from the reversal between liquids usually ingested—tea or wine— and the liquid coming out at the other end of the digestive track—urine. The scatological inversion of input and output—the possibility of drinking urine because old mother Grogan has peed in the teapot, or of drinking Christ's urine instead of his sacred blood at mass—triggers what Stephen and Haines, together with most readers, can easily identify as a carnivalesque comic effect.

We come to understand that Mulligan's change of perspective on food is not quite as radical as that later effected by Bloom. Mulligan's reversal, scatological and parodic as it is, has a derisive flavour to it. The character is perfectly familiar with the norm and codes he subverts, in this case Catholic rites and theology. His awareness of the Catholic ritual has been clear from his very first words in the novel, "*Introibo ad altare Dei*" (1.5). As for the story of old mother Grogan, Mulligan even brings to it a second layer of literary parody, when he attempts to pass it off as a point of interest for the Irish revival, probably for Haines's benefit. He repeatedly mocks and cynically uses the Englishman's interest in Irish culture, and the latter does not react when Mulligan, tongue in cheek, puts the following question to Stephen: "Can you recall, brother, is mother Grogan's tea and water pot spoken of in the Mabinogion or is it in the Upanishads?" (1.370–71).<sup>7</sup> On the whole, however, Mulligan's jokes are always in parodic reaction to something else, whether it be the Catholic ritual or the Irish Renaissance. They

<sup>7</sup> The connection between the Irish literary revival and urine or excrement is one which Joyce obviously appreciated, since in *Finnegans Wake* he dubbed the Celtic Twilight "cultic twalette" (FW 344.12). References to *Finnegans Wake* are to the Penguin 1976 edition (first published by Faber in 1939), and carry two numbers, the first indicating the page and the second the line on that page. They are cited parenthetically in the text.

stem from a well-read, cultured medical student, whose future is all mapped out and who will eventually fit in. He temporarily subverts norms but does not sincerely threaten them.

On the other hand, Bloom's literary culture is not as developed as Mulligan's, and his peculiar reversal of perspective on food is never presented as consciously derisive or parodic: he does in fact enjoy the savour of innards. Looking for taste and mouth-watering excitement—that is for the first stage of the digestive process—in what is usually considered its final stage, is simply presented as an unquestioned idiosyncrasy, the very first trait to be given about his character, rather than a reaction to anything previously established. Later on he will even display a certain spirituality together with a ritualized practice associated with this idiosyncratic taste, for instance in the priest-like gestures with which he prepares the kidneys bought from Duglacz's: "Pepper. He sprinkled it through his fingers ringwise from the chipped eggcup" (4.278–79). Only in "Ithaca" will the scene be alluded to in mock ritualistic terminology, when Bloom recapitulates his day beginning with "The preparation of breakfast (burnt offering): intestinal congestion and premeditative defecation (holy of holies)" (17.2044–45). Even then, although we are tempted to hear "hole" in Bloom's "holy of holies," the inversion between the scatological and the eschatological is far from Mulligan's tone of carnivalesque parody. As I will presently show, Bloom's digestive spirituality may not be only a joke or a simple question of bad taste. The aesthetic value of the digestive process is not to be so easily dismissed.

To find comparable idiosyncrasies of taste in Joyce's work, one must go back to the aesthetic discussion in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, when Stephen's friend Lynch confesses to having eaten dry cowdung. The exchange appears in the middle of the famous aesthetic discussion between the two young men, as Stephen attempts to draw a distinction between the superior aesthetic emotion and the inferior didactic—and especially pornographic—emotion:

— You say that art must not excite desire, said Lynch. I told you that one day I wrote my name in pencil on the backside of the Venus of Praxiteles in the Museum. Was that not desire?

— I speak of normal natures, said Stephen. You also told me that when you were a boy in that charming carmelite school you ate pieces of dried cowdung.

Lynch broke again into a whinny of laughter and again rubbed both his hands over his groins but without taking them from his pockets.

— O I did! I did! he cried. (*P*, 222)<sup>8</sup>

Significantly, Lynch's alimentary idiosyncrasy—or abnormality, as Stephen would have it—is here connected with an aesthetic peculiarity, his appreciation for the backside of one of the Greek statues whose plaster casts used to stand in the hall of the National Museum in Kildare Street—the Venus of Praxiteles. The first

<sup>8</sup> All references to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are to the Penguin edition edited by Seamus Deane (Penguin, 1992), and are cited parenthetically in the text. The *Portrait* was first published in *The Egoist* in 1914–1915.

quick conclusion one might draw, as does Stephen, is that the confusion between sexual desire and aesthetic judgement is as unnatural as would be that between food and excrement. However, the irony here also extends to Stephen, who does not seem familiar enough with the history of Greek sculpture, for in fact, Praxiteles' Venus became the wonder of the ancient Greek world specifically because of its naked backside. It was the first representation of the goddess to appear totally in the nude, and the temple specially built for its display in Knidos made it possible to enter from the back and admire the view, which many thought even more admirable than the front.<sup>9</sup> In other words, Lynch's appreciation of the statue is here as utterly valid as, if not even more cultured and refined than, Stephen's complete refusal of bodily drives in aesthetic judgement, a Hegelian stance which Joyce constantly disproved in his later works. As we already suspect from the absence of bodily correspondences for the first three episodes in *Ulysses*, Stephen's art refuses the body, but not Joyce's.<sup>10</sup>

The mention of the Venus of Praxiteles in connection with Lynch and idiosyncrasies of taste brings us "by a commodius vicus of recirculation" (FW 1.3) back to Leopold Bloom and food. The chapter most obviously associated with food in *Ulysses* is "Lestrygonians." It takes place between 1 and 2 o'clock, at the hour when Bloom is looking for a place to have lunch. In the Linati schema, the organ associated with the episode is the "oesophagus" and its technique described by Joyce as "peristaltic prose."<sup>11</sup> Peristalsis is an involuntary wave-like movement by which muscles propel food and liquid along the digestive track. Interestingly, "Lestrygonians" also contains an allusion to the Venus of Praxiteles, the same plaster reproduction mentioned by Stephen and Lynch in *A Portrait*, and the statue is explicitly connected with the digestive process:

Beauty: it curves: curves are beauty. Shapely goddesses, Venus, Juno; curves the world admires. Can see them library museum standing in the round hall, naked goddesses. Aids to digestion. (8.920–22)

This is confirmed when, at the very end of the episode, Bloom is seen entering the museum after his meal. Furthermore, when, in the next chapter, he is sighted in the library on Kildare Street, it is revealed that he has been admiring the statue of the goddess, more specifically, its backside. Of course, the best man to catch him in the act is Buck Mulligan himself, who exclaims:

<sup>9</sup> On this subject, see my article, "Stephen and the Venus of Praxiteles: The Backside of Aesthetics," in *Cultural Studies of James Joyce*, R. B. Kershner ed., "European Joyce Studies" 15, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003, pp. 59–76.

<sup>10</sup> For a comparable demonstration on Stephen's writing, see Geert Lernout's fascinating little book, *James Joyce, Reader*: "Some critics believe that Stephen Dedalus at the end of *Ulysses* is ready to write the novel: I would like to argue that he would not even be able to read it properly. Bloom probably could not write *Ulysses* ... , but his way of interpreting the world certainly helps us more in understanding the novel than Stephen's way of interpreting 'the signatures of all things' that he feels he has to read at the beginning of 'Proteus'" (Dublin: The National Library of Ireland James Joyce Studies 13, 2004, 25).

<sup>11</sup> Richard Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey*, op. cit., "Appendix" (pp. 187 sq.).

I found him over in the museum where I went to hail the foamborn Aphrodite. ... Every day we must do homage to her. ... O, I fear me, he is Greeker than the Greeks. His pale Galilean eyes were upon her mesial groove. Venus kallipyge. (9.609–16)

Again we may note how Mulligan's admiration for the Venus, and particularly her backside, is permeated with erudition: well-read in ancient Greek culture, he uses the term "callipygian," even further Hellenised visually with a "k," a word which Bloom would not necessarily understand.<sup>12</sup> On the contrary, in "Lestrygonians" in the midst of (other) reflexions about food and nurturing, Bloom reveals how his fascination for the statue's backside is permeated with realistic, down-to-earth concerns:

Lovely forms of women sculpted Junonian. Immortal lovely. And we stuffing food in one hole and out behind: food, chyle, blood, dung, earth, food: have to feed it like stoking an engine. They have no. Never looked. I'll look today. Keeper won't see. Bend down let something drop. See if she. (8.928–32)

Just as Mulligan's erudition was emphasised with the "k" in "kallipyge," Bloom's ignorance is highlighted by the absence of a "t" in "sculpted." Besides, unlike Mulligan, his desire to see the Venus' backside is not sexual but digestive ("aids to digestion" as he said earlier). A keyword here stands out in *absentia*: "They have no. Never looked." Readers fill in the blank with the word "anus," whose presence or absence on the statue permits the detection of a digestive activity, as if digestion constituted the final proof of the statue's perfection and realism. In art history, the Venus of Praxiteles—because it was known to represent an actual woman, Praxiteles' own mistress, and because of its complete nudity—is generally considered as a turning point in the evolution of Greek sculpture as it evolved from the Classical to the more realistic Hellenistic Age. In other words, just like Lynch, and with as little classical culture or even less, Bloom's intuitive appreciation of the statue is perfectly adequate and in fact most refined.

To Bloom, life is a process, and human life perhaps most perceptible in the digestive process which turns food into excrement.<sup>13</sup> The statue's perfection lies in its bearing some trace of the digestive process, or rather in its generating doubts about the existence of such a process inside its marble flanks. Such an emphasis on transformation, progression, and evolution is continually linked to

<sup>12</sup> The Callipygean Venus is not by Praxiteles, but a more recent statue discovered in Rome: nevertheless, it bears strong resemblances to the Cnidian Aphrodite, and is traditionally accompanied by similar stories of being excessively appreciated for its buttocks.

<sup>13</sup> As the philosopher and Joyce scholar Andrew Mitchell provocatively put it in a recent article: "To think excrement is to encounter life. A life that is not eternal, but intensely finite. A life that must devour and consume in order to grow; a life which consequently dies. To take shit seriously is to become a student of this life and to understand it at the level of process. Life lives through expulsion. Joyce is an author of life and our greatest thinker of shit." Andrew Mitchell, "Excremental Self-Creation in *Finnegans Wake*" (*Hypermedia Joyce Studies* (5:1, 2004), <http://hjs.ff.cuni.cz/archives/v3/mitchell.html>)

food in “Lestrygonians,” where Bloom continually considers what will result from each specific intake: sweets are “bad for their tummies” (8.3) he says of some children in the beginning, then mentions in passing that phosphore in fish is “very good for the brain” (8.25–26). Later, upon coming across Stephen’s sister, he remarks that she looks underfed, probably because she has been eating a steady diet of “potatoes and marge, marge and potatoes. It’s after they feel it. Proof of the pudding. Undermines the constitution” (8.41–43). Such notations about proper nourishment are constant in “Lestrygonians,” revealing how Bloom—far from Stephen’s symbolic reading of his breakfast milk—considers food as the first step of a process later revealed in the transformation of the body as a whole. Following this reasoning in reverse, since Greek statues have perfect forms, some ideal digestion must be taking place within them, hence the probable presence of an anus on the statue’s backside, as terminal point and proof of the perfect digestive system within it. Needless to say, Joyce never reveals what Bloom might have seen when he looked at the Venus: realistic perfection remains a quest rather than a certainty.

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Leopold Bloom has often been noted by critics and scholars for his inversions—inversion of common taste, as we saw from the start, but also inversion of habitual perspective.<sup>14</sup> Most notable among them are the changes of viewpoint which he effects even in daily activities. In the beginning of “Calypso” for instance, as he prepares breakfast, Bloom is shown responding to his hungry cat demanding her morning feed: “Wonder what I look like to her. Height of a tower? No, she can jump me” (4.29). However, as we have just seen, Bloom’s reversals do not only result from a peculiarity of palate, nor even from a moral posture of understanding and tolerance, as might be construed from this scene with the cat. As illustrated by his admiring the Venus of Praxiteles from behind, such changes of perspective become an aesthetic stance of realism.

Bloom’s constant roundabout ways and desire to always go looking at things and people from the back, reversing traditional perspectives in all domains including the visual arts, bring to mind a famous anecdote drawn from art history. It is often reported that the French painters Camille Corot and Gustave Courbet would often go on painting expeditions together. Corot, faithful to the inheritance of Romantic landscape painters, spent hours choosing the place to set up his painting material, considering the prospect and composition of the landscape—in a way, finding the painting in nature before he would reproduce it on canvas. Once he had set up his easel, Courbet the realist would turn his back on him, and started painting whatever was to be seen on the other side. Courbet’s about-turn—by which I do not only mean his change of perspective for

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<sup>14</sup> The frequent references to the astronomical process of “parallax”—which allows for the calculation of a star’s position by measuring its distance from the earth from two different viewpoints on the terrestrial orbit—are often considered a symbol of this changing perspective. Of course it is also represented by the narratological technique applied by Joyce throughout *Ulysses*.



each individual painting, but also his radical change of approach to the very artistic project of representation in painting—is a good analogue of Bloom's turning around the statue to look at it from behind. This new aesthetic stance or reverse shot at reality, whether adopted by the artist or by the viewer, may indeed correspond to the idiosyncratic touch of Joyce's modernism. However, in Joyce's case, the insistence on digestion reveals that his modernity does not only mean looking at the body from an unexpected perspective, it also means going beyond the absolute sincerity of uncompromising naturalism, and into a quest for rendering life in its very process and transformation.

In fact, Joyce's insistence on digestion in *Ulysses* is not only related to aesthetic judgement as illustrated by Bloom's appreciation of the Venus. It is also connected to the very activity of writing, and as I will presently try to show, it bears links to Joyce's own writing practices. The first suggestion to that effect comes when Bloom envisages himself as a writer. This takes place, revealingly, while he is sitting on the cuckstool, at the end of "Calypso":

Might manage a sketch. By Mr and Mrs L. M. Bloom. Invent a story for some proverb. Which? Time I used to try jotting down on my cuff what she said dressing. (4.518–20)

While effecting the final transmutation of his food into excrement, Bloom comes to consider the transmutation of his daily life into a piece of writing, from his observation of Molly, via the writing on his cuff, and into a story that would successfully sell to a paper. *Ulysses* itself is a story of Mr and Mrs Bloom, a lot of it containing Bloom's notations and thoughts about his wife, and a number of episodes did appear in journals and reviews before its final publication as a book. In other words, just as Bloom has digested other beings' digestive organs, his imaginary sketch is a mise en abyme of *Ulysses* as a whole. The final and ironic compression takes place when, having poetically mused on Ponchielli's dance of the hours and its application in his sketch, Bloom suddenly "tore away half the prize story sharply and wiped himself with it" (4.537). Indeed, this reverie about writing a sketch concludes the counterpoint at the end of "Calypso" between Bloom's morning defecation and his reading of the "Matcham's Masterstroke" story in an old number of a newspaper revealingly called *Titbits*:<sup>15</sup>

Asquat on the cuckstool he folded out his paper, turning its pages over on his bared knees. Something new and easy. No great hurry. Keep it a bit. Our

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<sup>15</sup> The newspaper actually existed, and its full title appeared as *Titbits from All the most Interesting Books, Periodicals and Newspapers in the World*. It was a sixty-page penny-weekly, published on Thursdays, and its first issue in 1881 is considered by some historians of journalism as the birth of modern popular journalism. It did print a "Prize Titbit" in each issue, with payment quoted as it is in *Ulysses* ("Payment at the rate of one guinea a column has been made to the writer" 4.503–4). It seems that the young Joyce had himself written a story which he intended for *Titbits* and the money it promised, and that it included the sentence that Bloom reads here ("*Matcham often thinks of the masterstroke by which he won the laughing witch who now*" 4.513–14). All this information is provided in the invaluable *Ulysses Annotated*, op. cit., pp. 80–81.

prize titbit: *Matcham's Masterstroke*. Written by Mr Philip Beaufoy, ... Quietly he read, restraining himself, the first column and, yielding but resisting, began the second. Midway, his last resistance yielding, he allowed his bowels to ease themselves quietly as he read, reading still patiently that slight constipation of yesterday quite gone. (4.500–09)

This passage has often been commented upon, but I would like to point to Joyce's retaining, and even emphasizing, the generic title for the story—"Our prize titbit"—which is made to resonate with the previous phrase related to his bowels—"Keep it a bit." "Titbit" is the title for the column in which the story appears, and it implicitly alludes to Bloom's excrement, but of course it also refers to a dainty morsel to be eaten. In other words, in echo to the first sentence about Bloom in the beginning of "Calypso," the closing of the chapter reaffirms the confusion or compression between the two ends of the digestive track, but collapses it with reading as well as writing. Joyce thus draws a parallel between the two ends of the digestive process and the reading and writing experiences, one that might be revealing of his own writing practice.

For in fact, the comparison between a digestive system and Joyce's writing can be pursued in the light of recent genetic research. The various stages of Joyce's manuscripts, examined for crisscrossed echoes and references, and thus fitted with adequate commentaries, stand as so many witnesses to the formidable digestion that produced Joyce's text. For when genetic critics look at the various notebooks, copybooks, drafts and proofs, they consider in turn the input and the output—first the intake, and then the waste products, as well as the nutrients which have been absorbed into the body of the book. On one hand, they are concerned with finding the sources Joyce has nibbled and picked at, and on the other, with discovering what the quotes have been converted into within Joyce's texts. Joyce's reading notes can be considered as the first stage of ingestion, resulting in bits and morsels of other texts being first chewed and broken into smaller units, and then deposited in a notebook as swallowed material in a stomach. Then the second stage consists of the gradual digestion of these morsels, broken down into even smaller parts, squashed and mixed up at times beyond recognition. In a third stage, the mixture is taken through the peristaltic process, and either evacuated from the body (often copied into another notebook for later use), or transmuted into that body itself.<sup>16</sup> Just as Bloom eats more traditional foods, but also organs of digestion, Joyce's writing ingests not

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, this striking quote from a recent review: "*Finnegans Wake* is like a sculpture of great intricacy and beauty, which on closer scrutiny is discovered to be composed of small pieces of rubbish cleverly fitted together" (Roland McHugh, reviewing *The "Finnegans Wake" Notebooks at Buffalo*, VI.B.3, VI.B.10, VI.B.29, edited by Vincent Deane, Daniel Ferrer, and Geert Lernout, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2001, *A Reader's Guide to the Edition, James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol.39, n°1, Fall 2001, p. 169–70). Reviewing the same *Finnegans Wake Notebooks* edition later in the *JJQ* volume, Finn Fordham used a similar metaphor: "Reading the notebooks in the *Archive* was like looking into the linguistic crucible of somebody's brain" (*op. cit.*, p. 173).

only life (his own, as has been amply documented),<sup>17</sup> but also words already digested by other writers. Besides, the process is infinite, and genetic critics have noted the seemingly never-ending expansion of Joycean proofs, which revealed how often other titbits and choice morsels were added to an apparently finished body part (or episode), or even included elsewhere when additions came too late for the printer.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, Joyce's writing sometimes looks like a high-speed digesting process, where it is not so much a question of collecting and synthesizing ideas as of picking words and phrases here and there to reuse them, perhaps barely broken down, into his text.<sup>19</sup> Like true digestion, the whole process also takes place with a total disregard of traditional hierarchies: everything is chewed and mixed together, whether it is the caviar of what is traditionally considered high literature (such as Homer, Aristotle, or Shakespeare, to name only a few), or the crumbs of daily bread, such as extracts from newspapers. "Matcham's Masterstroke" is the most obvious example here, but *Ulysses* contains numerous other mentions of newspapers or pastiches of journalese: any titbit will do.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See in particular Richard Ellmann's famous biography, *James Joyce*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1959) 1982.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Daniel Ferrer's article on Joyce's corrections for the "Circe" proofs: he explains how corrections that were sent too late could not be included by Darantière, so that Joyce then decided to include the additions in the episode on which he was working when the printer returned the proofs, modifying them so that they would fit their new context ("Reflections on a discarded set of proofs" in *Probes: Genetic Studies in Joyce*, David Hayman and Sam Slote eds, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 1995). In a recent review, Dirk Van Hulle wrote about a passage from notebook VI.B.9 that eventually did not make it into *Ulysses*: "Thanks to Joyce's textual economy, however, the words were recycled and incorporated in *Finnegans Wake*" (Dirk Van Hulle, reviewing *Writing its Own Wrunes For Ever: Essais de Génétique Joycienne / Essays in Joycean Genetics*, edited by Daniel Ferrer and Claude Jacquet, Tusson: Du Lérot, 1998, in *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol. 39, n°1, Fall 2001, p. 179.)

<sup>18</sup> As far as ephemeral literature bound for the trashcan is concerned, we remember that in *Ulysses*, a whole episode is devoted to journalese and journalism, whilst the first half of "Nausicaa" plagiarizes the cheap kind of female magazines that a girl like Gerty might be reading. The study of the early notebooks of *Finnegans Wake* confirms this fondness for "the trivia of current newspapers and periodicals," which seem to have been the first step in Joyce's project, rather than a later addition. Cf. Roland McHugh, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>19</sup> Geert Lernout has pointed to "the lack of serious scholarly effort," to the shallowness and superficiality in Joyce's reading, as proven by the study of his notebooks. Contrary to the notetaking habits of many modernist writers who were also careful and serious researchers (Thomas Mann, Beckett), Joyce just seems to have pilfered books and articles with an eye only onto his own concerns and projects, most of the time not even bothering to note the author or title (*James Joyce, Reader*, Dublin: The National Library of Ireland Joyce Studies 13, November 2004, p. 35).

<sup>20</sup> Recent genetic criticism has also shown that Joyce seems to have made particularly good use of his newspaper readings (see for instance Roland McHugh and the edition of the notebooks he reviews, *op. cit.*).

Finally, Joyce did not only digest other writers (just as Bloom digests other digestive organs), but also re-digested his own writing, as shown by the complex system of echoes within *Ulysses*. It is not only a question of references, characters or details reappearing in several episodes. It consists sometimes in the very rewriting of a sentence, as if the same broken down material could be combined into a different configuration and be employed in a different body part. For instance, in "Nausicaa," we witness the young girl's hair, described in the sentimental, hackneyed prose picked from a woman's magazine:

Gerty just took off her hat for a moment to settle her hair and a prettier, a daintier head of nutbrown tresses was never seen on a girl's shoulders. (13.309–11)

Two episodes later, in the middle of Nighttown, a whore has a similar gesture, which Joyce underlines using almost the same rhythm and phrases:

Kitty unpins her hat and sets it down calmly, patting her henna hair. And a prettier, a daintier head of winsome curls was never seen on a whore's shoulders. (15.2587–89)

Ironically, this digestion of his own writing also concerns the very first sentence from "Calypso" that brought our attention to the whole process: an echo of its beginning ("Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish...") may be found in the "peristaltic prose" of "Lestrygonians," as Bloom finally eats his meal at Davy Byrne's:

"Mr Bloom ate his strips of sandwich, fresh clean bread, *with relish* of disgust pungent mustard, the feety savour of green cheese. Sips of his wine soothed *his palate*." (8.818–20)<sup>21</sup>

We are reminded of the first introduction to the character not only by the peculiarity of the tastes mentioned ("disgust pungent mustard", "feety savour of green cheese"), but also by the verbal echoes: we recognize the very words that began "Calypso," except "with relish" is postponed and punningly used in its concrete meaning of a condiment or piquant sauce. The word "palate" in the following sentence adds another echo, this time to the end of Bloom's introductory paragraph ("... gave to his palate a fine tang of faintly scented urine"). Indeed, when we reach this sentence in "Lestrygonians," we not only sense that Bloom has once again fulfilled his operating principle, but that Joyce has digested his own previous writing, and that, just as Bloom enjoys organs and outputs from previous digestions, we can enjoy the transformed sentence once again, together with the memory of its first occurrence. The same intake has been used to build and nourish several cells in various body parts.

This parallel between Joyce's writing and digestion is not just an elaborate conceit or artificial construction: as earlier demonstrated, it not only stems from *Ulysses* itself, but also allows for a better understanding of the relationship between Joyce's text and the body. The particular taste of Joyce's language may be better understood if we consider that words, like food, are mouthed, tongued and chewed. Just as a body will prefer to feed on tasty morsels,

<sup>21</sup> Italics mine.

Joyce's prose will use palatable words, words which have often been noted for their acoustic, rhythmic and prosodic quality, words which readers often enjoy speaking and hearing aloud. Not only has the book a body, but this body responds and corresponds to the reader's bodily needs and tastes. It is no longer only a question of writing *about* the body, but further of moving *within* it, of being absorbed and digested, of proceeding and evolving inside a body of words. The use of "peristaltic prose" for the "Lestrygonians" episode is particularly revealing of Joyce's decision to not only include digestion, and the body in general in his writing, but also to include his writing in a bodily, digestive process.

Feeding on innards and reading titbits, Bloom's idiosyncratic tastes epitomize Joyce's modernist aesthetic choices. They represent the very transmutational process of his writing. We can now taste and appreciate, in all its fine tang, the perfect body of the book, inside of which such an elaborate digestion has taken place.