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"Ulysses" on Montmartre: An Earlier Ulysses in Another
Nighdtown, a French Shadow Play (1910), its Translation, and
an Essay on its Relation to James Joyce's "Ulysses" (review)

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(Review)

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between liturgy and epic swallow up such distinctions and alternate starting points for thinking about the epic? My own research into the genre suggests that the existential bias outlined in Balsamo's suggestive discussion of biography looks quite different when we treat historiography (the Bloom-Sinn Fein connection) or photography (Milly Bloom) as our touchstones. Is it possible that Joyce entertains different models of epic mimesis and brings different facets of the epic tradition into the foreground, in a manner analogous to his heterogeneous—"transaccidentated"—approaches to style? Perhaps a dramatization of just such a need to re-conceive the role of liturgy is at stake in Buck Mulligan's mockery of the Mass in "Telemachus." Balsamo's studies will stir debate. There is every reason to expect that he has still more substantial contributions to make to our understanding of Joyce.

Reviewed by Andras Ungar

NOTES

¹ Quotations in this review from *Joyce's Messianism* will be indicated by *Messianism* and from *Rituals of Literature by Rituals*.

² Sam Slote, *The Silence in Progress of Dante, Mallarmé, and Joyce* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), pp. 74, 83.

³ Gian Balsamo, *Pruning the Genealogical Tree: Procreation and Lineage in Literature, Law and Religion* (Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1999), and *Scriptural Poetics in "Finnegans Wake"* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2002).

⁴ Karen Lawrence, "Legal Fiction or Pulp Fiction in 'Lestrygonians,'" *"Ulysses"—Engendered Perspectives: Eighteen New Essays on the Episodes*, ed. Kimberly J. Devlin and Marilyn Reizbaum (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 108-09.

"*ULYSSES*" ON MONTMARTRE: AN EARLIER ULYSSES IN ANOTHER NIGHTTOWN, A FRENCH SHADOW PLAY (1910), ITS TRANSLATION, AND AN ESSAY ON ITS RELATION TO JAMES JOYCE'S "ULYSSES," edited by Akram Midani and Erwin R. Steinberg. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2002. 101 pp. \$14.95 paperback.

"Möbiuser and möbiuser," said Alice, "the involuntary parody of a critical edition of the script of a shadow-theater play parodizing an epic of classical antiquity, charged with sexual innuendo and satirical references to prominent but insider Parisian figures given to slumming. All this and Montmartre, too!"

This is the annotated edition and translation of a shadow play produced at the nightclub La Lune Rousse in Montmartre in September, 1910. *Les ombres chinoises* had become popular in France in the eighteenth century and were incorporated in satirical entertainment in the Parisian nightlife of a period from late 1887 to roughly 1923, when the club La Chaumière closed. The script, *Ulysse à Montmartre*, is credited to Dominique Bonnaud, Numa Blès, and Lucien Boyer, all performers and impresarios of the day. Allied with the writings of *les fumistes*, its premise is that Ulysses and his crew have come ashore at the foot of Montmartre. Starved of female company after eight years at sea and excited by the lively street scene, they hurry to a brothel. Ulysses, made of sterner stuff, refuses to be enticed, until he is shown the beautiful Anthelmys, a banker's wife no less, whom the madam had supposedly been keeping under wraps. Minerva, Ulysses's protectress, intervenes, and has the girl shipped off by train to Lesbos. His virtue intact, Ulysses regains his ship and returns to his travels. Here Homer is de-epicized, and the pretensions of the upper-middle-class are repeatedly punctured by their association with Montmartre and the randy mariners.

The script is a mixture of prose and rough-and-ready verse, presented by a narrator and small chorus. The racy silhouettes and other elements of the sets that are reproduced in this volume are among its few charms but are not otherwise usefully associated with the text in production and performance terms. One of the intriguing questions that the present edition raises is why this bit of nocturnal ephemera should have first been printed at all. Since the publisher is listed as La Société d'Édition de La Lune Rousse, it may have been some kind of commemorative or otherwise insider edition intended only for owners, performers, and patrons of the club. The editors speculate that the work was published to enhance the box-office take, which seems less likely, since most of the wit is good for only one reading or telling.

The deficiencies of this slim volume are almost too many to be enumerated, and most can be put down to naiveté and ignorance. The French text is a welcome bit of fluff to have resurfaced, but the translation seldom runs for more than a line or two without serious error. Within the first ten lines, we find this: "En ce temps-là le sage Ulysse, Tenté par les dieux ennemis, N'admettait en fait de délice Que celui par l'hymen permis" (42), translated as "At this time the wise Ulysses, tempted by the warring gods, was not permitted the joy of happiness which matrimony provided" (43). The hero is not "tempted" but "tried" by the "warring gods," Poseidon and Athena. Further, it is not that Ulysses was "not permitted" but that he did not permit himself the "joy of happiness" (whatever that might be); and this happy state was not denied him—rather he had access to it only in the marriage bed. Thus, starting on the wrong foot, the translation judders along

from one howler to another that would be cruelly tedious to list. Let two suffice: the French text reads “Circé . . . [n]e fit pas d’Ulysse un cochon” (“Circe did not make a pig of Ulysses,” with perhaps a sly nod in the direction of the French idiom *faire le cochon*) but is rendered as “[i]t was not fitting for Ulysses to have a pig” (44, 45). Another passage seems almost an intentional effort to get things as wrong as possible: “au pays Montmartrois [o]ù la plus modeste bergère [e]st un morceau digne des rois” is transmogrified into “in Montmartre land [w]here the most modest shepherd [i]s worthy to be a king” (46, 47). Readers who, like this reviewer, have successfully completed high-school French will correct this to “in Montmartre country where the most modest shepherdess is a piece worthy of kings.”

The language of the text, for all its sexual innuendo and *doubles entendres*, is relatively discreet, and the wordplay is of the Montmartre-Hill of Martyrs–Mons Veneris–Mound of Venus type. Little of this verbal fun comes across successfully in English, given the overall deficiencies of the translation.

The editors make an honest effort in their notes to identify the numerous allusions, and those referring to contemporary Paris and Parisians are much more interesting than learning that Lesbos is an “island of considerable size off the coast of Asia Minor where Sappho, a poetess, and her followers took residence” (97). The editors overstate the satirical intent of the work and its capacity to *épater la bourgeoisie*. It seems rather a witty sendup of topical events and notable figures, many of whom may well have been in the audience. Brothels, prostitutes, and lesbian social *mores* are only lightly cosmeticized, but few are likely to have been shocked by this open recognition of “Paris by Night.” Patrons were doubtless flattered, both to have understood the allusions and to have been the butts of the jokes. By and large, *Ulysse à Montmartre* is a self-congratulatory hymn to nightlife on the hill.

The comparison with Joyce is a puerile exercise readily ascribable to students taking their first steps in literary analysis and comparison. It does have the virtue of associating this bit of innovative writing and theatrics with other experimental literature of the times. Although not a point developed by the editors, the grotesque *chiaroscuro* effects of Joyce’s “Nighttown” would indeed bear an informed comparison with the basic limitations yet innovative effects of shadow theater, which, in turn-of-the-century Paris, had gray tones, efforts at perspective, lateral movement of screens on runners, and translucent colored panels, plus the accompanying voice effects. Joyce had to invent a site where license and art could be combined; the nightclubs of Montmartre offered one ready-made. One solid correspondence the editors do make is to call attention (16) to Joyce’s experimentation with light and shadow effects in unintentionally voyeuristic window scenes in the draft of *Silhouettes* and, later, with a window that stays

empty of figures, in "The Sisters." Nor should we forget Joyce's interest in film.

One last wacky, Wakean translation: "Pompéïa, un instant surprise par ce langage énergique, se ravise"; "Pompéïa, momentarily surprised by this energetic language, is thrilled" (74, 75). Perhaps the publishers at Carnegie Mellon should have kept their thrills in check and, like the prudent madam, had a second thought.

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BECKETT, JOYCE AND THE ART OF THE NEGATIVE, edited by Colleen Jaurretche. New York: Rodopi Press, 2005. 246 pp. \$63.00.

Beckett, Joyce and the Art of the Negative is an issue of the *European Joyce Studies Annual* pretending (though not very hard) to be a book. It offers no principle of selection or coherence; Beckett is included because someone suggested including him; the essays are, arbitrarily, "arranged alphabetically by author" (14); there is neither a list of contributors, nor a Works Cited page, nor an index. Criticism has increasingly found good reasons to link Joyce and Samuel Beckett (as I have myself in a recently completed manuscript), but only one of the book's twelve essays discusses both writers, while four are on Joyce and seven on Beckett.

The umbrella title and perfunctory introduction gesture toward unity: "Samuel Beckett and James Joyce write with deep awareness of ancient, medieval and modern philosophical and theological traditions that express negation and its correlative states—absence, void, emptiness and nothingness—as central to language and representation" (11). But the introduction provides no discussion of Joyce and Beckett's special, if not unique, relationship; nor is any linkage posited between and among these essays other than the sweeping thesis that "[n]egation is the dark metaphysical heart of modern literature" (11)—not at all unreasonable on its face, but needing more than mere assertion.

The essays vary considerably in length, quality, and methodology, with the Joyce ones being most eclectic. The book's longest piece, Keri Elizabeth Ames's "Joyce's Aesthetic of the Double Negative and His Encounters with Homer's *Odyssey*," could have benefited most from an editor's hand since its reasonable conclusions (that Joyce had excellent Latin and poor Greek and that he encountered *The Odyssey* in multiple translations) are demonstrable in far less space and without exhaustively nit-picking, tangential digressions. Fritz Senn's