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Love, Race, and *Exiles*: The Bleak Side of *Ulysses*

VICKI MAHAFFEY

The first thing I want to explain is my use of the adjective “bleak” to describe an aspect of *Ulysses*. I have chosen the metaphor of bleakness advisedly, because although it means “exposed and barren and often windswept . . . lacking in warmth or kindness,” it derives from the Middle English word *bleke*, meaning “paleness.”¹ By referring to the colder, more hopeless side of *Ulysses* as bleak or pale rather than dark, I hope to draw attention to the way that *Ulysses*, unlike *Star Wars*, emphatically refuses to equate darkness with evil. Or, to put it another way, Joyce sees a moral equivalency between light and darkness that is reinforced by the verbal similarity of “black,” “blanc,” and “blank.”² Everyone knows that the male heroes of *Ulysses* are two dark horses in the human race who win that race against long odds. The fact that these men are dark (dressed in black) and associated with waste (through the winning horse’s name, “Throwaway”) shows that Joyce takes a bold minority view of the contest among races, upholding the value of currently disadvantaged or “dark” races, preferring unknowns to favorites.³ Not only Bloom and Stephen but also Molly is associated with darkness; like the two rivals in Shakespeare’s sonnets, Stephen and Bloom are drawn together through their almost gravitational attraction to this “dark lady.”

Ulysses, then, is a book in which the protagonists, although they are racially “white,” are all metaphorically dark. Joyce depicts them as dark partly to underscore the downtrodden status of the Irish and the Jews, which enables him to predict their unexpected resurgence. It is essential, however, to realize that the victory of these “dark” horses is *not* depicted, as it usually is, as a triumph of resistant nationalism, but as a triumph of ethics and, specifically, a triumph of heterodoxy. Bloom, Stephen, and Molly do not represent one side of an oppositional conflict; they represent *both* sides, and the possibility of dialogue between them. This is to say

that they are not only dark but also white; the heterodoxy that Joyce would have us embrace might best be represented as chiaroscuro, in which an artful management of light and shade displaces the dominance of conventional or thoughtless morality. Ultimately, I will return to the question of why the protagonists of *Ulysses* not only do but also must signify the symbiosis of opposite extremes. It is worth pointing out that, although I am currently picturing those extremes as darkness and light, they could just as easily be defined as male and female or gentile and Jew. But in order to appreciate the ethics of the chiaroscuro perspective that Joyce so carefully offers to the reader, we must first consider his depiction of darkness and brightness, because Joyce's construction of the meaning of both differs so sharply from the way they are usually interpreted. Darkness, typically understood as "evil" in the popular imagination, is for Joyce not only a social and political index of the untapped power of ghettoized peoples, but also represents a more general attitude of mind, an attentiveness to the unknown. Psychologically and spiritually, what makes Stephen, Bloom, and Molly extraordinary is that like Averrões and Moses Maimonides, whom Stephen calls "dark men," they have the power to apprehend "the obscure soul of the world, a darkness shining in brightness which brightness could not comprehend."⁴

What does Stephen mean by "the obscure soul of the world?" Later in the "Nestor" episode, Joyce helps to clarify the difference between popular views of darkness and Stephen's revisionary ones through Stephen's verbal joust with Mr. Deasy. Deasy sees Jews as both dark and evil because, as he alleges, they "sinned against the light. . . . And you can see the darkness in their eyes. And that is why they are wanderers on the earth to this day" (2.361–63). Stephen counters by asking, "Who has not?" (2.373). In Stephen's mind, everyone has sinned against the light; everyone has darkness in his or her eyes, and everyone is a wanderer, an exile, in search of a home that is as elusive to us as it was to Odysseus and perhaps even to the Greek bard so appropriately known as "Homer" (in *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce puns on "home" as "howme," or "how me").⁵ Where Stephen and Mr. Deasy differ is in their attitude toward sin. Mr. Deasy associates sin with otherness: specifically, with Jews and women. He assumes for himself and for others like him the divine right of kings, arguing that we are "all kings' sons"; Stephen comments, "Alas" (2.280–81). This is Deasy's vision of race: a contest between the aristocratic favorites, backing king's colors, and the dark horses—literally "nightmares"—of history (2.377), who are quite rightly punished for their misdeeds. (Deasy's self-congratulatory view of race is further emphasized by

the pictures of vanished racehorses that Stephen observes on the walls of the headmaster's study [2.300–304]. In the *Odyssey*, Nestor was also a charioteer.) The problem with this view of race is not only its hypocrisy (Deasy accuses women and Jews of sin yet keeps a picture of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, a notorious libertine, above his mantel, 2.265–67) but also its violence: after remembering scenes at the racetrack when he was led there by Cranly, Stephen associates the hurrying hoofs first with the clack of the hockey sticks outside his window and then with battle: “Time shocked rebounds, shock by shock. Jousts, slush and uproar of battles, the frozen deathspew of the slain, a shout of spearspikes baited with men’s bloodied guts” (2.316–18). Deasy enjoys such contests—“I like to break a lance with you,” he tells Stephen (2.424–25)—and part of his enjoyment comes from his comfortable assurance that he is always right: “I will fight for the right till the end. *For Ulster will fight! And Ulster will be right*” (2.395–98). Similarly, Deasy can comfortably condemn women because, as he argues, “A woman brought sin into the world” (2.390). Stephen’s perspective on women is markedly different. He muses that *amor matris* or mother love might be the only true thing in life, an early protection against the brutal human race. He notes that were it not for Sargent’s mother (and his own), “the race of the world would have trampled him underfoot, a squashed boneless snail” (2.141–42).

Deasy’s view of the human race is unconsciously defined by rhyme: he associates right not only with might but also with light. Joyce challenges Deasy’s simple chain of association by painting him in sunlight only to expose him as wrong (rather than right) and weak instead of mighty. Both Deasy and Mulligan are depicted as “light” characters, in sharp contrast to their darker (and more ethically substantial) counterparts, Stephen and Bloom. Malachi Mulligan, in his yellow dressinggown, describes his name, with its double dactyls, as “Tripping and sunny like the buck himself” (1.42). Deasy is twice pictured through a wash of sunlight; first, “the garish sunshine [bleaches] the honey of his illdyed head” (2.197–98), and later, the sunlight hardens into gold, a sign of Deasy’s acquisitiveness: “On his wise shoulders through the checkerwork of leaves the sun flung spangles, dancing coins” (2.448–49). Deasy’s obsession with saving links him to the mercantile Jews he would revile. At the same time, it illuminates another motive for his refusal to understand humanity in more nuanced ways: profit. Money is power, as we can see from Buck’s exultation over the prospect of the “omnipotent sovereigns” (1.297) that Stephen will get from Deasy. Mulligan directs Stephen to get money from

Haines, and Deasy, too, counsels Stephen to hoard money, to “*Put but money in thy purse*” (2.239), ironically echoing the villain Iago in Shakespeare’s *Othello*. Mr. Deasy, who so gravely dispenses Iago’s advice along with golden coins, “symbols soiled by greed and misery” (2.227–28), is—like Mulligan—materialistic, racist, and optimistic without the sobering check of humility or realism. We later discover Stephen’s view that such “sunniness” is sentimental and opportunistic: as Stephen telegrams Mulligan, a sentimentalist as he defines it *is* an opportunist, he who would “*enjoy without incurring the immense debtorship for a thing done*” (9.550–51).

If both Mulligan and Deasy would brightly discard the “obscure soul of the world” (2.159) as soiled and worthless, Stephen, in sharp contrast, highly values the knowledge of sin.⁶ He advocates an awareness—even an acceptance—of individual and collective sin as a mode of access to the “obscure soul of the world.” What links sin with obscurity is an awareness of inadequacy: “obscure” means “lacking or inadequately supplied with light . . . withdrawn from the centers of human activity . . . not readily understood or clearly expressed.”⁷ When an individual admits inadequacy without succumbing to hopelessness or despair, Joyce suggests that the admission opens the way to the divine heart, which, as Joyce wrote in his article on Wilde, cannot be reached “except through that sense of separation and loss called sin.”⁸ Sin, then, is another word for exile, without which redemption is meaningless. Only a dark horse can win the human race, because only those who have experienced their own sin and loss through the fullness of mourning will, like the Jews Stephen pictures on the steps of the Paris stock exchange, “[know] their years of wandering and, patient, [know] the dishonours of their flesh” (2.371–72). An acceptance of personal fallibility is the bleak but ethically essential countersign to the assertion of self-worth.

Say, then, that this is the situation at the beginning of *Ulysses*: Stephen and Bloom are dark men, men who have sinned—Stephen through insensitivity to his mother, Bloom through insensitivity to his wife—and who are conscious of their strong sense of separation and loss. Although Stephen and Bloom are far from blameless, their sin is depicted as preferable to the glib ease of their aggressively male but sunny counterparts, Mulligan and Deasy (their emphatic maleness is underscored by the animals Joyce links to them: a buck is a male animal and Stephen associates Deasy, who is much older, with a bullock, or castrated bull). Neither extreme is ideal, but the human race is on, and the two sides have been pitted against

one another. Both Mulligan and Deasy use more warlike tactics than Stephen and Bloom, the “toothless terrors” (2.429–30). In the first three episodes, Stephen shows that he is not, however, simply the inverse or shadow of his opponents by refusing either to join or revile them. First, he will neither fight his opponents nor abandon his own position. He gives up the key to the tower and agrees to eat the salt bread of exile rather than escalate the warlike competition with Mulligan, although he clearly articulates what he has been holding against Mulligan and does not back down in the face of Mulligan’s offensive self-defense. And although Stephen sees through Deasy’s self-serving myths of history, he doesn’t spurn Deasy completely either, but resolves to “help him in his fight,” although he anticipates that Mulligan will make fun of his willingness to do so by dubbing him “the bullockbefriending bard” (2.430–32). Second, unlike Mulligan and Deasy, Stephen is in search of a better balance between darkness and light, one that inclines toward the dark but doesn’t exclude light. He thinks of “uncouth” or unknown stars (3.412) as an image of what he yearns for, musing, “Darkly they are there behind this light, darkness shining in the brightness, delta of Cassiopeia, worlds” (3.409–10). Stephen imagines the dark presence of what lies behind the visible world, an obscurity he links not only with sin but also with the soul. As he tells an imagined reader in “Proteus,” “You find my words dark. Darkness is in our souls do you not think?” (3.420–21). Stephen is listening for the unconscious, the unspoken, straining for a glimpse of the unbeheld, and he urges his reader to do likewise—not because the darkness is evil, but because it is an image of the hidden beauty of the soul, a darkness shot through with light, or, as the narrator describes it in “Ithaca,” a “heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit” (17.1039). Finally, Stephen differs from Mulligan and Deasy in his determination to resist the promptings of the speaker in Yeats’s poem “Who Goes with Fergus?” Mulligan recites the words to him, counseling, “*And no more turn aside and brood / Upon love’s bitter mystery / For Fergus rules the brazen cars*” (1.239–41). But the narrator describes Stephen’s brain as obstinately “brooding” and “beset” with memories (1.265–66); he is determined to understand those words that caused his mother to cry “in her wretched bed. For those words, Stephen: love’s bitter mystery” (1.252–53).

Love’s bitter mystery: this is yet another way of describing that balance between opposing forces that Stephen elsewhere calls “the obscure soul of the world” (2.159). Love is a mystery; it is deeply desired and highly prized, but it is also elusive and bitter—or, in the words of my title, it is

lonely and bleak. According to the *OED*, the word *mystery* comes from a Greek root meaning “to close (the lips and eyes).” A mystery is inaccessible through the light of reason; it is “a matter unexplained or inexplicable; something beyond human knowledge or comprehension.” In religion, it refers to a “truth known only from divine revelation,” and it refers more generally to “the condition or property of being secret or obscure” (*OED*). Mystery, then, is a kind of obscurity that is capable of being revealed, but it is not accessible through the light of reason. It is what Stephen imagines as the dark presence existing “behind this light,” “darkness shining in brightness which brightness could not comprehend” (3.409, 2.160). It is this mystery that Stephen and Bloom are trying, in their different ways, to apprehend, as when Stephen’s heart is fretted by “pain, that was not yet the pain of love” (1.102) as he broods over his mother’s tears at love’s bitter mystery. A sense of “Love’s bitter mystery” is also what *Ulysses* attempts to convey to its readers through its own potentially enlightening obscurity.

So, I am saying (like Richard Ellmann in his preface to the Gabler edition) that *Ulysses* is indeed about love, but (unlike Ellmann) I would specify that love, like darkness, needs to be carefully redefined, because Joyce means something very different by it than do most casual users of the word. As Joyce demonstrates in “Cyclops,” love as it is commonly used is childishly narcissistic and sentimental; it is self-satisfied optimism at its most ludicrous, the product of romantic and religious brainwashing aimed at the kindergarten set:

Love loves to love love. Nurse loves the new chemist. Constable 14A loves Mary Kelly. Gerty MacDowell loves the boy that has the bicycle. M. B. loves a fair gentleman. Li Chi Han lovey up kissy Cha Pu Chow. Jumbo, the elephant, loves Alice, the elephant. Old Mr Verschoyle with the ear trumpet loves old Mrs Verschoyle with the turnedin eye. The man in the brown macintosh loves a lady who is dead. His Majesty the King loves Her Majesty the Queen. Mrs Norman W. Tupper loves officer Taylor. You love a certain person. And this person loves that other person because everybody loves somebody but God loves everybody.

(12.1493–1501)

Love, as Joyce redefines the term, offers a more complex challenge. Joyce subjects love in *Ulysses* to a treatment similar to the one he gave

passion in “The Dead”: he took the popular idea of passion as white-hot desire (which the lover assumes to be reciprocated) and had his protagonist, Gabriel Conroy, act it out. Joyce then pitted Gabriel’s model of passion—a frenzy to possess the aestheticized object of desire—against an older model of passion that captures the original meaning of the word: to suffer. Michael Furey’s willingness to suffer in order to see Gretta before she left Galway stands in such sharp contrast to Gabriel’s self-satisfied assurance of his own desirability that he is pricked to see himself as a fatuous, self-important clown who has experienced lust but has never known love: “he had never felt like that himself towards any woman but he knew that such a feeling must be love.”⁹

The problem with the Michael Furey model of love, like that of Christ’s passion on which it is based, is that in the act of giving everything for the beloved, the self is destroyed: Furey’s gift to Gretta is a ghostly, pyrrhic victory. The question then becomes, is it possible to give love without relinquishing one’s life? (As Stephen thinks when he imagines trying to save a drowning man, “I want his life still to be his, mine to be mine” [3.327–28].) Joyce first addresses this question in his only play, *Exiles*: how can love be *given*? Is it something that *can* be given or *possessed*? In order to understand Joyce’s treatment of love in *Ulysses*, a reader must first come to terms with what Joyce learned in *Exiles*, which he finished as he was beginning the composition of *Ulysses*.

Exiles is a play about homecoming in which Joyce imagines what it might be like for him to return from Italy to Dublin with his lover and their son. The play centers on the interactions of four main characters and two minor ones: Richard Rowan, loosely based on Joyce; Bertha, his partner; Archie, their son; and Brigid, their servant, form one group. The other two characters are cousins who have remained in Dublin while the Rowans were abroad in Italy: Beatrice Justice, who has been an inspiration for Richard’s writing and with whom he corresponded while he was away, and Robert Hand, a journalist and friend of Richard’s who is trying to help Richard get a professorship at the university. The play consists primarily of conversations between shifting pairs of characters. The dialogue ranges from cliché to melodrama as the audience learns more and more of each character’s rather ordinary secrets. Beatrice is a despairing, chilly woman who ventriloquizes her hidden pride and scorn through Richard’s writing. Richard is at this point less concerned with Beatrice than with his partner, Bertha: he feels guilty because he has inadvertently fostered Bertha’s increasing dependence on him. He had hoped that their evasion

of marriage would give them both more freedom, but the shame and uncertainty of their relationship, her greater isolation, and the responsibilities of motherhood have curtailed her freedom and awakened in her a wistful, romantic nostalgia. Robert wants to steal Bertha from Richard, and he is secretly courting her in Richard's own home, but Bertha keeps Richard informed of every move Robert makes. Richard wants everyone to be free to choose his or her own course of action, but he doesn't want anyone to act secretly, "in the dark."¹⁰ Therefore, when Robert is expecting a visit from Bertha, Richard shows up ahead of her and tells Robert that he knows everything. Robert is quite naturally embarrassed, but Richard rather unexpectedly tells him to carry on, that he isn't going to try to stop Robert from seducing Bertha. He just didn't want Robert to think he was putting anything over on him. Richard leaves, Bertha shows up, and Robert is annoyed at her for not having told him that Richard knew. She explains that she is an honest and straightforward person and tells him she would have been honest with him too if he had ever asked her whether Richard suspected what was going on. The act ends while Robert and Bertha are still together in Robert's cottage, and the audience never learns what happened there, or whether anything happened.

The last act opens early the next morning. We see Richard suffering and Bertha sleepless but concerned about Richard. She offers to tell him what happened, but he responds that even if she tells him, he will never know; this is a bleakly truthful understanding of "love's bitter mystery." Beatrice comes in to show them the morning paper, which contains a leading article that Robert has written about Richard called "A Distinguished Irishman" (94). She tells them Robert is leaving town and Bertha sends for him immediately. Bertha chides Robert for planning to leave without talking to Richard, reminding him that such an act would leave Richard with the wrong impression. Robert and Richard speak, and the play ends with Bertha and Richard expressing their feelings of isolation and doubt, respectively.

As this summary might suggest, *Exiles* was not likely to be a box-office success. It's the kind of play that would have driven Artaud wild: if the life of theater is gesture—physical contact and conflict of the sort represented by a Balinese cockfight—*Exiles* has no life. The only way it could possibly succeed as theater is if it were staged as antitheater: an ultraconventional "ghost story" set in the stifling atmosphere of two enclosed rooms, where the only relief comes from opening a window or a door. The unreality of the characters could be emphasized by unchanging,

larger-than-life masks—Richard’s set in a habitual scowl, Robert’s in a knowing smile. Beatrice’s mask would give her a thin, pale, bitter expression, and Bertha would have no mask until the beginning of the third act. This is still to visualize what Joyce demanded that we hear: the tinny insincerity of four voices jockeying for advantage under the guise of mutual regard.

Like Gabriel in “The Dead,” the four characters in *Exiles* have tried to love, but their efforts seem wasted. More specifically, the characters are unable to reconcile love with either freedom or responsibility. *Exiles*, then, might best be described as a thought experiment in dramatic form. The problems it explores are these: is it possible to *give* freedom? Can freedom be given or awarded (to a lover, a child, or a reader) as a *gift*? What is the relation between generosity (giving) and *forgiveness*? What does it feel like for an author, lover, or parent to give this gift? Finally, does the recipient of this gift experience the blended joy and responsibility of genuine freedom, or does he become irresponsible and immoral, lacking any remorse of conscience? (This last change seems to describe what happens to Robert and perhaps even Archie.)

I want to address each of these questions in turn, but first I’d like to draw closer attention to my parenthetical suggestion that freedom may be offered to a lover, a child, or a reader. Part of what differentiates *Exiles* from “The Dead” and ties it to *Ulysses* is that, for the first time, Joyce sets out to explore the connections between generosity, responsibility, and freedom on *three* levels, or in three different kinds of relationships. Most critics focus on the anguished sexual relations in *Exiles*; understandably so, because these relations are the most central. What I want to emphasize, though, is that Joyce is treating all three forms of relation—sexual, textual (or artistic), and parental—as analogous, and that these three kinds of relationships again overlap in significant ways in *Ulysses*.

The problem with mothers and fathers, lovers, and authors and readers is that the tension between generosity and strictness tends to be reenacted between partners in each couple instead of internalized in the individual. I will begin by exploring how this paternal polarization affects their child, which is dramatized in the play through three sets of parent-child relations: Richard’s relation to his parents, Beatrice’s relation to *her* parents, and Archie’s relation to Richard and Bertha. In Act I, Richard introduces the dilemma of how love is related to generosity by contrasting the generosity of his (dead) father with the hard-heartedness of his (also dead) mother. Richard’s last memory of his father is of an act of generosity:

when Richard was fourteen, his father called him to his bedside to give him both permission and money to do something he knew Richard wanted to do: hear *Carmen*. He died while Richard was gone (24). Richard calls the memory “sweet and noble,” referring to his father as “the smiler,” whereas he remembers his mother as hard, cold, and begrudging (23). He claims to “pity her cold blighted love” for him, but he confesses that he is still inwardly battling her spirit (23). Her miserly spirit is apparent in two ways—in her obdurate refusal to forgive him, even on her deathbed (forgiveness, as the word suggests, being associated with giving), and in her effect on his life. He says that “On account of her I lived years in exile and poverty too, or near it” (23). Richard clearly prefers the gift of pleasure and music granted him by his dying father to the grim letter of warning sent by his dying mother, but he prays twice not for his father’s warmth but for *her* hardness of heart (22, 25). Love is not reducible to mere generosity, then, as much as Richard would like for it to be. And it is not generosity but principle that Richard needs, as we can see in his indulgently permissive relation to his own son, Archie.

Beatrice’s parental influences mirror Richard’s with the genders reversed. It is her father who epitomizes “gloom, seriousness, [and] righteousness” (30) and Robert’s mother (Beatrice’s aunt) who gives the gift of music. Joyce adds this information to clarify the point that an affinity for generosity or principle is not linked to gender: men as well as women can be severe, and women as well as men can be joyous and musical. Richard is generous, like his own father, leaving the discipline to Bertha. Bertha perceptively understands that he is repeating the pattern of his own family of origin, projecting onto her the role of “cruel mother” because he never loved his own mother (52). She also intuitively understands the destructiveness of a generosity that lacks restraint, as she denies the implication that her discipline is loveless. (Her solicitude for Archie is particularly apparent in Act III, when she cleans his mouth with her handkerchief, wet with her tongue [92]). Bertha diagnoses the problem with Richard’s generosity—he is helpless to be anything other than generous; he cannot say no—to Archie, to Robert, or to her (52, 56). Beatrice, according to Bertha, is Richard’s exact opposite—she cannot give; “she is not generous” (55). In fact, Beatrice needs Richard *because* she is unable to give; he expresses the generous sentiments that she has choked off. If love is not reducible to generosity, Beatrice shows that neither is love possible in the *absence* of generosity.

To give a quick recap, then: Robert is greedy, trying to steal (or rob) Bertha from Richard, whom he sees as both generous and—as his name suggests—rich in love. Beatrice is *not* generous, but neither is she acquisitive; she lives vicariously through the expressions of others: Richard’s writing, Archie’s piano playing. Richard is compulsively generous, and Bertha is simply bewildered by Richard’s desire to give her and Robert’s desire to take her. What she wants is to keep things as they were when she and Richard first met. The question is, do any of these positions represent a truly loving attitude? At first, it may be tempting to equate Joyce’s position with Richard’s, because he is the autobiographical character and because he claims to have outgrown Robert’s romantic and demonic philosophy of self-assertion. Moreover, Richard tries to justify his compulsive generosity by reframing it as sacrifice. When he asks Archie if he understands what it means to give a thing (46), he is outlining the ethos of sacrifice. He explains that giving is the only guarantee of eternal possession (47). This is clearly a theological idea—he is giving in order to receive, sacrificing in the literal sense of “making sacred” the object of his desire. What is odd—maybe even unique—about this ploy is that Richard is applying it not to food, as the ancients did, but to the realm of sexuality: he is giving away his “wife” in order to forestall losing her, while at the same time sacralizing (or resacralizing) their union. This is such an unconventional idea that it can easily be confused with a radical, even a feminist position: instead of having his Nora walk out on him, as Ibsen’s heroine so controversially walked out on her husband and children in *A Doll’s House*, Joyce imagines his protagonist *giving* her freely to another man for whom she feels desire.

But Richard’s attitude toward love is *not* that of the mature Joyce. The questions Richard never asks are first, whether Bertha is his to give, and second, whether she is a *thing* (“Do you understand what it is to give a thing” [46]). It should be obvious that the answer is “no” to both questions. Despite his predilection for masochistic sacrifice, Richard’s motives are as possessive as Robert’s. He tries to possess not only by giving but also by remembering; as Richard boasts, he never forgets anything (99). Yet another indirect way Richard tries to possess those he loves is by insisting on telling them everything he knows (to tell one’s secrets is also to number or count them, to render them material by putting them into words). He tells Bertha about his infidelities and he tells Robert everything he knows about Robert’s attempts to seduce Bertha. Then (and only then) he offers to give them their freedom as a gift from him; he must

first possess or master this freedom in order to give it to them—their freedom must pass through his mind and hands.

Robert is just as acquisitive as Richard, although his rationalization is that of a hedonist rather than a saint. Not only does he want to steal Bertha and win over Archie, he also wants to *give* Richard a reputation for distinction by composing and publishing it, literally authorizing Richard's talent. He recognizes and resents Richard's prodigality when he tells him that the "fatted calf" will be eaten in his honor at the vice chancellor's dinner (45). What Robert resents is the indirectness of Richard's acquisitiveness, its pretensions to being spiritual (and therefore higher) than Robert's carnal appetite. In their youth, they shared a pride of possession, symbolized by the two keys they had to the cottage where they enjoyed a succession of women. Richard boasts that he has given up his key, but Robert senses that it was in order to own one woman more totally. Robert's attitude, however, is not an ethical alternative—he gets not by remembering, but by *forgetting*, by denying the burdens of consciousness and conscience (he says, "I have no remorse of conscience" [41]). He frames his defense in the language not of God but of Lucifer, arguing that he (like Richard when he was young, and like Stephen Dedalus) will not serve: "I am sure that no law made by man is sacred before the impulse of passion. . . . There is no law before impulse. Laws are for slaves" (87). He tells Richard with Nietzschean fervor, "All life is a conquest, the victory of human passion over the commandments of cowardice. . . . The blinding instant of passion alone—passion, free, unashamed, irresistible—that is the only gate by which we can escape from the misery of what slaves call life. Is not this the language of your own youth . . . ?" (71).

What Robert calls freedom is simply revolt; what Richard calls freedom is false philanthropy. Beatrice feels free by ventriloquizing through Richard's writing, and Bertha reads what the others call freedom as simple loneliness. Although the play is set in Ireland two months after John Redmond had succeeded in getting an Irish Home Rule bill on the docket in Parliament, it is ironically clear that none of the characters (with the possible exception of Archie) has a clue what freedom is. Freedom is neither a thing to be given (as England is considering giving it to Ireland) nor a refusal of law (the Irish rebel position). What, then, does Joyce suggest it might be? Can freedom be a love-offering, something made available to a child, a lover, or a reader without covert implications of anxiety and coercion?

The answer is important politically, ethically, and textually, because freedom is also something Joyce badly wanted to give to those he loved, including his readers. But if he had to discover, like Richard, that freedom is not a thing to be given, and it is not his to give, how then could he encourage freedom of response? Not by doing what Robert does—writing for the common person, using the language of people whose opinions he doesn't share. Although Robert claims to be a patriot, Richard reads Robert's style as lacking independence. In one of the excised fragments of the play, Richard accuses Robert of having "taken the smooth path, accepting ironically everything in which you disbelieved and building for your body and for that function of it which I suppose you call your soul a peace of prudence, irony, and pleasure."¹¹ Richard boasts that he, in contrast, has "lived without prudence, risking everything, destroying everything in order to create again."¹² Richard's claim rings false, although romantically so, but Robert has sold out too; he is simply more pragmatic about it.

At some point during the composition of *Exiles*, Joyce realized the romantic hypocrisy of Richard's position, seeing that it matched Robert's while seeming to oppose it. What Richard discovers while trying to *give* freedom is that it can't be given, that it is not always a welcome gift, and that freedom without principle produces nothing more than hedonism or crass materialism, on the one hand, or loneliness, on the other. All the characters glimpse, painfully, restlessly, with brief moments of joy and clarity, how difficult it is to resist (but not defy) temptation, to listen to what is in their hearts, to balance generosity and justice, freedom and principle, in their interactions with others. This is the definition of love that Joyce would take with him when he turned to *Ulysses*: love is the care-ful creation and preservation of an artful, precarious balance between freedom and limits, generosity and principle, engagement and detachment, openhandedness and justice. Richard is struggling with the difficulty of achieving this balance, however melodramatically, at the end: he refuses to despair, but does not wish to be deceived either. Richard does, however, catch a glimpse of a love so finely calibrated that it rivals great art, but he can only apprehend this idea by first acknowledging a basic limitation of his own: he cannot read the hearts of those he loves.

The most important moment in *Exiles* is Richard's acceptance of the fact that he "cannot read in" Robert's heart, or in Bertha's either (73). When Bertha accuses him of abandoning her when he refuses to tell her what he wants her to do, and he answers, "Your own heart will tell you" (75), he experiences a wild delight. She has become the text and he a

reader who sharply registers and attentively enjoys but cannot control that text. He has learned—briefly—to forget his own desires to control her, either by giving her or by interpreting her; instead, he asks, “Who am I that I should call myself master of your heart or of any woman’s?” (75). Richard ultimately directs Robert, Bertha, and Beatrice to “free yourself[ves]” (71)—he cannot free them. But he can try to model the process of self-emancipation, and he does this by acknowledging the difficulty of understanding them without relinquishing his curiosity and wonder at their ability to elude reductive categorization.

The problem with this vision of love, so perfectly poised between self and other, is that it is so difficult, perhaps even impossible, to sustain. *Exiles*, like *Ulysses*, is haunted by the possibility that the experience of freedom, like the gift of virginity, may be unique and unrepeatable. This is Bertha’s position. She tells Brigid, “that time comes only once in a lifetime. The rest of life is good for nothing except to remember that time” (91), and she tells Richard, “Not a day passes that I do not see ourselves, you and me, as we were when we met first. Every day of my life I see that” (111). She begs Richard to turn back the clock to that irretrievable moment: “Forget me, Dick. Forget me and love me again as you did the first time” (112). But if freedom of choice is only possible once, the play offers the tenuous possibility that it can live again in children, who signify a temporary renewal of lost innocence. As Robert tells Richard, “Perhaps there, Richard, is the freedom we seek—you in one way, I in another. In him and not in us” (109). For those who decline the presumption of knowing or understanding the hearts of those they love, children, too, may sometimes relieve loneliness. For the most part, however, *Exiles* is peopled by characters who seem helpless to palliate their exile, even when they are most at home.

This insight—that love requires a recognition of but not a resignation to exile—infuses *Ulysses* at every level. It shapes Stephen’s understanding of the soul as a dark shape born of sin, which makes him in turn value obscurity over transparency of language (he distrusted “aquacities of thought and language” [17.240]), riddles over journalism, and dark men over their sunnier, more successful counterparts. Parental love in *Ulysses* is haunted by the same insistence on uncertainty: the Blooms had two children, one dead and one living, which leaves them forever pulled between love and grief. The two Bloom children function like the two thieves in St. Augustine’s dictum that Beckett’s tramps puzzle over in *Waiting for Godot*: Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not

presume; one of the thieves was damned.¹³ Erotic love, too, is shadowed by betrayal: Leopold and Molly are united by multiple bonds, but Molly's adultery is a sign of Bloom's abandonment of Molly as well as a counter-abandonment of Bloom by Molly herself. Both Bloom and Molly need a renewed awareness of the bleakness in each other's lives. And Molly echoes Bertha's fear that a free and joyous mutual exchange may be a unique and unrepeatable event in the plot of a relationship. As she thinks in "Penelope," "with all the talk of the world about it people make its only the first time after that its just the ordinary do it and think no more about it" (18.100–102).

What does love have to do with reading? As it turns out, the two are intimately related in the world of *Ulysses*. Reading a text with mastery and ease is like claiming to be able to read the heart of a lover: it may be reassuring, but it is hardly enriching and seldom inspiring. Frustration with reading that resists easy appropriation is a sign of the expectation that most things are easy to penetrate, to assimilate, to conquer. This is what most readers think they want—to *possess* knowledge, as Gabriel desired to *possess* Gretta, but, paradoxically, when a text or a lover is less accessible, it kindles the reader's sense of wonder. In *Exiles*, Richard holds that to take care for the future is to destroy all hope and love in the world. We could paraphrase and extend Richard's comment by saying that to understand a book on a first reading is to destroy all curiosity and wonder in the world. To make understanding difficult but not impossible *is* a gift, but it is not philanthropy. It is a gift of labor that allows the reader the freedom to free herself from self-limiting assumptions. As the narrator cheers in *Finnegans Wake's* "The Ballad of Pierce O'Reilly," "Hirp! Hirp! for their Missed Understandings! chirps the Ballad of Perce-Oreille" (175.27–28).

Love and reading work in tandem, then, and for Joyce the main gift that a writer can give a reader in a written work, or love letter, is a renewed appreciation for what Yeats in "The Circus Animals' Desertion" calls "Heart-mysteries."¹⁴ The recognition that love depends upon an awareness of the final unknowability of the beloved, although future insight remains both possible and desirable, is to say that love demands an acknowledgment of bleakness, but not a surrender to it. It is Joyce's way of saying what Crazy Jane said so memorably to the Bishop in Yeats's late poem: "But Love has pitched his mansion / In the place of excrement, / And nothing can be sole or whole / That has not been rent" (255). The darkness that Deasy would project outward onto women or Jews, and

that a frustrated reader would erase from the pages of *Ulysses*, is actually within us. “Darkness is in our souls, do you not think?” Meaning is an arrangement of that darkness against its bleak background: “signs on a white field” (3.421, 414–15).

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NOTES

1. Merriam-Webster OnLine Dictionary, available at <http://www.m-w.com>.
2. According to the *OED*, the history of the word “black” is difficult, because in Old English it was often confused with the word for “white” or “shining,” which was essentially the same word when it was spelled, as it sometimes was, with a long vowel. Older forms of the word “bleak” also wavered in meaning between black and white. The *OED* also notes that “bleak” was akin to the Middle English *blecche* (related to “bleach”), which involved placing something in the hot sun. The sun could whiten it, but it could also blacken it.
3. It is important to remember that from the late nineteenth century through the 1940s, Jews were often classified as a race. According to Raul Hilberg, “racism acquired a ‘theoretical’ basis only in the 1800s . . . [when] racists . . . stated explicitly that cultural characteristics, good or bad, were the product of physical characteristics. Physical attributes did not change; hence social behavior patterns also had to be immutable. In the eyes of the anti-Semite, the Jews therefore became a ‘race.’” Raul Hilberg, *Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), 19.
4. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler, with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (New York: Random House, 1986), 2.158–60. Hereafter this work will be cited parenthetically in the text by episode and line number.
5. James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking, 1939), 173, l.27. Hereafter this work will be cited parenthetically in the text by page and line number.
6. Joyce seems to have developed this philosophy of the value of sin after reading Yeats’s 1896 story “The Tables of the Law,” which Joyce describes Stephen repeating to himself (along with “The Adoration of the Magi”) in *Stephen Hero*. What attracts Stephen to the story is the figure of Owen Aherne (based on Lionel Johnson), who has transcended human law and discovered the law of his own being. The discovery turns Aherne into a heroic figure like Moses or Jesus, but Yeats unexpectedly emphasizes the loneliness and sadness of that transcendence. Stephen envisions Aherne as a kind of human phantom, leaning “pitifully towards the earth, like vapours, desirous of sin.” The story is designed to show the lawless Irish the occult importance of arbitrary law, which is essential in that it alone makes sin, redemption, and community possible. James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (New York: New Directions, 1963), 178.
7. Merriam-Webster OnLine Dictionary, available at <http://www.m-w.com>.
8. James Joyce, *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, ed. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking, 1959), 205.

9. James Joyce, *Dubliners*, ed. Robert Scholes (New York: Viking, 1967), 223.
10. James Joyce, *Exiles* (New York: Viking, 1951), 70. Hereafter this work will be cited parenthetically by page number in the text.
11. Robert M. Adams, "New Light on Joyce's *Exiles*? A New MS, a Curious Analogue, and Some Speculations," *Studies in Bibliography* 17 (1964): 86.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 8–9.
14. William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 336. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number in the text.