GENERIC ENGINEERING: A STUDY OF PARODY IN SELECTED WORKS OF OSCAR WILDE, JAMES JOYCE AND TOM STOPPARD

by

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own

original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at

any university for a degree.

ABSTRACT

The following thesis develops a theory of parody as a multifunctional practice in relation to selected works of Oscar Wilde, James Joyce and Tom Stoppard. The study discusses parody as a mode of generic engineering (rather than a genre itself) with ideological ramifications. Based on an understanding of literary and non-literary genres as social institutions, this thesis describes the practice of parody as one of engineering generic or discursive incongruity with a particular cultural purpose in mind. In refiguring generic conventions, the parodist simultaneously reworks their implicit ideological premises. Parody hence comes to serve as a means of negotiating with "the world" through generic modification, and the notions of parodic social agency and cultural work are consequently central to this thesis.

Focusing on *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* respectively, Chapters Two and Three discuss Wilde's use of parody, and especially parodic "word-masks", for subverting the aesthetic and social conventions of Victorian England, and covertly propagating a gay subculture through parodic in-jokes. Word-masks – central to Wildean parody – entail the duplicitous use of an object text / genre as a cover under which a parodist hides other meanings.

If Wildean parody might be described as claiming a covert agency, Joycean parody must, in contrast, be acknowledged as expressing deep-seated political ambivalence. Chapters Four and Five of this thesis discuss Joyce's *Ulysses* with specific reference to his use of parody to conflate, relativize and problematize the dominant aesthetic and Irish nationalist discourses of the early twentieth-century. Joycean parody also

demonstrates parodic ambivalence and this is especially evident in what might be called his "parodic patriotism".

In contrast to Wilde's and Joyce's use of parody for the expression of subversive or progressive political views, Stoppard's parodies confirm conservative English values not only in their reification of the English canon but also in terms of the ideological premises with which they invest their hypotexts. Chapters Six and Seven examine how parody can serve as one of the ways in which modern artists have managed to come to terms with tradition. Focusing on Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Travesties* respectively, these chapters explore parody's capacity to function as tribute or homage to the writers of the past being parodied.

Ultimately this thesis aims to demonstrate the continuum of parodic cultural work or effects of which parody, as a mode of generic engineering, is capable.

OPSOMMING

In hierdie tesis word daar – met verwysing na geselekteerde werke van Oscar Wilde, James Joyce en Tom Stoppard – 'n teorie van parodie as multi-funktionele praktyk ontwikkel. Parodie word bespreek as 'n vorm van generiese manipulasie (eerder as 'n genre op sigself) met ideologiese implikasies. Op die basis van 'n vertolking van literêre en nie-literêre genres as sosiale instellings, beskryf hierdie tesis die praktyk van parodie as die bewerkstelling van generiese en diskursiewe ongelyksoortigheid met 'n besondere kulturele oogmerk in gedagte. In die herfigurering van generiese konvensies is die beoefenaar van parodie terselfdertyd besig om hulle geïmpliseerde ideologiese aannames te herbewerk. Parodie word dus 'n metode om met behulp van generiese modifikasie in omgang met "die wêreld" te verkeer; en die idee van die sosiale agentskap en kulturele aksie van parodie staan dus ook sentraal tot hierdie tesis.

Hoofstukke Twee en Drie fokus onderskeidelik op *The Picture of Dorian Gray* en *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In hierdie twee hoofstukke word Wilde se gebruik van parodie bespreek, met besondere aandag aan sy parodiese "woordmaskers" om die estetiese en sosiale konvensies van Victoriaanse Engeland te ondermyn, asook sy bedekte propagering – deur middel van parodiese binne-grappe -- van 'n *gay* sub-kultuur. Sentraal tot Wilde se parodie is woordmaskers wat 'n dubbelsinnige gebruik van teks en genre inspan as 'n dekmantel waaronder die beoefenaar van parodie ander betekenisse verskuil hou.

As Wilde se parodie beskryf kan word as bedekte bemiddeling of tussenkoms (*covert*

agency), moet Joyce se parodie – as teenstelling – identifiseer word as 'n uitdrukking van diepliggende politiese ambivalensie. In Hoofstukke Vier en Vyf word Joyce se *Ulysses* bespreek met spesifieke verwysing na sy gebruik van parodie om dominante estetiese en Ierse nasionalistiese diskoerse van die vroeë twintigste eeu saam te voeg, te relativiseer en te bevraagteken.. Joyce se parodie illustreer ook parodiese ambivalensie – 'n aspek wat duidelik blyk uit wat sy "parodiese patriotisme" genoem kon word.

In teenstelling met Wilde en Joyce se gebruik van parodie as uitdrukking van ondermynende of progressiewe gesigspunte, bevestig Stoppard se parodie konserwatiewe Engelse waardes nie net in hulle vergestalting van Engelse kanoniese tekste nie, maar ook in terme van die ideologiese aannames wat hulle aan hul hipotekste toeskryf. Hoofstukke Ses en Sewe ondersoek hoe parodie kan dien as een van die weë waarlangs moderne kunstenaars daarin geslaag het om hulleself te versoen met tradiese. In Hoofstukke Ses en Sewe – waar daar onderskeidelik op *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* en *Travesties* gefokus word – word ook aandag geskenk aan die vermoë van parodie om te funksioneer as huldeblyk of eerbetoon aan skrywers wie se werke geparodieer word.

Hierdie tesis poog om die kontinuum van parodiese kulturele werk te illustreer waartoe parodie, as 'n vorm van generiese manipulasie, in staat is.

I'd like to thank my supervisors, Edwin and Michiel, for their unflinching support and invaluable guidance (over the years and years). I'd also like to thank Lukes, Lynus, Stefano, Kick, Jut and Nuk for… well… you know… everything (over the years and years and years).

Literary criticism is not your forte, my dear fellow. Don't try it. You should leave that to people who haven't been at a University.

Algernon, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

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CHAPTER 1

Generic Engineering: A Theory of Parody

Although a good deal has been written on parody, it remains, to quote Müller, "a notoriously vague phenomenon" (1997: 1). In the absence of a generally accepted definition, the term has been subjected to as many denotations as users, connotations as critics and applications as so-called parodists. Essentially the problem has been this: the exact delimitation of a definition that locates it between the outdated mocking-double, on the one hand, and any type of intertextuality, on the other.

The following thesis develops a theory of parody in relation to the writings of three parodists. Focusing on selected works of Oscar Wilde, James Joyce and Tom Stoppard, this study discusses parody as a mode of generic engineering with ideological ramifications. Based on an understanding of literary and non-literary genres as social institutions, this thesis describes the practice of parody as one of engineering generic or discursive incongruity with a particular cultural purpose in mind. In refiguring generic conventions, the parodist simultaneously reworks their implicit ideological premises. Parody, in this sense, comes to serve as a means of negotiating with "the world" through generic modification.

The importance of genre to the production and interpretation of texts cannot be overemphasized. Genre is basic to all writing and reading. Hawkes even goes so far as to say that "a world without a theory of genre is unthinkable, and untrue to experience"

(1986a: 100). Although some texts deviate more than others from clearly defined genres, "[e]very work of literature has a generic context" (Peck and Coyle, 1993: 2). In this sense the notion of the non-generic text (sometimes used for supposedly original, "artistic" productions) is indisputably an impossibility. As Derrida has said, "a text cannot belong to no genre. Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text" (<cited by Chandler, 1997>).

Generic tampering is central to the practice of parody. Although parodies are often described as either specific or general in nature – "the former aimed at a specific precursor text, the latter at a whole body of texts or kind of discourse" (Dentith, 2000: 7) – the distinction should not be allowed to obscure parody's essentially generic involvement with its objects. Parody, one might say, "takes place" at the level of generic convention. Yet in attempting to theorize parody as a genre in itself we encounter a number of problems. Although genre's etymological roots in genus equate it to "kind", parody is not of the "kinds" that genre typically denotes.

A genre might be described as a semiological system requiring an appropriate strategy of interpretation. Todorov writes that a "genre, whether literary or not, is nothing other than a codification of discursive properties" (1990: 18). Yet the generic codes to which Todorov alludes should not be thought of as pertaining to production only. "Semiotically", Chandler writes, "a genre can be seen as a shared code between the producers and interpreters of texts included within it" (<1997>). Generic codes are thus as important for readers as they are for writers. Fowler offers a useful example in this

regard. "An interpretation", he writes, "that ignored the Bible's spiritual challenge and put it with other works in cadenced prose 'to be read as literature' would quite falsify its character" (1982: 13). Generic classifications, in other words, denote ways of reading as much as ways / types of writing and are "as useful to the consumer as to the producer" (Hawkes, 1986a: 103). For this reason genres might be said to serve a dual purpose – functioning both as "'horizons of expectation' for readers and as 'models of writing' for authors" (Todorov, 1990: 18).

Although akin to a genre in some respects, parody is perhaps more accurately termed a mode. Genres exist as "organized sets of... conventions" (Bolongaro, 1992: 304) still typically discussed in terms of the "bifurcated approach" used by Wellek and Warren in "[o]ne of the most influential and level-headed attempts to renew genre theory in the post-Croce era" (Altman, 1999: 7). In their conception a genre is "a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (specific metre or structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose - more crudely, subject and audience)" (Wellek and Warren, 1956: 231). While naively writing-centred in a sense, this definition is useful for conceptualizing genres as dependent on two distinct types of conventions – and for demonstrating why parody is better thought of as a mode. Unlike the conventions of a genre, those of a mode pertain to matters of inner form only. "Modes", Fowler writes, "have always an incomplete repertoire... and one from which overall external structure is absent" (1982: 107). Parody constitutes such a practice – relying instead on its object text to provide it with outer form.

Admittedly the terminological distinctions between literary types are to some extent a matter of interpretation. What one theorist calls a *"technique, style, mode, formula* or *thematic grouping...* may be treated as a *genre* by another" (<Chandler, 1997>). Yet the "more elusive generic idea" (Fowler, 1982: 106) of mode does seem – as I will demonstrate shortly – better suited to denoting the practice of parody.

Parody is invariably a metatextual practice. Hutcheon stresses that parody's "'target' text is always another work of art or, more generally, another form of coded discourse" (1985: 16). The point is helpful in that it provides an important criterion for making the sometimes tricky distinction between parody – which can have satirical intentions – and satire in general. Parody, in Hutcheon's summation, is "an 'intramural' form with aesthetic norms" distinguishable from the "extramural" social and moral norms dealt with in satire (1985: 25). Hutcheon's model is one we might conflate with an earlier taxonomy offered by Dane. Appropriating the work of Saussure, Dane delineates a model based on the different hermeneutic strategies required by parody and satire. Readers of parody, Dane explains, are referred to a "system of expression"; those of satire to a "system of content" (1980: 145). The important difference between the two is that, unlike a system of expression, a system of content – like a set of social conventions – "is regarded primarily in its non-signifying capacity" (148).

Admittedly, a distinction between parody and satire based on their textual as opposed to non-textual objects is easily problematized. Bryant, for instance, is eager to point out that if "the implications of Baudrillard's writings have already been accepted – that everything

is a kind of discourse or text... then the distinction... [Hutcheon makes] is meaningless" (<Bryant>). Two points need to be made in this regard. Firstly, neither Hutcheon nor I address "texts" in the extravagantly inclusive sense adduced by Baudrillard. Our studies in parody, like most others, maintain narrower foci to avoid precisely the sort of confusion Bryant attempts to create. Hutcheon herself acknowledges that the separation she makes "would break down in a deconstructionist perspective where there is no *hors-texte*", but points out that this not her "immediate context" (1985: 16). A second difficulty with Bryant's claim is its implicit premise that what I call metatextuality is the sole difference on which Hutcheon bases her distinction between parody and satire. In separating the two, Hutcheon also stresses that while both "imply critical distancing and therefore value judgements... satire generally uses that distance to make a negative statement about that which is satirized" (44). Some would take this line of thinking even further to say that satire "always criticises" (Pollard, 1970: 73).

However, if parody is an essentially metatextual practice, what is its relationship to intertextuality? Müller notes that "no matter how diverse the discourse on parody might otherwise be, nobody disputes that intertextuality is a decisive – if not the ultimate – characteristic of parody" (1997: 8). The point is a valid but problematic one. Intertextuality is central to both the production and interpretation of parody, but few would dispute its centrality to writing and reading in general. Dentith's summation of intertextuality as "the dense network of quotation, glancing reference, imitation, polemical refutation and so on in which all texts have their being" (2000: 5) demonstrates the point exactly. Writing and reading cannot take place anywhere but in "the

intertextual soup" (Phiddian, 1997: 683). Parody, therefore, needs to be understood as "a particular form of intertextuality" (Ommundsen, 1993: 10).

Within the parameters of parodic design, intertextuality is perhaps best theorized in conjunction with the notion of *intratextuality*. Rose writes that "[u]nlike satire, the parody makes the 'victim', or object, of its attack a part of its own structure" (Rose, 1993: 79) - and it is this basic principle of assimilation or incorporation which sets parodic intertextuality apart. Unlike the outward pointing allusion, parody internalizes a sustained intertextual relationship between two (or more) dissimilar discourses. Intertextual relationships are, in other words, encompassed and made intratextual in the process of parodic production. It is this intratextual nature of parodic design which accounts for it being both "overtly hybrid and double-voiced" (Hutcheon, 1985: 28).

Yet the incorporation or "organized recollection" (Nash, 1985: 81) of artistic material is not in itself parodic. The modi operandi of adapters, imitators, literary critics and plagiarists might be described in similar terms. It is, rather, in its modification of appropriated material that parody sets itself apart. While most aspects of parody have been open to debate for decades – if not centuries – few studies in the "postclassical critical reception of parody" dispute its close relationship with irony (Dane, 1988: 149). Parody, Hutcheon writes, is not simply "a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion" (1985: 6). And although Hutcheon stresses elsewhere that her model is a fundamentally twentieth-century one – and that "there are probably no transhistorical definitions of parody" (10) – ironic inversion is a principle to which she ascribes a trans-

historical status. "Ironic inversion", she writes, "is a characteristic of all parody" (6). This is a point she substantiates with an array of examples – the oldest being Euripides' *Medea*.

It is with this centrality of irony in mind that Phiddian describes parody as writing "with the instability of irony inscribed deep in its structure" (1997: 683) – and the role of intratextuality in this "inscription" should not be overlooked. Parody always ironizes, and its irony stems, by and large, from discrepancies between conjoined textual realities or – in simpler terms – generic or discursive incongruity. Much of the irony in Joyce's *Ulysses*, for instance, arises out of fundamental "disagreements" between epic and novel. Consider for example "the individual hero of the novel [being] opposed to the collective hero of the epic" (Todorov, 1990: 19). In this instance the irony stems from the discrepancy between generic views on character and action as expressed in what might be called a generic polemic – Joyce, in effect, playing one genre off against another.

This notion of the generic or discursive polemic, one application of parodic intratextuality, is central to the theory of parody that this thesis attempts to develop. The following chapters discuss the parodist's craft as one of engineering an intratextual, generic polemic. As what Phiddian calls a "genre-bricoleur" (1997: 681), the parodist constructs a counterpoint of discourse and counter-discourse(s). The result is, of course, a generic hybrid, but this is not to say that all generically hybrid works are parodic. On the contrary, generic hybridity is more a literary norm than exception. Bolongaro is quite correct in asserting that "no generic theories since the turn of the [twentieth] century have

maintained that genres are 'quiet categories' and pure concepts providing the ground for easy taxonomies" (1992: 303). Yet it is in the incompatibility of parody's generic components that parodic hybridity sets itself apart. Parodic hybridity, in this sense, entails the creation of ironic juxtaposition rather than seamless fusion – its ironic inversions relying in turn not so much on a change to a single genre as an exchange between two (or more). Parody is, in this way, a practice that relies on at least two generic reading strategies being undertaken simultaneously.

It is with this understanding of parody in mind that I describe it as a mode of generic engineering, rather than a genre itself. Generic engineering is, in part, a "pun-in-cheek" allusion to both the field of the genetic engineer and the biological analogies that famously characterized nineteenth-century genre theory. It is not, however, my aim to develop analogies in either of these regards. While it is true that both parody and genetic engineering involve the manipulation of pre-existing material in an attempt to modify an entity with a function in mind, their equally salient differences would make any analogy in this regard nonsensical. Furthermore, while "critics have energetically pursued parallels between genres and biological species" since the nineteenth-century (Dubrow, 1982: 7), the practice is a largely discredited one. However, it is to emphasize parody as a theory and practice of generic modification or "refunctioning" (Rose, 1993: 52) that I call it a mode of generic engineering – the practice of parody being after all a practice of "mode-ification".

The notion of parodic refunctioning involves, as Rose writes, a "new set of functions

[being] given to parodied material in the parody and may also entail some criticism of the parodied work". Rose also thinks of it as essentially "comic" (1993: 52). Like a joke, she notes, parody involves the "controlled evocation and destruction of audience expectations" (35) for the "creation of comic incongruity or discrepancy" (31). Yet, as she goes on to note, parody's humour need not be at the expense of an object text (hypotext) or genre.

The notion of the in-joke is also a common point of reference in discussions of parody. Dentith, for instance, writes that some parodies read like a "series of in-jokes" (2000: 24), while Brower considers "the mark of all parody" precisely that "smile of amused recognition shared by reader and writer" (1974: 4). The correlation has even been made in reverse by writers like Nash who consider the allusive in-joke a kind of "minimal parody" (1985: 78) in which "the jester invites the listener / reader to rejoice in his own literary and linguistic knowledge" (77).

Yet not all writers regard the notion of laughter as "indispensable to the idea of parody" (Kiremidjian, 1985: 52). Although Hutcheon agrees that refunctioning is a basic principle of parody, she regards Rose's association of it with comedy as "restrictive" and prefers the "more neutral" (1985: 20) terms of her own definition – and a parody like Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* would seem to support her definition. Rather than associating parody with any immutable intention, Hutcheon prefers to emphasize its technical aspects, calling it "an integrated structural modelling process of revising, replaying, inverting, and 'trans-contextualizing' previous works of art" (1985: 11).

Yet, though not always undertaken with comic intentions, parodic refunctioning always involves the adjustment of an object discourse's meanings, and this is particularly important for understanding the "ideological implications" (Hutcheon, 1985: 28) of parody.

Wellek and Warren – like Todorov – note that a genre exists not as, for example, an animal but as a social institution – "as Church, University, or State is an institution" (1956: 226). An understanding of genre as an institution is important for two reasons. Firstly, as opposed to those theories based on biological analogies, it "reveals that genres are more than just convenient classification aids" (Altman, 1999: 8). Secondly, it acknowledges genres as part of their respective societies and "far from... ideologically neutral" (<Chandler, 1997>).

The notion of genres as "agents of ideological closure" (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 1994: 128) is central to recent thinking on genre. While some genres are more obviously politically motivated than others, no genre is without an ideological leaning. Genres develop under social conditions to which they are intimately related. Todorov writes that "[l]ike any other institution, genres bring to light the constitutive features of the society to which they belong" (1990: 19). Yet the process is not one of neutral reflection. Genres constitute ideological responses to the conditions of their existence. Like any institution, a genre enacts an ideological affiliation – its very conventions being embodiments of "certain values and ideological assumptions" (<Chandler, 1997>).

One drawback of distinguishing parody from satire is that for some this suggests a dissociation of parody from a role in society – whereas this is anything but the case. It is true that parody is in one sense a self-concerned art form, but "the parodic appropriation of the past reaches out beyond textual introversion and aesthetic narcissism to address the 'text's nature in the world'" (Hutcheon, 1985: 116). Drawing on the work of S. J. Schmidt, Rose writes that most parodies can be described as embodying at least two texts "accompanied by their own 'worlds' of authors and readers and their expectations" (1993: 41).

Parody cannot exist independently from genre. All parody – as I asserted earlier – "takes place" at the level of genre (even when a specific hypotext is being used as an embodiment of generic conventions). However, this is not to say that parody is a purely aesthetic enterprise. A genre is by definition a "historically attested codification of discursive properties" (Todorov, 1990: 19) with its society implicit in it. Every society, Todorov notes, "chooses and codifies the acts that correspond most closely to its ideology" (1990: 19). Parodic generic engineering is, consequently, as much a political as artistic enterprise.

Of course, all artistic production negotiates with and through prevailing ideologies and genres. Parody, however, does so in a slightly different sense. Parody is what might be termed a metacultural practice. Metacultural discourse, as described by Mulhern, is "that in which culture, however defined, speaks of itself" (2000: xiv). In another formulation,

it is "discourse in which culture addresses its own generality and conditions of existence". Mulhern describes two basic traits – shared by most meta-practices or disciplines – relevant to this designation. The first of these is a basic concern with "the most general and fundamental problems of their domain" and the second is reflexivity. Meta-practices, Mulhern notes, are generally "themselves a part of what they speak of" (xiv).

As a metacultural practice parody also needs to be understood as a form capable of "substantive cultural work... as it both inhibits and moves forward literary and cultural innovation" (Dentith, 2000: x). Parody has been "many different things to different people" (Rose, 1980: 3) and is a discursive mode with a wide "range of intent" (Hutcheon, 1985: 6). Indeed, it can take any form from "the ridiculing imitation mentioned in standard dictionary definitions" (5) to what Donaldson calls "friendly parodies" (1980: 45). Although parody always subverts / inverts the meanings of its object text or genre, it does not necessarily do so for the purpose of ridicule. As a parody like *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* demonstrates, parodic subversion can be undertaken playfully, and can even be affirmative of its model. For this reason Dentith describes parody as capable of "a continuum of parodic cultural work or parodic cultural effects" (2000: 19).

An important aspect of recent discussions of parody is the "large question about the cultural politics of parody, namely whether it is to be thought of as an essentially conservative or essentially subversive mode" (Dentith, 2000: 10). We have already noted that parody subverts / inverts and ironizes the meanings of its object in some way, but

this can be undertaken playfully or affectionately rather than antagonistically. The "subversions" of *Hamlet* and the *Odyssey* in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Ulysses* respectively, demonstrate just this – being, in fact, also ironized affirmations of their canonical objects. Hence although parody always embodies a "mixture of conservative and revolutionary impulses in both aesthetic and social terms" (Hutcheon, 1985: 115), they always give priority to one of these impulses. Indeed, as Dentith notes in this regard, parody's "uses are never neutral" (2000: 28).

Dentith's observation is especially important for understanding "[p]arody's emergence as a key term for social agency" (Burns, 1998: 238). Drawing on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Judith Butler, Burns emphasizes the use of parody as a "gesture of mediation between self and social forces". "Parody", Burns writes, "operates as an unstable act that builds out of the way consciousness is constructed, weighing on the question of how that consciousness is related to social normativity and how it is engaged by representational acts" (238). Hence in the parodic act of negotiating with prevailing generic codes, the parodist is simultaneously negotiating a position within "the world". As Burns goes on to note in this regard, parody's link to social agency "is largely due to its conceptual location at the interstices between the self and its constitutive elements" (238).

Parody offered Wilde the textual means for subverting hegemony from within. "Wilde", Varty writes, "is now championed as one of the most radical and progressive writers of the 1890s, challenging conventions, whether aesthetic, social or political, from within" (2000: xxvi). Yet the subversion Wilde undertook in his writing never amounted to open

defiance. Focusing on *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* respectively, Chapters Two and Three of this thesis explore the use of parodic "word-masks" (Rose, 1993: 30) for the purpose of covert subversion. Word-masks – central to Wildean parody – entail the duplicitous use of an object text / genre as a cover under which a parodist hides other meanings. In such a case the object text may be subjected to "some reform or rewriting by the parodist, but may also be the object of satire, or a mask used to allow other targets to be attacked or reformed in an 'Aesopian' or covert manner" (Rose, 1993: 30). All three of these applications are at work in Wilde's parodies. Yet the potential for covert political operations – amidst concurrent negotiations of generic and social conventions – is undoubtedly what drew Wilde to this particular brand of parody. Parodic word-masks not only allowed Wilde to subvert the conventions of the prevailing hegemony, but also to propagate a gay identity "publicly" – but within relative safety. As Rose notes with regard to word-masks, "[s]uch disguises may be used by the parodist where direct criticism might run the risk of bringing down censorship or a libel suit" (30). The consequences in Wilde's case were obviously much greater, and the need for protection increased accordingly.

If Wildean parody might be described as claiming a covert agency, Joycean parody must, in contrast, be acknowledged as expressing deep-seated political ambivalence. Ambivalence is – to some or other degree – a characteristic of all parodic appropriation because not even the most denigrating of parodies can be completely dismissive of its object. Dubrow writes in this regard that "[t]he decision to parody a genre at the very least indicates some involvement with its values, some interest in what previous writers

have achieved in it" (1982: 25). Joycean parody reflects the "profound ambivalence" (2000: ix) Dentith attributes to the mode. With specific reference to *Ulysses*, Chapters Four and Five of this thesis explore Joyce's use of parody for negotiating an artistic and national identity. As an Irish writer who "described himself with some justification as 'apolitical'" (Alexander, 1990: 8), Joyce spent his career trying to negotiate a position between "the blandishments of the monoglossic Gaelic culture with its accompanying nostalgia and reverence for the epic past" on the one hand, and "the terrors imposed by cultural domination by the monoglossic English language, the instrument of everyday humiliation" (Crowley, 1996: 199) on the other. Using the essentially polyphonic structure of parody to conflate, relativize and problematize the dominant aesthetic and political discourses of his time, Joyce demonstrates how parodic ambivalence "may entail not only a mixture of criticism and sympathy for the parodied text, but also the creative expansion of it into something new" (Rose, 1993: 51) – and this is especially evident in what might be called his "parodic patriotism".

If Joyce and Wilde could be said to use parody for the expression of subversive or progressive political views, Stoppard's use of it is, by contrast, fairly conservative. Although Joyce's *Ulysses* might be considered conservative in its implicit confirmation of the *Odyssey*'s value as a canonical text, *Ulysses* also, and perhaps more importantly, uses the *Odyssey* as a vehicle for subversive politics – challenging both English and Irish hegemony. Stoppard's parodies, on the other hand, confirm conservative English values not only in their reification of the English canon but also in terms of the ideological premises with which they invest their hypotexts. Chapters Six and Seven examine the

way in which parody can serve as "one of the ways in which modern artists have managed to come to terms with the weight of the past" (Hutcheon, 1985: 29) – and, indeed, tradition. Focusing on *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and *Travesties* respectively, these chapters explore parody's capacity to function as tribute or homage to the writers of the past in a fashion revealing "real respect for the assumptions behind the literary type" (Dubrow, 1982: 24) being parodied. Indeed, as Sammells notes, for Stoppard, the Eastern European Englishman, "Englishness becomes... a deliberate fantasy of the eccentric, the authentic, the individualist and the traditional" (2002: 118).

CHAPTER 2

Framing *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: Wilde and the Parodic Impulse

The Evening News headline on the first day of Wilde's libel case did *not* read "Wilde & Queensbury" nor "Wilde & Marquis", but "Oscar & Marquis". The juxtaposition is telling. In its use of first name and title the headline does not suggest the case to be the clash of two equals as much as one of individual with Establishment – a representation closer to the truth. The case may have been civil rather than criminal, but there were obvious criminal implications were Wilde to lose (for which the state's machinery waited in the wings). In this respect the libel suit was merely an opening act. Having learnt of forthcoming testimonies from prostitutes, Wilde and his counsel withdrew their case, but too late. The assembly of prostitutes set the scene for the establishment's victory. In a belated and self-defeating attempt to limit damage, Wilde acknowledged the allegation – "posing as a somdomite" (*sic*) – to be true and in the interests of society. However, the word "posing" was about to be taken out of the equation. "Within hours after Wilde dropped his suit", Epstein writes, "Queensbury gave the public prosecutor the prostitutes' statements. On this evidence the Crown immediately brought charges against Wilde" (Epstein, 1998: 11) and within a day he sat in Holloway Prison.

An increasing number of studies make reference to the importance of parody in the works of Oscar Wilde. "Wilde's career as a writer", Sammells writes, "might be mapped in terms of his engagement with the power of literary and theatrical convention; his was a struggle to reinvent genre" (2002: 106), and parody afforded Wilde the basic textual strategies for doing so. But Wilde's struggle against the

generic conventions of his age was not simply an aesthetic one. Indeed, Wilde's artistic struggle needs to be recognized as part of a broader political struggle against Victorian social as much as artistic conventions. Focusing primarily on *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the following two chapters explore Wilde's use of parody, as a mode of generic engineering, for subverting discourses from within while simultaneously, and covertly, propagating gay meanings.

Although the term parody is more often applied to Wilde's comedies, the mechanics of parody are equally, if less obviously, operative in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. McCormack makes the point that "[i]t is hard to say anything original about *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, largely because there is so little that is original in it" (1997: 110). The assertion is, of course, a little extreme, yet it does underscore the profoundly assimilative nature of the text. In McEvoy's introduction to Lewis's *The Monk* – a parodic novel in its own right – she describes Lewis as "a glutton of literary styles, [with] an incredible capacity for having his cake and eating it" (1998: xxvii), and a similar point could be made about Wilde. Indeed, as Julian reminds us, "*The Picture of Dorian Gray* has been said to be a succession of parodies, almost a compilation" (1969: 185) – dominated by its two concurrent (and closely related) parodies of Gothic and realist fiction.

Dorian Gray (1890) appeared during the late nineteenth-century Gothic revival and is commonly considered part of it. It certainly does approximate the dark writing of excess described by Halberstam (1995) and Botting (1996) in their two seminal studies of the genre. But in *Dorian Gray* Wilde could be said to refunction,

metafictionalize and ironize Gothic conventions in a way that prevents his novel from becoming conventionally Gothic. Indeed, *Dorian Gray* is a fine example of how, in his appropriations of generic conventions, Gothic and otherwise, "Wilde uses parody to transform the prevailing literary norms of his age according to his own demands" (<Van Cauwenberge, 1996>).

Although "it is impossible to define a fixed set of conventions" (Botting, 1996: 15) for the Gothic novel, there do exist, to quote Gautier, "shared formal conventions that make our use of the generic term intelligible" (1999: 202). Gothic writing "began as part of an attempt to liberate and validate kinds of narrative – folkloristic, mythic, supernatural – that 'progress' and 'modernity' in their eighteenth-century versions had tended to exclude or marginalise" (Blair, 2002: viii). Like most romantic fiction, Gothic is an imaginatively subjective mode of literary expression aimed at an emotional response in its reader – most notably in terms of fear and revulsion. The Gothic tradition, Botting writes, is one drawing on "medieval romances, supernatural, Faustian and fairy tales, Renaissance drama, sentimental, picaresque and confessional narratives as well as the ruins, tombs and nocturnal speculations that fascinated Graveyard poets" (1996: 14). Set in the proverbial half-light of castles, mansions, abbeys and alleys, Gothic plots, typically pitched beyond the margins of verisimilitude, comprise events of a sensational, threatening and generally supernatural nature, in which characters – rarely more than crudely manipulated stereotypes – clash as exponents of good or evil. As such, at least in its traditional form, Gothic tended to "combine extravagant incident with rather conventional morality in ways that seem clumsy and naïve to modern eyes" (Blair, 2002: viii).

Wilde's novel certainly incorporates Gothic conventions. "One Gothic convention that seems to fly in the face of the habits of the reading of character that we expect in the realist novel", according to McEvoy, "is the technique of paralleling or doubling, where character is conveyed through the use of doubles or correspondences" (1998: xviii). The living painting, around which *Dorian Gray*'s plot revolves, has (like most Gothic tropes) deep roots in European superstition. Ancient German, Slavonic, Norse and Greek tales offer accounts of the "externalizable soul". In his discussion of ancient folklore, Frazer recounts the belief that a soul could be temporarily removed from its body and still continue to animate it "by virtue of a sort of sympathy or 'action at a distance'. So long as this object which he calls his life or soul remains unharmed, the man is well; if it is injured, he suffers; if it is destroyed, he dies" (1981: 296). Alternatively, as Frazer continues, "if he should find some place of absolute security, he may be content to leave his soul there permanently. The advantage of this is that, so long as the soul remains unharmed in the place where he has deposited it, the man himself is immortal; nothing can kill his body, since his life is not in it" (297).

This superstition of the externalizable soul provided Wilde with a basic premise for his plot. In the painting (the site of Dorian's externalized soul) Wilde employs two fairly standard Gothic tropes: the portrait coming to life and the double – the double itself rooted in the *doppelganger* superstition. In the novel these two tropes are combined with an additional supernatural element, namely the somewhat Faustian pact Dorian inadvertently makes with an unseen force. "How sad it is", Dorian murmurs as he looks at his portrait in Basil's studio, "I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than

this day in June..." (Wilde, 1968: 34). The thought prompts Dorian to make a wish: "[i]f it were only the other way. If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that – for that – I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that" (34). Of course, it is not long before Dorian begins to suspect that a reversal has in fact taken place. Having uttered his "mad wish that he himself might remain young, and the portrait grow old", Dorian soon begins to notice seemingly "impossible" (78) changes in the painting.

In conjunction with his use of standard Gothic tropes, Wilde also employs the standard rhetorical strategies and lexicon of the Gothic genre. Consider for instance the following description of one of Dorian's nocturnal walks in a "Gothicized" London:

> Where he went he hardly knew. He remembered wandering through dimly lit streets, past gaunt black-shadowed archways and evil-looking houses. Women with hoarse voices and harsh laughter had called after him. Drunkards had reeled by cursing, and chattering to themselves like monstrous apes. He had seen grotesque children huddled upon doorsteps, and heard shrieks and oaths from gloomy corners. (Wilde, 1968: 76)

The treatment is recognizably Gothic, exemplifying the "ornamental excess" (akin to that of Gothic architecture) or "rhetorical extravagance" (1995: 2) to which Halberstam refers. Few nouns appear without a generically well-worn adjective, and adjectives serve to suggest a foreboding atmosphere rather than describe nouns accurately. "In Gothic productions", Botting writes, "imagination and emotional effects exceed reason" (1996: 3), and Dorian's quintessentially Gothic experience of

London's nightlife is wholly indicative of this. Gothic style could hence be thought of as a sort of literary impressionism; a style of elaborate, subjective word-work with the primary aim of capturing ambience (or at least a focalizer's perception of it) at the expense of a scene's "true" details. Scenic descriptions in Gothic novels are as much recordings of psychological landscapes, as they are of geographical, and, as such, often more suggestive of fearful, over-imaginative interpretation than rational observation. Indeed, in this respect the way in which Dorian perceives London might be compared to the way in which protagonists in classic Gothic fiction perceived the treacherous castles, dungeons, mountainous landscapes and graveyards in which these stories are set. Dorian's responses to London by night are "Gothic responses". Indeed, the Gothic is invoked time and time again in Dorian's responses to London and its inhabitants – as in Dorian's description to Lord Henry of "this grey, monstrous London of ours" as a dangerous, yet scintillating, "labyrinth of grimy streets and black, grassless squares" in which some people "filled [him] with terror" (Wilde, 1968: 49).

Yet although *Dorian Gray* incorporates Gothic conventions, it also subverts (through ironic inversion) and / or problematizes them. Wilde's handling of moral conflict is especially important in this regard. Breaking away from the traditional imbroglio of barefaced villains and brazen heroes, Wilde engineers an infinitely subtler design by inverting the positions of character and conflict. While Gothic novelists typically situate their protagonists within a Manichean struggle, Wilde, instead, situates his novel's moral struggle within his protagonist (using character as a context for conflict, rather than the other way round). As Dorian himself remarks in this regard, "[e]ach of us has Heaven and Hell in him" (Wilde, 1968: 122), and it is in situating his novel's

struggle between good and evil within Dorian's own psychology that Wilde's novel subverts the standard Gothic plot and problematizes its Manichean morality. Of course, in some ways this recalls what Stevenson undertakes in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (which appeared in 1886 and doubtless served as an influence, if not hypotext of sorts, for Wilde's novel), but Stevenson's novel remains conventionally Gothic in that, even though it's hero and villain are the same person, they are still two clearly discernable and diametrically opposed personae – one good, one bad. In Wilde's novel, though, Dorian – as the unitary and ironic embodiment of villain and hero – is Jekyll and simultaneously Hyde. Dorian's portrait is not another self, but rather becomes a sort of magical mirror reflecting the "corruption of his soul" (103).

Furthermore, as a particularly metaficional type of parody, *Dorian Gray* also reflects upon the Gothic conventions it incorporates. "Metafiction", Ommundsen writes, "presents its readers with allegories of the fictional experience, calling our attention to the functioning of the fictional artefact, its creation and reception, its participation in the meaning-making systems of our culture" (1993: 12). *Dorian Gray* constantly and explicitly reflects on the generic conventions it incorporates, whether Gothic, realist, mythical, fantastical, melodramatic or Shakespearean (to name but some of the more important examples). Chapter 6 of the novel offers a good example of such a reflection on the Gothic sensibility the text embodies when Basil questions Lord Henry's views on morality:

> "But, surely, if one lives merely for one's self, Harry, one pays a terrible price for doing so?" suggested the painter.

"Yes, we are overcharged for everything nowadays. I should fancy that the real tragedy of the poor is that they can afford nothing but self-denial. Beautiful sins, like beautiful things, are the privilege of the rich".

"One has to pay in other ways but money."

"What sort of ways, Basil?"

"Oh! I should fancy in remorse, in suffering, in... well, in the consciousness of degradation."

Lord Henry shrugged his shoulders. "My dear fellow, mediaeval art is charming, but mediaeval emotions are out of date. One can use them in fiction, of course. But the only things one can use in fiction are the things that one has ceased to use in fact". (Wilde, 1968: 69)

In the above excerpt, the novel's Gothic poetics might be described as engaging, quite literally, in a Bakhtinian dialogue with realist poetics. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century Gothic novelists sustained a love affair with the Middle Ages, drawing extensively on "the myths, legends and folklore of medieval romances" (Botting, 1996: 3). Medievalism was consequently an important influence on Gothic fiction – in aesthetic as well as moral terms. The Manichean morality of the traditional Gothic novel, for which Basil serves as a spokesman above, is closely related to Gothic's medieval sources. In the extract above, Basil, speaking for virtue with "mediaeval emotion", supplies the discourse of Gothic fiction to which Lord Henry, as an advocate for mimetic poetics, responds. Making a self-reflexive call for verisimilitude, Lord Henry censures Basil for his Gothic effusion. Yet, while subverting and ironizing the novel's Gothic strain, this passage simultaneously, and ironically, subverts the mimetic poetics for which Lord Henry speaks. Indeed, as Hutcheon writes, "modern metafiction exists on the self-conscious border between art and life" (1985: 72) and, as such, "contests the realist dogma" (73). In drawing our

attention to the textuality of the narrative, Lord Henry's condemnation of Basil's "Gothic behaviour" simultaneously contradicts the mimesis for which he speaks.

This intratextual relationship between realist and Gothic discourses is central to *Dorian Gray*'s parodic structure – Wilde often parodying the one from the vantage point of the other. But that is not to imply that the combination of Gothic and realist genres is somehow inherently parodic. The co-existence of Gothic and realist elements in "unparodic" texts was commonplace by the 1890's. As Botting notes, the Gothic "strain existed in excess of, and often within, realist forms, both inhabiting and excluded from its homogenising representations of the world" (1996: 12). Dickens and Bronte, for instance, grafted Gothic and realist conventions together in unparodic ways. But it is in the way that Wilde engineers a mutually subversive interrelationship between these genres (in effect playing the one off against the other) that his novel is parodic.

On a number of occasions *Dorian Gray*'s narrator adopts an authorial demeanour closer to Eliot or Gaskell than Stevenson or Poe. The opening of Chapter 4, describing one of Dorian's visits to Lord Henry, demonstrates one such generic shift:

> One afternoon, a month later, Dorian was reclining in a luxurious arm-chair, in the little library of Lord Henry's house in Mayfair. It was, in its way, a very charming room, with its high-panelled wainscoting of olive-stained oak, its cream-coloured frieze and ceiling of raised plaster-work, and its brick-dust felt carpet strewn with silk long-fringed Persian-rugs... Lord Henry had not yet come in. He was always late on principle, his principle being that punctuality is the thief of time. (46-47)

The authorial presence – typically third person, omniscient, authoritative and yet familiar – is thoroughly characteristic of the realist tradition. The excerpt also demonstrates the documentation of "accessory detail" as well as the intellectual and social "conventionalities of the moment" which Pater found to exemplify "the better sort of realism" (1969: 36). As in the Gothic excerpt discussed above, this description is also rich in adjectives, but the effect is of a less overwhelming sort; their appeal is intellectual rather than emotional, guiding the reader in the mental construction of physical scenery rather than the creation of a pervasive atmosphere suggestive of an internal state. Indeed, the generic shift is so pronounced at places in the novel that it is near impossible to imagine that the world described in this particular passage (and others like it) is the same one in which, we are expected to believe, a supernatural painting holds Dorian's soul.

Yet, although incorporating realist conventions, *Dorian Gray* also subverts them in its narrative structure and thematic concerns. Kohl describes *Dorian Gray's* "narrative dramatisation of the loss of identity [as] a kind of parody on the classic *Bildungsroman* and its ilk, in which the hero's personality develops from selfish egotism to compassionate maturity" (1989: 161). In *Dorian Gray* this formulaic development of the realist protagonist is reversed; Dorian undergoes growth of a very different sort that leads, rather, from compassion to selfish egotism. In this way *Dorian Gray* might be said to use Gothic conventions – and that is to say, a "rhetorical style and narrative structure designed to produce fear and desire in the reader" (Halberstam, 1995: 2) – to subvert the conventions of the realist novel. At the beginning of Wilde's novel Dorian is described as having "all youth's passionate

purity" (1968: 27) and as a "very earnest" person with "a beautiful nature" (26). "There was something in his face", we read in Chapter 2, "that made one trust him at once" (27). Like the traditional hero of the *Bildungsroman*, Dorian's education then begins. Lord Henry's influence fills him with "a wild desire to know everything about life" (49), and "[t]he more he knew, the more he desired to know" (103). Yet the influence of Lord Henry – as Dorian's Mephistophelian tempter – takes the narrative in a very direction from that of the standard Victorian novel of development. It is his doctrine of "new Hedonism" (104) and the mysterious "yellow book" (101) that "poison[s]" (115) Dorian, and makes of him the depraved, self-serving murderer he becomes. Yet it is ultimately Dorian who takes responsibility for this. "[Dorian] knew that he had tarnished himself", we read, "filled his mind with corruption, and given horror to his fancy; that he had been an evil influence to others, and had experienced a terrible joy in being so" (164). In an attempt to "kill the past" Dorian then attempts to "kill the painters work" (167), but succeeds only in killing himself. For Dorian, the realist hero's developmental stages of self-awareness, humanity and accomplishment hence become those of narcissism, murder and death.

It is important to note that, although Wilde parodies Gothic and realist genres concurrently in *Dorian Gray*, the natures of these parodies are actually quite different politically speaking. Unlike the parody of realism, Wilde's parody of the Gothic genre – while a radical appropriation of it – still reflects a "sincere" ideological affiliation to it. As Rose paraphrases Tynyanov, "parody can be sympathetic to its target and... the material for it can be both respected and admired" (1996: 120). Prior to the appearance of *Dorian Gray*, the Gothic novel had already earned a reputation as a soapbox for the disenfranchised. Although traditionally associated with

conventional morality, the Gothic tradition had also become notorious for celebrating "sinful" and / or "criminal" behaviour and, as such, offered Wilde an alternative to realism and the morality it endorsed. As Marez writes, Wilde's "championing of anti-mimeticism, artificiality, laziness, lying, and decay explicitly challenged dominant English and American notions of realism, the work ethic, sincerity and progress" (1997: 273) – in other words, precisely the aesthetic and social values embodied in the realist novel. In this respect the Gothic genre (as both anti-mimetic and "decadent") enabled Wilde to propound an alternative world-view – by using Gothic as both a counter-discourse for subverting realism, and also as a medium for propagating counter-hegemonic values.

A number of feminist studies draw attention to the use of Gothic devices by female authors in response to patriarchal oppression. "Monsters", Halberstam writes, "have to be everything the human is not and, in producing the negative of human, [Gothic] novels make way for the invention of human as white, male, middle-class, and heterosexual" (1995: 22). However, while even female novelists "invented" (or defined) human in this fashion, they also challenged it as such. The monster, as supreme threat to the masculine hero, commonly embodied femaleness. Some readings of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, for instance, suggest the monster to represent "women's creativity [or] Mary Shelley herself" (29). Feminist Gothic is, in this respect, sometimes more or less allegorical. Its central dichotomy of good and evil is really that of patriarchal order and an apatriarchal alternative.

But feminists are not alone in enunciating the hidden meanings of the Gothic novel. The discoveries of queer theorists are strikingly similar. "[T]he Gothic", Sedgwick

argues, "was the first novelistic form in England to have close, relatively visible links to male homosexuality, at a time when styles of homosexuality, and even its visibility and distinctness, were markers of division and tension between classes as much as genders" (1985: 91). The situation explains thematic similarities between queer and feminist Gothic. The increasingly pronounced "markers of division" to which Sedgwick refers distinguished gay men as apatriarchal and inferior. Queer and feminist Gothic consequently share concerns like otherness, oppression, victimization and persecution. As the monster in feminist Gothic is easily theorized as female itself, so the monster in queer Gothic "becomes easily recognizable as queer" (Halberstam, 1995: 65). But while queer and feminist Gothic might be said to explore similar experiences at the hands of patriarchal domination, their anxieties are distinctly different. Whereas the oppression and / or persecution of women typically began at birth, that of gay men began with exposure.

In *Dorian Gray,* Wilde refunctions Gothic conventions to reflect on the plight of the homosexual within the context of Victorian England. In his discussion of Wilde's novel Sutherland writes that "homosexual hints are deeply buried beneath Dorian's conventional heterosexual villainies (the seduction of Sibyl Vane, the debauching of society wives, the ruining of young girls, the inhaling of opium)" (1998: 198). But homosexuality and its place within Victorian sexual politics are also addressed through the novel's ambiguous or inexplicit use of Gothic rhetorical strategies. Consider for instance the following passage taken from Chapter 11:

> There are few of us who have not sometimes wakened before dawn, either after one of those dreamless nights that make us almost enamoured of death, or one of those nights of horror and misshapen joy, when through the

chambers of the brain sweep phantoms more terrible than reality itself, and instinct with that vivid life that lurks in all grotesques, and that lends to Gothic art its enduring vitality, this art being, one might fancy, especially the art of those whose minds have been troubled with the malady of reverie. (Wilde, 1968: 104-5)

In this passage references to "those nights of horror and misshapen joy" and "sweep[ing] phantoms more terrible than reality itself" offer good examples of the ambiguous use of Gothic elements for reflecting on Dorian's "unspeakable" homosexual acts in relation to an internalized hegemonic morality. In this extract Wilde uses the ghost or phantom, a standard Gothic trope, to reflect on Dorian (and others) being haunted by forbidden desires. Combining antitheses in phrases like "horror and misshapen joy", Wilde's novel reflects on the Manichean struggle in Dorian's "chambers of the brain" – his own feelings of delight and desire as well as fear and guilt. "The scandalousness of an act", writes W. A. Cohen, "hinges upon the degree of secrecy requisite to its commission" (1996: 5), and homosexuality, as Victorian England's best-kept secret, was consequently also its most devastating in the event of revelation. It is this anxiety, reflected in the passage above, that lies at the heart of what Sedgwick calls the novel of "homosexual panic" – a literary form which "crystallized for English audiences the terms of a dialectic between male homosexuality and homophobia, in which homophobia appeared thematically in paranoid plots" (1985: 92).

In *Dorian Gray* Wilde undertakes an ironic redirection of Gothic's rhetorical strategies to reflect on the tyranny of conventional morality – or, as Lord Henry prefers, "the maladies of medievalism" (Wilde, 1968: 29). Dorian's feelings of guilt and paranoia over his "splendid sins" (49) are indicative of the hegemonic morality he

has internalized and against which he struggles. Dorian Gray might hence also be termed a "Victorian novel of homosexual conscience" in which a protagonist struggles with his desire for that which, to quote Lord Henry, "monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful" (29). Indeed, the Manichean struggle that Wilde situates within Dorian is really one between a "good" heterosexual norm and an "evil" homosexual variation. In this way Dorian becomes both Gothic villain and hero, and dramatizes Lord Henry's assertion that "the bravest man amongst us is afraid of himself" (29).

This notion of the "evil" homosexual variation is also relevant to the portrait – a parodic device in its own right. Upon first seeing the altered portrait, Basil cannot believe that it is the same painting. "It was some foul parody", he thinks, "some infamous, ignoble satire" (Wilde, 1968: 121). But what Basil mistakes for a satirical parody of his own painting, which Lord Henry once called "the finest portrait of modern times" (33), is not so much a lampoon on his art as a caricature of the Victorian homosexual as an ironic and monstrous inversion of a heterosexual man. "A man who loved other men", Bartlett writes, "could only be described as an invert, an inversion of something, a pervert, an exotic, a disease, a victim, a variation" (Bartlett, 1989: 164) – or, as Dorian's portrait suggests, a parody of a "normal" man.

The issue of categorization (in society's dealings with same-sex relations) is one we should also consider in conjunction with Wilde's use and misuse of patriarchal and fraternal discourses. There is a sense in which Wilde's approach to language itself is parodic. Wilde's "epigrammatic style of mimicry and reversal" (Lesjak, 2000: 181) – most evident in his plays – is often used to both replicate and subvert or destabilize

discursive conventions and conventional wisdom / morality. This strategy is also employed in *Dorian Gray*, Lord Henry's assertion that "[they] live in an age that reads too much to be wise" (Wilde, 1968: 87) being a good example. Yet in *Dorian Gray* Wilde's subversion of hegemonic language and ideology is also achieved in another way.

Wilde's use of patriarchal and / or fraternal discourses often involves concepts being refunctioned to convey homoerotic and romantic sentiments. The world in which Dorian, Basil and Lord Henry live is conspicuously male. Women hardly feature and, when they do, function only to bring about developments between men. However, while the novel certainly presents "a man's world" of sorts, it is one in which patriarchal and fraternal discourses function ambiguously. No example illustrates this better than the novel's reinvention of "friendship". As a concept recurring in conversations throughout the novel, friendship seems to take on a versatility amenable to almost any point on what Sedgwick calls the continuum of "[m]ale homosocial desire" (Sedgwick, 1985: 2). Lord Henry's assertions that he chooses his "friends for their good looks" and "acquaintances for their good characters" (Wilde, 1968: 23) suggest a meaning for friendship somewhat at odds with its standard definition. Indeed, the "friendships" to which Lord Henry refers seem to owe their existence to the principles of sexual attraction rather than those of platonic affinity. Basil's description of Dorian's friendship as "so fatal to young men" (117) invokes a comparable (homo)sexual and / or romantic subtext – a subtext developed still further by Dorian's history of ultimately disgraced, if not suicidal, friends. What Wilde undertakes in *Dorian Gray* might hence be described as an "opening up" of a key definition in fraternal discourse to accommodate a wider spectrum of same-sex

relations – a strategy subverting fraternal discourse altogether. In dissolving the boundaries between "types" of male-male relationships, Wilde infuses the otherwise black-and-white conceptual framework of fraternity with the (Dorian) gray it has been designed to exclude.

In the novel this strategy is, of course, complemented by Lord Henry's new Hedonism – a "return to the Hellenic ideal... [and possibly] to something finer, richer, than the Hellenic ideal" (Wilde, 1968: 29). Wilde invokes Hellenism to signify an alternative moral context in which homosexuality was permitted, and his parodic incorporation of Greek mythology also serves to do this. Earlier on in this chapter I refer to how eighteenth and nineteenth-century Gothic novelists drew extensively on the myths of the Middle Ages (Botting, 1996: 3). However, in Wilde's case, Gothic's use of mythology undergoes a signatory twist. While sustaining Gothic's love affair with mythology, Wilde's myths of choice are those of Ancient Greece rather than Medieval England – a strategy invoking an alternative moral context. Furthermore, whereas Gothic authors typically drew on myths as unmentioned sources, in *Dorian Gray* they are labeled and parodied in a manner prefiguring the metempsychosis of Joyce's *Ulysses*. "In *Picture*", Riquelme notes, "Wilde provides an early example of what T. S. Eliot called 'the mythical method,' a defining element of modernism that Eliot locates in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and earlier in some of William Butler Yeats's poems" (2000: 617). In Chapter 11 of *Dorian Gray* we encounter a reference to one having "ancestors in literature, as well as in one's race, nearer perhaps in type and temperament, many of them, and certainly with an influence of which one was more absolutely conscious" (Wilde, 1968: 113). This observation on the part of the narrator is quite obviously a key to understanding the parodic and allusive strategies behind

Wilde's highly self-conscious novel. Earlier on in Chapter 11 we find a description of the hero of "the yellow book" (101) that Lord Henry sends Dorian as "a kind of pre-figuring type of [Dorian]" (102). "And, indeed", as the passage continues, "the whole book seemed to [Dorian] to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it" (102). Most critics believe this unnamed French novel to be Huysmans's *A rebours*, but the notion of Dorian having "pre-figuring types" or "ancestors in literature" is fundamental to an understanding of *Dorian Gray*'s intertextual strategies in general.

At a number of points throughout the novel, Dorian either models himself on or recognizes himself as a mythical, literary or dramatic archetype. Yet the parallels established almost invariably become parodic. Although not the only Greek myth assimilated, that of Narcissus provides the most obvious and sustained of the novel's mythical inclusions. Upon seeing his image in the portrait, Dorian "recognise[s] himself for the first time" (Wilde, 1968: 33), and the moment constitutes the first of many correspondences with the myth of Narcissus. Indeed, it is Dorian's own portrait – an image of him "in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty" (167) – with which he falls in love. These are parallels of which Dorian is aware, sometimes even creates, and to which he responds playfully. "Once", we read, "in a boyish mockery of Narcissus, he had kissed, or feigned to kiss, those painted lips that now smile so cruelly at him" (88). And yet, while the myth is reproduced in such parallels, it is also subverted by the inversion / antithesis his "reflection" eventually becomes. Unlike Narcissus, though, Dorian's reflection is a changing one and it is not long before his metamorphic portrait must be stowed out of sight. While still growing "more and more enamoured of his own beauty" (103), Dorian's interest in the portrait changes as

it begins to reflect his "monstrous soul life" (167). Often, we are told, Dorian would "stand, with a mirror, in front of the portrait that Basil Hallward had painted of him, looking now at the evil and ageing face on the canvas, and now at the fair young face that laughed back at him from the polished glass" (102-3). Furthermore, within the framework of the Narcissus myth, Sibyl Vane features as a reworking of Echo, who – longing for Dorian – dies a death with "all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which [Dorian] took a great part, but by which [he has] not been wounded" (84).

While *Dorian Gray* itself embodies traditional Victorian morality in what Sutherland calls its "hyper-moralistic narrative" (1998: 200), it also, by way of various interrelated textual strategies, propagates an alternative sexual preference. In *Dorian Gray* Wilde employs parody as a means for reinventing genres for new purposes. Neither primarily comic nor satirical, *Dorian Gray* reflects parody's subtler potential for refunctioning a genre by subverting, ironizing and problematizing its aesthetic and moral values, while simultaneously propagating others. It also demonstrates parody's potential to conceal meanings under what Rose refers to as "word-masks" (1993: 30). Word-masks, Rose explains, entail the duplicitous use of an object text / genre as a cover under which a parodist conceals other meanings. In such a case the object text "allow[s] other targets to be attacked or reformed in an 'Aesopian' or covert manner" (30). This potential for covert writing is undoubtedly what drew Wilde to parody, and it is this aspect of parody that he developed further in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

CHAPTER 3

Behind Enemy Lines: Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*

The Importance of Being Earnest (1895) is a very difficult play to discuss in generic terms since it incorporates such a wide range of generic conventions (including those of farce, comedy of manners, play of ideas, Victorian melodrama and the French "well-made" play, to name but a few). "Behind Wilde's play", Donaldson writes, "stretch long ever-receding, echoing corridors of theatrical history, parodies of imitations of well-known theatrical situations" (1980: 46). *Earnest*'s basic plot is itself an especially well-known scenario: it "travesties a universal plot – used by Euripides in *Ion* and in Shakespeare's late romances – concerned with the discovery of true identities and the consequent reconciliation of the long-separated members of a family" (Morgan, 1990: 42). *Earnest*'s characters are similarly conventional in the extreme – on one level little more than "the established literary types of the wicked brother, the officious guardian, the gorgon-aunt etc." (Sammells, 1986: 381). Indeed, *Earnest* is very much a play of (and on) the clichés of its time – in aesthetic as well as ideological terms.

Focusing on Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, this chapter goes on to explore in greater detail Wilde's use of parody as a means for subverting and refunctioning hegemonic discourses. As an essentially double-coded or layered mode of textual production, parody, in its subtlest form, can afford a writer the opportunity to conceal one discourse under another. In such a case hegemonic meanings can be used as a camouflage under which a writer conveys secret counter-hegemonic meanings and, in

effect, inscribes a hidden discourse. Parody requires, after all, as much a parodic mode of reading as writing. On this point Nash refers to the importance of a perceptible "stylistic discrepancy" for the reader's recognition of parody (1985: 89). Yet if the signifiers of such a discrepancy remain both subtle and esoteric, parody can have its secondary discourse more or less overlooked by the uninitiated – the uninitiated being, in the case of Wilde's works, the general (heterosexual) public. In this sense one might say that parody offered Wilde a set of tactics for covert operations "behind enemy lines" in textual as well as political terms.

Donaldson writes that *Earnest* is a play "buil[t] on cliché – cliché of speech and sentiment, cliché of dramatic situation" (1980: 45). As such it is also a play built on a "clichéd morality", and Wilde's use of Victorian melodrama, as an aesthetic and ideological point of reference, is central to *Earnest*'s parodic design – *Earnest* being, as Sammells notes, a play in which Wilde "reinvents" Victorian melodrama (2002: 106). In as much as Victorian melodrama "was the prototype of Victorian art which claimed to reflect reality and educate its audience with plain truths" (<Van Cauwenberge, 1996>), it serves as an embodiment of that hegemony that Wilde subverts in his text. Indeed, as Sinfield notes in this regard, "a dissident text may derive its leverage, its purchase, precisely from its partial implication with the dominant; it may embarrass the dominant by appropriating its concepts and imagery" (1994: 16), and this is what Wilde undertakes in a number of ways in *Earnest*.

While *Earnest* incorporates elements of melodrama, it simultaneously subverts them.

This is especially evident in its subversion, through metafiction, of melodrama's basic pretence of mimesis. In *Earnest*, Alexander notes, "[r]ealistic presentation is rejected, in characterization, in situation, in dialogue" (1990: 26). While *Earnest*'s characters frequently refer to notions like truth, reality and verisimilitude in their conversations, Wilde's play also continually draws our attention to its own mechanics (in a fashion that would later inspire Tom Stoppard's *Travesties*). The play's denouement offers good examples of this. Just as it emerges that Miss Prism lost the handbag containing the Moncrieff baby in a cloakroom on Victoria Station's Brighton line (precisely where Jack had been discovered as an infant), Lady Bracknell looks at Jack and says: "I sincerely hope nothing improbable is going to happen. The improbable is always in bad, or at any rate, questionable taste" (Wilde, 1968: 379). In this remark Wilde reflects, satirically, on the suspenseful, coincidence-ridden plot that he parodies. "According to the Russian Formalists", Van Cauwenberge writes, "parody unveils to the readers the trite use of literary conventions and clichés which are otherwise taken for granted through over-familiarisation" (<1996>), and this certainly is what Wilde achieves at this point in *Earnest*. Another comic reflection on the hackneyed use of suspense before the revelation of a character's true identity soon follows. While Jack goes off to (improbably) find the handbag in which he was found, Lady Bracknell remarks that she "wish[es] he would arrive at some conclusion" to which Gwendolen replies: "[t]his suspense is terrible. I hope it will last" (Wilde, 1968: 379). Yet, of course, ultimately there is no real doubt or suspense as to what will happen. In as much as *Earnest* incorporates the plot of "conventionally unimaginative farce" (Alexander, 1990: 26), we are prepared for the clichéd ending Miss Prism describes as the meaning of "Fiction":

"[t]he good end[ing] happily, the bad unhappily" (341).

This use of metafiction to subvert the mimetic pretences of melodrama is also evident in *Dorian Gray* – itself, in part, a parody of Victorian melodrama. Those sections of the novel that deal with the Vane family often parody Victorian melodrama. For instance, hearing of Sibyl Vane's involvement with Dorian, James Vane, her brother, swears that "as sure as there is a God in heaven, if [Dorian] ever does [her] any wrong [he] shall kill him" (Wilde, 1968: 63). James also states that he would like to cancel his trip to Australia so as to be able to look out for her, but Sibyl dismisses his concern. "Oh, don't be so serious, Jim", Sibyl replies, "[y]ou are like one of the heroes of those silly melodramas mother used to be so fond of acting in" (63). In this passage Wilde not only refutes any pretence of mimesis, but also accentuates the salacious plots and characters that were typical of the genre – not to mention its Manichean binary and didactic element. Responding to James's threat to kill Dorian, Sibyl replies: "[y]ou are foolish, Jim, utterly foolish; a bad-tempered boy, that is all… I wish you would fall in love. Love makes people good, and what you said was wicked" (63)

By contrasting two brothers, one good, one wicked, *Earnest* also incorporates melodrama's Manichean morality into its structure. Nineteenth-century melodrama "produced a kind of naively sensational entertainment in which the main characters were excessively virtuous or exceptionally evil (hence the luminously good hero or heroine and the villain of deepest and darkest dye)" (Cuddon, 1999: 502). Yet Wilde's play simultaneously subverts this morality – its philosophy being, as Wilde explained, "[t]hat

we should treat all the trivial things of life very seriously, and all the serious things of life with sincere and studied triviality" (Morgan, 1990: 43). About to meet Algernon as her "Uncle Jack's brother... wicked cousin Ernest" (Wilde, 1968: 343), the virginal Cecily remarks that she has "never met a really wicked person before" and that she is "afraid he will look just like everyone else" (342). Yet when "cousin Ernest" arrives – and does look just like everyone else – the play inverts conventional morality. "I am not really wicked at all, cousin Cecily", he remarks, "[y]ou mustn't think that I am wicked" (343). "If you are not", Cecily replies, "then you have certainly been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner. You have made Uncle Jack believe that you are very bad. I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy" (343). This sort of inversion of standard logic and morality is typical of the play, and subverts the "sound English common sense" that we find described in *Dorian Gray* as "[t]he inherited stupidity of the race" (Wilde, 1968: 138).

While Victorian melodrama attempted to educate the public with pure and simple truths, Wilde's play suggests that "[t]he truth is rarely pure and never simple" (Wilde, 1968: 326). Truth is an unstable notion in a play that abounds with all sorts of fictions – and in which lies often turn out to be true. Consider, for instance, Jack's discovery that he has "a brother after all" (380), or that his name "is Ernest after all"(383). Honesty is also devalued in the process. Having discovered that his name "naturally is Ernest", Jack remarks that "it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth", and asks Gwendolen if she can forgive him. "I

can", Gwendolen replies, "[f]or I feel that you are sure to change" (383). Once again Wilde uses ironic inversion to subvert conventional wisdom and morality, and generates comedy through "the collision of the expected and the unexpected, the reassuringly familiar and the disconcertingly original" (Donaldson, 1980: 45).

In the previous chapter we noted how Wilde's approach to language and conventional thinking might in itself be called parodic. Wilde's language, Alexander notes, is characterized by "ironic inversion" (1990: 26) and this, coupled with his "epigrammatic style of mimicry and reversal" (Lesjak, 2000: 181), is often used parodically in relation to the standard English idiom of his time and the thinking typically associated with it. This strategy characterizes much of the dialogue in *Earnest*. For instance, speaking about Lady Harbury, a recently widowed friend, Lady Bracknell says that she "never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger" – to which Algernon adds that he has heard "her hair has turned quite gold from grief" (Wilde, 1968: 328). This scene is quite obviously an ironic inversion of standard portrayals of mourning and widowhood. As such it is also part of the play's broader criticism of marriage. Wilde, Varty reminds us, "was highly critical of the Victorian institution of marriage" as, he believed, "founded on corrupt ethics of ownership, possession and property in which it was impossible for individuals to flourish" (2002: xx) – and Mrs Harbury's rejuvenation after "her poor husband's death" (Wilde, 2002: 328) reflects precisely this view.

Like *Dorian Gray*, *Earnest* also parodies patriarchal discourse and subverts its basic premises. For instance, speaking to Cecily about her father, Lord Bracknell, Gwendolen

remarks that he is entirely unknown outside the family circle, and that she thinks this "is quite as it should be" (Wilde, 1968: 362). "The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man", she goes on to say, "[a]nd certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not?" (363). Inverting the social norm, Wilde draws our attention to the oppression of women in Victorian society, but also, by implication, to that of the "abnormal" men patriarchal structures excluded. The figure of Lady Bracknell embodies a similar inversion of the archetypal patriarch. Described by Jack as having a "masculine mind" (382), Lady Bracknell plays the role of the domineering patriarch in *Earnest* – the role that would typically have been filled by her husband in Victorian melodrama.

Through parodic strategies like this Wilde both subverts conventional morality and destabilizes hegemonic meanings. But *Earnest* also employs a number of parodic strategies for communicating a gay discourse behind the language of hegemony. Indeed, parody's greatest appeal for Wilde was probably its potential to encode. In discussing the phenomenon of "unrevealed parodies" Rose makes the following point:

> Parodies of plots are often deeply concealed. It is doubtful that anyone would have realised that 'Count Nulin' is a parody, had Pushkin not testified to that effect. And how many of such unrevealed parodies are there? When the parody is not revealed, the work changes. So changes every literary work when taken out of the plane to which it was assigned. (1993: 121)

By the same token, a work changes quite considerably when its parodic nature *is* revealed. Unlike the parodies of Tom Stoppard, for instance, Wilde's parodies were

never publicly labeled as such, and Wilde presented his works to the public with their parodic natures more or less disguised. This meant that the general public was left in the dark as to *how* to read his work – parody requiring as much a parodic mode of reading as of writing. For this reason Wilde might be described as having produced parodies (like *Dorian Gray* and *Earnest*) *meant* for mass "misconsumption" with the intention of propagating gay sub-cultural meanings in secret behind hegemonic discourses.

During the late nineteenth-century, Sinfield notes, "[i]n a flurry of writing and networking, more various than at any time until the 1970s, 'homosexual' identity was being explored" (1994: 15). However, a number of factors complicated the establishment of an independent homosexual identity. Sinfield makes the point that "[h]omosexuality and heterosexuality are mutually defining concepts; the one is stigmatized because it is not the other" (203), and their respective histories reflect this thinking. While the domain of heterosexuality has been one of centrality, normality, morality and legality, that of homosexuality has been characterized by the very opposites of these terms.

Yet prejudice and legal sanctions were not the only impediments to the establishment of a gay identity. The intrinsic hegemony of a "centralized" language rendered homosexuality quite literally unspeakable. Ed Cohen notes that "[a]s inhabitants of a subculture" homosexuals have long had to use "a public language" largely unfit for representing themselves and their activities. The result has been a tendency on their part to "produce new discursive strategies to express concerns unvoiced within the dominant culture" (1987: 806). Strategies of this variety have typically been both appropriative and

reactionary. Sinfield picks up on a related point made by Foucault who refers to "the emergence of the concept homosexuality as an instance of what he terms 'a "reverse" discourse'" (1994: 16). "[H]omosexuality", Foucault notes, "began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (Sinfield, 1994: 16).

Although Wilde's works predate explicit, public reversals of medical and legal discourses, they do covertly pioneer the principles on which such reversals would be based. For obvious reasons, most gay nineteenth-century writing and networking took place "underground", but the pretence of fiction afforded one way for homosexual concerns to find their way into mainstream media. This, however, could not occur without additional dissimulation. The label "fiction" could not on its own legitimate the representation of homosexuality, and gay writers were consequently forced to "devise ways to mediate their expressions of passion" (E. Cohen, 1987: 810). Commenting on gay nineteenth-century writers in this regard Bartlett remarks:

> They were masters of allusion, suggestion, misinterpretation and reinterpretation of images... They reduced the rules and models of culture to a fantasy in order to make it malleable to their own commands. They read between the lines of history, stole its best lines for their own use. They were magpies, thieves, *bricoleurs* for whom the past could be reassembled, given new and wicked meanings... (1989: 227)

Wilde was without a doubt one such nineteenth-century *bricoleur* whose parodies are

riddled with refunctioned words. Wilde, after all, wrote for two audiences – one straight, the other gay – and his parodies were in part engineered for this.

In the documentary *Changing Stages* (Downes, 2000), Richard Eyre lifts out a few examples of what he calls "secret in-jokes" from *Earnest* for Wilde's homosexual contemporaries. While the "Earnest" of the title is, of course, a play on Jack's assumed and, ironically, real name, as well as precisely what the play is not, it was also Victorian slang for gay. Cecily also had an "underworld" meaning. While a popular name for girls – derived from that of St Cecilia, the virgin martyr – it was also a common trade name for nineteenth-century rent boys. Jack's silver cigarette case bore a related secret meaning, the cigarette case being a tactful form of payment for rent boys (Downes, 2000).

Each example serves to illustrate the giving of "new and wicked meanings" described by Bartlett above, and Wilde's parodic stratagem is then to restore them to their original places with their secondary meanings in tow. Taken from their places in the dominant social discourse of the time, "earnest" and "Cecily" have had their meanings "perverted" in ways that affront their traditional meanings and ironize their origins. While entailing the use of standard words and meanings, Wilde's technique simultaneously entails the subversion of them: in essence, a strategy of infusing the English of the Queen with that of "the queens".

For those conscious of these sub-cultural meanings, Wilde's play is rich in comic equivocation. Algernon describes Jack as "the most earnest-looking person [he] ever saw

in [his] life" (Wilde, 1968: 325), for instance, while Lady Bracknell remembers that the "the General was called Ernest" (383). Similar in-jokes revolve around the name Cecily. Algernon's statement that he will not allow Jack to marry his first cousin, Gwendolen, before clearing up the "whole question of Cecily" (323) provides a case in point. While the hegemonic meaning is largely privileged over the counter-hegemonic in the ensuing conversation, the initial ambiguity in Algernon's reference to the "question of Cecily" destabilizes the dominant discourse for those "in the know".

Wilde's use of "respectable" terms like "earnest" and "Cecily" for a counter-hegemonic purpose demonstrates the parodist's capacity for hijacking and redirecting the signifiers of a dominant ideology. Ross cites an interesting example of such parody in his alternative history of cinema. "In their quest for new tricks to be played upon a very old theme", he writes, "pornographers quickly turned to parody. Explicit and theoretically humorous versions of established films, stars and genres soon appeared. Nothing was sacred, not even Disney-esque cartoons..." (1993: 8). This tendency of pornographers to "lift ideas and subvert the titles of the latest big hits" (20) is in some ways comparable to what Wilde undertakes in *Earnest*'s dissenting in-jokes. Jack's curtain-line in which he states that he has "now realised... the vital Importance of Being Earnest" (Wilde, 1968: 384) reflects this in its gleeful subversion of Victorian "earnestness" (and its associated morality).

The double-lives and secret pasts of the play's two leading male characters complement Wilde's parodic in-jokes. As in the case of *Dorian Gray*, the need for ambiguity and

duplicity serves to signify the homosexual plight. Algernon's "incomparable expression" of "Bunburyist" (325) is especially important in this regard – the term coming to feature as a codeword (or euphemism) for "unspeakable" sexual activity. For instance, having listened to Jack explain that he is called "Ernest in town and Jack in the country", Algernon remarks that he had "always suspected [Jack] of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist… and [that he is] quite sure of it now" (325).

Although largely "misread" by the Victorian public, Wilde's writings are now generally thought of as the work of an artist "continually imagining his own [secret] life under the guise of fiction" (Bartlett, 1989: 198) – and, as such, as riddled with redirected, refunctioned and hidden discourses. But Wilde's parodies also need to be understood as having undertaken, and achieved "cultural work". Varty writes that "Wilde is now championed as one of the most radical and progressive writers of the 1890s, challenging conventions, whether aesthetic, social or political, from within" (2002: xxvi), and parody afforded Wilde the basic strategies for doing so in his writing. Indeed, Wilde's use of parody cannot be separated from a sexual / political agenda. W. A. Cohen writes that "a history like Oscar Wilde's – of sexual misconduct resulting in imprisonment with hard labour – is... proof that sexuality belongs within the domain of politics" (W. A. Cohen, 1996: 238). Yet it must be remembered that homosexuality, as a political cause, was relatively undefined during Wilde's lifetime. Ed Cohen notes that certain theorists (like himself)

contend that the 'homosexual' acquired a unique specificity in the nineteenth century that marks the concept as a socially and historically determinant frame for

comprehending and experiencing a set of sexual practices between men in such a way that they are distinguishable from earlier ways of knowing/experiencing the 'same' practices [with members of the opposite sex] (E. Cohen, 1993: 211).

However, this "determinant frame" – on which a later revolution would be based – was something Wilde, amongst others, was still in the process of bringing into being. One must bear in mind that "homosexuality" as a term first appeared in 1869 and only became widely known during the 1890s – along with its proposed alternative "heterosexuality" (E. Cohen, 1993: 9). Thinking in the oppositional terms required for a (homo)sexual revolution was therefore relatively new. Yet Wilde certainly was pioneering "oppositionality" in the counter-discourses of his parodies. In fixing subversive and gay meanings into his texts, Wilde began contributing to a political cause. Indeed, as Dorian quotes Lord Henry in *Dorian Gray*, "[i]t is simply expression… that gives reality to things" (Wilde, 1968: 89), and Browning's assertion that "nearly all the current writing on homosexual identities derives from the nineteenth-century Oscar Wilde" (1994: 208) affirms Wilde's proto-revolutionary status.

However, the equivocal security in which Wilde had propagated gay meanings came to an abrupt end with his trial. As Ed Cohen notes, during the trial Carson "undertook to impress upon the court *not* that Wilde had engaged in any specific sexual acts with any of the men listed in the plea, but rather that Wilde – in both his life and in his writings – had demonstrated a 'tendency' toward 'indecent' (i.e. nonnormative) relationships with other men" (E. Cohen, 1993: 128). For the investigation of this tendency Carson refined a hermeneutic approach aimed at looking beyond the novel's "manifestly straight" language

(E. Cohen, 1987: 805) for the signs of a distinctly dissident semiology – precisely the semiology on which *Dorian Gray*'s status as a "handbook of gay style and behaviour" rested (Sedgwick, 1985: 95). In his handling of Wilde's writings, Carson aimed to show the Victorians how Wilde should *really* be read. In this regard one cannot overlook the ironic debt of Wildean queer theorists to the pioneering work of Edward Carson. Carson's courtroom analyses, while crude and antagonistic, did, nevertheless, constitute the first published attempts to locate "the missing link" between Wilde's sexual and textual inclinations. The conservative sexual politics of Victorian England had, as W. A. Cohen points out, rendered literary critics "as incapable as Wilde of making [homosexual] suggestions explicit, regardless of their antithetical reasons for wishing to do so", and *Dorian Gray* consequently "had to await a court of law for its sexual insinuations to be articulated outright" (1996: 217). Wilde's cross-examination, in this regard, amounted to a ground-breaking literary inquiry through which Carson aimed to both prove and delineate what Ed Cohen calls the "effective equation between Wilde's aesthetic and sexual ideologies" (E. Cohen, 1993: 162). Studies based – directly or indirectly – on ideas first ventured publicly by Carson are literally countless. Indeed, it is perhaps the greatest irony of Wildean scholarship that Edward Carson inadvertently became Wildean queer theory's founding member.

CHAPTER 4

All art is quite *Ulysses*: James Joyce and Generic Tradition

In many respects James Joyce's textual strategies were developments of those pioneered by Oscar Wilde. Alexander situates both Joyce and Wilde within a distinctly Irish "tradition of subversiveness and linguistic virtuosity" (1990: 24) characterized by a highly self-conscious use of language and literary form, as well as a rejection of English realism. Furthermore, what makes the works of both Joyce and Wilde "peculiarly Irish" in Alexander's terms is that "language is used with the kind of absolute control over effect which comes from distance, from being able to see it as raw material rather than a colourless mediator of meaning" (26).

As a writer who "described himself with some justification as 'apolitical'" (Alexander, 1990: 8), Joyce spent much of his creative life trying to negotiate a position between "the blandishments of the monoglossic Gaelic culture with its accompanying nostalgia and reverence for the epic past" on the one hand, and "the terrors imposed by the monoglossic English language, the instrument of everyday humiliation" (Crowley, 1996: 199), on the other – and parody provided Joyce with the basic textual strategies for doing so. With specific reference to *Ulysses* (1922), the following two chapters discuss Joyce's personal campaign to "parodically reshape [the world's] aesthetic languages" (Waugh, 1992: 154). The first of these chapters, a preparatory discussion for the second, examines Joyce's use of parody as a means for relativizing the aesthetic discourses within which he worked. The second chapter then goes on to discuss the political dimension of Joycean parody –

and what might be termed his "parodic patriotism".

Frank Budgen, a friend of Joyce's, writes with regard to *Ulysses* that "[i]t was hardly likely that, having denied all religious dogma, and having carefully avoided all political doctrine, [Joyce] would submit to artistic limitations" (Budgen, 1972: 198). The comment serves, most obviously, as a rough-and-ready explanation for the "great generic indeterminacy" (Farrel, 1997: 250) often attributed to *Ulysses*. It could also be used to theorize the closely related matter of Joyce's interest in parody as a means of relativizing discourses.

Ulysses is an essentially polyphonic work that brings together and "equalizes" a great many literary and non-literary discourses. To its first readers, Johnson writes, "*Ulysses* looked like a novel, but it also looked like a drama, or catechism, or poetry, or music depending on which page one happened to open" (1998: xiii). Johnson's statement is a valuable reminder of the essentially "omnigeneric" (Fowler, 1982: 125) character of a text that Reichert likens to a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunswerk*. Not only does *Ulysses* subsume "all literary genres... but [it] also made language audible by using its 'material' parts, sounds and rhythms, and 'composed' them according to musical rules (as in the 'Sirens' chapter)" (Reichert, 1993: 76). Chapters such as "Aeolus" and "Scylla and Carybdis" similarly heighten our visual experience of the text with their typographical eccentricities. Furthermore, in addition to the many literary genres *Ulysses* subsumes, there are those discourses Todorov calls "nonliterary" (1990: 11). And although, as Bakhtin demonstrates, these are present in any novel, *Ulysses* is very self-consciously a

"mosaic of set pieces – sermons, speeches, stories, witticisms, rhetorical extravaganzas, and mimicries" (Deane, 1993: 43).

Yet, while incorporating a great many discourses, *Ulysses* is also a work dominated by two primary generic polemics – namely those of epic and novel, on the one hand, and realism and modernism, on the other.

As a generic category the term "novel" denotes a large and rather shapeless body of work that "disregards the constraints that govern other literary forms, and acknowledges no obligatory structure, style, or subject matter" (Baldick, 2001: 173). For this reason it is also particularly difficult to define. A common shortcoming with studies of the novel is that they revolve around too specific a definition of the genre, essentially elevating "*one kind* of novel into a definition of the novel as such" (Holquist, 1990: xxiv). This happens quite frequently with the conventions of the realist novel being taken for the conventions of the novel in general. For this reason, when offering a definition of the novel, it is important to begin by making the fairly rudimentary point that the novel is "an untidy genre" (Peck and Coyle, 1993: 109) defined by "very few and very loose rules" (Dubrow, 1982: 10). A novel, one might say, is "nearly always an extended fictional prose narrative, although some novels are very short, some are non-fictional, some have been written in verse, and some do not even tell a story" (Baldick, 2001: 173). Indeed, as Holquist notes, the novel is best thought of as either a "supergenre... or not a genre in any strict, traditional sense at all" (Holquist, 1990: xxix).

This plasticity of the novel afforded Joyce the basic means for subverting the more rigid epic genre. "Epic discourse", Bakhtin writes, "is a discourse handed down by tradition" (1990: 16), and it is precisely for this reason that Dubrow, amongst others, refers to its history as exemplifying "the force of generic conventions" (1982: 9). Drawing on the models of Homer and the writings of various rhetoricians, Dubrow goes on to note, "any poet attempting an epic writes with a deep awareness of the characteristics customarily associated with his chosen form" (9).

The generic conventions of the classical epic are too many to list here in full. However, there are a few of these conventions that warrant outlining for our purpose. Traditionally speaking, an epic is a long, narrative poem, divided into books or cantos, concerned with "the exploits and adventures of a superhuman hero" (Howatson and Chilvers, 1993: 203). Characteristic plots involve journeys and / or wars and frequently feature royalty as well as gods, monsters and other supernatural elements (scenes are, for instance, sometimes set in heaven or the Underworld). In any event the "focus is always on the action in epics" (Beye, 1976: 106) and the action is always "sweeping in scope" (Dubrow, 1982: 9).

An important aspect of representation in the epic is that of epic distance. Epic is always written from "the reverent point of view of a descendant" (Bakhtin, 1990: 13) and invariably inflated in style, "its tone conforming to its elevated matter" (Farrel, 1997: 258). Epic distance is, in this sense, the result of expressed veneration, but it is as much a strategy for the preservation of the epic hero's integrity. In the latter sense epic distance

serves to preclude the epic hero's superhuman status from being compromised through over-familiarity. It is important, for instance, that "in a heroic epic the ignoble bodily functions are ignored" (Griffin, 1980: 32) as their inclusion would subvert the elevation of epic representation with characters and events being "valorized to an extreme degree" (Bakhtin, 1990: 15).

A further aspect of epic distance is that of historicity. Epic, traditionally, deals with events in the distant past and "an absolute epic distance separates the epic world from contemporary reality, that is, from the time in which the singer (the author and his audience) lives" (Bakhtin, 1990: 13). Epic distance is, in other words, not achieved simply through the valorization of character and action but also through temporality, and temporal distance in the case of the epic is absolute. As Bakhtin goes on to point out, there is a sense in which "the epic past is locked into itself and walled off from all subsequent times by an impenetrable boundary" (17). Yet the temporal insulation to which Bakhtin refers does not prevent an epic from having "value" in later eras. Indeed, it is precisely because of this insulation that the epic holds what might be described as a "free-standing" position in culture which we might associate with the notion of "*transcendance*, or the idea that the authority and truth of epic narrative are wholly independent of any historical or cultural contingency" (Farrel, 1997: 259).

But this is not to say that the epic is dissociated from history. As Farrel notes, epic tales are narrated with "*authority*, or the idea that the stories told by the epic narrator are literally true" (1997: 258). And while epics subsume "myth, legend, history, and folk-

tale" (Howatson and Chilvers, 1993: 203) it was their association with history that stood paramount in the ancient world. Despite the fantastic elements of Homer's epics the "Greeks of classical times had no doubt at all that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* told the true history of the Trojan War and the return of heroes who had fought and won it" (Hawkes, 1980: 7). As Bakhtin notes, it is "national tradition... [which] serves as the source for the epic" and "a national epic past... [which] serves as the subject" (Bakhtin, 1990: 13).

Ulysses is, amongst other things, a parodic novelization of Homer's *Odyssey*. While *Ulysses* embodies a wealth of textual appropriations, it is the *Odyssey* that provides "the most obvious 'Master Narrative' in the novel" (Waugh, 1992: 152). In its use of "extended parallels with the Homeric model on the level of character and plot" (Hutcheon, 1985: 5), *Ulysses* demonstrates what Eliot refers to as "the mythical method" – a strategy of "manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" (Eliot, 1970: 270-1). The technique is one we might consider in conjunction with the novel's concern with metempsychosis or reincarnation. The definition of metempsychosis Bloom offers Molly as "from the Greek", "the transmigration of souls", is as much a reflection on their own status in *Ulysses* as a definition of the term. In recounting the belief that "we all lived before on the earth thousands of years ago" (Joyce, 1998: 62) Bloom is, inadvertently, describing their own situation as novelistic reincarnations of Odysseus and Penelope.

Yet *Ulysses* is not a straightforward modernization of the *Odyssey*. Bloom is not quite "another Ulysses" (Joyce, 1998: 187), nor is Molly the loyal "Penelope stayathome"

(193) of the epic (as Homer's characters are invoked as literary archetypes in conversation in "Scylla and Charybdis"). In each instance the Homeric example exists "as an ideal or at least as a norm from which the modern departs" (Hutcheon, 1985: 5). And while these departures do not ridicule the object-text as such, they do subvert it parodically. As in the case of other mock-epics, "ironic difference" (5) and the "collapse of the sublime into the commonplace" (De Almeida, 1983: 403) are evident throughout *Ulysses* in its variations on the epic.

While the epic is an essentially plot-driven form, *Ulysses* is, as Johnson notes, a novel "in which the word 'plot' is more likely to refer to Paddy Dignam's resting place than to the machinations of fiction" (1998: xxiv). *Ulysses* also demonstrates Todorov's understanding of "the individual hero of the novel [being] opposed to the collective hero of the epic" (1990: 19). The introduction of Odysseus, warrior, adventurer, hero and King of Ithaca, as the parochial "Mr Leopold Bloom" (Joyce, 1998: 54), a humble Dublin advertisement canvasser, offers a good example of the novel's ironic and deflationary treatment of epic character.

The same could be said of Penelope's reincarnation as Molly. In the *Odyssey* Penelope is visited by a total of a hundred-and-eight suitors in her husband's absence (Homer, 1991: 247), yet remains faithful to Odysseus. Molly, on the other hand, has been anything but chaste in Bloom's absence(s), and this is a fact of which we (and Bloom) are constantly reminded. Bloom's Freudian slip in Barney Kiernan's pub during the "Cyclops" episode provides perhaps the most memorable example of this. While intending to refer to his

"wife's advisers" Bloom accidentally, and much to the confusion of Joe Hynes, makes a reference to his "wife's admirers" (Joyce, 1998: 300). The mistake is not followed up in conversation, it is merely corrected, but it does serve as an obvious, if unintended, allusion to Molly's collection of suitors, a series of men with whom Molly, unlike Penelope, has been sexually involved. This collection of men is catalogued in "Ithaca" and described as "originating in and repeated to infinity" (683).

This use of the catalogue in "Ithaca" to recount Molly's infidelities is a practice one might consider doubly at odds with the epic. The list of Molly's (sometimes unlikely) sexual partners is as much a parodic subversion of the epic convention of the catalogue as an ironic deviation from Penelope's moral precedent. Catalogues are a common feature of "most early epics throughout the world" (Beye, 1976: 89) and appear in both Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, although more frequently in the *Iliad*, and the convention is one Joyce seizes upon and parodies in several places in *Ulysses*.

In the Homeric epics the catalogue is used to enumerate a wide variety of things including "ships, troops, a queen's suitors, those who have fallen in battle, places visited and so on" (Beye, 1976: 89). In the *Odyssey* the practice of cataloguing, like much else in the epic, is reserved for serious matters, whereas the catalogues in *Ulysses* are almost invariably comical. The catalogue of suitors featured in "Ithaca" reads as much as a comical exposé of Dublin's "hypocracy" as a list of Molly's infidelities. Along with Blazes Boylan, her visitor of the day, Stephen Dedalus's father and several others, the list includes men like Father Bernard Corrigan and the Lord Mayor of Dublin himself,

Valentine Blake Dillon (Joyce, 1998: 683).

Absurdity is also an important feature of the catalogues in *Ulysses*. The blessing of Barney Kiernan's pub in the "Cyclops" chapter, as conducted by the unnamed, first-person narrator, offers a case in point. True to the "Gigantism" that is the chapter's technique, the overlong, hyperbolic and generally farcical lists of which the blessing is constructed disallow any of the reverence typically associated with either the epic or religious ritual, for instance, in Joyce's inclusion of "saints" with names like Anonymous, Eponymous and Pseudonymous alongside the likes of Saint Thomas Aquinas in the list of "saints, martyrs, virgins and confessors" (Joyce, 1998: 324). The list of things accompanying these people is perhaps an even better example of the comic absurdity Joyce uses to subvert the epic catalogue. While beginning with fairly standard Biblical paraphernalia like "palms and harps and swords and olive crowns" (1998: 325), the catalogue proceeds to succumb to more than just the "occasional extra joke" (Johnson, 1998: 897). Growing increasingly striking in its intermingling of the everyday and the absurd, the list goes on to include, amongst other things, babes in a bathtub, dragons, boxes of Vaseline, and ends with "eyes on a dish, wax candles, aspergills, unicorns" (Joyce, 1998: 325).

Comic elements, such as in these catalogues, occur throughout *Ulysses* and serve to subvert epic sensibility wherever they appear. Bakhtin writes that it "is precisely laughter that destroys the epic, and in general destroys any hierarchical (distancing and valorized) distance" (1990: 23). And while humour need not necessarily occur at the expense of the

epic, the mock-epic does typically use humour to compromise epic conventions.

However, humour is only one of the strategies Joyce employs to subvert the epic. It is in its novelistic focus on the "largely mundane, and occasionally sordid lives... [of its characters] ironically framed within an epic dimension" (Ousby, 1994: 952) that *Ulysses* deviates still further from its epic predecessor. Like other epics, the *Odyssey* is, as noted earlier, a narrative of heroic deeds "valorized to an extreme degree" (Bakhtin, 1990: 15), and the distanced representation characteristic of epic narratives is starkly contrasted by the familiarity permitted in the novel. *Ulysses* is full of details Homer would have deemed either too prosaic or personal for inclusion in the epic. Whereas, as Griffin has noted, "the ignoble bodily functions are ignored" (1980: 32) in the epics, these are described at several points in *Ulysses*. Indeed, bodily functions are dealt with so frequently, and in such detail, that *Ulysses* has been called "the epic of the Human Body" (Melchiori, 1975: 67).

Ulysses, indeed, owes much of its early notoriety to what has been described as "bodily realism" (Dentith, 2000: 78): in "Proteus" Stephen lays a piece of "dry snot picked from his nostril on a ledge of rock" (Joyce, 1998: 50); in "Sirens" Bloom breaks wind surreptitiously on a Dublin street (279); in "Penelope" Molly thinks to herself "that [menstrual] thing has come on me" (719). However, it is the lavatory scene of "Calypso" which seems most at odds with the epic and the notion of epic distance. Bloom's stint on the toilet is undoubtedly the paramount example of a situation in which we would not have found Odysseus. Odysseus, we accept, is not a man who sits "[a]squat on the

cuckstool" (66) to relieve yesterday's constipation. And even if he were the toilet-type, it is hard to imagine brave Odysseus afraid to "bring on the piles again" (66). Bloom, however, is accorded no privacy for conducting his business. In a scene of what Staten calls "perhaps unprecedented novelistic realism" (1997: 380) every sensation of Bloom's "intestinal congestion and premeditative defecation" (Joyce, 1998: 680) is relayed to the reader, from the "gentle loosening of his bowels" (65) to the "feeling [of] his water flow[ing] quietly" (66-7).

This scene is certainly an instance of "realism" in *Ulysses*, but the notion of realism, as Staten and many others have applied it to the text, warrants brief qualification. "*Ulysses*, literary historians agree, is one of the founding texts of the 'High Modernist' phase of literary modernism" (McHale, 1992: 41), and any association of *Ulysses* with realism needs to be qualified in relation to its place within modernism as a movement "characterized chiefly [or at least typically] by the rejection of 19th-century traditions" (Baldick, 2001: 159).

Although modernism "is in no way an organized or unified movement" (Bell, 1980: 2), *Ulysses* is generally considered a prime example of "a text in which modernist poetics is simultaneously elaborated, consolidated, and made conspicuous, available for appropriation and imitation" (McHale, 1992: 41). Yet it would be incorrect to think of the poetics that *Ulysses* embodies as based on an outright rejection of realist conventions. Indeed, there is a sense in which what Lukacs calls "the dogmas of 'modernist anti-realism'" (Lukacs, 1972: 17) are more accurately described as a development on the

conventions of realism rather than their abandonment. Modernism, in this view, entails "a radical criticism of the old [realist] mode without completely rejecting it" (Bell, 1980: 18) – an agenda very often realized through parody.

In addressing the question of whether *Ulysses* can be considered a realist novel, Bell acknowledges a curious duality in the text in asserting that the answer must be "both positive and negative" (1980: 4). There can be no doubt that *Ulysses* is, in some respects, an example of novelistic realism. It certainly reads as a work intent on "representing the world as it is rather than as it ought to be" (Ousby, 1994: 768), and "the clarity with which the sights and sounds and smells of Dublin come to life, the rotundity of the character-drawing, and the naturalness of the dialogue" (Frye, 1957: 313) have been points of consensus ever since it first appeared.

Yet *Ulysses* obviously cannot be considered a realist text in the same sense that Eliot's *Middlemarch* and Gaskell's *Mary Barton* are. Amongst the many parodic, intratextual relationships *Ulysses* negotiates is a polemic between traditional realism and another set of practices we now consider modernist. Indeed, it is precisely on the basis of this interaction that *Ulysses* might, ironically, be described as "embodying an extreme in literary realism" (Kiremidjian, 1985: 110) born out of its subjection to "the general, radical reshaping of styles and structures" (Stevenson, 1992: 163) characteristic of literary modernism.

As a generic strain in *Ulysses*, realism is often associated with Bloom, and the episode of

"Calypso" (in which Bloom is introduced to the reader) offers a good example of what Kiremidjian refers to as the "most general and fundamental notion of parody... [as] a literary mimicry which retains the form but alters the content of the original" (1985: 2). Stevenson describes Bloom's first presentation to the reader in "Calypso" as "a parody of formal introduction, the excessively polite 'Mr Leopold Bloom' followed by the kind of authorial report of distinguishing characters, likes and dislikes, which often appears in Victorian fiction" (1992: 51). Yet the tastes of this protagonist, which include "thick giblet soup, nutty gizzards... [and] grilled mutton kidneys which gave to his palate a fine tang of faintly scented urine" (Joyce, 1998: 53) are, in Stevenson's words, "comically insalubrious" (1992: 51) and subvert – through ironic discrepancy – the formality of the language.

"Eumaeus" also offers a parody of realism, but of a very different sort. The "appalling would-be literary style" (Mason, 1972: 57) of "Eumaeus" parodies the idiom of Victorian realism, taking its cue from the mind of a character in the text (much as in the case of Stoppard's *Travesties*). Most critics agree that the style of "Eumaeus" is one that emanates from Bloom's mind and can be identified, despite certain differences, "with that of his monologues" (French, 1982: 209). As Mercier states, "[a]lthough Bloom is a character in the story told, we could almost imagine that he is also the author of it" (1994: 291), and there are several signals in "Eumaeus" to encourage such a reading. Amongst the many "Utopian plans... flashing through his (Bloom's) busy brain" while sitting in the cabman's shelter are those about the "literature, journalism, [and] prize titbits" (Joyce, 1998: 612) he hopes to produce someday. At one point Bloom even imagines himself as

the author of a text like "Eumaeus". "Suppose", we read, "he were to pen something out of the common groove (as he fully intended doing) at the rate of one guinea per column, *My Experiences*, let us say, *in a Cabman's Shelter*" (Joyce, 1998: 601). And it is without a doubt one of the most elaborate jokes in *Ulysses* that "Eumaeus" should demonstrate what it would be like "to be entrapped inside a novel with Leopold Bloom in possession of the pen" (Kenner, 1982: 130).

In "Eumaeus" a narrator, presumably Bloom, attempts to emulate the authorial presence, eloquence, formality, manners, morality and "truthfulness" associated with nineteenth-century realism. Yet the result is as much a comical satire on Bloom as a comical parody of the idiom of classic realism. Through stylistic exaggeration, "Eumaeus" exaggerates the conventions which "clogged-up" the nineteenth-century novel. The entire episode is a third-person narrative delivered, with a conspicuous degree of authority, by a "doughty narrator" (Joyce, 1998: 584). As in the example from "Calypso" discussed above, "Eumaeus" is also overly concerned with manners and excessively formal in style. At one point, with complete disregard for those belonging to what he calls "the fair sex" (Joyce, 1998: 617), the reader is even addressed as "sir" (601).

The formality of "Eumaeus" is taken to still greater extremes than in "Calypso". Under what we might assume to be pretensions of eloquence and politeness, "Eumaeus" is circumlocutional and euphemistic in the extreme. Johnson describes the chapter as characterized by a "never-use-one-word-when-thirty-will-do kind of prolixity" (1998: 945), and circumlocution constitutes its dominant stylistic feature. We need only consult

the chapter's redundant opening phrase, "[p]reparatory to anything else" (Joyce, 1998: 569), for an example of the "fog of words" (Bolt, 1992: 145) that ensues. As the chapter progresses its circumlocutions become more and more intrusive and obfuscating. Consider for instance the use of "the result was in the negative" (Joyce, 1998: 573) to describe Stephen's unsuccessful attempt to find his money; followed by the shelter keeper's arrival to place "a boiling swimming cup of a choice concoction labelled coffee on the table" (578); and then the overly emphatic affirmation that "Mr Bloom thoroughly agreed [with Stephen's comment], entirely endorsing the remark, that was overwhelmingly right and the whole world was overwhelmingly full of that sort of thing" (598).

Euphemism is another prominent stylistic feature of "Eumaeus" (and very often the motivation behind its cirumlocution). French describes the chapter's narrator as "'nice'" in that "[h]e will not make a derogatory remark, at least not directly" (1982: 210), and much of our doughty narrator's energy is spent attempting to avert making direct criticism. In the description of the photograph Bloom presents to Stephen, for instance, "Mrs Bloom, [his] wife the *prima donna*, Madam Marion Tweedy" is described as "a large sized lady, with her fleshy charms on evidence in an open fashion" (Joyce, 1998: 606), and as having a figure "which came in for a lot of notice usually and which did not come out to the best advantage in that getup" (607). In this instance the narrator's "high" style is also deflated as the sentence collapses into slang.

In addition to being civil, our narrator is also something of a prude who constantly uses

euphemism to deal with matters "running counter to morality" (Joyce, 1998: 600). In addressing "the mantle of adultery" (608) for instance, as it pertains to "several famous cases of feminine infatuation" (609), he describes how a woman might "cho[ose] to be tired of wedded life, and [allow] for a little flutter in polite debauchery to press their intentions on her with improper intent" (609). Bloom speaking to Stephen and calling Lenehan "a mean bloody swab with a sprinkling of other uncalled for expressions" (572) offers another good example.

The cumulative effect is, of course, one of escalating comedy at the expense, in part, of the generic nineteenth-century narrator. On this point it is interesting to note the many idiomatic correspondences between "Eumaeus" and the satirical parody of Dickens featured in the chapter Mercier calls "the Garden of Parodies" (Mercier, 1994: 277): "Oxen of the Sun". Although "Eumaeus" is obviously the more lavish parody of the two, the parody of Dickens featured in "Oxen of the Sun" has much in common, stylistically speaking, with "Eumaeus". In the passage parodying Dickens, for example, Mina Purefoy is described as "in the first bloom of her new motherhood" (Joyce, 1998: 400). The description is one we might compare with that of Molly in "Eumaeus" as "in the full bloom of womanhood" (606). Each is an idealized, and even sentimentalized, representation of a female character that works by romanticizing motherhood. Each of these also offers a good example of the hackneyed expressions with which their narrators communicate. A similar point could be made about the use of personification in these sections. Both the reference to "Dame Nature" (583) in "Eumaeus" and that to "father Cronion" (400) in the Dickens passage serve to invoke hackneyed, allegorical figures to

stand in for broader concepts. Once again, although these expressions are intended affectionately, the sentimentality of the clichés brands them as insincere.

The narrators of these two sections also hold similar moral positions very much in line with "the Sacred Book" (400) and that of the classic realist narrator. And although a distinction must be made between the Christian and Jewish paradigms of Dickens and Bloom respectively, the two sections are comparable (or at least complementary) in terms of their morals and religious references. In "Oxen of the Sun", for instance, the newborn is referred to as the "fruit of their lawful embraces" (400), and the phrase is obviously morally aligned with those like "legal wife" (607) and "legitimate husband" which we find being used in "Eumaeus" to distinguish sanctioned relations from "illicit proceedings" (609). Both narrators also affirm their characters' actions in Biblical terms. As "Doady" is congratulated as "thou good and faithful servant" of the "One above, the Universal Husband" (400) in "Oxen of the Sun", so Bloom's care for Stephen is affirmed as being "in orthodox Samaritan fashion" (569) in "Eumaeus". Both narrators also refer to good fortune in terms of blessings. In "Oxen of the Sun" Mina Purefoy "wishes only one blessing more, to have her dear Doady there with her to share her joy" (400). In "Eumaeus" Stephen is described as "blessed with an allowance of brains" (609), and as a man who in "the nature of single blessedness... would one day take unto himself a wife when... Miss Right came on the scene" (610).

Like "Eumaeus", the passage parodying Dickens could also be described as demonstrating, although on a smaller scale, the wordiness which "clogged up" Victorian

prose. Consider for example the use of expressions like "weary weary while" and "very very happy" or the redoubling (and now conspicuously gendered) confirmation that "the brave woman [Mina Purefoy] had manfully helped. She had" (Joyce, 1998: 399). Each is a phrase Dickens would have intended emphatically. However, in "Oxen of the Sun" the basic idiom of the passage is shown up to be distracting in itself and ironized as such. The examples above could be likened to the affirmation in "Eumaeus" that "Mr Bloom thoroughly agreed [with Stephen's comment], entirely endorsing the remark, that was overwhelmingly right and the whole world was overwhelmingly full of that sort of thing" (Joyce, 1998: 598). Once again, although the narrator's intention is quite obviously to stress, the effect is to distract.

In addition to being a critical parody of certain realist conventions, "Eumaeus" is also a comical reflection on Bloom's literary aspirations. Inasmuch as we are encouraged to think of Bloom as the "foot-in-mouth narrator" (Mercier, 1994: 291) of "Eumaeus", its overblown style is a demonstration of Bloom's hypothetical literary ability (or lack thereof). Stylistically speaking, "Eumaeus" is also indicative of "Bloom's mind [as] replete with the detritus of popular culture – clichés, aphorisms, advertising slogans, half-remembered bits of knowledge acquired at school or on Dublin's streets or from his eclectic reading" (Johnson, 1998: xxi). In this regard "Eumaeus" is somewhat reminiscent of Joyce's *Dubliners* which "subtly mimics the moral conditions... it describes, by strategically-placed clichés, shabby-genteel euphemisms, [and] jog-trot repetitions" (Gross, 1971: 36). Yet while these appear in "ostensibly flat and neutral" (35) prose in *Dubliners*, in "Eumaeus" they form part of a sententious, "sub-literary"

discourse we read as a satire on its would-be author. And while "the impoverished strategies of euphemism, cliché, evasion, indirection, and blindness" (Johnson, 2000: xiv) are used deliberately by Joyce in *Dubliners* to reflect on a particular cultural context and set of values, the "imaginary writer" of "Eumaeus" presumably uses them unthinkingly under what he believes to be the auspices of good (realist) writing.

Staten describes *Ulysses* as a text in which traditional realism is problematized and "realist mimesis is reconceived" (1997: 380). An important aspect of *Ulysses* for Staten's argument is that of onomatopoeia. Despite its ambitions, onomatopoeia, itself bound by the limits of language, can never exceed mere approximation. "Ideally", Staten writes, "onomatopoeia should be the unmediated presentation of the form of the represented, but such a presentation would transcend the medium of language" (1997: 381). Onomatopoeia thus "relies more on conventional associations between verbal and non-verbal sounds than on the direct duplication of one by the other" (Baldick, 2001: 178).

Inventive instances of onomatopoeia occur throughout *Ulysses* and constitute, in one sense, the most extreme – and parodic – "attempts" at realism. In his use of onomatopoeia, Staten argues, Joyce "press[es] the internal logic of mimesis to the limit... which manifests in a peculiarly condensed way the self-contradictory character of the realist project" (1997: 381). To call a text realist is, after all, to "imply that [its] narrative language is transparent and representational, words standing in a more or less one-to-one relation to facts, events and characters" (Brink, 1998: 65). Yet, as Staten continues to point out, "[f]orm in the sense of the repeatable identity of the thing – the Aristotelian

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definition that grounds classical mimesis – comes unglued from itself in the onomatopoeic project" (1997: 381).

In *Ulysses* there are several memorable instances of onomatopoeia that call our attention to their own textuality and, in so doing, refute mimesis: "Sirens" applies musical principles to language; in "Proteus" the sea speaks a "fourworded wavespeech: seesoo, hrss, rsseeiss ooos" (Joyce, 1998: 49); and in "Circe", overly loyal to its dramaturgical format, the bells and gong are even given "speaking parts" (414). Yet our encounter with Bloom's cat in "Calypso" perhaps best demonstrates how Joyce uses onomatopoeia to subvert realist principles, in the number of linguistic constructions used to describe the sound Bloom's cat makes. Each construction functions to signify a different perspective within the text and suggest, in turn, a particular degree of authenticity in its representation. "[M]ewed" and "mewing" (Joyce, 1998: 53) appear in the authorial report or diegesis of the chapter and reflect, of course, the perspective of the third-person, omniscient narrator of the sort we would find in a realist novel. Each construction is the outcome of a generally accepted onomatopoeic root being subjected to the grammar of a sentence. Yet any associations with mimesis these configurations might elicit are offset by the appearances of the "[m]rkgnao" (53) attributed to the cat. Unlike "mrkgnao", "mewed" and "mewing" are conventional linguistic constructions demonstrating, in turn, linguistic norms. Thus "mrkgnao" challenges the mimetic capabilities of these two constructions as they function within the discourse of traditional realism.

However, it is not only literary genres and conventions that are parodied in *Ulysses*.

Ulysses offers perhaps the supreme, and most self-conscious, example of what Bakhtin means when he says that the "novel parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and language; it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, re-formulating and re-accentuating them" (1990: 5). And it is not only literary genres that are parodied in this way. The novel, Bakhtin goes on to note, has a "special relationship with extraliterary genres, with the genres of everyday life and with ideological genres" and it is exactly this relationship or, as Bakhtin prefers, "zone of contact" (33) to which Joyce draws our attention in *Ulysses*.

Ulysses certainly demonstrates Bakhtin's assertion that "the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, between literature and nonliterature and so forth are not laid up in heaven" (33). As a writer Joyce was "deeply interested in – and greatly enjoyed – everyday and prosaic language (which might sometimes be called... sciencese, journalese, legalese, or technologese)" (Weinstein, 1979: 3). As Stevenson notes, "the parody of *Ulysses* [much like that of Wilde's parodies] focuses primarily on language" (Stevenson, 1992: 167).

In "Aeolus" for example – a chapter governed, in part, by the "extraliterary" conventions of journalese – a narrative is sub-divided into 63 sections, resembling newspaper articles, each with its own headline printed in uppercase letters, as in the chapter's opening headline: "IN THE HEART OF THE HIBERNIAN METROPOLIS" (Joyce, 1998: 112). Some of these headlines serve to remind us of the master narratives against which

Ulysses is constructed. The headline "SOPHIST WALLOPS HAUGHTY HELEN SQUARE ON PROBOSCIS. SPARTANS GNASH MOLARS. ITHACANS VOW PEN IS CHAMP" (142), for instance, affirms, comically, the Odyssean parallel. "HORATIO IS CYNOSURE THIS FAIR JUNE DAY" (143) functions as a similar affirmation of the novel's parallels with *Hamlet*. However, the primary effect of these headlines is, as Johnson writes, to "displace *Ulysses* generically from novel to newspaper and call... into question many of our most closely held illusions about fiction" (1998: xxxiii). Information in "Aeolus", she goes on to note, is "not [presented by] a narrator but an editor" (xxxiii), and the headlines serve to draw our attention to the actual structure (and implicit construction) of the text we are reading. In this respect *Ulysses* "departs decisively from the habits of nineteenth-century fiction, in which language most often works, as far as possible, as a transparent medium through which the world of the fiction is observed by the reader" (Stevenson, 1992: 168).

Yet the use of journalistic conventions in "Aeolus" is not simply intended to remind us that "the 'transparency' of the [traditional] novel is an illusion" (Walder, 1995: 10). Stevenson goes on to make the point that the "newspaper headlines that figure in... 'Aeolus', may be explained as a consequence of the setting in a newspaper office" (1992: 168). This chapter redirects a journalistic discourse to address its own origins. Consider for instance the headline "WITH UNFEIGNED REGRET IT IS WE ANNOUNCE THE DISSOLUTION OF A MOST RESPECTED DUBLIN BURGESS" which introduces a passage in which Bloom, having entered "Nanetti's reading closet", imagines Hynes to be there in connection with "an account of [Patrick Dignam's] funeral probably" (Joyce,

1998: 114). Alternatively we might consider the headline "WE SEE THE CANVASSER AT WORK" which precedes the passage in which Bloom lays "his cutting on Mr Nanetti's desk" (115) and explains the requested design of the Keyes advertisement. Although only two of the chapter's 63 headlines, these demonstrate how the headlines in "Aeolus" feature as an expressly nonliterary discourse that Joyce incorporates – while simultaneously redirecting it to report, ironically enough, on its own creation.

Yet, while invariably metafictional, not all of the headlines featured in "Aeolus" conform to the conventions of provincial journalese. "ORTHOGRAPHICAL" (Joyce, 1998: 117), for example, is distinctively unlike a newspaper headline and serves to draw our attention to the words (letter for letter) of which *Ulysses* consists. Other headlines invoke additional genres (aside from novel and newspaper report). "EXIT BLOOM" (124) and "RETURN OF BLOOM" (140), for instance, read more like stage directions than headlines and foreshadow the more extensive use of dramatic conventions in "Scylla and Charybdis" and especially "Circe".

The most inventive forms these "headlines" take on are those in which they subvert themselves precisely as instances of a generic convention associated with a particular set of expectations. In "headlines" like "???" (Joyce, 1998: 127) and "WHAT? - AND LIKEWISE - WHERE?" (143), for example, our expectations of what a headline should be are subverted altogether. Indeed, these examples can no longer, technically speaking, even be considered headlines. Instead of venturing information with regards to the content to follow, "headlines" like these simply acknowledge the ignorance of the reader.

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"Ithaca" is, of course, another chapter governed by the conventions of a nonliterary genre. Written in language Weinstein calls "sciencese" (1979: 3), "Ithaca" tells of Bloom's return home (with Stephen) in the form of alternating questions and answers in the cool, rational and specific language of a scientific report. It is a chapter in which we view the world "with the cold eye of science, the 'art' of the episode" (Mercier, 1994: 296), and in which "[t]he rock of Ithaca to which Odysseus longs to return becomes stylistically 'Ithaca's' 'hard facts'" (Johnson, 1998: xxxiv-v). "Who drank more quickly?" (Joyce, 1998: 630) we read with reference to Bloom and Stephen having "in jocoserious silence Epp's massproduct, the creature cocoa" (629). The answer is: "Bloom having the advantage of ten seconds at the initiation and taking, from the concave surface of a spoon along the handle of which a steady flow of heat was conducted, three sips to his opponents one, six to two, nine to three" (630). In this instance, playfully incorporating the "language of sport" too, Stephen and Bloom's actions are described with the extreme accuracy and pretence of objectivity characteristic of the chapter as a whole. As such "Ithaca", as a satirical parody of scientific authority in narrative, might be read as yet another subversion of the "truth telling" realist project.

Ulysses, Dentith notes, is a text situated within an "alternative novelistic tradition" alongside the works of writers like Rabelais, Sterne, Rushdie and Chamoiseau, and somewhat at odds with the tradition of Cervantes, Fielding, Austen and Thackeray (2000: 78). This alternative tradition is one Dentith describes as "learned, scatological, fantastic, and wildly inclusive of discursive styles drawn from all directions, high and low,

academic and popular". It is also a tradition Dentith goes on to describe as making "extensive use of parody in multiple ways as it assimilates, assaults and lovingly reproduces the diverse verbal materials out of which it is constituted" (78). And although Cervantes and Austen are parodists in their own right, it is on the scale that this alternative tradition incorporates and relativizes discourses that it sets itself apart. *Ulysses*, and for that matter *Finnegans Wake*, are indeed "amazingly dense *intertexts*" (Brink, 1998: 3) in which a wide range of "languages" (from a wide range of sources) are brought into an equalizing intratextual coexistence. And it is this use of the "overtly hybrid and double-voiced" (Hutcheon, 1985: 28) nature of parody as a mode of generic engineering that appealed to Joyce for aesthetic as well as political reasons – as discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Parodic Patriotism: The Politics of Joyce's *Ulysses*

In the previous chapter I quote Budgen as saying with regards to *Ulysses* that "[i]t was hardly likely that, having denied all religious dogma, and having carefully avoided all political doctrine, [Joyce] would submit to artistic limitations" (1972: 198). Budgen's point is particularly useful in that it recognizes a commonality in these three aversions. Despite obvious differences, Joyce, like Wilde, was reluctant to succumb to the servitude of hegemony – whether aesthetic, religious or political (and whether English or Irish). As noted in the previous chapter, Joyce too belonged to "[t]he tradition of subversiveness and linguistic virtuosity in Irish writing" (Alexander, 1990: 25), and used parody as a "weapon" against hegemony. All his life Joyce defined himself in opposition to prevailing codes and causes with intermittent proclamations to this effect. Even as a young man, Bolt notes, in the "excited and expectant little world" of Dublin at the turn of the century, Joyce "contemptuously announced that he distrusted all enthusiasms" (Bolt, 1992: 13). The view is characteristic of Joyce's "ill-ease with group adherence" (Burns, 1998: 238), and while these attitudes betray a certain artistic affectation, we should not forget the genuinely oppressive nature of some of the causes and institutions against which Joyce was reacting.

Burns makes the point that while "there has been a major impetus to reclaim Joyce as nationalist in his politics... too often such endeavours have turned a blind eye to the implications of [his] parody" (Burns, 1998: 239). Although he remained forever

sympathetic with them, Joyce saw the Irish of his time as a backward-looking people. Accordingly he also, somewhat over-ambitiously, took it upon himself to conscientize them. As he wrote to a prospective publisher of *Dubliners* in 1906: "I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilisation in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass" (Johnson, 2000: vii). *Ulysses* is in many respects a continuation of this project. In *Ulysses* Joyce uses parody to critique the dominant Irish socio-political discourses of his time, and establish an alternative, more inclusive brand of Irish politics. Using the "overtly hybrid and double voiced" (Hutcheon, 1985: 28) character of parody as a means for engineering discursive relativity, Joyce resists "any imaginary position of unitary subjects" and, as such, "makes the reader aware of his / her own construction within contradictory discourses, creating the 'conscience' or consciousness of an audience he could not locate, for a form of political awareness that did not yet exist" (Burns, 1998: 239). Parody, in this sense, provided Joyce with the means for refashioning the Irish nationalism of his time into what might be called a "parodic patriotism".

British Imperialism was obviously the most oppressive social or institutional force operative in early twentieth-century Ireland, but the forces of Irish nationalism and Roman Catholicism were, in Joyce's view, equally if not more to blame for the oppression of the Irish people. Nationalism, Joyce believed, "no less than Catholicism, operated as a conservative social force, deprecating the development of class consciousness as a threat to national unity" (Bolt, 1992: 12). Furthermore, when considering Irish nationalism in relation to British Imperialism and Roman Catholicism,

Joyce saw a social force that was nothing "other than an extension of those imperialisms, despite its apparent antagonism to them" (Deane, 1993: 35). This situation presented Joyce with a dilemma to which he saw only one solution. Having surveyed the possibilities, as Deane notes, Joyce "could find no alternative to imperialisms and nationalism other than an attitude of fierce repudiation" (35).

However, this repudiation is also complicated by a seemingly contradictory engagement with all that he sought to distance himself from. Joyce was a writer who "described himself with some justification as 'apolitical'" (Alexander, 1990: 8), but he also remained obsessed with politics for all of his adult life. Furthermore, though Joyce saw no alternative to exile, "it was as impossible for [him] to break with nation as with family" (Bolt, 1992: 12). Indeed, as Bolt notes, even "[h]is self-imposed exile was only to afford him the observation post from which to contemplate an incurable involvement" (12).

If exile did in fact fulfil this function for Joyce, parody offered him the textual means for expressing his ambivalence. Joyce, Burns writes, "alternately loved and loathed his homeland" (1998: 237), and this is clearly evident in *Ulysses*. Indeed, the generic heterogeneity and parodic distance inherent in the text are used to express precisely this ambivalence towards the Irish nationalist enterprise, and to problematize its nostalgic use of epic, myth and legend.

The previous chapter outlines the relationship of *Ulysses* to its Homeric hypotext with special reference to what Eliot calls the "mythical method" (1970: 270-1). However, the

Homeric parallels constitute only one of a number of oral traditions appropriated parodically in *Ulysses*. It is true that "[e]very culture on earth has developed its own rich collection of myths and has celebrated the exploits of mythological heroes in heroic literature" (Burgess ed., 1997: 9). However, it is also true that some cultures are more myth-dependent than others. As Schopflin notes, "some communities will have evolved a much more complex, much richer mythology than others" (2000: 83), and this is certainly true of Irish culture and politics as Joyce portrays them in *Ulysses*.

Irish culture at the turn of the century was saturated with mythology. It was an era in which traditional practices were being "resurrected by the Gaelic Athletic Association, while… the Gaelic League was resurrecting the native language and making available translations of ancient Irish texts which offered mythological heroes as a new source of national pride" (Bolt, 1992: 13). Moreover, the discourses of Irish nationalism themselves took on mythic and epic sensibilities. In the minds of those aligned with the Gaelic League at the turn of the century, Crowley writes, "'Real Ireland' was Gaelic, Catholic and in the past" (1996: 142), and there are several sections of *Ulysses* which demonstrate, though ironically, what Crowley refers to as "the blandishments of the monoglossic Gaelic culture with its accompanying nostalgia and reverence for the epic past" (199).

One aspect of Irish culture described repeatedly in these terms is the Gaelic language. In "Telemachus" an old woman, after first mistaking the dying language (spoken by Haines) for French and being corrected by Mulligan, refers to Gaelic with exactly the sentiments

Crowley describes. The old woman states that she is ashamed she does not speak Gaelic and remarks that she has been "told it's a grand language by them that knows" (Joyce, 1998: 14). This tone of adulation is taken up by Mulligan too who corrects her a second time in saying that "[g]rand is no name for it", preferring "[w]onderful entirely" (14). For Mulligan and the old woman, as for many other characters in *Ulysses,* the Gaelic language serves as an index for both a bygone golden age of Ireland and an authentically Irish way of life. Indeed, the old woman may even perceive her inability to speak Gaelic as something of a shortcoming in her "makeup" as Irish. *True* Irish men and women, she might think, speak the grand language. For her, as for the rest of Ireland, English is not only the language of the conqueror but also, as spoken by the Irish, the supreme signifier of their subjugation. This is a matter addressed in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* too, albeit from a slightly different angle. During a conversation with the dean, Stephen contemplates the different relationships he and his English interlocutor have with the English language. "The language in which we are speaking", Stephen thinks, "is his before it is mine" (Joyce, 1965: 205) and it occurs to Stephen that words like "*home, Christ, ale,* [and] *master*" function very differently for the dean. The dean's use of English strikes Stephen as more "natural" than his own. English, Stephen thinks, "will always be for me an acquired speech" (205).

Of course English is as much an acquired language for the dean as for Stephen, but it is in relation to the dean's seemingly natural correlation of language and race that Stephen notices the schism in his own identity. If the dean is what we might call English-English, Stephen is English-Irish and perceives within himself a misalignment of language and

race. To Stephen English is a language at once "so familiar and so foreign" whose words, like "master", he cannot speak "without unrest of spirit" (Joyce, 1965: 205). And although English is ostensibly *his* language too, it is entirely because it is the language of Ireland's colonial oppressor. Stephen accordingly thinks of his soul as "fret[ting] in the shadow of [the dean's] language" (205).

For this reason Gaelic was typically associated with the idea of a free and revitalized Ireland. In "Cyclops" the narrator refers to a Mr Joseph M'Carthy Hynes as a "well known and respected worker in the cause of our old tongue" (Joyce, 1998: 304). Hynes, we hear, makes an "eloquent appeal for the resuscitation of the ancient Gaelic sports and pastimes, practised morning and evening by Finn Mac Cool, as calculated to revive the best traditions of manly strength and powers handed down to [the Irish] from ancient ages" (304). Along with the invocation of Fionn Mac Cumhail – Irish chieftain, military figure, poet and central character of the Ossian and Finn sagas (Johnson, 1998: 891) – the references to strength, masculinity, national heritage and the ancient world accentuate the idiosyncrasies of a particular type of late nineteenth-century / early twentieth-century pro-Irish rhetoric governed by mythical, legendary and epic sensibilities. This is a discourse Joyce parodies satirically in some detail in *Ulysses* and especially in the "Cyclops" chapter.

Looking at the writers of the Irish Movement in the early twentieth-century, the young Joyce saw a group of artists "blinded by a mendacious patriotism, which led them to glorify ridiculous myths, together with a foggy otherworldliness, that distracted their

attentions from the here and now" (Bolt, 1992: 14). This too became the "theoretical framework" of much Irish political thinking. The section of "Cyclops" recounting Hynes' speech forms part of a broader parody on the "minutes of the meeting of a social or political organization written up as a newspaper puff" (Johnson, 1998: 891). Beginning with the phrase "[a] most interesting discussion took place", this section goes on to parody, satirically, the invocation of mythical and legendary figures and places in the Irish cultural and political discourses of the time. The discussion in which Hynes participates is one on "the revival of ancient Gaelic sports and the importance of physical culture", and is described as taking place in "the ancient hall of *Brian O'Cairnain's* in *Straid na Bretaine Bheag*, under the auspices of *Sluagh na h-Eireann*" (Joyce, 1998: 303). The context for this debate, as described by the narrator, resonates with Old Irish significance. While the setting is only that of Barney Kiernan's pub in Little Britain Street, its correlation with an "ancient hall" and accompanying references to owner and location in Gaelic (Johnson, 1998: 891), conflate and confuse the conventions of meeting minutes and newspaper puff with those of Irish legend. In Gaelic these references acquire a nostalgic, cultural resonance closely related to what De Almeida calls "the Irish political rhetoric of loss" (1983: 404).

This rhetoric of loss, basic to much political debate of the time, is parodied in several places in "Cyclops" and very often in conjunction with the epic myths and legends on which it drew. The parodic catalogue of "Irish heroes and heroines of antiquity" (Joyce, 1998: 284) featured earlier in "Cyclops" offers a good example of this. As in the case of the blessing of Barney Kiernan's pub (324-5) – discussed in the previous chapter – with

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its overlong, hyperbolic and generally farcical lists, this catalogue also subverts epic sensibility through escalating absurdity. The catalogue in question supposedly enumerates the Irish heroes and heroines whose names have been carved onto "a row of seastones" dangling from the girdle of a "figure seated on a large boulder at the foot of a round tower" (284). The list begins plausibly and predictably with Cuchulin and goes on to include the likes of "Conn of hundred battles, Niall of nine hostages, [and] Brian of Kincora" (284). Importantly, the first 16 of these names pertain to real people – "kings, rebels, patriots, [and] founders of nationalist societies" (Johnson, 1998: 296). This initial group is also what we might call "authentically" Irish.

Yet the catalogue proceeds to expand "in a colonizing fashion" (Johnson, 1998: 886), appropriating figures from a wide range of popular, sacred, literary, historical, legendary and mythological sources. The latter section of this list is eclectic in the extreme and features figures like "Goliath… the Village Blacksmith, Captain Moonlight, Captain Boycott… Christopher Columbus… Charlemagne… the Mother of the Maccabees, the Last of the Mohicans… The Man that Broke the Bank At Monte Carlo… The Woman Who Didn't, Benjamin Franklin, Napoleon Bonaparte, John L. Sullivan, Cleopatra… Julius Caesar… William Tell, Michelangelo… Muhammad… Captain Nemo… Ludwig Beethoven… [and] Adam and Eve" (284-5). The effect is, first and foremost, a subversion of the reverence and / or nostalgia one might associate with a catalogue of Irish heroes. The previous chapter described the catalogue as a convention of "most early epics throughout the world" and as a device usually reserved for serious matters like enumerating "ships, troops, a queen's suitors, those who have fallen in battle, places

visited and so on" (Beye, 1976: 89). Yet the overly inclusive character of this catalogue subverts, through comic absurdity, any pretence of an epic Irish past established by its first few names. Not only do most of the figures listed in the catalogue have very little to do with Ireland, but they are also seldom heroes in any traditional (or epic) sense of the word.

Aside from eliciting a comic response, anomalies like Goliath and Beethoven also involve the reader in a deconstruction of the parodied discourse. Phiddian suggests that parody and deconstruction are "secretly the same thing" (1997: 681), and although I would not, as Phiddian does, make this claim for parody in general, it certainly holds true for many of the parodies featured in *Ulysses*. The catalogue of Irish heroes discussed above forms one of those parodies that, according to Phiddian, "exist in a critically deconstructive relation to their model" (686) whose "comic aspects... generate critical perspectives" (691). In sorting through its various entries – in relation to notions like "Irishness", "nationhood", "heroism", "fiction" and "non-fiction" – the reader is drawn into a deconstructive reading of an essentially starry-eyed discourse of Irish patriotism.

This sort of parody is evident in several sections of the "Cyclops" episode too. "Cyclops" is, after all, a chapter with Politics as its Art "in which most of Irish history, tradition, and politics is held up to ridicule" (Mercier, 1994: 267). The chapter concerns itself primarily with Irish patriotism(s) and satirizes two characteristics of the nationalist discourses of the time. The first of these characteristics or tendencies, already referred to, is the appropriation of myth and legend not only to invoke an apocryphal heroic past, but

also to invest the nationalist cause with a sense of epic conquest. The second of these discursive tendencies involves the use of blinkered, xenophobic and jingoistic rhetoric.

In "Cyclops" Joyce parodies heroic sensibilities at several critical stages in the unnamed first-person narrator's tale of a political debate in a Dublin pub. The description of the pub's location, towards the beginning of the chapter, offers a good example of this. "In Inisfail the fair", the narrator states, "there lies a land, the land of holy Michan. There rises a watchtower beheld of men afar. There sleep the mighty dead as in life they slept, warriors and princes of high renown" (Joyce, 1998: 282). As Johnson notes, the passage is a parody of James Clarence Mangan's English translation of a poem called *Aldfrid's Itinerary* by the seventh-century Northumbrian king Aldfrid (1998: 885). The description serves, primarily, to set the geographical scene for the debate that ensues. "Inisfail the fair" is a reference to Ireland, Inisfail being an anglicized version of the Gaelic "Inis Fal" for Ireland. Furthermore, "the land of holy Michan" refers to the location of Kiernan's pub in the Dublin municipal district of St Michan's parish (885). Yet the passage does more than simply set a geographical scene. It also sets what might be called a discursive or paradigmatic scene. Through its archaisms and references to "warriors and princes of high renown" the passage evokes, satirically, a heroic context for the political debate that ensues.

Epic conventions are also employed in the descriptions of the debate's participants. Bloom, for instance, is accorded an especially grand announcement. "Who comes through Michan's land", the narrator asks, "bedight in sable armour? O'Bloom," he

answers, "the son of Rory: it is he. Impervious to fear is Rory's son: he of the prudent soul" (Joyce, 1998: 285). This particular passage parodies a generic Irish legend. As in the case of Bloom's pairing with Odysseus, his pairing with a hero of Irish legend is once again both ironic and deflationary. The "Irishized" "O'Bloom" also functions ironically in relation to Bloom's distinctively un-Irish heritage and serves to foreshadow the Irish racialism and racism later in the chapter.

Racialism and, its more prejudicial relative, racism are evident in most of the political discourses (parodic or otherwise) in *Ulysses*. "Telemachus" is especially important in establishing racialism and racism as themes. Here, for instance, Mulligan expresses impatience with Haines in relation to his race: "God, isn't he dreadful? A ponderous Saxon. He thinks you're not a gentleman. God, these bloody English. Bursting with money and indigestion" (Joyce, 1998: 4).

Haines has racist views of his own that are also underscored in "Telemachus". Haines is an English patriot who calls himself a "Britisher" (Joyce, 1998: 21). Like many of the other patriotisms we encounter in *Ulysses*, his too incorporates xenophobic and racist notions. He believes that the Irish "ought to speak Irish in Ireland" (14) and expresses some sympathy with the Irish plight. In response to Stephen's explanation of Irish servitude at the hands of London and Rome, Haines remarks that he can understand that "[a]n Irishman must think like that" (20), and that "[w]e feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly" (20). Yet the compassion Haines expresses for the Irish is problematic for a number of reasons. While motioning towards an acknowledgment of

the prejudices and injustices of the past, the euphemistic "we have treated you rather unfairly" fails to address the magnitude of the imperialist enterprise in Ireland. It also glosses over English guilt – not to mention Haines's own implication (as an Englishman) in it. "[H]istory is to blame" (20) is, as Johnson notes, "a gesture of attempted self-absolution" in which "Haines displaces his guilt by troping history as an infernal agent, much like the schoolboy caught redhanded who seeks to escape imminent punishment by squealing "I didn't do it. History did" (1998: 775). Such an understanding of history could also be compared with Mr Deasy's in "Nestor" that also posits history as an impersonal and infernal machine beyond moral reproach. "All history", Mr Deasy states, "moves towards the one great goal, the manifestation of God" (Joyce, 1998: 34). Both Haines's and Deasy's sympathies lie with the English, and their understandings of history reflect hegemonic complacency. To both of them the Irish plight is a consequence of a natural order. Importantly, it is Stephen, whose sympathies lie with the Irish race, who thinks of history as "a nightmare from which [he is] trying to awake" (34).

Haines's view that the Irish should revert to speaking Gaelic might also be interpreted as patronizing towards the Irish race and culture. Although Haines clearly takes a genuine interest in Gaelic and the Irish culture, his interest is very much that of an imperialist in the exotic culture of the colonials. Haines's interest in Stephen's sayings on Ireland of which he, if given permission, intends to "make a collection" (Joyce, 1998: 16) offers a good example. Although apparently pro-Irish, Haines comes close to endorsing what was then a popular stereotype – both at home and abroad – of the Irish race and its predicament in a comparatively undeveloped country. Deane writes that Joyce viewed

the leaders of the Irish Revival and "their supporters [as]... dangerously close to committing themselves to a version of the pseudo-Irishness which had once been the preserve of the stage-Irishman of nineteenth-century England" (1993: 38). This pseudo-Irishness typically involved an idealization of Irish rural life and history and "was, by the last decade of the century, becoming the property of the Celtic Irishman of the day" (38). Such an understanding of the Irish race, ironically enough, even came to characterize Irish nationalist thinking with its emphasis on "moral purity, attributing to the Irish people a peculiar innocence, and harking back nostalgically to the Dark Ages, when Ireland had been famous for her saints and sages" (Bolt, 1990: 13).

The drive to resuscitate the Gaelic language and an all but lost Celtic heritage was, in Joyce's view, itself a lost cause. Joyce, Deane notes, "made it clear that, in his opinion, the Revival was conceding to public pressure by allowing the caricatured, but popular, version of Ireland to become the abiding image of the Abbey Theatre" (1993: 39). Such an understanding of the Irish – in which they are thought of as better off returning to their "natural" state – arguably informs Haines's opinion that the Irish should be speaking Gaelic. Joyce, by contrast, believed that, in the wake of colonialism, the return to the natural was not to be achieved "by a romanticizing of rural and peasant life, or the idea of the Celt and his lost language" (39). In Joyce's view, as Deane goes on to note, this could only be achieved "by an unflinching realism which, like that of Ibsen, stripped the mask from the pharisaic middle-class society of urban Europe and exposed its spiritual hypocrisy and impoverishment" (39).

Yet the racism implicit in Haines's views on the Irish pales in relation to that he expresses towards the Jews. Anti-Semitism is a recurring theme in *Ulysses* first established in "Telemachus". In addressing what he calls England's "national problem", Haines declares that he does not "want to see [his] country fall into the hands of the German jews" (Joyce, 1998: 21). The opinion is similar to Mr Deasy's in "Nestor". "Mark my words, Mr Dedalus," he states, "England is in the hands of the jews. In all the highest places: her finance, her press" (33). For Mr Deasy, as for Haines, developments like these constitute "the signs of a nation's decay": like the rinderpest dealt with in his letter to the press, the Jews are simply another parasite. "Wherever they gather", he remarks to Stephen, "they eat up the nation's vital strength. I have seen it coming for years. As sure as we are standing here the jew merchants are already at their work of destruction. Old England is dying... Dying... if not dead by now" (33).

Mr Deasy's argument, however, fails to convince Stephen. For Stephen there is no logical link between the success of the Jewish merchant and the demise of England's traditional ways. "A merchant," Stephen asks, "is one who buys cheap and sells dear, jew or gentile, is he not?" (Joyce, 1998: 34). Mr Deasy prefers not to offer a straight answer. Instead, he offers a biblical justification for his Anti-Semitic view: "[t]hey sinned against the light, Mr Deasy says gravely. And that is why they are wanderers on the earth to this day" (34). Once again racial subjugation is justified not only through an appeal to a higher authority but also on the basis of a supposed natural order.

The parodies featured in "Cyclops" address these racialist and racist themes in some

detail. Indeed, as Burns notes, "Cyclops" is an episode "[w]e can read… as an astute study of how racialism leads to racism, not only through the obvious excesses of the Citizen's angry, negating discourse but also in the stereotyping of the mock heroic passages" (1998: 240-1). In this way the chapter sets up, as Burns goes on to point out, "the negative extreme of racism… as a mirror of 'high' celebratory racialism" (242).

Most of the generic parodies of Irish legend satirize the racialism that characterized not only much traditional Irish literature but also most Irish cultural and political discourses. A good example of this is to be found in a passage describing the entrance of three Dubliners into Kiernan's pub. The passage begins with "[a]nd lo" – an archaic call for attention which serves as a key-signature to mark a generic modulation – and goes on to tell, in mock-heroic fashion, of three newcomers who enter the pub while its occupants "quaffed their cup of joy" (Joyce, 1998: 286). The first of these is "a godlike messenger… radiant as the eye of heaven, a comely youth"; the second is "an elder of noble gait and countenance, bearing the sacred scrolls of law"; and the third is "his lady wife, a dame of peerless lineage, fairest of her race". As in the case of the generic parody referring to "O'Bloom" (285), this parody once again accentuates a link between Irish legend, as genre, and the Irish race, based on the notion of parallel heritages – one cultural or generic, the other biological or genetic.

This link to which this passage draws our attention, a link often made by racially conscious Irish nationalists, is ironized and discredited in two ways: firstly, through the obsequious tone of the passage itself; and secondly, in the re-description of the incident in

the paragraph that follows from the perspective of an entirely different narrator – the same disrespectful narrator who later refers to Molly as "[t]he fat heap [Bloom] married... a nice old phenomenon with a back on her like a bowling alley" (Joyce, 1998: 293). In stark contrast to the archaic idiom of Irish legend, the diegesis shifts into one both contemporary and colloquial, and retells, in expressly antithetical terms to those of the preceding paragraph, the entry of the three Dubliners – subverting, in the process, both the previous paragraph's epic reverence and emphasis on racial purity. The "godlike messenger" or "comely youth" becomes simply "[l]ittle Alf Bergan" (286) whose entrance is marked by horseplay and laughter. The description of the second entrant is even more deflationary, characterized by (in sharp contrast to epic reverence) vindictive disrespect. The "elder of noble gait" is "only that bloody pantaloon Denis Breen in his bath slippers with two bloody big books tucked under his oxter". Denis Breen's "lady wife" is dealt a similar indignity. With ironic implications for her status as a thoroughbred specimen of her race, Mrs Breen is described as "hotfoot after [her husband], an unfortunate wretched woman trotting like a poodle" (286).

In the political debate that takes place in the pub in "Cyclops" racialism and racism, as central tropes in Irish cultural and political discourses, are dealt with explicitly – especially in the section leading up to what is described in "Ithaca" as Bloom's "altercation with a truculent troglodyte in Bernard Kiernan's premises" (Joyce, 1998: 681). In creating the "truculent troglodyte" or "citizen" who dominates the debate in the pub, Joyce fused the Cyclops of Homer's *Odyssey* with the actual figure of Michael Cusack, the founder of the Gaelic Athletic Association (Johnson, 1998: 885). The citizen

is the most radical of all the Irish nationalists we encounter in *Ulysses* and becomes, in Johnson's words, the "spokesman for Ireland right or wrong" (884). Indeed, "[a]s various commentators have noted, the 'Citizen' is so ardently identified with his nationalist passion that he no longer has a proper name. He is pure type" (Burns, 1998: 241).

Unlike the mythical parallels of Molly with Penelope or Bloom with Odysseus, that of the citizen with the Cyclops, while still deflationary, functions metaphorically rather than ironically, serving to accentuate similarity. The citizen *is* a monster of sorts and a "one-eyed" one at that. Vision in both literal and figurative terms is an important motif in "Cyclops". The chapter, opens, for instance, with a punning single "I" (Joyce, 1998: 280) as the first-person narrator begins with a story about the "bloody [chimney] sweep" who "near drove his gear into [the narrator's] eye" (280). This introductory story is, of course, an allusion to the blinding of the Cyclops in the *Odyssey*, and serves to establish vision as a motif. Over the course of the chapter this motif takes on an increasingly figurative meaning. This is so especially in relation to the narrow, two-dimensional and therefore essentially "one-eyed" or monocular outlook of the citizen.

Through the citizen Joyce parodies an especially tunnel-visioned brand of radical Irish nationalism to which Bloom, as the agent of Joycean common sense, can only respond with phrases like "*but don't you see?* and *but on the other hand*" (Joyce, 1998: 293). The citizen speaks in rhetoric that is aggressive, fixated on race and replete with all "the symptoms of cultural paranoia that can haunt radical nationalism" (Burns, 1998: 241).

Not only is he entirely insensitive to the complexities, ambiguities and ironies of Ireland's history and politics, but he is also naively one-sided and ferociously uncompromising in his interpretation of Ireland's issues. Impatient with Bloom's opinions on Irish politics, the citizen attempts to close the debate: in the idiom of the Irish rhetoric of loss, he proposes a toast to "[t]he memory of the dead" while "taking up his pintglass and glaring at Bloom" (293). When Bloom attempts to elaborate on his final point he is interrupted once again with nationalist rhetoric. The citizen exclaims "Sinn Fein... Sinn fein amhain!" – Gaelic for "Ourselves... Ourselves alone" (Johnson, 1998: 888) – and goes on to finish his toast with: "[t]he friends we love are by our sides and the foes we hate before us" (Joyce, 1998: 293). This toast demonstrates not only the citizen's uses of rhetoric to preclude debate on certain matters, but also the "black and white" terms in which he thinks. His conception of Irish politics is entirely binary: people are either allies or enemies and either racially pure or impure.

The primary binary operative in the citizen's nationalist discourse is, of course, that of colonial Ireland and imperial England – or, as he prefers, Irish civilization and English "syphilisation" (Joyce, 1998: 311). This binary is deployed in several places in "Cyclops" – most memorably, perhaps, in the narrator's parodic, mock-epic description of a boxing match as "a historic and hefty battle" between an "Irish gladiator" and a "redcoat" (305). Yet the polarities of this binary are taken to bizarre and dubious extremes in the citizen's nationalist discourse. Exaggerating the parasitism inherent in imperialism, the citizen describes England as a country without a culture of its own, with "[n]o music and no art and no literature worthy of the name" (311). "Any civilisation

they have", he goes on to remark, "they stole from [the Irish]". The English, in his view, are nothing more than the "[t]onguetied sons of bastards' ghosts". Irish culture, on the other hand – their "potteries and textiles… [being] the finest in the world" (312) and so forth – calls for jingoistic enthusiasm.

Of course the binary the citizen establishes here is entirely uninformed by the events and ambiguities of history. Not only is it wholly dismissive of even the possibility of a characteristically English culture, but it also overlooks the common ground, politically speaking, between England and Ireland. For instance, as Bloom remembers in "Eumaeus", "Irish soldiers had as often fought for England as against her, more so, in fact" (Joyce, 1998: 596). This narrow-mindedness is also evident in the citizen's thinking on nationhood. The citizen's conception of the Irish nation is closely related to the dubious notion of Irish racialism satirized in several places in *Ulysses*. In his discourse this racialism is infused with both racist and xenophobic sentiments. The citizen's remark, "[w]e want no more strangers in our house" (310), underscores the exclusivity implicit in his understanding of Irishness. Once again, a binary is established whereby only those of "pure" Celtic descent and nationalist orientation can qualify as Irish. Aliens and non-conformists of all sorts are treated as enemies and scapegoated for Ireland's problems. Strangers, the citizen remarks, are "[s]windling the peasants… and the poor of Ireland". These strangers are predominantly, as he goes on to explain, the "saxon robbers" brought across by the Irish "adulteress and her paramour" (310).

It is Bloom – the "bloody jewman" (Joyce, 1998: 327) – who is a more immediate

irritation to the citizen and his ideal of a homogeneous Irish society. When asked by John Wyse to define a nation Bloom states that it is "the same people living in the same place" (317). Of course the definition is a problematic one. As Ned notes, laughing, "if that's so I'm a nation for I'm living in the same place for the past five years". Bloom attempts to improve his definition by adding "[o]r also living in different places", but once again the inadequacy of his definition is pointed out, this time by Joe who remarks: "[t]hat covers my case". However, despite its obvious shortcomings, the definition of nationhood Bloom offers is a good deal less problematic than the citizen's and, in fact, serves to draw attention to the fragility of the citizen's definition. This difference is further emphasized in Bloom's answer to the citizen's question, asked with mock-civility, "[w]hat is your nation if I may ask". "Ireland" is what Bloom replies initially and goes on to explain that this is so because it is his place of birth (317).

It is, however, the second part of Bloom's reply that is closer to the citizen's implication. Bloom goes on to state that he "belong[s] to a race too… that is hated and persecuted. Also now. This very moment. This very instant" (Joyce, 1998: 318). The race Bloom has in mind is, of course, that of the Jews or, in the citizen's terms, those associated with "the new Jerusalem". At this point, in what is perhaps one of his most conventionally heroic moments, Bloom launches into a speech on the plight of the Jews worldwide. However, in keeping with the deflated or mock-heroic tone of the novel, even this speech begins with Bloom nearly burning "his fingers with the butt of his old cigar". He nevertheless manages to recompose himself and continue. The Jews, Bloom states, are "[r]obbed… Plundered. Insulted. Persecuted". "[P]utting up his fist", in the fashion of

a true rabble-rouser, Bloom goes on to say that even "[a]t this very moment" Jews are being "sold by auction off in Morocco like slaves or cattle" (318). After a few questions and comments Bloom goes on to argue that "[f]orce, hatred, history, all that… [are] not life for men and women, insult and hatred" (319). "[E]verybody", Bloom remarks, "knows that it's the very opposite of that that is really life" – meaning, as he goes on to explain, "[l]ove… the opposite of hatred" (319).

Although Bloom's view is clearly one Joyce identified with to some extent, the parodic subversion to which he subjects it prevents it from dominating the chapter. Once again, true to the distinctively unheroic sensibility of the novel, no sooner is Bloom apparently in mid-speech than he is remarking to John Wyse beside him: "I must go now… Just round to the court a moment to see if Martin is there. If he comes just say I'll be back in a second. Just a moment" (Joyce, 1998: 319). Furthermore, the credibility of Bloom's political discourse is also compromised through his habitual use of cliché, to which the citizen responds with mockery. "A new apostle to the gentiles", he remarks, "[u]niversal love" (319).

However, the citizen's political discourse is subverted far more vigorously than Bloom's, through his inadvertent evocation of irony – many of his comments being instances of the pot calling the kettle black. Harmless Bloom, for instance, is described as "[a] wolf in sheep's clothing" (Joyce, 1998: 324) by the xenophobic thug. However, the most memorable example of this occurs during a discussion on law and history. Responding to Bloom's remark that "[s]ome people… can see the mote in other's eyes but they can't see

the beam in their own", the citizen – as Joyce's blinded Cyclops – replies that "[t]here's no-one as blind as the fellow that won't see" (312).

This parodic parallel with the Cyclops of Homer's *Odyssey* is brought to a conclusion when Bloom returns to the pub after his brief absence. Anti-Semitic tensions escalate once again, but this time Bloom responds by pointing out the irony that "the Saviour was a jew and his father was a jew" (Joyce, 1998: 327). The citizen regards this as a blasphemous idea and, in a blind fury, exclaims that he will "brain that bloody jewman for using the holy name". However, instead of using a rock as the Cyclops does, the citizen asks for a nearby "biscuitbox" (327) that he throws at Bloom outside. Missing Bloom, "the old tinbox [simply goes] clattering down the street" (329).

The parody of so-called women's literature in "Nausicaa" also satirizes Irish racialism. Gerty MacDowell is a woman "pronounced beautiful by all who knew her" whose "Greekly perfect" looks and "queenly *hauteur*" (Joyce, 1998: 333) are closely associated with her Irishness. Gerty is described as "in very truth as fair a specimen of winsome Irish girlhood as one could wish to see" with a face "almost spiritual in its ivorylike purity" (333), a dark brown "wealth of wonderful hair" (334) and eyes "of the bluest Irish blue" (333). Yet the notion of Gerty's racial pedigree is subverted in a number of ways.

Like much else of "Nausicaa", as in many of the parodies discussed above, the passages describing Gerty are heavily stylized. Bakhtin writes that "[i]n general any strict adherence to a genre begins to feel like a stylization, a stylization taken to the point of

parody, despite the artistic intent of the author" (1990: 6). This sort of "over-compliance" with generic conventions and formulas can, however, be used very deliberately for parodic, comic and / or metafictional purposes. Many sections of "Nausicaa" offer almost textbook examples of this sort of parody. "Nausicaa" accentuates the conventions of the popular romance story to a point of comical caricature. Indeed, in its self-conscious "over-compliance" with generic conventions, "Nausicaa" not only makes fun of these conventions but also discredits its own narratorial voice. The self-consciously saccharine descriptions of Gerty's "patriotic" beauty and demeanor cannot, in other words, be taken seriously – as the narrator goes on to state with regards to her hair, for instance, "a daintier head of nutbrown tresses was never seen on a girl's shoulders, a radiant little vision, in sooth, almost maddening in its sweetness" (Joyce, 1998: 344).

Gerty's Irish pedigree is problematized further by her Scottish surname. Though we are told, "as folks often said, she was more a Giltrap than a MacDowell" (Joyce, 1998: 333), Gerty clearly has no claim to an untainted Irish lineage. Her status as the perfect model of Irish girlhood is also problematized by Bloom's discovery that "[s]he's lame" (351). Bloom "watch[es] her as she limp[s] away" and thinks to himself: "[p]oor girl! That's why she's left on the shelf and the others did a sprint" (351).

In Joyce's view, Ireland (England's oldest colony) was, as Bolt writes, a country in which "the conditions of slavery had produced a slavish mentality" (1992: 14) – and it was a mentality Joyce did his utmost to escape. Indeed, even in 1940 when "caught in defeated

France, Joyce refused to exchange his embarrassing British passport for an Irish one, even though this would have removed the obstacles he was encountering in escaping once again to neutral Switzerland" (25), and it is important to remember that "[i]t was the Irish, rather than the English, whose oppression he fled from" (14). As Stephen – Joyce's literary alter ego – explains in *A Portrait*, "[w]hen the soul of a man is born in [Ireland] there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight" (Joyce, 1965: 220).

Nevertheless, even in exile, Joyce remained engaged with Irish politics – and a patriot of sorts. Although rejecting the Ireland and the Irish nationalism(s) of his time, Joyce never rejected the Irish nation. He did, however, feel the need to mediate his identification with it, and the distancing, ironizing and relativizing principles of parody afforded him a means of doing so. "Joyce", Burns writes, "insistently parodied that with which he identified, putting himself in the odd position of judging what was both part of himself and had somehow grown estranged" (1998: 238), and it is with such an understanding of Joyce's work in mind that he might be called a "parodic patriot".

CHAPTER 6

Reinventing *Hamlet*: Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

In discussing the use of "parodic or second-order forms" by twentieth-century playwrights, Dentith singles out Tom Stoppard as the paramount British exponent, whose plays *Rozencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, The Real Inspector Hound* and *Travesties* "all make sophisticated use of parody" (2000: 153). Unlike works conforming to a conventional definition of parody as literary satire entailing "[t]he imitative use of the words, style, attitude, tone and ideas of an author in such a way as to make them ridiculous" (Cuddon, 1999: 640), Stoppard's parodies, like Joyce's of the *Odyssey*, exemplify twentieth-century parody as the "integrated structural modeling process of revising, replaying, inverting, and 'trans-contextualizing' previous works of art" (Hutcheon, 1985: 11), and reflect, too, parody's wide "range of intent" (6) – sometimes within a single work.

Rejecting Jameson's theory of postmodern parody as a kind of pastiche or "blank parody" – "a neutral practice of... mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives" (1991: 17) – the following two chapters demonstrate how Stoppard uses parody, as a multifunctional mode of generic engineering, to act on a wide range of cultural and political agendas. A number of claims have been made for Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967) as an "apolitical" play. Sales, for instance, claims that Stoppard "depoliticizes [*Hamlet*], because his attendant lords 'stand outside the web of political intrigue and corruption'" (quoted by Sammells, 2002: 111). However, what

such claims fail to recognize is how *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* – in reworking *Hamlet*, a play of political intrigue – propagates its own political agenda. Sammells, in refuting Sales's claim, points out that "[t]he choices faced by the two courtiers, and the pressures that envelop them, are clearly political pressures: the pressures of individuals trying to assert themselves against collectivism" (111). In this way, as Alexander notes, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is "a notable, but by no means unique example, of theatrical foregrounding [being used] to open up a discourse on political oppression" (1990: 185).

The first of the two chapters on *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* discusses it as demonstrating parody's capacity to negotiate with the literary past and, in so doing, affirm the writer's own cultural and political position. This is to read the play as demonstrating what Dentith has called late twentieth-century parody's "polemical relation to the cultural past [which] often expresses itself in the practice of 'writing back': the canonic texts of the past are scrutinized, challenged and parodied in the name of subject positions (of class, race or gender) which they are seen to exclude" (2000: 29). Although this practice of "writing back" is generally associated with leftist concerns (like those of Marxism, post-colonialism and feminism), *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* might too – in parodying *Hamlet* with distinctly twentieth-century, democratic, middle class concerns in mind – be viewed as an example of "writing back". Stoppard's play is, after all, one that rewrites *Hamlet's* monarchical setting as an oppressive, totalitarian regime (inherently vulnerable to corruption) by dramatizing an existentialist crisis experienced by two minor characters who long for information, influence and freedom. Furthermore,

in offering a particular "reading" of *Hamlet*, Stoppard's play also demonstrates parody's capacity to perform the sort of evaluative work traditionally associated with literary criticism – which, in this instance, ranges from advancing a novel interpretation to paying homage in the spirit of what Hutcheon calls "loving parody" (1985: 7).

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is an especially useful text for demonstrating how the generic polemic of parody can be used to animate a metacultural polemic between value systems. Stoppard's play is, after all, a parody with two clearly discernable base or hypotexts, namely, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* – each of which stands as the supreme embodiment of its genre. Just as definitions of revenge tragedy typically refer to *Hamlet* as the play in which Shakespeare "raise[d] the genre to its highest level" (Cuddon, 1999: 745), so definitions of the theatre of the absurd describe Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as "[t]he classic work of absurdist theatre" (Baldick, 2001: 1) in which Beckett "made the themes and method [of the genre] accessible on a world-wide scale" (Hinchliffe, 1969: 63-4). *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, then, can, as Bull proposes, "be read politically simply in terms of its relationship to the political ideologies of its two base texts" (2002: 139) – or, perhaps more importantly, in terms of the ideologies these texts can be made to represent.

Appropriations of Shakespeare – many of which might be called "radical" – are commonplace in modern day literary, filmic and dramatic spheres, and it is not difficult to understand why. Paraphrasing Margot Heinemann, Sinfield writes that "the reason for adjusting Shakespeare to radical ends is that he is an established cultural token" (Sinfield,

1989: 178). However, as Sinfield goes on to point out, "it is precisely that establishment status which proves, always, a hindrance... the whole aura of elusive genius and institutionalised profundity" (178). Even in the case of fairly radical appropriations, it is typically "the Bard" – or worse, some transcendental notion of him – who / that is credited with authority; it is "the idea of the real Shakespeare from which it all emanates [that] registers cultural authority, and implies that every innovation has been anticipated" (178). This institutionalized reification of Shakespeare is something Sinfield is particularly critical of. Indeed, as he goes on to state, it is precisely "the cultural, and therefore political, authority of Shakespeare which must be challenged – and especially the assumption that because human nature is always the same the plays can be presented as direct sources of wisdom" (178-9).

One way of undertaking this challenge, according to Sinfield, "is to take aspects of the plays and reconstitute them explicitly so that they become the vehicle of other values" – as in the adaptations by Charles Marowitz, Brecht's *Coriolanus*, Edward Bond's *Lear*, Arnold Wesker's *The Merchant* and, of course, Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (Sinfield, 1989: 179).

"Stoppard's Shakespeare", Levenson notes, "belongs to the second half of the twentieth century, a product of its artistic styles and political views" (2002: 156), and Stoppard's reworking / refunctioning of *Hamlet* certainly reflects this context. Indeed, there is a sense in which Stoppard's play could be described as investing *Hamlet* with democratic values, and, in doing so, undertaking a democratization of *Hamlet*. Inasmuch as *Hamlet*

is a play "concerned with kingship" (Leggatt, 1990: ix), *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is a play concerned with the plight of two hapless pawns in a chess game played by Denmark's royal family. In discussing this shift in emphasis Bull describes the central idea behind *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* as "the movement of the spotlight away from the activities of the royal figures to the bemused alienation of the two outsider figures, who have brought with them from their university studies all the post-1945 existentialist *angst* of Beckett's protagonists" (2002: 139). In doing so *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, like *Waiting for Godot*, expresses sympathy with two "little men" (Stoppard, 2000: 102), but this time their existentialist crisis takes place within the context of *Hamlet's* plot of intrigue and revenge, and within the context of an authoritarian political system predisposed to the abuse of human rights (albeit anachronistically). And it is in dramatizing this predicament (in which "little men" are denied civil liberties and rulers act without accountability) that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* might be said to imply the value of democratic principles.

The parody of *Hamlet* that Stoppard offers us in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is particularly engaged with the fatalism that *Hamlet* embodies as a revenge tragedy. Indeed, even the title of Stoppard's play reflects this emphasis. However, in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, Stoppard offsets the fatalism of revenge tragedy with the indeterminacy of absurdist theatre incorporated through its second hypotext, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, which, according to Hinchcliffe, "made the themes and method [of absurdist theatre] accessible on a world-wide scale" (1969: 63-4). *The theatre of the absurd* is a phrase coined by the English critic Martin Esslin to refer to the work of a

group of mid-twentieth century European and American playwrights. Although journalists have often "confus[ed] it with the everyday meaning of absurd as outrageously funny" (Ousby, 1994: 3), the phrase is actually intended to describe those plays that "give dramatic expression to the philosophical notion of the 'absurd', a notion that had received widespread diffusion following the publication of Camus's essay *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* in 1942" (Drabble and Stringer, 1996: 2). The representation of humanity that Camus offers in this essay might be summarized as one of "human beings struggling with the irrationality of experience, in a state of what has been described as 'metaphysical anguish'" (Cuddon, 1999: 912). Absurdist plays accordingly abandon "logical form, character, and dialogue together with realistic illusion" (Baldick, 2001: 01) to present the audience with an absurd world in which characters grapple with incomprehensible situations. To describe the world as absurd is, after all, "to recognize its fundamentally indecipherable nature, and this recognition is frequently associated with feelings of loss, purposelessness, and bewilderment" (Drabble and Stringer, 1996: 2). The techniques employed in absurdist plays are accordingly "of the disruptive kind associated with farce, but there is no presiding context of harmony to give reassurance to an audience"; we should not forget that the phrase *the theatre of the absurd* "[l]iterally mean[s] 'out of harmony'" (Ousby, 1994: 3).

Although they do so in very different ways (and with very different conclusions), both *Waiting for Godot* and *Hamlet* could be described as reflecting on historical and political dynamics. Leggatt notes that there "is political interest everywhere in Shakespeare... Everywhere there are rulers, laws, contracts, questions of authority and obedience"

(1990: ix), and although such matters are not always at the centre of his plays, in *Hamlet* they certainly are. *Hamlet*, as a revenge tragedy, is a play *about* agency, authority and social order – and the moral dilemmas that can arise out of loyalties to contradictory moral codes. Beckett's play, on the other hand, could be described in virtually antithetical terms. *Waiting for Godot* is above all a play *about* atrophy, powerlessness and social disorder in an entirely amoral (or even "post-moral") world. Of course, as in the case of all binaries, such descriptions also suggest an affinity of sorts between the plays. Hamlet's interest in restoring social order (or, at least, what he deems to be social order) through revenge is, after all, in itself a struggle against social disorder (or, once again, his definition of it). However, these binary distinctions do draw attention to the different paradigms within which each play's actions (or inactions) take place.

While *Hamlet* has been described as a play whose "philosophical actions and choric commentaries define the problem of moral decision and belief in an evil world" (Ornstein, 1960: 227), the moral vacuum in which Vladimir and Estragon exist disallows not only the possibility of a "moral decision" but also any related sense of agency. The result of this is the sense of powerlessness, purposelessness and stagnation with which Beckett's protagonists wrestle all through the play. As Esslin writes, "[i]f in the well-made play the core of the drama is *action, happenings*, the very purpose of [*Waiting for Godot*] is to say that *nothing happens* – nothing really happens in human life" (1968: 60-1). In so doing Beckett's play also offers an interpretation of political and historical dynamics at odds with those in *Hamlet*. Indeed, as Bull points out, "[t]he pattern of repetition [in absurdist plays], suggesting that nothing in human history will or can be

changed, which is central to absurdist theatre, opposes the central tenet of political theatre as defined by Brecht, that man is 'alterable and able to alter'" (Bull, 2002: 138-9) – a tenet with which *Hamlet* could be described as conforming as a play about a prince's "transformation" (Shakespeare, 1996: 2.2.5) and call to political agency.

In his discussion of absurdist drama Hinchliffe suggests that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, like Arthur Kopit's *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feeling so Sad* (1960), "parod[ies] the conventions of *avant-garde* drama in a play at once funny and not even mildly disturbing" (1969: 87). Whether or not we find *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* disturbing depends, of course, on how seriously we take the existentialist and political questions it raises, but Hinchliffe is quite correct in asserting that the play parodies absurdist conventions and philosophy (with specific reference to *Waiting for Godot*) and often does so to comic effect.

Marcus writes that Stoppard's "play's great achievement is in its use of idiom", and makes this point with reference to the way in which Stoppard gives Rosencrantz and Guildenstern "modern, slightly stylized, speech which, surprisingly, blends quite naturally with the excerpts from *Hamlet*" (Page, 1986: 17). Needless to say, the more modern of these two discourses is closely related to that of *Waiting for Godot*. Like Beckett's, Stoppard's dialogue is – when not Shakespearean – colloquial in diction and rhythm, but also obviously stylized in its perpetually interrogative design. Bull notes that "the use of *Godot* appealed to Stoppard not only for its contemporaneity but for the very circularity of its form: a dialogue that never leads to answers but only to more questions"

(2002: 138). Vladimir and Estragon's conversation about happiness in Act II of *Waiting for Godot* offers a good example of this:

> VLADIMIR: You must be happy, too, deep down, if only you knew it.
> ESTRAGON: Happy about what?
> VLADIMIR: To be back with me again.
> ESTRAGON: Would you say so?
> VLADIMIR: Say you are, even if it's not true.
> ESTRAGON: What am I to say?
> VLADIMIR: Say, I am happy.
> ESTRAGON: I am happy.
> VLADIMIR: So am I.
> ESTRAGON: So am I.
> VLADIMIR: We are happy.
> ESTRAGON: We are happy. (*Silence.*) What do we do now, now that we are happy? (Beckett, 1965: 60)

The extract above shows clearly how questions beget questions in *Waiting for Godot,* and in this way communicate the indeterminacy basic to absurdist theatre. Indicative of the philosophical mode of the play, the interrogative design of the dialogue reflects not only the uncertainty of Beckett's two protagonists, but also their implacable need for answers (which is, in turn, related to their need for security and fulfilment). Most of the answers to the questions they pose are tentative and inconclusive, and, as such, portals to further questions. Alternatively, answers are appropriated as premises on which other questions are based. Once Beckett's protagonists have agreed (for argument's sake) to call themselves happy, Estragon's next question becomes what to do with their happiness. "Wait for Godot" comes Vladimir's reply, to which Estragon responds: "[a]nd what if he

doesn't come?" (60) – and so the cycle continues. In this way Beckett might be described as situating his characters in a vortex of "question-begetting-questions", and, in doing so, dramatizing the absurdist belief in the impossibility of final knowledge.

Stoppard's play too presents its audience with a vortex of this sort, and many of the conversations Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have are clearly meant to echo those of Vladimir and Estragon. Consider for instance the extract below:

> **Guil** Are you happy?
> **Ros** What?
> **Guil** Content? At ease?
> **Ros** I suppose so.
> **Guil** What are you going to do now? (Stoppard, 2000: 7)

In both its subject matter and style this dialogue closely resembles the extract quoted from *Waiting for Godot*. Not only does it invoke the existentialist concerns of Beckett's play, but it also adopts the circularity of its form within which / against which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are just as helpless as Vladimir and Estragon. Yet the context in which Stoppard's characters consider whether or not they are "at ease" is – as I discuss shortly – marked by parodic difference from that of Beckett's characters. Furthermore, Stoppard parodically and comically trans-contextualizes Beckett's existentialist questions and circularity of form in the game comically and self-consciously played by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in which the aim is to answer questions with questions:

Ros   Am I dead?

Guil   Yes or no?

Ros   Is there a choice?

Guil   Is there a God?

Ros   Foul! No *non sequiturs*, three-two, one game all. (Stoppard, 2000: 35)

In having his protagonists play this game, Stoppard sustains a Beckettian vortex of questions, but in a simply "aesthetic" – and that is to say, deflationary – way. The context of the game is one in which the "big questions" of absurdist drama are reproduced, but without weight, and, in this way, devalued.

Another manner in which Beckett's text is incorporated into *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is in Stoppard's use of what might be called compound or hybrid characters – an aspect that also reflects the play's fundamentally dialogic design. Most of Stoppard's characters have been taken from *Hamlet*, but a number of these have quite obviously been "written over" those of *Waiting for Godot*: Guildenstern over Vladimir, Rosencrantz over Estragon, the Player over Pozzo and Alfred over Lucky (while also incorporating elements of the Boy). Esslin describes Vladimir as the "more rational and down-to-earth" (1968: 59) of Beckett's two protagonists, and the same could be said of Guildenstern.   This is especially evident in Guildenstern's use of scientific and philosophical discourses to theorize the predicaments in which he and Rosencrantz find themselves. Guildenstern's instinct or, perhaps more accurately, defence mechanism, is to intellectualize and he is continually (and explicitly) drawing on the authority of scientific laws (Stoppard, 2000: 2-3) and philosophical propositions – advanced by the

likes of ancient Greek (102) and Chinese (51) thinkers – to understand and explain their situation. He is also described by the Player as "quicker than [his] friend" (17) and by Rosencrantz himself as having the "dominant personality" (95). Consequently it is Guildenstern who, like Vladimir, frequently ends up in the role of "big brother". Like Vladimir – who remarks that, if it were not for him, Estragon would be "a little heap of bones at the present minute" (Beckett, 1965: 9) – Guildenstern also takes responsibility for his friend. This aspect of their relationship is made apparent at several points. It is Guildenstern who typically leads discussions about their predicament (with Rosencrantz and the Player) and who comforts a despondent Rosencrantz in Act III by saying "I'll see we're all right" (95).

As the above example also illustrates, parallels of this sort exist between Rosencrantz and Estragon too. Esslin describes Estragon as "emotional and a poet" (1968: 59), and although Rosencrantz cannot really be called "poetic", he certainly is the more emotional of Stoppard's two protagonists. In contrast with Guildenstern, Rosencrantz wears his heart on his sleeve in a way that Guildenstern has decided not to do. It is Guildenstern who prefers to rationalize and, in so doing, mediate his emotion – using, by his own admission, "[t]he scientific approach to the examination of phenomena [as] a defence against the pure emotion of fear" (Stoppard, 2000: 7). Rosencrantz, on the other hand, is altogether more spontaneous and demonstrative in his responses, as in being almost reduced to tears of anxiety in Act III at the thought of "what's going to become of [them]" (95).

Extending the Beckettian parallel, the Player and Alfred, like Pozzo and Lucky, are traveling opportunists who chance upon two waiting protagonists with whom they interact uncomfortably. The relationship between the Player and Alfred also resembles that of Pozzo and Lucky in being one of master and slave. Pozzo's "old and faithful servant" (Beckett, 1965: 33), Lucky, is every bit Pozzo's property with whom / which he does as he pleases: like a brutalized animal, the ironically named Lucky is kept on a lead and driven with a whip. Like Lucky, Alfred is also mistreated by his owner. In the "private and uncut performance of the Rape of the Sabine Women" that the Player offers to show Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, for instance, it is Alfred who is given the role of "woman" (Stoppard, 2000: 17). Moreover, the Player also treats Alfred as property in explicitly economic terms. After having lost a bet against Guildenstern, the Player offers him Alfred instead of money as "the best [they've] got" (22).

More important than simple character parallels, however, is Stoppard's parodic appropriation of absurdist conventions of dramatic situation. Stoppard's play opens with an utterly absurd scenario. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are playing a simple game of coin flipping. The game is ostensibly one of chance, but its outcomes continually defy the law of probability. "The law of probability", Guildenstern states, "it has been oddly asserted, is something to do with the proposition that if six monkeys… were thrown up in the air for long enough they would land on their tails about as often as they would land on their [heads]" (Stoppard, 2000: 2-3). However, of the approximately one hundred coins they toss, not even one lands tails up. The incomprehensible nature of the situation is typical of absurdist theatre, as is the bewilderment and anxiety it elicits. However, what

makes this an instance of parody (as opposed to an example of "straight" absurdist theatre) is that it is a mere game, rather than a "real life" predicament, that is – for the time being – the sole source of Guildenstern's angst. Whereas the opening of *Waiting for Godot* wastes no time in establishing "real" human brutality, loneliness and death as the anxieties of its characters, Stoppard's play begins – ironically and comically – with a seemingly trivial situation which, nevertheless, manages to generate equal if not greater anxiety in at least one of its protagonists. "It must be indicative of something," a worried Guildenstern wonders aloud, "besides the redistribution of wealth" (6).

Yet, while Guildenstern remains in the dark for the time being, the audience is quite aware of how the game serves to foreshadow their misfortune. Reflecting the absurdist worldview the play incorporates, the inexplicable outcomes of the game are indicative of the position of powerlessness in which Stoppard's protagonists soon find themselves as they are drawn into an equally mysterious game of revenge. Both inside and outside their game of coin flipping Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are entirely at the mercy of forces beyond both their control and their comprehension. In this game Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are doubly disempowered. Not only is it a game of chance: its outcomes also continually defy the law of probability and, thus, prediction (the little control they might have had). After eighty-four "heads" in a row, for instance, Guildenstern remarks that he "feel[s] the spell about to be broken" (Stoppard, 2000: 4), but once again is proved wrong. "Well", he continues, "it was an even chance… if my calculations are correct" (4). Not surprisingly Guildenstern's faith in his calculations soon dwindles, and he begins to suspect that their game of luck has become a game of bad luck. For

Guildenstern the game becomes an omen. "I'm afraid it isn't your day", Rosencrantz says to Guildenstern after having won the eighty-sixth coin in a row. Suspecting the worst, Guildenstern replies: "I'm afraid it is" (6).

In this way the game serves to foreshadow the broader political predicament in which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern find themselves as they are drawn into Hamlet's plot of political intrigue – in which, once again, they are confused and powerless. Needless to say, their predicament within the plot of *Hamlet* is typically absurdist in its helplessness. Yet while incorporating absurdist conventions of situation, Stoppard's play simultaneously subverts them, and Stoppard's use of dramatic irony is especially important in this regard. Traditionally associated with tragedy, dramatic irony is foreign to absurdist theatre. An absurdist play – by definition – dramatizes disorientation, and it is meant to be as disorientating for its audience as for its characters. The experience is meant to be shared. However, this is obviously not the case in Stoppard's play. Although Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, as Guildenstern himself points, "haven't got much to go on" (Stoppard, 2000: 107), the audience has the overarching plot of *Hamlet* on which to draw for information, and it is consequently only Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who are "without... hope of explanation" (112).

This is an important difference between Stoppard's play and absurdist theatre in general. Although Stoppard is often described as having his roots in an "Anglicization of the 'absurdist' tradition" (Bull, 2002: 138), it would be a mistake to label *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* as an example of an absurdist play. Unlike the situations dramatized in

"true" or "straight" absurdist theatre, the predicament in which Stoppard's protagonist's find themselves is not so much *indecipherable* as *undeciphered*. Hence while using absurdist conventions (as well as incorporating the philosophical notion of the 'absurd'), Stoppard's play does not, like absurdist theatre, present life as essentially absurd, but rather suggests that – under certain circumstances or, more pertinently, regimes – it can be made to seem so.

Sammells writes that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* "is as political a play as its exact contemporary, Stoppard's [1966] adaptation of Slawomir Mrozek's *Tango*", which "[a]ccording to Martin Esslin, the original Polish audience... in the Warsaw of 1964, would have seen... as a bitter and sardonic comment on Stalinism and its totalitarian structure of power" (Sammells, 2002: 111). "The peculiar power of *Tango*", Sammells goes on to explain, "lies precisely in its political exploitation of absurdist theatrical devices – designed to reflect a society in which traditional values and order have been overturned – in a stylistic maneuver identical to the dramatic strategy at the center of *R &* *GAD*" (111). In this way, although anachronistic in its choice of regime, Stoppard's play might be said to offer a critique on authoritarian systems from the vantage point of a twentieth-century, liberal democracy. Indeed, a 1996 Hungarian production of the play emphasized exactly this aspect of it. "In Gabor Mate's production," Bull notes, "the two friends were recognizable as Hungarian strangers let loose in the police state of a Russian court in a way that not only demonstrated the play's flexibility but also released much of the inherent general political content of the text" (2002: 139).

Stoppard's output reflects a sustained interest in the relationship of the individual to social systems, and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is no exception. "In all of Stoppard's work", Bull notes, "the individual operates in a continual state of flux between being the 'free man' of his ironically entitled first stage play, and being part of the mechanism of a larger informing structure, whether it be the office, the palace, or the state" (2002: 137). In the case of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* the "larger informing structure" is, of course, the royal court of Denmark, and the relationship the play explores is consequently an implicitly political one – namely that of "little man" to authoritarian regime. Although part of the powerful machinery of the state, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are, in their individual capacities, unambiguously powerless. Their position is one of absolute subordination to an authoritarian state, and this is made explicit at several points in *Hamlet*. Having received their orders from the King and Queen to visit Hamlet, for instance, Rosencrantz responds as follows: "[b]oth your majesties / [m]ight, by the sovereign power you have of us, / [p]ut your dread pleasures more into command / [t]han to entreaty". "But", as Guildenstern continues, "we both obey / [a]nd here give up ourselves in the full bent / [t]o lay our service at your feet, / [t]o be commanded" (Shakespeare, 1996: 2.2.26-32).

This scene is especially important to Stoppard's play in which it is parodied with special attention to the discrepancy in status between the King and Queen, on the one hand, and the two courtiers, on the other. While retaining most of Shakespeare's dialogue, Stoppard radically refashions the scene by inserting farcical stage directions that serve to emphasize the lowly status of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and, in so doing, underscore

them as the servile "whatsisnames" of the royal court of Denmark. Upon first encountering the two courtiers Claudius greets them as follows: "[w]elcome, dear Rosencrantz... (*He raises a hand at Guil while Ros bows – Guil bows late and hurriedly)*... and Guildenstern" (Stoppard, 2000: 26). Claudius then "*raises a hand at Ros while Guil bows to him – Ros is still straightening up from his previous bow and half way up he bows down again. With his head down, he twists to look at Guil, who is on the way up*" (26). The two courtiers then begin "*adjusting their clothing for Claudius's presence*" (27), and continue doing so for some time into his speech.

The stage directions Stoppard "writes into" this section of *Hamlet* are clearly indebted to *Waiting for Godot*. Esslin points to the "knockabout comedy of the silent film" as an important influence on *Waiting for Godot* – whose "two tramps wear Chaplin's battered bowler and gaping boots, [while] their relationship recalls such pairs as Laurel and Hardy" (1968: 63). Stoppard's play too draws on these conventions and, like Beckett's, uses them to reflect on the feebleness of its protagonists. The slapstick in this scene of Stoppard's play serves to underscore Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as political nobodies. Despite their centrality to Claudius's plan, Claudius's actions make it quite clear that he cannot even tell them apart – presumably because he has never bothered to remember who is who. To Claudius they are simply pawns, and the scene (in the style of Beckettian tragicomedy) reflects – comically yet poignantly – on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's position within an order in which they are all but insignificant.

In doing so the scene also serves to debunk Guildenstern's earlier claim of being in a

position of some authority at the royal court. In a conversation with the Player about whether his troupe's encounters and opportunities are provided by chance or fate, the Player asserts that both are operative. "We have no control", he goes on to say, "[t]onight we play to the court. Or the night after. Or to the tavern. Or not" (Stoppard, 2000: 16). In response to the Player's uncertainty Guildenstern suggests that, as a man of some political influence, he may be able to secure them a performance, and the conversation continues as follows:

Guil	Perhaps I can use my influence.
Player	At the tavern?
Guil	At the court. I would say I have some influence.
Player	Would you say so?
Guil	I have influence yet.
Player	Yet what?

Guil seizes the player violently.

Guil	I have influence! (Stoppard, 2000: 16-7)

In the above extract the "voices" (and philosophies) of absurdist and Brechtian political theatre engage in a Bakhtinian dialogue. The Player, clearly resigned to an existence at the mercy of forces beyond his control, represents the absurdist paradigm that the play incorporates; Guildenstern, on the other hand – in asserting himself as a "political being" with the potential to act on situations and, in so doing, alter the course of events (as Hamlet does) – represents that of political theatre. Yet, while intent on convincing the

Player of his influence, the desperation the Player's sustained (and recognizably Beckettian) interrogation manages to elicit betrays Guildenstern's own uncertainty on the matter. The Player's doubts are evidently, at some level, his too, and the two courtiers' farcical encounter with Claudius makes Guildenstern's attempt to convince the Player of his political authority seem like an exercise in self-delusion.

As the drama unfolds, it becomes increasingly difficult for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to ignore or downplay their sense of powerlessness within an oppressive social order – to which they eventually surrender entirely. Having discovered that their so-called "letter which explains everything" (Stoppard, 2000: 97) is actually an order to have "Hamlet's head cut off" (101), Guildenstern argues that it is not the place of a courtier to evaluate or dispute a royal decree. "[W]e are little men", Guildenstern states, "we don't know the ins and outs of the matter, there are wheels within wheels, etcetera – it would be presumptuous of us to interfere with the design of fate or even kings" (102). It is not their place, as Guildenstern goes on to note, to "apply logic… [o]r justice" (102) to the matter.

In dramatizing the process by which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern "learn their places" within a social order, Stoppard's play offers us a reading of *Hamlet* that, through its parodic strategy of inversion, cultivates sympathy for the "little men" of Shakespeare's play rather than the "great ones" – in whom, Claudius states, madness "must not unwatched go" (Shakespeare, 1996: 3.1.189). Stoppard's play, Brater notes, "subverts the traditional relationship between background and foreground as it has been generally

understood within the western theatre's conventions for staging 'high' drama" (2002: 204). In doing so, it works, according to Brater, with "theatrical reversals" of "downstage, upstage, and offstage action" (204), and these have obvious implications for its treatment of character. Hamlet is, in a sense, made to trade places with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who become the protagonists of Stoppard's play and, as such, the objects of the audience's attention and sympathy.

However, while Hamlet and the two courtiers trade places textually speaking, their hierarchical positions remain the same in political terms. Although Rosencrantz and Guildenstern become major characters, they remain minor figures politically speaking, and the textual inversion hence becomes a strategy for the magnification and examination of their political position within *Hamlet's* plot – and assertion of their innocence. The reading of *Hamlet* that Stoppard's play offers us presents Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as two "little men" who find themselves embroiled in a royal plot without ever understanding the reason for their "little deaths" (Stoppard, 2000: 108). As Stoppard pointed out in an interview by Giles Gordon, "Hamlet's assumption that [Rosencrantz and Guildenstern] were privy to Claudius's plot is entirely gratuitous. As far as their involvement in Shakespeare's text is concerned they are told very little about what is going on and much of what they are told isn't true" (Page, 1986: 15). As Stoppard went on to explain, "I see [Rosencrantz and Guildenstern] much more clearly as a couple of bewildered innocents rather than a couple of henchmen, which is the usual way they are depicted in productions of *Hamlet*" (15). In emphasizing this aspect of *Hamlet*, Stoppard's play might be described as exonerating Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, while

indicting the Danish royalty and their political system.

Yet although both Hamlet and Claudius appear as antagonists in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, the play does not present either of them, in their individual capacities, as responsible for the fate of the two courtiers. Indeed, in Stoppard's play the conspiracies of Claudius and Hamlet seem merely symptomatic of an already unfavourable political system. As a production like that of Gabor Mate's (set in a Russian police state) accentuates, Stoppard's play presents the regime under which its protagonists exist as the true cause of their misfortune. Although Rosencrantz and Guildenstern never come to fully understand their predicament, they do learn enough to realize that their misfortune has been brought about by the mechanics of the prevailing order – as Guildenstern's continual references to wheels reflect. "Wheels have been set in motion", Guildenstern points out, "and they have their own pace, to which we are… condemned. Each move is dictated by the previous one – that is the meaning of order" (Stoppard, 2000: 51). Through this emphasis on social order (and that is to say, in emphasizing the *political* over the *politician*) Stoppard's play draws our attention to the fact that it is precisely the context of an oppressive, autocratic political system – a system inherently vulnerable to corruption and the abuse of power – that provides the conditions suitable for the Machiavellian conspiracies of *Hamlet's* plot. And it is in this way that Stoppard's parodic reworking of Shakespeare's text asserts democratic values by way of negative example.

Although Stoppard has at times been difficult to discuss in political terms – having

declared that he "burn[s] with no causes" and "write[s] with[out] any social objective" (Bull, 2002: 139) – his commitment to democratic values (albeit a particularly traditional version of them) has never been in doubt. As an immigrant to England whose family fled both the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia and the Japanese invasion of Singapore (during which his father was killed), Stoppard has been explicit in his admiration for British society as a "Western liberal democracy favouring an intellectual elite and a progressive middle class dedicated to the pursuit of Christian moral values" (Sammells, 2002: 117), and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* certainly reflects his affinity with the "Western liberal democracy".

At the beginning of this chapter I refer to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* as a "democratization" of *Hamlet* in which Stoppard refunctions Shakespeare's text to demonstrate the value of democratic principles, and this is evident in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's ongoing struggle against their increasingly stifling circumstances. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are continually troubled by what they perceive to be the totality of the prevailing order (under which they suspect free action of any sort might be impossible). As Guildenstern remarks to Rosencrantz in this regard, "if we happened, just happened to discover, or even suspect, that our spontaneity was part of their order, we'd know that we were lost" (Stoppard, 2000: 51). This notion of the overarching order as having limitless and pervasive control is one to which Stoppard returns several times, but most notably in Act III in the form of what he calls "'a Beckett joke,' meaning a technique Beckett uses in his novels as well as his plays. "It appears in various forms", Stoppard notes, "but it consists of confident statement followed by immediate refutation

by the same voice'" (Levenson, 2002: 160). While on board the ship bound for England, Rosencrantz is unsettled at being unable to imagine their arrival. "We're slipping off the map" (Stoppard, 2000: 99), he remarks to Guildenstern, and contemplates an escape. "I could jump over the side", he goes on to say, "[t]hat would put a spoke in their wheel" (99). "Unless they're counting on it", Guildenstern remarks, to which Rosencrantz responds: "I shall remain on board. That'll put a spoke in their wheel" (100).

In dramatizing the two courtiers' response to their circumstances – and that is to say, in dramatizing their longing for information, influence and freedom under increasingly oppressive conditions – Stoppard propagates the democratic ideals to which both he and his protagonists subscribe. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are preoccupied with information, influence and freedom precisely because they realize that they do not have them, and thus entertain various (increasingly ironic) delusions to console themselves. Consider, for instance, the following extract from Act III in which Guildenstern asserts their freedom:

Guil   … We are not restricted. No boundaries have been defined, no inhibitions imposed. We have, for the while, secured, or blundered into, our release, for the while. Spontaneity and whim are the order of the day. Other wheels are turning but they are not our concern. We can breathe. We can relax. We can do what we like and say what we like to whomever we like, without restriction

Ros   Within limits, of course.

Guil   Certainly within limits. (Stoppard, 2000: 107-8)

Once again the structure of this section is that of a "Beckett joke". Having asserted that "[n]o boundaries" have been defined for them, Guildenstern goes on to negate this statement with his nonchalant acknowledgment of the obvious limits placed on them. What he ends up offering is a nonsensical, or at least paradoxical, description of a life entirely "without restriction" but, ironically, only so "within limits". A similar irony is evident in Guildenstern calling "[s]pontaneity and whim... the order of the day". Here too the so-called freedom to which he refers is ironized and negated by its situation within a governing system – a problem we have already encountered in Guildenstern's word of caution to Rosencrantz about jumping overboard.

Guildenstern's assertion of their right to free speech – that they can "say what [they] like to whomever [they] like, without restriction" – is, of course, also ironic. Stoppard once said that "[t]he only thing that would make [him] leave England would be control over free speech" (Sammells, 2002: 117), and this concern with free speech is clearly (and anachronistically) evident in the preoccupations of his protagonists and the limitations placed on communication in the play. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are particularly conscious of the fact that not just anything *may* be communicated in their world. The so-called "performances" of the Player and his troupe, for instance – which Guildenstern condemns as the *"obscene"* work of "a comic pornographer and a rabble of prostitutes" (Stoppard, 2000: 17-8) – are similarly condemned by Rosencrantz as "[f]ilth" for which he threatens to "report [them] to the authorities" (19). Indeed, their awareness of such regulations is so acute that they even begin to suspect that certain things *cannot* be said. In attempting to test the limits of the system within which they exist, Rosencrantz yells

"[f]ire!" at the audience. "Where?" Guildenstern asks, to which Rosencrantz replies: "[i]t's all right – I'm demonstrating the misuse of free speech. To prove that it exists" (51). Of course there are a number of problems with the "proof" Rosencrantz offers. Although supposedly demonstrating that free speech exists, Rosencrantz's demonstration is hypothetical in the extreme. Not only is there no fire, but the subject matter and context of his demonstration render it meaningless; the context is unlike any in which they might wish to have influence through free speech. Rosencrantz is neither addressing the public nor a superior, and is not even expressing an opinion. The "proof" he offers is hence inadequate – and this is made quite clear in its repeated contradiction by their inability to speak freely in the presence of royalty. For example, in attempting "a direct informal approach" with Hamlet (to ask "[n]ow look here, what's it all about"), Rosencrantz begins by "*mov*[ing] *towards Hamlet but his nerve fails. He returns*" and explains his behaviour to Guildenstern as follows: "[w]e're overawed", he begins, "that's our trouble. When it comes to the point we succumb to their personality" (Stoppard, 2000: 66).

This capitulation to their superiors is also evident in the way that the two courtiers succumb to the language of *Hamlet* when in the presence of authority. Marcus writes that, in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, the excerpts from *Hamlet* are made to "sound like rather archaic court jargon, which, like present-day legal jargon, is easily accepted... [and this] lends the scenes in question a rarified distinction" (Page, 1986: 17). In contrast with the colloquial, Beckettian dialogues of the "low" characters, the language of *Hamlet*, as the language of authority, functions as a kind of "officialese" in which Rosencrantz and

Guildenstern simply speak their parts, and, in so doing, play their roles as "little men".

We have already seen that, in dramatizing how its two protagonists succumb to the systemic, Stoppard' play encourages compassion with the plight of the two courtiers. However, an important point needs to be made with regards to the sympathy Stoppard cultivates for the "little men" of Shakespeare's play. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is a play concerned with the plight of the unempowered, but it would be a mistake to call it a "leftist" play. In discussing the historical specificity of Stoppard's interest in individualism Sammells writes that "for him, it is defined by resistance to the collective ethic, and is characteristic of a nostalgic rejection of a new 'leftist' collectivism in postwar British politics and culture" (2002: 109). Stoppard, we should not forget, "is self-admittedly a 'conservative by temperament' who believes that social and cultural evolution 'is far too fast' and who convinced at least one interviewer that he was 'a somewhat defensive Thatcherite'" (Vanden Heuvel, 2002: 219), and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* reflects this conservatism in its treatment of the individual and the collective. "In R & GAD", Sammells notes, "the pressures of collectivism are stylized in the dilemma faced by the two courtiers – whether to resist or accede to the momentum of the action that threatens to sweep them away" (2000: 109).

The way in which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern succumb to the personalities of their superiors is indicative of two closely related things: firstly, on a metafictional level, the way in which they accede to the fatalistic action of *Hamlet*, and secondly, on a political level, the way in which they succumb to a larger purpose – and that is to say, the way in

which they succumb to collective or systemic values. At the beginning of this chapter I cite Alexander as referring to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* as a play that uses "theatrical foregrounding to open up a discourse on political oppression" (1990: 185), and what makes this a particularly useful observation is that it locates an intersection between the play's metafictional and political concerns. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* is a play that "explores the usefulness of theatre as a metaphor for life" (Sammells, 2002: 110), and it does so with a particular emphasis on the notions of "scripted" and "unscripted" action in implicitly political terms. Indeed, in dramatizing how Rosencrantz and Guildenstern first struggle against the fatalistic action of *Hamlet* and then accede to it, the play poses a central question: "is there any possibility of a spontaneous act, or is the agent's sense of purpose – and hence identity – just capitulation to a logic unstoppable and absurd? Are we all just actors in someone else's script – defined not by individual, authentic essence, but by the pressures of collectivism?" (110). And it is hence the script of *Hamlet* (used to substitute dramatic for social conventions) that, in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, is made to represent the collective or systemic against which the two courtiers attempt to assert themselves as individuals capable of "unscripted" action.

Of course Rosencrantz and Guildenstern eventually accept their places in someone else's script; "[w]e don't question, we don't doubt. We perform" (Stoppard, 2000: 100), Rosencrantz remarks. Yet, although the two courtiers ultimately succumb to the collective, the play does not present their fates as inevitable. On the contrary, it suggests that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern could have, and should have, asserted themselves

against both textual and political superstructures and, in so doing, saved themselves. Whereas Guildenstern initially describes their position as one of being "presented with alternatives... [b]ut not choice" (30), it is clear by the end of the play that their fate is, at least for the most part, a consequence of their own lack of initiative as individuals. "[T]here must have been a moment, at the beginning, where we could have said – no", Guildenstern remarks in his final speech, "[b]ut somehow we missed it" (116). And it is in dramatizing how Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – as "passive onlookers" (Brater, 2002: 204) – fail to seek out this choice and, in this way, forego their individuality (not to mention lives) in the interests of a greater purpose, that Stoppard's play indicts leftist collectivism as oppressive in itself, and asserts instead a brand of democratic values that emphasizes individualism. The conservatism to which Stoppard holds is, after all, one "that places emphasis on the exceptional individual" (Bull, 2002: 151) and on those (distinctly middle class) democratic values that allow for such a person to act in his or her own best interests. Of course, such an emphasis on the exceptional individual has unfavourable implications for the majority. As Bull notes in this regard, "in Stoppard's world not all men can be free, nor all men equal", and his political thinking "shar[es] something of the ideology of Margaret Thatcher's vision" (151). However, the conservatism with which Stoppard aligns himself on matters of politics, education and art – which he stresses should be written with a lowercase c – must be qualified as distinct from Thatcherism and its own potential for oppression. Indeed, as Bull notes, "it is completely opposed to the efforts of such as the ex-prime minister to impose order on the chaos that is life to Stoppard or to deny the creativity of the individual in the supposed cause of greater good" (151).

Of course, in arguing for a political reading of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, I am not denying its broader metaphysical concerns. If this reading has been over-insistent on the play's political dimension, it has been to counteract the common view that Stoppard's parody is an essentially "apolitical" play, and not to suggest that it is an overtly political one.

Nevertheless, in reworking Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with distinctly twentieth-century, democratic, middle class concerns in mind, Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* does reflect how parody, as an act of "writing back", can provide writers with a way of "com[ing] to terms with the weight of the past" (Hutcheon, 1985: 28), which Stoppard employs yet again in *Travesties*.

CHAPTER 7

Metaparody: Stoppard's *Travesties*

In the face of Jameson's reference to a postmodern "blank parody" (1991: 1), it seems necessary to insist, with Dentih, that parody's "uses are never neutral" (2000: 28). The parodist is always making a value judgement of sorts, if only by implication, in the motive for selecting a particular object text or genre. However, it does not necessarily follow that parodists undertake this evaluation from a common political position; thus Dentith refers, in his discussion of recent theoretical approaches to parody, to the "large question about the cultural politics of parody, namely whether it is to be thought of as an essentially conservative or essentially subversive mode" (10).

Most of this thesis has focused on texts that demonstrate the subversive (though not necessarily satirical) capabilities of parody – firstly, in the "word masks" of Oscar Wilde, and secondly, in the "parodic patriotism" of James Joyce; but, as the previous chapter began to demonstrate, parody can also be undertaken with conservative intentions. In the previous chapter I looked at Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* as an example of what Dentith calls "writing back" whereby Stoppard responds to *Hamlet* from a distinctly twentieth-century, democratic, middle class position. Yet it is important to note that, while *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* could be called a radical appropriation of *Hamlet*, it is not in any fundamental way antagonistic towards its Shakespearean hypotext, but rather affirmative of it. Even as it "reduces high tragedy to offbeat comedy" (Levenson, 2002: 162), its handling of *Hamlet* is playful and affectionate rather than satirical. In Stoppard's appropriation of *Hamlet*, Levenson suggests, he "claims Shakespeare as a fellow artist" (162) and

affirms the value of Shakespeare's text as, to quote Stoppard himself, "part of a sort of common mythology" (158). Hence what we see is that, as Sinfield notes, the politics of radical appropriations of Shakespeare need "not always [be] a progressive politics" (1989: 179). Indeed, even radical appropriations can – as what Donaldson calls "friendly parodies" (1980: 45) – serve traditional ends. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* certainly demonstrates how even a radically parodic appropriation of Shakespeare can be conservative – firstly, in terms of the political values with which it invests *Hamlet*, and secondly, in terms of the way it serves as a homage to a canonical text, and thus reaffirms its canonical status.

Focusing primarily on Tom Stoppard's *Travesties* (1974), this chapter goes on to explore in greater detail the conservative potential of parody. In discussing "the possibilities for "cultural conservatism" in parody, Dentith writes that some parodies read like "a series of in-jokes, policing the boundaries of the sayable, and preserving a notion of the decorous or the 'natural' by which the absurdities and extremities of writing can be measured" (2000: 25). In this way parody can become, as Kitchin says, "the watchdog of national interests... respectability, and... established forms" (quoted by Dentith, 25). Of course neither *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* nor *Travesties* conforms entirely to this definition of conservative parody; neither of these plays satirizes "the new" in an attempt to affirm the traditional, or attempts to police the "sayable" in the interests of respectability. Yet both plays affiliate themselves with the canon in an essentially conservative way – firstly through "selectively min[ing] the 'imaginary museum' of western art" (Kelly, 2002a: 11), and secondly as a form of tribute as well as a type of conservative in-joke.

We have already noted that parody is an essentially metatextual practice, yet few parodies showcase metatextuality as spectacularly as Stoppard's *Travesties*. Eclectically incorporative in its design, *Travesties* is a play whose dense web of literary allusions, quotations, specific and general parodies resembles that of Joyce's *Ulysses*, but, unlike Joyce, who seldom signposts his sources, Stoppard quite explicitly acknowledges his hypotexts. At the centre of *Travesties*, as its primary hypotext, is Wilde's "quintessential English jewel" (Stoppard, 1975: 33), *The Importance of Being Earnest*. *Travesties's* parodic incorporation of *Earnest* in some ways recalls the strategies Stoppard pioneered in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*. Just as in that play a number of *Hamlet's* characters are conflated with those of *Waiting for Godot*, in *Travesties* historical figures are conflated with the dramatis personae of *Earnest*: Carr with Algernon, Tzara with Jack, Joyce with Lady Bracknell, Bennett with Lane, Lenin with the Reverend Chasuble and Nadya with Miss Prism. Gwendolen and Cecily are the only characters from *Earnest* who appear in *Travesties* under the same names, but they too have had other identities imposed on them. Gwendolen is Carr's younger sister and Joyce's assistant; Cecily is a librarian, and, by the end of the play, Carr's wife. Furthermore, in addition to parodying *Earnest's* characters and plot, *Travesties* also uses *Earnest* as the basic structure into which to incorporate a number of other texts and genres – sometimes parodically.

Stoppard's title, of course, obliges us to consider the relationship between parody and travesty. Travesty is one of "a number of parody-related forms" (Müller, 1997: 4), along with the likes of pastiche and burlesque. What parody and travesty have in common is easy to define: both entail the modified repetition of "another discursive text" (Hutcheon, 1985: 43). How they differ, though, is somewhat less clear-cut.

Kiremidjian attempts to offer a rule of thumb in this regard. "Parody", he writes, "is a literary mimicry which retains the form but alters the content of the original. A travesty does just the opposite, and these two procedures in various degrees of mixture and modification constitute the mechanism of the burlesque" (1985: 2). Yet the structural distinction Kiremidjian offers is (and was even in 1985) a somewhat outmoded one. Indeed, as Hutcheon notes in the same year, "distinctions that separate style from subject... suggest a separation of form and content that is, to many theorists, now considered questionable" (1985: 40). Rose, too, dissents from the sort of distinction Kiremidjian makes, in stating that parody can entail changing "either, and sometimes both, the 'form' and 'content', or style and subject-matter, or syntax and meaning of another work, or, most simply, its vocabulary" (1993: 45). Parody and travesty are hence more convincingly distinguished from one another in terms of their intentions. Summarizing Genette's view on this matter, Dentith writes that "parody is to be distinguished from travesty because the textual transformation which it performs is done in a playful rather than satirical manner" (2000: 11), but the difficulty with this distinction is that parody can have satirical intentions too. Perhaps the most useful distinction is that drawn by Hutcheon, who notes that while "[b]oth burlesque and travesty do necessarily involve ridicule... parody does not" (1985: 40).

Stoppard's reworking of *Earnest* in *Travesties* is obviously parodic, but the notion of a "travesty" as a distortion or falsification of something is, of course, central to Stoppard's play. Aside from the outcome of Carr's court case against Joyce as a "travesty of justice" (Stoppard: 1975: 43), *Travesties* abounds with misrepresentations of specific literary / dramatic texts, genres and narratives of recorded history. As Stoppard's programme note to the first London production states, "*Travesties* is a

work of fiction which makes use, and misuse of history... for the most part... presented through the fevered imagination of its principal character" (Page, 1986: 45). Stoppard's use of Carr as an unreliable first-person narrator and protagonist is an almost novelistic device for both holding together and accounting for the play's fragmented design. Like a novel, *Travesties* is a narrative shaped by the consciousness of its narrator, whose dubious memory, tendency to romanticize and ever-present personal prejudices all come into play. As such, it also attributes its postmodern, parodic mishmash of fact and fiction to the shortcomings of its protagonist's "think-box" (Stoppard, 1975: 43).

Dentith notes with regards to parody and the postmodern novel that "[t]he general point to make with respect to parody... is that 'postmodernism' can best be understood in this context as a particular 'take' on the formal repertoire available to novelists; more precisely, as a move towards novelistic self-consciousness which drags into view other modes of discourse, other possible ways of understanding the world" (2000: 175). A similar point could of course be made in connection with postmodern drama. Postmodern parody affords the playwright a particular "take" on theatrical tradition(s) – once again a "take" characterized by self-reflexivity and the incorporation of other discourses and perspectives. *Travesties* reflects this aspect of postmodernism as well as its preference for "nonselection or quasi-nonselection... a rejection of discriminating hierarchies, and a refusal to distinguish between truth and fiction, past and present, relevant and irrelevant" (Fokkema, 1984: 42).

Londré writes of Stoppard's work that "[b]oth in structure and in detail his plays offer innumerable variations on the theme that there is no such thing as a single all-

encompassing vision of reality" (1988: 358); in Stoppard's world there are only perspectives, and few of his plays demonstrate this as clearly as *Travesties*. Complementing its metatextual design, *Travesties* is a play *about* art that uses an array of historical and fictional characters to present a wide range of perspectives on art and its place / function in society. Yet it does not allow any one perspective to dominate. Ultimately the play is dominated by Stoppard's "fascination with contestatory ideas that engage, contradict, and clash without resolving the issues they bring to bear into a stable and totalizing synthesis" (Vanden Heuvel, 2002: 217). *Travesties* is hence something of a forum for contradictory discourses on art – and, that is to say, on itself.

Four principal perspectives on art are presented in *Travesties*, each of which reflects a different attitude towards artistic tradition. Lenin's "socialist realism" (Dean, 1988: 247) propounds the (re)direction of all artistic enterprise towards the socio-political goals of the proletariat. In Lenin's view all "literature must become party literature" and, as such, function as "a cog in the Social democratic mechanism" (Stoppard, 1975: 58). "Non-partisan literature" and "literary supermen" (58) have no place in the world that he envisions. Cecily also supports this view. For Cecily "[t]he sole duty and justification for art is social criticism… or it is nothing" (49-50).

Carr's opinions, on the other hand, reflect middle class concerns. Responding to Cecily's belief that social criticism is the one true purpose of art, Carr suggests that "a great deal of what we call art has no such function and yet in some way it gratifies a hunger that is common to princes and peasants" (Stoppard, 1975: 50). Furthermore, in contrast to Lenin's views, Carr views the autonomy of the artist (and that is to say,

the artist's freedom from political obligations) as an indicator of the "well-being" of a society. As Carr remarks in this regard, "[t]he easiest way of knowing whether good has triumphed over evil is to examine the freedom of the artist" (22). Yet Carr's views on art ironically impose their own limitations on artistic freedom in the sense that they bind the artist to traditions and, especially, middle class tastes. It is Carr – with his belief that Gilbert and Sullivan *lead* "the world in dramatic art" (32) – who is the play's spokesman for "conventional bourgeois art" (Dean, 1988: 247).

Contrasting Carr's support for the conventional, Joyce and Tzara are both radical innovators who support "[a]rt for art's sake" (Stoppard, 1975: 30) – but differ significantly in their conception of it. Joyce claims to "attach no importance to the swings and roundabout of political history" (32). In contrast to what may be called Joyce's "apoliltical" stance, Tzara's art is reactionary and more accurately termed "anti-political". As Tzara explains, whereas Huelsenbeck, his fellow founder of Dada, had proposed an "[i]nternational revolutionary union of all artists on the basis of radical Communism", he had rejected the proposition in defence of "[t]he right to urinate in different colours" (41). Differences between Joyce and Tzara are also apparent in their attitudes towards artistic tradition. Whereas Joyce's art could be called "unconventional", Tzara's would more accurately be called "anti-conventional". Tzara believes "[a]ll literature is obscene" (17) and renounces the canonical: "[t]he classics – tradition – vomit on it" (18). Accordingly he stresses the need for "vandals and desecrators, simple-minded demolition men to smash centuries of baroque subtlety, to bring down the temple, and thus finally, to reconcile the shame and the necessity of being an artist" (41) – a point he drives home by *"smash[ing] whatever crockery is to hand"* (41). Joyce, however, while a radical innovator

himself, is still affirmative of the traditional and canonical. He is quite comfortable with English as the "tongue of Shakespeare – of Sheridan – of Wilde" (32), and, while "reshaping the novel into the permanent form of his own monument" (45), certainly affirms the canonical. We need only consider the way in which he draws on Homer's epic for his "Dublin Odyssey" (42), and "uses the gamut of English literature from Chaucer to Carlyle" (70) for his "Oxen of the Sun" chapter for proof of this. In contrast to Tzara, who calls for the abuse, if not rejection, of the canon, Joyce views the canon as a quarry that the modern artist might mine for raw material.

Although Joyce's views are never privileged over those of the other characters in the dialogue of the play, it is clear that his philosophy informs the design of *Travesties*. In Zinman's discussion of Stoppard's use of *Earnest* in *Travesties,* he makes the valuable point that "Stoppard may be doing to Wilde what Joyce was doing to Homer" (2002: 124). Stoppard's use of *Earnest* for a basic narrative design and set of characters certainly does recall Joyce's appropriation of Homer's *Odyssey* in *Ulysses*. Furthermore, just as Joyce suggests that his "Dublin Odyssey will double [the] immortality" (Stoppard, 1975: 42) of Homer's epic, Stoppard's play similarly affirms the reputation of its Wildean hypotext. In this sense Stoppard's play might be described as drawing on a conservative impulse inherent in *Ulysses* itself. We must of course remember that, although *Ulysses* could be called subversive / progressive in its treatment of generic conventions and Irish nationalism, it is also a deeply conservative work in the way that it both subsumes and reifies the western literary canon. Yet there is also a sense in which Stoppard's parody of *Earnest* operates in an inverse manner to Joyce's parody of the *Odyssey*. As Zinman notes, "just as Joyce started with a work as monumental as the *Odyssey* and seemed to diminish it by the

quotidian, yet finally exalted the quotidian by the 'travesty' of the Homeric source...

so Stoppard works apparently in reverse, beginning with the apparent triviality of *The*

Importance of Being Earnest and exalting it through his travesty" (2002: 124).

Ironically, in "exalting" Wilde's play, Stoppard simultaneously undermines it.

Whereas Stoppard's "friendly parody" functions as a sort of tribute to Wilde, his use

of *Earnest* to encase the (hypothetical) interactions of a set of historical figures who

have shaped the contemporary world opposes, in itself, the spirit of Wilde's "trivial"

play. While retaining the tone and patterns of Wilde's dialogue, the subject matter in

Travesties is often a good deal more "serious" than that of *Earnest*, and it often seems

as if Stoppard is about to invest Wilde's play with precisely what it was intended not

to have – weight. Whereas Algernon and Lane stick to topics like cucumber

sandwiches and champagne in their opening conversation, Carr and Bennett – their

Stoppardian counterparts – move on to address "[t]he war [that] continues to dominate

the papers" (Stoppard, 1975: 11), the many spies in Zurich and the "revolution in

Russia" (12). Yet, though its new context of the First World War (the war of Wilfred

Owen's poetry) might have been used to undercut or problematize the frivolity of

Wilde's play, Stoppard uses it instead to accentuate parodically *Earnest's* features and

strategies. In *Travesties* the triviality of *Earnest* and the gravity of historical narrative

are conflated in such a way as to take *Earnest's* trivializing to new extremes and, in so

doing, make its basic strategy conspicuous. Much of the humour in *Travesties* stems

from the way its characters speak "Wildeanly" (and that is to say, casually, ironically

and inversely) of even the "serious matters" of war, espionage and revolution.

Speaking of the Russian revolution, for instance, Bennett remarks, "*[e]xpressionless

as always*", that "[t]here have been scenes of violence" (13), to which Carr replies that

he is not at all surprised: "anyone with half an acquaintance with Russian society could see that the day was not far off before the exploited class, disillusioned by the neglect of its interests, alarmed by the falling value of the rouble, and above all goaded by its servants, should turn upon those butlers, footmen, cooks, valets..." (13).

"[I]f we are in any danger of accepting *The Importance of Being Earnest* as simply a social comedy of manners", Sammells writes, "the hyper-literary self-consciousness of *Travesties* ensures that we take a second look" (1986: 378). We have already noted how parody, as a metatextual practice, can have an "element of literary criticism" (Rose, 1993: 78) implicit in its "reading" of a hypotext. Yet what makes *Travesties* particularly interesting in this regard is that its primary hypotext is already parodic. Donaldson notes that *Travesties* "recognizes better than any academic criticism [he has] encountered just how central a part parody plays in *The Importance of Being Earnest*" (1980: 47). By re-contextualising Wilde's devices, Stoppard's play both draws attention to and explores the mechanics of Wildean textuality. Indeed, *Travesties* is a parody constructed with such attention to the structural principles of its already parodic hypotext that it might even be called a "metaparody".

Donaldson describes Wilde's play as "buil[t] on cliché – cliché of speech and sentiment, cliché of dramatic situation" (1980: 45), and this aspect of its design is underscored in a number of ways in *Travesties*. Stoppard's invocation – through Carr – of various "types" offers a good example of this. In *Travesties*, Sammells notes, Carr "refashions himself and his rivals in the same way as the characters in *The Importance of Being Earnest* use the established literary types of the wicked brother, the officious guardian, the gorgon-aunt, etc., to give shape and significance to their

lives" (1986: 380). Joyce being "cast" as Lady Bracknell, for example, reflects Carr's own perception of Joyce as "Bracknell-like" – an officious and unlikeable bigot. But *Travesties* also incorporates stereotypes of other sorts. From Carr's point of view, Tzara, for instance, is at one point presented (and mocked) as *essentially* Romanian – "*a Romanian nonsense... [whose] entrance might be set to appropriate music*" (Stoppard, 1975: 15). Joyce is similarly presented (and mocked) as *essentially* Irish – "*an Irish nonsense*" (16) who speaks in limericks.

Stoppard's reworking of "Wilde's baroque plot" (Sammells, 1986: 377) also emphasizes how Wilde interconnects and parodies a great many "classic theatrical situation[s]" (Donaldson, 1980: 46): a case of mistaken identities, a forbidden love affair, a comparison between two brothers (one good, one wicked), and many others. Indeed, what the parody of *Travesties* ultimately does is recognize how these "familiar dramatic patterns, like the familiar patterns of speech and logic which Wilde... seizes upon, form the basic structural elements of [*Earnest*], giving it a formal elegance which Wilde may then wittily and unpredictably vary, this way and that" (46). In doing so, Stoppard's play also draws our attention to the strategies Wilde's play uses to subvert or, at least, destabilize hegemonic meanings.

In *Travesties*, the parodic devices whereby Wilde subverts conventional patterns of genre, speech and logic are made conspicuous through their isolation, accentuation and elaboration. The effect of this might be described as a "magnification" of *Earnest's* mechanics – often aided by the juxtaposition of Wilde's parodic style with a "straight" or "unparodic" discourse. Perhaps the best example of such a juxtaposition is to be found at the start of Act II. The act begins with a lecture by Cecily on Lenin,

outlining how Lenin "came to Zurich... work[ed] on his book on Imperialism... [and] burned with eagerness to go to Russia" (45-6). But, unlike the speeches featured in Wilde's play, this is a lecture delivered "in earnest" and, as such, a monologue that serves to incorporate precisely the sensibility that Wilde subverts in *Earnest* – or, in other terms, the discursive norms from which he departs by way of ironic inversion. This discrepancy between the "straight" discourse of Cecily's lecture and the parodic discourse of Wilde's play is emphasized as Act II of *Travesties* modulates into the style of *Earnest* when Carr hands Cecily the visiting card he received from Bennett in Act I. Having read the card aloud – "Tristan Tzara. Dada, Dada, Dada" – Cecily exclaims, *"[w]hy, it's Jack's younger brother"* (46), and the conversation continues as follows:

CARR: You must be Cecily!

CECILY: Ssssh!

CARR: You are!

CECILY: And you, I see from your calling card, are Jack's decadent nihilist younger brother.

CARR: Oh, I'm not really a decadent nihilist at all, Cecily. You mustn't think that I am a decadent nihilist.

CECILY: If you are not then you have been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner. To *masquerade* as a decadent nihilist – or at any rate to ruminate in different colours and display the results in Bahnhofstrasse – would be hypocritical (46-7)

In this conversation – obviously a reworking of that between Cecily and Algernon in Act II of *Earnest* in which Cecily takes Algernon to be her "Uncle Jack's brother... cousin Ernest... wicked cousin Ernest" (Wilde, 1968: 343) – Stoppard appropriates Wilde's text in a manner that accentuates its parodic style. Situated after the monophonic discourse of Cecily's lecture, this dialogue goes on to demonstrate by

way of contrast the essentially "hybrid and double-voiced" (Hutcheon, 1985: 28) structure of parodic discourse and, in particular, of Wilde's play. What this contrast ultimately makes apparent is how Wilde's dialogue continually invokes conventional wisdom and discursive norms only to subvert them. In *Earnest*, Cecily's use of the term "hypocrisy" in response to Algernon's supposed "double life" – one "wicked" and one "really good" (Wilde, 1968: 343) – is obviously reminiscent of conventional wisdom and traditional values. Yet, as Stoppard's reworking serves to remind us, the way in which Cecily applies "hypocrisy" to his alleged duplicity subverts the word's traditional meaning through ironic inversion. In doing so *Travesties* reminds us of how Wilde uses parody as a means for destabilizing hegemonic morality.

This aspect of Wildean parody is, as we have already seen, closely related to Wilde's propagation of a secret gay agenda, and *Travesties* even recalls some of the strategies Wilde uses for this purpose. Earlier on in this thesis I discuss how Wildean parody often redirects / refunctions discourses to address "ironically atypical" gay subject matter or to communicate alternative gay meanings. I have also noted the importance of double-meanings (like those of "earnest" and "Cecily") and made-up terminology (like "Bunbury" and "Bunburyist") in Wildean parody. In *Travesties* Stoppard also acknowledges this dimension of *Earnest* by ironically redirecting the discourse of Wilde's play (as, amongst other things, a parody of the comedy of manners) to address the lifestyle and sexuality of its "bourgeois individualist" (Stoppard, 1975: 49) author. As in Wilde's play, Stoppard has Carr substitute a home-made word of his own for the "unspeakable" – and, in so doing, ironically makes Wilde's sexuality the taboo in a parody of his own play. In response to Joyce's request that Carr play the leading role in a production of *Earnest*, Carr (Stoppard's Algernon) claims that he

does not "know" (33) the play – although he admits to having heard of it. He also adds that, based on what he does know of it, it is a play he does not like. Attempting to explain his discomfort with the play to Joyce, though not wishing to scandalize Gwendolen with the word "sodomite", he remarks only that he knows it to be "a play written by an Irish – (*Glances at* GWENDOLEN) Gomorrahist" (33). The comment recalls the use of "Bunburyist" (as a codeword for homosexual) in some of *Earnest's* many gay in-jokes. Consider, for example, Algernon's remark to Jack that he has "always suspected [him] of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist" (Wilde, 1968: 325). Yet in *Travesties* it is appropriately Carr's homophobic Victorian prudishness that is satirized. Just as he and Joyce leave the room, Gwendolen remarks "*[a]bsently*" to herself: "Gomorrahist... Silly bugger" (34).

Furthermore, there are also elements of *Travesties* that, like *Earnest*, subvert the comedy of manners – although in Stoppard's play this is achieved far more directly. While *Travesties's* characters try desperately to keep up pretences of good manners, gentility and grace, their attempts are continually undercut by their impulsive badmouthing of one another – *Travesties* being, after all, a play famous for its elaborate insults. Consider for instance Tzara's dismissal of Joyce as a "supercilious streak of Irish puke! [A] four-eyed, bog-ignorant, potato-eating ponce" (Stoppard, 1975: 40). Carr is especially guilty of similar indiscretions. There are numerous occasions on which he fails the code of civility commended by the "fashionable society" (24) to which he aspires. For instance, in a conversation with Tzara about the motives behind the war, he loses his temper and dismisses Tzara with barrage of racial slurs: "you little Romanian wog – you bloody dago – you jumped-up phrase-making smart-alecy arty-intellectual Balkan turd" (22). However, it is ultimately Joyce who

is the primary target of Carr's abuse. Although Carr is determined to present himself as a "proper" English gentleman in narrating his memoir, Carr frequently finds himself unable to restrain his animosity towards Joyce for dragging him "through the courts for a few francs" (5-6). While initially referring – euphemistically – to the "unfortunate consequences" (5) of the play, and assuring us that he is "[n]ot one to bear a grudge", it is clear that the "Irish lout" (5) is anything but forgiven. In recounting his "*Memories of James Joyce*" (6), Carr constantly and inadvertently succumbs to making antithetical statements about Joyce that conform to the design of the "Beckett jokes" discussed in the previous chapter. For instance, in describing Joyce's personality, as he claims he is "often asked" (6) to do, Carr begins by referring to Joyce as a man

> in no way profligate or vulgar, and yet convivial, without being spend-thrift, and yet still without primness towards hard currency in all its transmutable and transferable forms and denominations, of which, however, he demanded only a sufficiency from the world at large, exhibiting a monkish unconcern for worldly and bodily comforts, without at the same time shutting himself off from the richness of human society, whose temptations, on the other hand, he met with an ascetic disregard tempered only by sudden and catastrophic aberrations... (6)

The description is then completed as follows: "in short, a liar and a hypocrite, a tight-fisted, sponging, fornicating drunk not worth the paper, that's that bit done" (6-7).

Travesties also affirms *Earnest's* parodic status by associating it with *Ulysses* – a work better known for its parodic design – and, in so doing, making certain similarities apparent. Although *Earnest* is the most obvious and, consequently, most often discussed of *Travesties's* hypotexts, we should not overlook Stoppard's use of

Ulysses as both a primary point of reference and secondary parodic hypotext.

"The making of *Ulysses*" (Stoppard, 1975: 6) is a recurring topic throughout *Travesties*. The play begins with a dramatization of *Ulysses's* construction as Joyce dictates the opening incantations of "Oxen of the Sun" to Gwendolen, his assistant, who writes them down (2). This is an important moment for a number of reasons. Most obviously, in demonstrating the care with which Joyce worked, it presents an antithetical approach to the production of art to Tzara's chance-based creation. But it also serves to remind us that Joyce assembled *Ulysses* from pre-existing fragments – "[h]oopsa, boyaboy, hoopsa" (2), for instance, being "the chant of celebration at the birth of a boy" (Johnson, 1998: 908). It also serves to reaffirm *Ulysses* as a celebration of textuality (and that is to say, artifice). As already noted, the "Oxen of the Sun" chapter of Ulysses is a chapter that, to quote Stoppard's Joyce, "by a miracle of compression, uses the gamut of English literature from Chaucer to Carlyle to describe events taking place in a lying-in hospital in Dublin" (70). In doing so it also evokes Stoppard's own "habit of recycling prior texts" (Kelly, 2002a: 10) – one of which is, in this instance, *Ulysses* itself.

Aspects of *Ulysses* are incorporated into *Travesties* in a number of ways. The "[s]notgreen" (Joyce, 1998: 37) sea of "Proteus", for instance, becomes "the swiftly-gliding snot-green (mucus mutandis) Limmat River" (Stoppard, 1975: 6) in Carr's narration. We should also not forget that even Carr features in *Ulysses*, cast unfavourably as the "drunk and quarrelsome" (Budgen, 1972: 250) Private Carr in its "Circe" episode. But it is perhaps the "Oxen of the Sun" chapter of *Ulysses* that is most important to the design of *Travesties*. Described as "erratic in style" (Stoppard,

1975: 70) by Carr, the chapter outlines the language of English literature, an aspect of its parodic methodology that Stoppard appropriates in *Travesties*. Like "Oxen of the Sun", Stoppard's play too incorporates and / or parodies the language of the English stage and page. Using Carr's dodgy "think-box" and tendency to get his "wires crossed" (43) as a device for doing so, *Travesties* incorporates, often parodically, a wide range of generic conventions (ranging from memoir, to spy thriller, to musical, to limerick) as well as a wide range of "literary greats" – like Shakespeare, Wilde and Joyce. The ultimate effect of this is akin to that of Joyce's multi-parodic "literary profiling" in "Oxen of the Sun", which Mercier describes as "the Garden of Parodies" (Mercier, 1994: 277) – a description that might just as easily be applied to *Travesties*.

But *Travesties* also features parodies of other sections of *Ulysses*. For example, just as Gwendolen, Joyce's assistant, informs Tzara that the chapter she and Joyce will be "doing next is cast in the form of the Christian Catechism" (Stoppard, 1975: 37), *Travesties* itself takes on the question and answer form of "Ithaca". Joyce proceeds to question Tzara on the meaning and history of Dada in language that both recalls and exaggerates the authority, coolness and particularity of "Ithaca's" "sciencese" (Weinstein, 1979: 3). "What", Joyce asks at one point, "reduced to their simplest reciprocal form, were Tzara's thoughts about Ball's thoughts about Tzara, and Tzara's thoughts about Ball's thoughts about Tzara's thoughts about Ball?" – to which Tzara responds in kind: "[h]e thought that he thought that he knew what he was thinking, whereas he knew that he knew that he knew that he did not" (Stoppard, 1975: 40). "Ithaca" is also parodied earlier in *Travesties* when Carr, having been asked to play the lead role in *Earnest*, interrogates Joyce, in similar language, on the nature of Wilde's play – at one point requesting that Joyce "[d]escribe the play briefly, omitting

all but essential detail" (34).

Yet the most interesting aspect of *Travesties's* parodic play lies in the way its Wildean and Joycean hypotexts are made to interact with one another. To some extent this strategy recalls the use of *Hamlet* and *Waiting for Godot* in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, but Stoppard's use of two hypotexts in *Travesties* is undertaken with an entirely different motive in mind: whereas *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* establishes an intratextual relationship between two hypotexts in order to exploit their differences, *Travesties* conflates *Earnest* and *Ulysses* in order to explore and exploit their similarities – both with each other and with itself. Indeed, what is made quite apparent in the end is that "Stoppard's parody... draws its licence (so to speak) from the fact that both Joyce and Wilde were also practitioners of parody: Stoppard plays affectionately with their lives and works as they in turn played with the lives and works of those who went before them" (Donaldson, 1980: 48).

Stoppard playfully brings *Ulysses* and *Earnest* into contact with one another at several points in *Travesties*. A good example of this is the way he substitutes the loss of Joyce's "Oxen of the Sun" chapter – a chapter "remotely connected with midwifery" (Stoppard, 1975: 70) – for Miss Prism's loss of baby Ernest in Wilde's play. But there are also times at which *Ulysses* and *Earnest* are brought into a concordant dialogic relationship with one another to emphasize similarities in their designs. We have already noted how Stoppard might be described as doing to Wilde what Joyce did to Homer, but there are also moments in *Travesties* that stress similarities between Wilde's and Joyce's strategies for generic engineering. Perhaps the best example of this is to be found in that section of *Travesties*, referred to above, in which Joyce

questions Tzara about Dada. As already noted, this section of *Travesties* is a parody of "Ithaca", but it is also a parody of *Earnest's* famous "interrogation scene" in which Lady Bracknell questions Jack about his background. Lady Bracknell is recognizable as one of the literary / dramatic "types" referred to earlier. "The fearsome Lady Bracknell", Donaldson notes, "is in some ways a traditional figure of comedy, representing what Northrop Frye would call the blocking agent of comic action, the figure who stands formidably in the path of young love, and whose authoritative objections must be removed before the final promises of marriage can be achieved" (1980: 46). As such, Lady Bracknell is also the figure who speaks with the greatest authority in the play, and for whom Wilde parodically appropriates official and scientific discourses – often to comic effect. Consider, for instance, Lady Bracknell's response to hearing that Cecily and Algernon are "engaged to be married":

> I do not know whether there is anything peculiarly exciting in the air of this particular part of Hertfordshire, but the number of engagements that go on seems to me considerably above the proper average that statistics have laid down for our guidance. I think some preliminary inquiry on my part would not be out of place. (Wilde, 1968: 373)

In *Travesties* Stoppard parodically accentuates the authoritative (and occasionally scientific) specificity and formality with which Lady Bracknell speaks through a concurrent parody of *Ulysses's* "Ithaca" chapter. Consider, for instance, the questions Stoppard's "Lady Joyce" asks Tzara about Arp – inventor of a Dadaist sport or pastime called the "Eggboard" (Stoppard, 1975: 38):

> JOYCE: By what familiarity, indicating possession and amicability in equal parts, do you habitually refer to him?
>
> TZARA: My friend Arp.

JOYCE: Alternating with what colloquialism redolent of virtue and
            longevity?

TZARA: Good old Arp. (38)

In this conversation Stoppard accentuates Wilde's parodic strategy for Lady Bracknell

by superimposing a parody of the "constabular style of the 'Ithaca' section of

Ulysses" (Sammells, 1986: 382) over a parody of *Earnest's* interrogation scene. Both

of these sections, of course, present narratives in the form of questions and answers,

but both also parody the language of authority in their respective pursuits of "the

truth". In *Earnest*, Donaldson writes, "Wilde sabotages, even as he delightedly

appropriates, the popular comic stereotype [of the blocking agent], allowing Lady

Bracknell to emerge less as a figure of authority than as a parody of such a figure"

(1980: 46). Lady Bracknell's investigation of Jack's past is characterized by formal

but invasive questions. In response to having been told by Jack that he was found in

"an ordinary hand-bag", for instance, she asks: "[i]n what locality did this Mr. James,

or Thomas, Cardew come across this ordinary hand-bag?" (Wilde, 1968: 334). Jack

replies that it was in a cloak-room at Victoria Station and, after a further question,

adds that it was the Brighton Line – to which Lady Bracknell pompously, and now

famously, responds: "[t]he line is immaterial" (334). In *Travesties* the parodic

strategy behind Lady Bracknell's pomposity, her comical tendency towards scientific

and official terms rather than their colloquial counterparts ("locality" instead of

"place", for instance), is underscored through Stoppard's invocation of "Ithaca" as an

additional template for this scene, itself a parody of scientific enquiry and a satire of

scientific authority.

Travesties's accentuation of the parodic and metafictional strategies of its two primary

hypotexts also serves to remind us how *Earnest* and *Ulysses* celebrate artifice by refuting mimesis – just as *Travesties* itself does. Sammells notes in this regard that "Stoppard's desire to locate himself within an artistic tradition, to declare a degree of aesthetic conservatism, means that he has little interest in that relative newcomer: theatrical naturalism, or what he describes in *Scene* as "the plot-riddled uproar of domestic crisis" (2002: 105). As Stoppard has also remarks: "I think that sort of truth-telling writing… is as big a lie as the deliberate fantasies I construct. There's a direct line of descent which leads you down to the dregs of bad theatre, bad thinking and bad feeling" (105). And it is this sentiment that Sammells cites to explain "Stoppard's Wildean [though equally Joycean] dismissal of the pretensions of naturalism" (105).

But the ultimate question raised by a discussion of Stoppard's metatextual and / or metaparodic strategies is that of the nature of his audience. The opening chapter of this thesis makes the point that parody is as much a mode of reading as it is of writing, of decoding as it is of encoding, and this is an important consideration for assessing the sort of audience for which a play like *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* or *Travesties* is written. Of course, like Joyce's *Ulysses*, Stoppard's parodies are what might be called "self-sufficient" in that they *can* be read / viewed and enjoyed without an understanding of their allusive, metafictional and parodic strategies. Yet such a reading of a play like *Travesties* at "face value" is doubtless an impoverished one. In attempting to ascertain what Stoppard's intellectual and "talky" technique tells us about the audience he is writing for, Brater writes that "[f]irst and foremost… it is literate in precisely the same way that shares and appreciates and above all recognizes his telling points of reference… This is drama for the A-level and AP-English crowd"

(Brater, 2002: 205). And, as Brater goes on to point out, "though it may not be politically correct to say so, this is also the same audience that knows this traditional canon backwards and forwards (and in this case preferably backwards)" (205).

This is, in other words, another sense in which Stoppard's parody might be considered conservative. Not only are his "friendly parodies" a form of homage or tribute, but they are also a form of conservative in-joke that affirms the "cultural" rather than, as in the case of Wilde's in-jokes, the "counter-cultural". Whereas Wilde's parodic in-jokes serve the interests of a (gay) subculture, Stoppard's serve the interests of a hegemonic elite. In this regard an important distinction must be made between Stoppard and Wilde in terms of their attitudes towards the English Establishment. As Sammells notes in this regard, for Wilde "Englishness becomes a target for subversion" whereas for Stoppard it becomes "a deliberate fantasy of the eccentric, the authentic, the individualist and the traditional" (2002: 118). While the parodies of Oscar Wilde (and, to some extent, James Joyce) might be called "subversive" in that they subvert hegemonic values and, in so doing, propagate progressive politics, Tom Stoppard's parodies demonstrate how parody can, by affirming the canonical, function conservatively too.

CONCLUSION

Parody is an increasingly important area of study in the humanities. Not only is it a virtually omnipresent phenomenon now, but it is also one with an ever-increasing range of applications – from the subversive to the conservative.

Rejecting the standard dictionary definition of parody as "literary satire", this thesis has discussed parody as a mode of generic engineering with ideological ramifications. Viewing literary and non-literary genres as social institutions, this thesis has described the practice of parody as one of engineering generic or discursive incongruity with a particular purpose in mind. In refiguring generic conventions the parodist simultaneously reworks their implicit ideological premises. In this way parody comes to serve as a means of negotiating with prevailing ideologies through generic modification. Eagleton makes a useful point in this regard:

> Discourses, sign-systems and signifying practices of all kinds, from film and television to fiction and the languages of natural science, produce effects, shape forms of consciousness and unconsciousness, which are closely related to the maintenance or transformation of our existing systems of power... Indeed 'ideology' can be taken to indicate no more than this connection - the link or nexus between discourses and power. (1996: 210)

Parodic "generic engineering" can hence seldom, if ever, occur without political ramifications. If we assume discourse, ideology and systems of power are inseparable, then it becomes impossible to tamper with a discourse without tampering with an inherent ideology. Conversely, a parodist can also express an ideological association with a genre or text by affirming its place in the world. Parody in this

sense is always political – it is only its affiliation and degree of aggression that varies.

Chapters Two and Three of this thesis discussed Wilde's use of parody, and especially parodic "word-masks" (Rose, 1993: 30), for subverting the generic as well as social conventions of Victorian England, and covertly propagating "gay meanings" in parodic in-jokes. "Word-masks", basic to Wildean parody, entail the duplicitous use of an object text / genre as a cover under which a parodist conveys secret meanings. As Rose notes with regard to word-masks, "[s]uch disguises may be used by the parodist where direct criticism might run the risk of bringing down censorship or a libel suit" (1993: 30) – and the consequences were obviously much worse in Wilde's case

In contrast to Wildean parody's (covert) agency, Joycean parody must be recognized as expressing political ambivalence. In Chapters Four and Five of this thesis I discussed Joyce's *Ulysses* with specific reference to its treatment of the dominant aesthetic and Irish nationalist discourses of the early twentieth-century. Reflecting the "profound ambivalence" (2000: ix) Dentith attributes to the mode, Joycean parody also demonstrates how parodic ambivalence "may entail not only a mixture of criticism and sympathy for the parodied text, but also the creative expansion of it into something new" (Rose, 1993: 51) – and this is particularly evident in what we might call his "parodic patriotism".

In contrast to Joyce and Wilde who use parody to express subversive / progressive political views, Stoppard uses parody to confirm traditional English values. Chapters Six and Seven examined how parody can serve as "one of the ways in which modern

artists have managed to come to terms with the weight of the past" (Hutcheon, 1985: 29) – and, indeed, tradition. Focusing on Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and *Travesties* respectively, these chapters explored parody's capacity to function as tribute or homage to the writers of the past in a fashion revealing "real respect for the assumptions behind the literary type" (Dubrow, 1982: 24) being parodied.

Hence we see that parody is a practice capable of a wide range of cultural work, and that it is neither inherently conservative nor subversive, but rather amenable to a wide range of cultural applications.

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