

## INTRODUCTION

# DERRIDA AND JOYCE: ON TOTALITY AND EQUIVOCATION

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Joyce is a great landmark in the history of deconstruction.

—Jacques Derrida, “The Villanova Roundtable:  
A Conversation with Jacques Derrida”<sup>1</sup>

once in the dairy days of buy and buy

—James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (161.13–14)

The conjunction of James Joyce and Jacques Derrida brings together what many would consider to be the arch representative of high modernism with the signal figure of postmodernism, a writer who authored some of the boldest experiments with the English language with a thinker who reinvented theory as deconstruction and ineradicably changed the way texts are read, studied, and written. Even within the singular history of encounters between philosophy and literature—Heidegger and Hölderlin, Benjamin and Baudelaire, Sartre and Genet, to name only a few—the Derrida and Joyce relation would still hold a special place. Derrida does not comment upon Joyce (even when engaged in seemingly straightforward exegesis), but thinks with him, through him, and allows Joyce a shaping hand in his own set of philosophical concerns. While Derrida has perhaps devoted more pages in his oeuvre to other literary figures (Mallarmé and Celan immediately come to mind), there is no one to whom he has returned more often and across such a great variety of works in the course of an almost forty year engagement.

*Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts* brings together all of Derrida’s published writings on Joyce, in fresh, new translations, along with essays in interpretation of this engagement. In regard to Derrida’s texts, our volume features the first complete translation of Derrida’s book *Ulysses Gramophone*,

containing the essays “Two Words for Joyce” (translated by Geoffrey Bennington) and “Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce” (translated by François Raffoul, who likewise translated the introduction and jacket text to the volume). The versions contained in that book and translated here are revised by Derrida from earlier lecture versions (“Two Words for Joyce”) or first publications (“Ulysses Gramophone”). While these earlier versions have previously appeared in English, the final, expanded versions have not and appear here for the first time. The translation of *Ulysses Gramophone* is complemented here by the first English translation of Derrida’s essay “The Night Watch” (translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas). Full details on these translations can be found in the preceding note on the translations. Across these texts, Derrida’s commitment to interrogating the bounds of philosophy and literature, of reason and its other, of the “outside” of the text, is on full display in all the flamboyance and provocation of his concerns.

*Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts* examines the importance of the Derrida/Joyce relation on a number of fronts, from explicit treatments of Derrida’s readings of Joyce (part 2, Returns), to elaborations of the consequences of this encounter (part 3, Departures), and concludes with ruminations on Derrida’s participation at the two Joyce events he famously attended (part 4, Recollections). In so doing, the editors hope to demonstrate that the Derrida/Joyce relationship does not concern the appropriation of a literary exemplar, nor the establishing of a disciplinary privilege between philosophy and literature, nor even a comprehension of the thought of another, but instead a relentless pursuit for the limits of any and all such efforts at totalization (appropriation, establishment, comprehension), a concern endemic to both philosophy and literature and any possible relationship between them. Joyce’s towering literary efforts provide Derrida occasion to observe the staggering failure of any totality, even the most encyclopedic and multilingual, to ever truly complete itself. But Derrida does not simply observe the failure, he provokes the fall, finds himself claimed by the same ambiguities, the same equivocations, and through this participation, finds himself falling at the same time under the mastery of Joyce. Totalization remains ineradicably equivocal. The Derrida/Joyce relation stages this deconstructive play of totality and equivocation, situating itself at the fecund limit between them.

In his lecture “Two Words for Joyce”—which was first delivered at the Centre national d’Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou at a symposium honoring the centennial of Joyce’s birth in 1982—Derrida claims that “yes, every time I write, and even in academic things, Joyce’s ghost is always coming on board” (TW 27/27). Certainly, Derrida had referred to Joyce on a number of previous occasions, sometimes cryptically, but here he affirms

Joyce's presence, albeit spectral, throughout the entire range of his philosophical writings with a "yes" that echoes Molly's ambiguous, polymorphous "yes" (itself the subject of Derrida's next major contribution to Joyce studies). Derrida's affirmation of Joyce is equivocal, not least because in the same piece he also admits "I'm not sure of loving Joyce, of loving him all the time" (TW 24/20). So, apparently, Joyce's ghost is *always* coming on board even though Derrida is unsure of loving Joyce *all the time*. Joyce is the visitor who is not always welcome.

Given that the visitor is not a resident of one's home, but comes from somewhere beyond its bounds, comes aboard from outside the domain of one's own, the idea of a visitor brings with it a thinking of the outside. Derrida's repeated engagements with Joyce, from the passing mentions to the three fuller engagements later in his career, concern the question of an "outside" to Joyce's work. Joyce stands as a paradoxical figure of totality for Derrida. Joyce's work, or rather the "event" of Joyce—*Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* most of all (it is only with some difficulty that one could see the claim holding for *Chamber Music*)—leads Derrida to ruminations on a vast Joyce "computer" (UG 59/97) or Joyce "software" (TW 25/22–23) that would encompass and appropriate the entirety of culture and ourselves along with it. This Joyce is infinitely appropriative, an authority and master beyond reckoning.

But Joyce is also a figure of ambiguity and the equivocal for Derrida. The event of Joyce is an event of division and confusion of languages (Derrida's frequent recourse to the story of the Tower of Babel in conjunction with Joyce emphasizes just this point). Yet the confusion of Joyce is the confusion of literature. Joyce stands as the event of literature's confusion, its distancing from itself in writing itself, its division within itself, the equivocal play of the spoken and the written (the "gramophonic"). Joyce's work would seem to embody the deconstruction of meaning theorized by Derrida to an unprecedented degree.

Derrida is not sure of "loving" Joyce and he notes that this "affect" controls the "scene of our relationship with whoever writes" (TW 23/19). Derrida is not sure that Joyce is loved, "Except when he laughs—and you'll tell me that he's always laughing. That's true, I'll come back to it, but then everything is played out between the different tonalities of his laughter" (TW 23/20). The ambiguous affect of loving and not loving Joyce is tied precisely to the ambiguous laughter of Joyce's text. For Joyce's laughter is the sneering laughter of total mastery and dominance and/or the welcoming laughter of release, a laughter that laughs beyond the project of totalization, at the naïveté of it. The difference is a difference of tone. Derrida's relation to Joyce is always an equivocal one, as a brief survey of his works will show.

Derrida's equivocal response to Joyce is not without significance since in his first major work, a lengthy introduction to his translation of Edmund

Husserl's brief essay "Origin of Geometry" (1962), he grandly proposed Joyce as an alternative to Husserl's project to render philosophical thinking univocal, dependent as it was upon a vision of language as self-identical, transparent, and ahistorical (EH 101-3/102-5). For Derrida in that work, Joyce stands as an exemplar of the equivocal, Joyce's writing seeking "to repeat and take responsibility for all equivocation itself, utilizing a language that could equalize the greatest possible synchrony with the greatest potential for buried, accumulated, and interwoven intentions within each linguistic atom, each vocable, each word, each simple proposition, in all wordly cultures and their most ingenious forms (mythology, religion, sciences, arts, literature, politics, philosophy, and so forth)" (EH 102/104). And so, for Derrida, Joyce, the Joycean text, stands as an alternative to the philosophical project exemplified by Husserl, though by no means in simple opposition to it. There is a strange agreement between the two, we detect a Joycean "project" as well, equally expansive: "this writing resolutely settles itself within the labyrinthian field of culture 'bound' by its own equivocations, in order to travel through and explore the vastest possible historical distance that is now at all possible" (EH 102/104-5). For Derrida, both Husserl's and Joyce's approaches to language share the wish to "assume and interiorize the memory of a culture in a kind of recollection (*Erinnerung*) in the Hegelian sense" (EH 102/104). The questions raised here regarding the relationship between Joyce's writing and the systematizing projects of philosophy remain central for Derrida's readings of Joyce throughout his career.

In this way, Joyce, or rather Derrida's reading of Joyce, would be another moment in the long quarrel between philosophy and literature. Philosophy—so the argument goes—tends to view literature as inessential and more than a few theorists of literature have taken this definition as their own. Philosophy, it is said, deals with ideas and the fundamental concepts and structures that govern our knowledge and understanding of the world, whereas literature is basically mere rhetoric, stories about dragons, everyday people, everyman, and so on. In other words, literature is little more than a distracting entertainment, but one that threatens to lead us away from the truth that philosophy proudly proclaims.

Of course, such a binaristic opposition between philosophy and literature is rarely, if ever, pure. Even Plato's apparent denunciation of literature in *The Republic*—the archetype of philosophy's denigration of literature—is not without some irony. As Jed Deppman cogently argues in his contribution to this volume, Derrida does not simply hold Joyce as the antithesis to Husserl, rather, he brings up Joyce within his essay to suggest that the Husserlian project of transparency is already tinged by Joycean polyvalence. In his essay in this volume Jean-Michel Rabaté continues in this direction and argues how the name "Joyce" within Derrida's work is not (just) simply an

author, but rather an exemplary model of the act of equivocation embodied by literature. For Derrida, Joyce is literature par excellence.

While Derrida signals a certain Joycean strain within Husserl, the situation is once again nothing one-sided or unambiguous. For Derrida likewise signals a Husserlian side of Joyce. Joyce's project of taking responsibility "for all equivocation itself" (EH 102/104) depends upon univocity and "could only succeed by allotting its share to univocity, whether it might draw from a given univocity or try to produce another. Otherwise, the very text of its repetition would have been unintelligible; at least it would have remained so forever and for everyone" (EH 103/105). From the start, then, Derrida reads Joyce in a tensed relation to philosophy, at once proposing an equivocal alternative to univocal transparency and likewise casting an equally expansive and controlling project of appropriative "recollection" of his own. And so, if Derrida can be called a literary philosopher (that is, a philosopher thinking through literature), then Joyce is, perhaps, a philosophical litterateur. On the one hand, Joyce, as perhaps the embodiment of literature par excellence (and Derrida remains equivocal on this point), embodies that which disturbs univocal metaphysics, but, on the other hand, as the embodiment par excellence of this disruption, Joyce, the logodaedalus, has domesticated said disruption. In this way, Derrida signals that Joyce, the Joycean oeuvre, marks a problem for both philosophy and literature as rigorously defined or "totalized" disciplines, a problem that serves as the *entrée* to this volume.

While Derrida does not engage Joyce's texts in a sustained manner until the 1980s, Joyce nonetheless gets aboard a number of Derrida's most pivotal works before then. After the Husserl essay, the name "Joyce" appears through the sixties and seventies as though a sigil of both the greatest accomplishment of totalization since Hegel and simultaneously the foremost exemplar of literary resistance to totalization. Passing references in two 1964 essays collected in *Writing and Difference* set the stage. On the one hand, the lengthy reading of Lévinas, "Violence and Metaphysics," closes with a quote from Joyce that would seem to ally him with the agenda of philosophy: "this proposition from perhaps the most Hegelian of modern novelists: 'Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet'" (WD 153/228; quoting U 15.2098–99).<sup>2</sup> Joyce here stands as a thinker invested in the reconciliation of opposition, à la Hegel. On the other hand, one of the opening epigraphs to "Cogito and the History of Madness" quotes Joyce in conversation with Jacques Mercanton regarding *Ulysses*, "In any event this book was terribly daring. A transparent sheet separates it from madness" (WD 31/51).<sup>3</sup> Here Joyce would seem positioned as a writer aware of the limits of order and the dangerous proximity of its other (precisely the concerns at stake in this

critical engagement with Foucault). The sheet of separation is transparent, the isolation imperfect, the boundary permissive.

This permissive reading of Joyce surfaces again in 1968, in Derrida's genre-breaking treatment of Plato's *Phaedrus*, "Plato's Pharmacy" (first published in *Tel Quel*), where consideration is again on the limits of the *logos* and its relation to its other, as well as on another Joycean theme, paternity. Derrida has the following footnote to a discussion of the role of the egg in ancient Egyptian mythology: "The paragraph that is about to end here will have marked the fact that this pharmacy of Plato's also brings into play Bataille's text, inscribing within the story of the egg the sun of the accursed part; the whole of that essay, as will quickly become apparent, being itself nothing but a reading of *Finnegans Wake*" (DI 88 fn. 20/99 fn. 17). In the 1982 address, Derrida called his Plato essay "a sort of indirect, perhaps distracted, reading of *Finnegans Wake*" (TW 28/29). The allusion, more provocative than substantive, would appear to be to the role of the "hen" (Greek "one"), the hen whose scratching makes up "The letter! The litter!" (FW 93.24) and the scrambling of whose egg, its mixing and dispersal, is proclaimed necessary for there to be any human "home": "you wish to ave some homelette, yes, lady! Good, mein leber! Your hegg he must break himself. See, I crack, so, he sit in the poele, unbedimbt!" (FW 59.30–32). Joyce here figures as a thinker of dissemination against hegemonic unity.

This Joyce climbs aboard the eclectic works of the seventies as well. In form and style Derrida's *Glas* has elicited numerous comparisons to *Finnegans Wake* even though it contains precious few references or allusions to Joyce. *Glas* is an extended meditation upon the possibility of Hegelian *Aufhebung* that works by pairing Hegel with an "other," in this case Jean Genet. The two columns of the text both engage in and undermine the processes of dialectic and, in so doing, suggest the terms of Derrida's reading of Joyce as that which equivocates between interiority and alterity. The rapport between *Glas* and Joyce is the subject of Sam Slote's essay in this volume.

In the first part of *The Post Card*, "Envois," which consists of a series of postcards by Derrida apparently addressed to his lover, Joyce and the *Wake* make a number of appearances, with mention of "Another fraternal couple in pp making war on itself, *the penman and the postman*" (PC 142/154). Joyce's thinking of the postman's relation to the penman mirrors much of Derrida's concerns for "postality" in the text, and this relation is at the center of Andrew J. Mitchell's contribution to the volume. *The Post Card* also makes mention of a trip to Joyce's grave at the Fluntern cemetery in Zürich by Derrida and J. Hillis Miller (PC 148/160–61) and takes up the issue of Babel and Babelization in regard to *Finnegans Wake* (PC 240–41/257–58).<sup>4</sup> In fact, Derrida's next major communication on Joyce, the 1982 "Two Words for Joyce," is an expansion of the two words from

the *Wake* that he singles out for consideration in “Envois,” “he war” (FW 258.12): “‘he war’ . . . YHWH declaring war by decreeing *la dichemination*, by deconstructing the tower, by saying to those who wished both to make a name for themselves, the Chemites, and to impose their particular language as the universal language, by saying ‘Babel’ to them” (PC 142/154–55). Again, as in “Plato’s Pharmacy,” Joyce figures as the thinker/writer of dissemination/dishemination.

“Two Words for Joyce,” Derrida’s 1982 address and first explicit treatment of Joyce, could be seen as an extension of this comment on Babel in *The Post Card*.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, this had occupied him for some time since he (briefly) mentioned the *Wake* and Babel in a roundtable discussion on translation at a 1979 symposium in Montreal (see EO 98–110/132–46 and 133–35/176–78) and in the essay “Des Tours de Babel” (PSI 191–225/203–35), which directly feeds into the 1982 address. In “Des Tours de Babel,” Derrida elaborates the idea that the myth of Babel is fundamental to equivocation. The problem is laid out in the word Babel that in Hebrew means “God, the father” (*Ba’bel*) and “confusion” (*Bavel*), relating thus to both the one and the many, unity and difference. According to the biblical myth, at the destruction of the tower of Babel, God created the plurality of languages that exists today. Therefore the tower bears both His name (*Ba’bel*) and the confusion (or confounding of languages) that ensued (PSI 192–93/204–5). The two words that Derrida chooses from the *Wake* in his 1982 essay, “he war,” exemplify this Babelian confusion in that they command the confusion of the Shemites (the builders of Babel) in the wake of the tower’s destruction:

“He war” calls for translation, both orders and forbids transposition into the other language. Change me—into yourself—and above all do not touch me, read and do not read, say and do not say otherwise what I have said and which will have been: in two words *which was*. Alliance and double-bind. For the “he war” also tells of the unreplaceability of the event that it is. It is what it is, which is also unchangeable because it has already been, a past without appeal which, before being and being present, was. So that’s war declared. Before being, that is being a present, it was: was *he, fuit*, the late god of fire the jealous god. (TW 33–34/40)

But it is with his two addresses in the eighties—“Two Words for Joyce,” the 1982 Pompidou Center address and “Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce,” a 1984 address to the Joyce Symposium in Frankfurt am Main—that the question of Joycean totality comes to the fore in all its equivocity and ambiguity. As Derrida puts it in “Two Words,” Joyce’s greatness lies in bringing about an event of such magnitude that “henceforth

you have only one way out: *being in memory of him*" (TW 24/21). This is not a matter of you remembering him, no, but of you being remembered by him, inhabiting his memory. The Joycean obligation is then "to be in his memory, to inhabit a memory henceforth greater than all your finite recall can gather up, in a single instant or a single vocable, of cultures, languages, mythologies, religions, philosophies, sciences, histories of spirit or of literatures. I don't know if you can love that, without resentment and without jealousy" (TW 24/21–22). The totalizing drive of Joyce's absorption and disaggregation of culture and history makes us part of his programming, where "in advance and forever it inscribes you in the book you are reading" (TW 24/22). We become part of the programming "on this 1000th generation computer, *Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake*, compared with which the current technology of our computers and our micro-computerized archives and our translating machines remains a *bricolage*, a prehistoric child's toy" (TW 25/22). We become part of the Joyce "software," the "joyceware" that places us in his memory. This condition of Joycean "hypermnnesia" is the subject of both Alan Roughley and Louis Armand's essays in this volume. Armand examines the technicity of hypermnnesia in the *Wake* as transformative of communication, agency, signification, and ultimately even identity. Roughley, on the other hand, looks at how Joyce has inhabited Derrida's work in a perpetual hypermnnesic dialogue not unlike the relation between Plato and Socrates that Derrida described in *The Post Card*.

Part of the inescapable nature of Joyce is attributable to the "Joycean institution" (UG 58/94) or Joyce industry, in the parlance of the times, that presides over the "signature" of Joyce. The Joyce scholar has "mastery over the *computer* of all memory, plays with the entire archive of culture" (UG 59/97). The computer programs everything that will come after it, "We are caught in this net. We find all the gestures that take the initiative of a movement announced in a superpotentialized text that will remind you, at a given time, that you are caught in a network of language, writing, knowledge and *even of narration*" (UG 60/97). The signature of Joyce is the affirmation of this mastery and presides over this program.

"Ulysses Gramophone" is consequently an exploration of the way in which this affirmation must remember itself in order to sustain itself. The affirmation must be archived, in other words, written somewhere and maintained. This is the gist of the term "gramophone," the utterance (*phonê*) must be archived and recorded (*grammê*) for the utterance to remain true to itself, for it to abide there must be a recording and archiving. The two are dependent upon one another and the point holds for any utterance. Insofar as every utterance is an *assertion*, a pronouncement of itself, it is likewise an affirmation ("a yes is co-extensive with every statement" [UG 72/124]). As a result, we are faced with the "ineluctable gramphony of the 'yes'" (UG



67/114), for all affirmation is divided within itself, it must on the one hand record itself to support its later memory of itself (remembering as necessary to an affirmative self-identity, the keeping of a promise, of one's word) and it must affirm itself to someone or something outside of itself (though even in affirming itself to itself this division is operative).<sup>6</sup> This makes "saying yes" (*l'oui-dire*) dependent upon an other who hears it and acknowledges receipt, a matter of "hearsay" (*l'ouï-dire*). As such, the simple "yes" that occupies Derrida in his lecture, Molly's yes and also Joyce's signature (which functions as an affirmation like the yes), is something divided within itself, split by both its relation to everything outside of it on which it depends for its self-assertion, and also by its relation to itself as evidenced by its need to be remembered and restored from somewhere that it is not.

The signature operates at a distance from itself, dependent on something or someone other than itself to relay itself back to itself (all the problems of the penman and the postman return here): "Yes, condition of every signature and performative, addresses itself to some other, which it does not constitute, and it can only begin by *asking*, as a response to an always prior demand, to *ask* him or her to say yes" (UG 74/127).<sup>7</sup> In posing the question of response, "Ulysses Gramophone" deals with matters of responsibility and is thus a key text for signaling the ethical dimensions of Derrida's work. In having an undecidable referent, Molly's "yes" is irresponsible and so the question is how does one respond to the irresponsible, which is, in effect, also to ask, how does one respond to the undecidable ambiguity of the magnum opus that is Joyce. "Reciprocally, two responses or two responsibilities refer to each other without having any relation between them. The two sign yet prevent the signature from gathering itself. All they can do is call for another yes, another signature. And furthermore, one cannot differentiate between two *yeses* that *must* gather together like twins, to the point of simulacrum, the one being the gramophony of the other" (UG 80/141). Laurent Milesi's essay in this volume explores this issue of responsibility in Derrida's reading of Joyce in relation to the various textual dialogues he participated in with H el ene Cixous: he construes these dialogues as responses *apropos* responsibility.

But even this computer and software that seeks to encompass all of history and culture within its program cannot so simply succeed. Joyce's texts have all the strategies and subversions of writing at their disposal. Joyce as literature is at odds with Joyce as cultural archive. In "Two Words," this plays out in a drama of citation. Joyce's text is always quotable, detachable, and thus insertable within other projects and contexts. In quoting Joyce, his text is given an authoritative position, but that authority is also simultaneously subverted, in that he is now at an unknown author's disposal and made to serve another's ends:

Paradoxical logic of this relationship between two unequal texts, two programs or two literary “softwares.” Whatever the difference between them, to the point of incommensurability, the “second” text, the one which, fatally, refers to the other, quotes it, exploits it, parasites it and deciphers it, is no doubt the minute parcel *detached* from the other, the offspring, the metonymic dwarf, the jester of the great anterior text which would have declared war on it in tongues. And yet (one can see this precisely with Joyce’s books which play both roles, the ancestor and the descendant), it is also another set, quite other, bigger and more powerful than the all-powerful which it drags off and reinscribes elsewhere, in another sequence, in order to defy, with its ascendancy, genealogy itself. (TW 26/25)

The text for all its authority is still subject to the crudest appropriation, citation, and misuse, and this inherently qua written work and despite any and all the best and worst efforts of the caretakers of that signature. For Derrida, there is a freedom to be found in this, the freedom of an opening: “In this war of languages, everything we could say after it looks in advance like a minute self-commentary with which this work accompanies itself. And yet the new marks carry off, enlarge and project elsewhere—one never knows where in advance—a program that appeared to constrain them, or at least watch over them. This is our only chance, minuscule but completely open” (TW 27/26). The repurposing of Joyce expands the range of the computer program, to be sure, but in order for the program to grow, it must reach beyond itself, and in that extension, in that surface of contact with the outside, that moment of alterity, there is chance.

“Ulysses Gramophone” takes up this issue of an outside to totality in terms of the signature, and Derek Attridge’s contribution to this volume focuses on the relation between signature and countersignature in Derrida’s readings. For Derrida, the confirmation of our affirmation is the countersignature of the other:

Now with the event signed Joyce, a *double-bind* has at least become explicit (for it already has had a hold on us ever since Babel or Homer, and all that followed): on the one hand, one must write, one must sign, one must make new events with untranslatable marks happen—and this is the desperate call, the distress of a signature that demands a *yes* from the other; but on the other hand, the singular novelty of any other *yes*, of any other signature, already finds itself programphoned in the Joycean corpus. (UG 61/99–100)

Here Derrida shows that even what comes from the outside may not be the singular event so hoped for and desired, but instead something already

preprogramed. Put in terms drawn from *Ulysses*, we can never be sure when we “introduce the necessary breach for the coming of the other, an other that one could always call Elijah, if Elijah is the name of the unpredictable other for whom a place must be kept” whether the Elijah as other who shows up, if he shows up, will in fact be Elijah the other, or “Elijah, the head of the megaprogramotelephonic network” and thus pre-envisioned by the computer all along (UG 70/120). For this reason, Derrida claims in regard to the repeated yes that “this essential repetition is haunted by an intrinsic threat, by the interior telephone that parasites it as its mimetic-mechanical double, as its unceasing parody” (UG 56/89). The singularity and novelty of the yes is challenged from the outset, contaminated, by the recording of it necessary for it to be itself.

When Derrida wonders whether he loves Joyce or not, he emphasizes that this is a question of affect and feeling, of a certain tonality. Joyce is loved when he is laughing, but he is laughing all the time, we are told. Laughter, the hallmark of affirmation from a Nietzschean perspective, becomes the fundamental mood of Joyce:

the totalizing hermeneutic that constitutes the task of a global and eternal foundation of Joycean studies will find itself before what I hesitate to call a dominant affect, a *Stimmung* or a *pathos*, a tonality that re-traverses all the others, but which nonetheless does not belong to the series of the others since it just re-marked them all, adding itself to them without letting itself be added up or totalized, like a remainder that is both quasi-transcendental and supplementary. (UG 68/116)

Derrida would be free to go ahead and love Joyce all the time, were it not for the fact that even this laughter suffers division. Laughter arises as the transpartition between the totality and its other, where we encounter “a writing about which it is no longer possible to decide if it still calculates, calculates better and more, or if it transcends the very order of calculable economy, or even of an incalculable or an undecidable which would still be homogeneous with the world of calculation” (TW 38/51). The contribution to this volume from Simon Critchley and Tom McCarthy takes up the economic side of Derrida’s reading with particular attention on the role of money in both authors’ work and thought. For Derrida at this point, “A certain quality of laughter would accord something like affect to this beyond of calculation, and of all calculable literature” (TW 38/51). But the transpartitioning quality of this laughter means that on the one hand, it is the laughter of the system, the sneering laughter of the conquering master, “I can hear a reactive, even negative yes-laughter resonate. It exults in a hypermnesic mastery, and by spinning a spider web that defies any other

possible mastery" (UG 68/117). On the other hand, it means that there is also a laughter that laughs at the very project of mastery, "there is a James Joyce who can be heard laughing at this omnipotence" (UG 69/117). This laughter aims in a different direction, toward the outside, a calling out to what lies beyond, a calling out or a calling back, a welcoming laughter that begins "to introduce the necessary breach for the coming of the other" (UG 70/120). To not be sure of loving Joyce is to remain faithful to this equivocal situation—*equivocation as the pathos of responsibility*.

This divided laughter threatens to vibrate and resound through the institutional edifice of literary and philosophical scholarship and bring down its walls, soliciting the crumbling of its foundations. It is uncapturable, they are no longer capable of capturing. An implication of this equivocality is that the Joycean text is not necessarily reducible to a singular determinant of meaning; the Joycean text equivocates, and it does so by incorporating all sorts of meanings from many different languages across the widest number of possible fields. The implication here is that the task of reading Joyce will not be fulfilled by simply parsing away the references, by an *explication du texte*, since that would reduce Joyce to a simple plurivocity, that is, to the realm of a singular determinant of meaning. In this way, Derrida has here proposed a mode of reading Joyce that is largely at odds with the methods and practices of traditional literary scholarship. For Derrida is not simply noting an ambiguous quality to Joyce's texts, where Joyce would simply provide us with an undecidable choice among equally qualified meanings. Rather, Derrida reads Joyce at the limits of meaning itself, where there are no longer any discrete meanings nicely arrayed for us to choose from (indeed Derrida goes so far as to question what even counts as a single word, the very countability of words), but instead we are faced with the linguistic friction of meaning's emergence, the "sending" of meaning. We might also add that the type of reading Derrida proposes is likewise at odds with many of the interpretations of Joyce that are done under the rubric of the "Derridean."

Both the 1982 and 1984 addresses, which were collected together in the 1987 French volume *Ulysse gramophone*, seem to mark the culmination of Derrida's engagement with Joyce. The totality of the hypermnestic cultural computer of Joyce is shown to undo itself on its own. The very extension that increases its domain undoes its self-presence. The very other that it seeks to appropriate it needs for its self-confirmation. The other that it contacts in confirmation of itself simultaneously undoes its self-identity in a showing of dependency. All the major themes of Derrida's thinking of meaning—citation, grafting, postality, mediation, technology, and the signature—play predominant roles in his reading of Joyce. As do the philosophers who most preoccupy Derrida's investigations in his other works

and lectures. In crafting his interpretation, Derrida enlists the assistance of Hegel (Joyce is a system builder and his work comparable to the *Encyclopaedia*), Nietzsche (Nietzschean affirmation is subject to the same doubling logic as Joyce's yes), Husserl (pure univocity and equivocity are equally impossible), and Heidegger (existence is a call, but this fact disrupts its purported self-presence<sup>8</sup>). While Derrida had previously deployed the name Joyce selectively, and briefly, throughout a number of key works, by the late 1980s he seems to have largely abandoned Joyce, apart from a few passing references and comments during interviews.<sup>9</sup> It is as if he had managed to overcome his "admiring resentment" (TW 26/24) and had out-Joyced Joyce, no longer needing him "on board." And yet, in a move that shows how a presumed mastery over equivocation is never final, whether Joyce's or his own, Derrida did essay one further contribution to Joyce studies.

In 2001, Derrida wrote an introduction for the republication of a monograph by his friend the psychoanalyst Jacques Trilling, *James Joyce ou l'écriture matricide*.<sup>10</sup> Entitled "The Night Watch," this essay adds an essential and (seemingly) final piece to Derrida's concern with Joyce. In 1994, at the conclusion of "The Villanova Roundtable: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida," Derrida is asked about his relationship to Joyce.<sup>11</sup> In the lengthy answer that follows, he lays out three main areas of this relation. He refers first to the "impossible task of precisely gathering in a totality, in a potential totality, the potentially infinite memory of humanity," which, as he explains, "is made possible only by loading every sentence, every word, with a maximum of equivocalities, virtual associations, by making this organic linguistic totality as rich as possible."<sup>12</sup> We have seen this ground covered in "Two Words for Joyce." The third point raised is likewise one with which we are familiar, this time through "Ulysses Gramophone," that of the doubling of the yes, "when you say 'yes,' you imply that in the next moment you will have to confirm the 'yes' by a second 'yes.' When I say 'yes,' I immediately say 'yes, yes.' I commit myself to confirm my commitment in the next second, and then tomorrow, and then the day after tomorrow."<sup>13</sup> But what Derrida raises as the second point of his relationship to Joyce had hitherto received no sustained treatment by him, though it is a theme that preoccupies so many of his other works, the question of filiation and paternity. Here he remarks on the supposed asymmetry between paternity and maternity, the "legal fiction" of fatherhood, in Joyce's famed expression, versus the natural fact of motherhood. Derrida quickly sketches the lines of an argument against this purportedly self-evident maternity, "today the mother is also a legal fiction [. . .]. Motherhood is something which is interpreted, the theme of a reconstruction from experience. What one calls today surrogate mothers, for instance, and all the enormous problems that you are familiar with, attest to the fact that we do not know who

the mother is. [ . . . ] if we had time, I would try to show what the equivocal consequences would be of this fact that the situation of the mother is the same as that of the father."<sup>14</sup> The opportunity for drawing out these consequences is provided by "The Night Watch," and we are pleased to publish Derrida's essay in this volume, in its first English translation by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas.<sup>15</sup>

The tension between writing and totalization that ran throughout the previous engagements with Joyce returns in this strange essay in striking form. "The Night Watch" is again very much concerned with totality, but this time on the part of the subject. The subject who appears in the world has always been born into the world, but this birth remains inappropriable or, to use Trilling's term, "uncircumventable" (NW 91/12) in that one cannot get behind it. As it has been a staple of Derrida's thinking that to write is to accept a certain death, the writer consequently could be seen as someone acting against their birth, contradicting it. Insofar as birth is understood as stable, as "a being or an origin" (NW 92/15), then to write is to wish to never have been born, to have no origin. Through the logic of Trilling and Derrida, writing becomes a form of matricide, a deconstruction of a purportedly pure origin and inception. Regarding this impure and non-inceptual origin, Derrida writes that "Matricide puts us on the path of a birth irreducible to all ontology, to all ontological or phenomenological thinking about originarity" (NW 92/15). The act of matricide would thus contain a strange ambiguity. On the one hand, it would be the recourse of a subject who wished to eradicate all marks of dependence in an impossible quest for self-sufficiency and self-identity. It would be driven by a desire for totality and completion. On the other, matricide would be the writing that makes way for birth of a different sort, a birth without the purity of origin, where "*being born*," as Derrida emphasizes, comes to me "from the other" (NW 92/15). This tension is played out in the ambiguity between the mother and maternity in the essay and it returns once again to Derrida's Joycean tension between totality and its other, an innovative return, to be sure, and one with consequences for our understanding of Derrida's thinking of the phantasm, the feminine, authorship, natality, and alterity, to name just a few of the concerns addressed. We are fortunate to include here two exceptional essays commenting on "The Night Watch," one by its co-translator, Michael Naas, detailing the logic of the phantasm operative in the essay, and one by Christine van Boheemen-Saaf taking up the problematic erasure of woman in the text.

If, in "The Night Watch," the moment of birth is the uncircumventable exteriority that occasions interiority, then, for Derrida, the event "Joyce" is the uncircumventable exteriority of philosophy, the unwelcome visitor who

marks and re-marks philosophy as incomplete. Confronted by an ineradicable, uncircumnavigable, ineluctable equivocation and always from the outset being forced to respond, having already said yes to this condition, being so tied to the other for even the simplest self-affirmation that we can no longer be said to be ourselves, to be marked by the other through and through, to never be whole while seeking to be whole, to be written ourselves while at the same time writing, such is the equivocal situation of this existence. Perhaps no one will have helped us to understand our situation more than Joyce and Derrida.

### Notes

1. "The Villanova Roundtable: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida," in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 3–28; 26.

2. In a footnote to this line, Derrida writes of Joyce's familiarity with Victor Bérard's work on the Semitic roots of Odysseus (WD 320–21 fn. 92/228 fn.1), suggesting that he is *au courant* enough with Joyce criticism to know of this influence.

3. Jacques Mercanton, "The Hours of James Joyce," trans. Lloyd C. Parks, *Portraits of the Artist in Exile*, ed. Willard Potts (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 206–52; 226, translation of *Les Heures de James Joyce* (Paris: Actes sud et l'aire, 1988), 55.

4. J. Hillis Miller recalls the trip in his *The Medium Is the Maker: Browning, Freud, Derrida, and the New Telepathic Ecotechnologies* (Eastbourne, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), 50: "Derrida and I did go together . . . to visit Joyce's tomb in the Zürich cemetery near the zoo. The animal cries from that zoo appear in *Finnegans Wake*. We did stand laughing before the tomb of Egon Zoller, 'Erfinder des Telephonographen,' with its engraved ticker tape machine and its carved Alpha and Omega. Derrida, as we stood looking at the tomb, did connect it to his then current writing about telecommunication networks, that is, the 'Envois.' He asked me to take a photograph later and send it to him, which I did have a friend do. It may be among his remains. It is the case that we searched for Peter Szondi's tomb, but failed to find it, though I found it easily enough on another visit to that cemetery. I do not remember, however, having a car in Zürich, so I do not see how I could have driven him up to the cemetery, as he asserts. Maybe I have forgotten, or maybe I rented a car for the occasion" (see PC 148/160–1).

5. Already in the 1962 *Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* the Tower of Babel was at stake. Derrida cites Leibniz's *New Essays on Human Understanding* as a progenitor of the Husserlian project of univocity: "For we have the option of fixing significations, at least in some learned language, and of agreeing on them, so as to pull down this Tower of Babel" (G. W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, ed. and trans. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 337). The Derrida citation occurs at EH 100–1 fn. 108/102 fn. 3), but the reference given is incorrect (Theophil's statement is at Book III, Chap. IX, §10).

6. Derrida returns to the issue a few years later in a 1987 text on the work of Michel de Certeau entitled “A Number of Yes” (PSII 231–40/239–48).

7. See also Rodolphe Gasché, *Inventions of Difference* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 236–50.

8. For another Heideggerian resonance around the term *war* in “Two Words for Joyce” (and all of Derrida’s concerns with the Tower of Babel), directed at the dispersal of being as Babelian detour, see Sam Slote, “No Symbols Where None Intended: Derrida’s War at *Finnegans Wake*,” in *James Joyce and the Difference of Language*, ed. Laurent Milesi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 195–207.

9. See for example, “Shibboleth: For Paul Celan” (1986) where Joyce is briefly contrasted with Celan (“Shibboleth: For Paul Celan,” trans. Joshua Wilner and Thomas Dutoit, in Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen [New York: Fordham University Press, 2005], 1–64; 27, translation of *Schibboleth pour Paul Celan* [Paris: Galilée, 1986], 51); the 1987 interview “Heidegger, the Philosophers’ Hell,” where Derrida remarks that his writings on Joyce are formally affected by the event of Joyce (PI: 188/200); *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin* (delivered 1992), where Joyce names the legal fictions of paternity and maternity in a lengthy discussion of European Jewish intellectuals (*Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998], 92, translation of *Le Monolinguisme de l’autre* [Paris: Galilée, 1996], 112); and “The Villanova Roundtable: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida” of 1994, where Derrida gives a lengthy summary of his concerns with Joyce (“Villanova Roundtable,” 25–28).

10. Jacques Trilling, *James Joyce ou l’écriture matricide* (Belfort: Circé, 2001).

11. Jacques Derrida, “Villanova Roundtable,” 25–28.

12. *Ibid.*, 25.

13. *Ibid.*, 27.

14. *Ibid.* 26–27.

15. Derrida discusses the transformations of the family with Elizabeth Roudinesco in their *For What Tomorrow . . . : A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), chap. 3 “Disordered Families,” 33–46, translation of *De quoi demain . . . : Dialogue* (Paris: Fayard/Galilée, 2001), 63–82. Even in this discussion, though, a reference is made back to the “Night Watch” essay as providing the philosophical basis for the topic at hand: “No doubt it would be necessary to sharpen the distinction between mother and maternity, the desire of the mother and the desire for maternity. I have tried to do this elsewhere,” where a footnote refers the reader to “The Night Watch” (Derrida and Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow . . .*, 42/76).