

Making Sense

Beauty, Creativity, and Healing

EDITED BY Bandy Lee, Nancy Olson,
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Writing Trauma:

Narrative Catharsis in Homer, Shakespeare, and Joyce

by Richard Kearney

Myself unto myself do give

This name Katharsis-Purgative (James Joyce, 'The Holy Office')

James Joyce, in a letter to his brother Stanislaus on November 13, 1906, announces that he has just started a new 'short story'. It is called 'Ulysses'. He came up with the idea, he explains, because of a memory triggered by a recent mugging in a street in Rome. He had just been fired from his job at the Bank and drunk all his severance pay (which should have paid the rent and help provide for his one year old son, Giorgio). On his way home Joyce was robbed and left lying in the gutter, destitute, despondent and bleeding. And it was at that very moment that he suddenly remembered something: being assaulted several years previously (June 22, 1904) in Dublin and rescued from the gutter by a man called Hunter, 'a cuckolded Jew' who dusted him down and took him home for a cup of cocoa. 'In true Samaritan fashion', as Joyce put it. This repetition of woundings triggered a lost memory where an immigrant Jew came to the rescue of a wounded Dubliner and planted a seed of *caritas* in his imagination.

Several weeks after the Rome mugging, Joyce and Nora were given tickets to an opera whose librettist was called Blum. This second moment of happenstance, after his humiliating fall in a Roman side street, furnished the name of his paternal protagonist, Leopold Bloom.

Thus was born the longest short story ever told. *Ulysses*. The tale of a father and a son traversing wounds on the way to healing.

My subject is the *writing cure*. My questions are the following. How might literature help us 'work through' trauma? How far can narrative catharsis go and what are its limits? And finally: how might narrative healing differ in the case of little trauma (the existential wounds of birth, loss and death) and big trauma

(war, torture, catastrophe)? My chosen example is Joyce's *Ulysses*—itself a story which rewrites two other stories, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Homer's *Odyssey*. All three are stories of fathers and sons. Stories of transgenerational trauma, which I will suggest, are transmitted and somehow transfigured in the writing of the stories themselves.

I

In the opening of Joyce's *Ulysses* we are told by Haines that it's all about 'the father and the son idea. The son striving to be atoned with the father'. It doesn't take long for us to realize that the son is Stephen-Telemachus and the father Bloom-Ulysses. Their paths cross in the middle of the book as Stephen exits and Bloom enters the National Library in Dublin. It is a pivotal scene in which Stephen expounds his central theory of the father/son idea in *Hamlet*. His thesis is that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* the year his son, Hamnet, died and his own father, John Shakespeare, was dying. The play is about the transmission of mortal trauma between fathers and sons. In short, according to Stephen, Shakespeare wrote 'the book of himself' in order to avoid the madness of melancholy, in order to properly mourn his father and his son in a way that he was unable to do in life. The play itself thus serves as a symbolic 'working through' of an otherwise irresolvable crisis in which a father (King Hamlet) commands his son (Prince Hamlet) to do something impossible: that is, to remember what cannot be remembered! To tell something that cannot be told. A double injunction. An unbearable burden. An impossible story. The double bind of trauma. 'To speak is impossible, not to speak is impossible'.¹

'Remember me, remember me...', says the ghostly father to his son, while at the same time adding:

'But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison house
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul... (*Hamlet*, act 1, sc 5)

The ghost's unspeakable secrets—for which he is condemned to the latency of purgatory, those 'sulphurous and tormenting flames'—these very things are precisely what *remain* secret. The secret 'crimes committed in his days of nature'

¹ Schreiber: Weitz cited by Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1995, p. 154.

(youth) are, King Hamlet tells us, *forbidden* tales. In short, the things to be remembered cannot be told in the first place!

We are concerned here, I suggest, with traumas. Unspeakable things which we do not possess but which 'possess us'—like specters. For traumas, as Cathy Caruth writes, describe 'overwhelming experiences of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena'.² I think *Hamlet* perfectly qualifies.

II

Now, if this reading of *Ulysses* sounds psychoanalytic it is because it is. Joyce himself admitted to being deeply interested in Jung and Freud when he was 'jung and easily freudened' (*Finnegans Wake*). And the story is well known of him bringing his daughter, Lucia, to visit Jung in Zurich only to be told by Jung that he would be as incurably psychotic as his daughter if he had not penned *Ulysses*. Writing his book of transgenerational trauma—of Ulysses and Telemachus, of King and Prince Hamlet, of Stephen and Bloom—was, it seemed, the 'writing cure' for Joyce's own trauma. The book of himself. And Joyce concedes the creative liaison between literature and life when he confesses: 'It is a brave man who would invent something that never happened'. What happens in *Ulysses* happened to Joyce. He was the manic magpie who, by his own admission, gleaned every word of his story from the stories of history, personal or collective. His fiction is haunted by what he called the 'nightmares of history', the mute 'mothers of memory' that cry out to be heard, spoken, written. Phantasmal hauntings torment the young Stephen with 'agenbite of inwit'. They revisit him obsessively, guiltily, ineluctably. Both *Hamlet* and *Ulysses* relate such ghostings of narrative memory.

As for Freud, no such meeting took place; but I sometimes imagine Joyce reading Freud's seminal theory of trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—published in 1920 as Joyce was completing *Ulysses* (1922)—and wondering when he came to the *fort/da* scene if it did not confirm his own theory of catharsis in the *Portrait*? Recall how Freud witnessed his grandson Ernst's first spoken

² Cathy Caruth, 'Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History', *Yale French Studies*, 79 in *Literature and the Ethical Question*, ed. Claire Nouvet, Yale UP, New Haven, 1991, p. 181.

words—*gone/back again*—while playing with a wooden cotton-reel which he made vanish under his curtained cot and then reappear again in imitation of his mother's coming and going from the house, a cause of unbearable separation anxiety for the young child. In Freud's famous account of little Ernst's two syllable tale—*fort/da*—invented to compensate for the little 'trauma' of his parents' absence (mother away, father at war) might not Joyce have recognized echoes of his own fictional ploy to compensate for intolerable loss? In other words, might not both Freud and Joyce have witnessed the magical power of words to 'work through' wounds, albeit at very different levels? *Working through* as *writing through*? And more precisely, when Freud wrote of his grandson's loss of his mother was he not also writing about his *own* loss of his daughter: the same person—Sophie Freud. For Sophie was, significantly, Freud's favorite daughter who died tragically in January, 1920, several months before Freud, devastated by the loss, wrote the *fort/da* scene. (This scene, incidentally, is inserted in the book's narrative, quite abruptly, after Freud's initial outline of a series of examples of WW1 trauma. And this interpolation of a 'little trauma'—separation from a loved one—into Freud's seminal account of 'Big Trauma'—unspeakable violence at war—opens up, I believe, the whole conversation about relations between ordinary and extraordinary trauma).

My suggestion here is that the mirror play of Sophie Freud's 'disappearance', enacted between her father (Freud) and her son (Ernst), is a micro-drama of transgenerational trauma (with a small t). It signals a crossing of identifications where Freud is at once Sophie's father and son, 'writing the book of himself', as Joyce puts it, so as to mourn a departed loved one (a lost object). My corollary suggestion is that Joyce may have found writerly resonances in Freud's therapeutic narrative of *fort/da*. The longest short story ever told echoing the shortest!

This hypothesis is fantasy—but Joyce was a voracious reader and he does have his *Finnegans Wake* narrator boast: 'I can psaoakoonaloose myself any time I want!' (FW 11, 31-4, Penguin edition, p 522).

III

So, to return to *Ulysses*. When Stephen tells us that *Hamlet* is the story of Shakespeare's father-son relationship, he is echoing his relationship with his own fathers (Mr Dedalus and Bloom). And this story within a story is—please

bear with me!—itself a parody of Homer's original story of Ulysses and Telemachus. In other words: we are dealing here with stories within stories within stories. Fathers and sons, repeating, reliving and (perhaps to some significant extent) relieving trauma. Narrative as catharsis. But not narrative catharsis understood as closure or completion. Rather narrative as impossible story: storytelling which forever fails to *cure* trauma but never fails to try to *heal* it. And in this very effort itself there is pleasure: the pleasurable purgation of pity and fear.

Now, let's go back to the beginning. Homer's Ulysses. It is a standard motif of Greek myth that sons act like father's before them. Like father like son, and so on ad infinitum, until someone says 'stop!' That someone is the true storyteller who transposes the regressive repetition of trauma in life into a cathartic repetition in narrative. Think of the great cyclical myths. Zeus castrating Saturn castrating Ouranos. Orestes reiterating the curse of the house of Atreus. Or perhaps, most famously, Oedipus repeating the deeds of his father Laios. Recall: Laios raped the son of his host, Pelops, thereby committing the equivalent of incest and the betrayal of hospitality. His double transgression replicates the curse (*ate*) of his own father, Labdacos, and is repeated by Oedipus in the next generation. The continuing narrative lineage comes under the heading of the 'House of Labdacos' and involves a recurring acting out of unspoken *traumata* (Greek for 'wounds').

Lévi-Strauss has remarked how the three names of patrilinear descent in the story—Labdacos (lame), Laios (left-sided), Oedipus (swollen footed)—all refer to wounds which cause difficulties in walking. This fact, he suggests, which is symptomatic of a transfer of trauma over three generations (and four if one includes Antigone and wishes to open the discussion to fathers and daughters and, by extension, to contemporary feminist readings). The only solution to this curse of cyclical repetition is the conversion of the untold wound into some form of telling—in this case, the symbolic emplotment of Oedipus's tragic narrative. Only this, according to Lévi-Strauss after Aristotle, can bring some sort of catharsis which suspends—through the purging of pity and fear—the compulsive acting out of mute trauma. The basic thesis, in sum, is that myths are machines for the purging of wounds: strategies for resolving at a *symbolic* level what remains irresolvable at the level of lived *empirical* experience.

Human existence is cursed by a tragic, because impossible, desire to escape

the trauma of our autochthonous origins. Namely, the desire to buck our finitude. To deny death. In the Oedipus cycle, this tragic curse is epitomized, as noted, by the patrilineal names for wounds that bind us to the earth. And the poetic role of *muthos-mimesis* that comprises tragic drama (as Aristotle reminds us in the *Poetics*) is to narrate our heroic desires to transcend our terrestrial nature: Cadmos kills the dragon, Oedipus defeats the sphinx. But our desires are ultimately *impossible*: we are scarred by contrary and irreconcilable fidelities: to earth and sky, to immanence and transcendence, finitude and infinity, matter and spirit, nature and culture. For Lévi-Strauss, great mythic narratives — beginning with the synchronic myths of *la pensée sauvage*—are attempts to procure cathartic relief by balancing these binary opposites in symbolic constellations or ‘my themes’. In a word: what is impossible in reality becomes possible in fiction.

IV

So how might this reading relate to the father-son story of Ulysses and Telemachus? Let me say a word about Homer’s version and then proceed to Joyce’s.

Ulysses is condemned to act out the wound of his own failure, his own existential finitude, again and again. He has absented himself from the wounds of his birth and upbringing, his autochthonous origins in Ithaca, sailing off to heroic glory. But his attempts to become an immortal warrior are constantly countered by reminders of mortality (the brutal carnage of Troy and subsequent calamities). And the breaking of the lure of Calypso is also central to his disillusionment. Originally leaving Ithaca as an aspirant hero, Ulysses returns as a beggar: a lowly outcast only recognized by the smell of his flesh (by his dog, Argos) and the scar on his thigh (by his nurse, Euryclea). It is significant that Euryclea only touches her master’s scar after a detailed narrative about how Ulysses received the original wound in a childhood hunting incident with his grandfather, Autolycus (bk 19, v 393-469). Yet another example of transgenerational trauma. (Note that this narrative ‘working through’ leading up to the final, healing touch, takes all of seventy seven lines).

Telemachus, expecting a triumphant victor to return, does not at first recognize Ulysses; he is so fixated on his Great Expectations of the father that he does not see the ‘scar’ on his body. He is blinded by illusory imagos.

Delusions abound. When he finally acknowledges that the mortified stranger before him is in fact his real father, they sit down together and eat. Sharing simple food of the earth, squatting in a swineherd’s den, is how they finally come together as host and guest. Hospitality as antidote to the hostile curse of fate (*ate*).

The word Homer uses for ‘scar’ here is *oulen* (Od, 19.391). This is a term often associated in Greek literature with ‘trauma’, as in Plato’s *Gorgias*, 524c, ‘*oulas en to somati...hypo traumaton*’ where *oulen* means both ‘trace’ and ‘scar’. While the wound is timeless, the scar appears in time: it is a carnal trace which can change and alter over time though it never disappears. Scars are written on the body; they are forms of proto-writing. And narrative catharsis is a process of working through such carnal traces. Put simply: while the wounds remain timeless and unrepresentable, scars are the marks left on the flesh to be seen, touched, told and read. Scars are engraved wounds that may, or may not, be healed. I shall return to this distinction below.

V

So how, in the light of all this, does Homer’s epic compare with Joyce’s parody? Quite apart from the fact that we have leaped three thousand years — from a ‘cold’ synchronic literature to a ‘hot’ diachronic one—the ‘father-son idea’ repeats itself. But the repetition is *forward* not *backward*. That is what writing can do: give a future to the past. Joyce’s narrative invites a release from the haunting cycle of trauma. The story of Stephen and Bloom recounts their respective efforts to escape the loss of absent parents (Stephen’s mother and father) and a departed son (Bloom’s prematurely departed son, Rudy). They both seek a new bond of spiritual paternity-filiality; but they cannot find it for as long as they remain captive to their illusions of what this should be—Stephen’s fantasy of perfect fusion and Bloom’s obsession with his lost son. Only when they accept their condition of wounded finite beings —Stephen breaking with the literary elite of Dublin, Bloom returning home to Molly (with ‘less envy than equanimity, less jealousy than abnegation’). Only then can arise a love beyond illusion. Surrogate father and surrogate son exchange stories of failure and mourn lost illusions. Such love beyond loss is only a hint of course, a glint in Molly’s matinal eye. But enough of a narrative catharsis, nonetheless, to give the reader hope in another day—in beginning again. ‘Childman weary,

manchild in the womb'.

VI

So, to return one last time to Hamlet, we might ask this: why does Stephen Dedalus choose this particular story to work out his theory of the father-son idea? Let's take a closer look.

The ghost of King Hamlet asks his son to remember something that cannot be remembered. So, as already noted, the play begins with a tale that cannot be told, a testimony that cannot be transmitted—thereby breaking with the age-old sacred tradition of death-bed blessings passed from fathers to sons. (This breakage is an example of what Dori Laub calls the 'collapse of witnessing').³ Hamlet, we saw, knows his father is condemned to flames for a secret sin committed in his youth. But his father is forbidden by this very same sin to say what this is, that is, from telling his story. So Hamlet inherits a double injunction: remember, don't remember. (A confusion confounded by a supplementary injunction: intervene to stop your mother's incest, but don't do anything: 'let not thy soul contrive against thy mother aught'! No wonder the Dane is confused!) Thus here, as in many ancient narratives of trauma, blind acts of murder and incest are encrypted rather than confessed. Whence the inheritance of the wound as a mark in one's flesh—what Hamlet famously calls 'the mole of nature' which one inherits with one's birth. Hamlet spends the entire play trying to 'catch the conscience of the King', deploying the 'antique disposition' of mask and subterfuge, pun and quip, play and wit, so that he might 'by indirection find direction out'. But working through takes time. Patience. Five full acts! Truth only ultimately reveals itself when Hamlet succeeds in abandoning his illusions about a perfect father—'look here upon this picture and on this...' (Act 3, sc 2)—and accepts that he, no less than his father before him, is a failed, forked, mortal, finite thing. Henceforth, 'the readiness is all'.

This surrender of idealised imagos reaches its climax in the famous graveyard scene when Hamlet comes to realise that the father who loved him as a child and bore him daily on his shoulders was not, as he had imagined, his natural father, King Hamlet, but the long buried court jester, 'poor Yorick'.

³ Dori Laub, 'Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle' in Cathy Caruth (ed), *Trauma: Explorations of Memory*, pp 61f.

Only then is Hamlet the son ready to act according to something beyond himself—'a divinity that shapes (his) ends'—acknowledging his own mortal condition. Now the 'readiness is all'. And here, as in *King Lear*, wisdom comes from the lowliest of creatures. *Hamlet* the son dies, the play hints, poisoned by the same sword that Hamlet the father used to poison King Fortinbras on the day Hamlet was born. And, to follow this hint of the grave scene, it was this secret poisoning which led to the cycle of further killings of Kings by Kings (Fortinbras, Hamlet, Claudius) and sons by sons (Hamlet, Laertes and—almost—Fortinbras). Inhumations and exhumations. Cryptings and decryptions. Secrets of the grave whisper through the mouths of fools.

This fatal circle of repetition only comes to an end when Hamlet himself becomes the sacrificial symptom of cyclical acting out and exposes the wound in his own body where the sword entered. Note that the fatal wounds of King Hamlet's body were never seen or touched by his son as 'scars', for the poisoned King was 'to his grave untimely sent', his prematurely decomposing body having to be interred without ceremony: Hamlet never saw the corpse of his father—just as Shakespeare himself, as Stephen reminds us, never saw the corpse of his son, Hamnet. The wounds were never witnessed as scars. Once again, we find a 'collapse of witnessing' which makes for traumatic 'delay'. Traumas are revisited as ghosts, coming back again and again, after the event, *revenants après coup*. Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*.

(This phenomenon of delay is extremely relevant, I think, for an understanding of our own contemporary culture's fear around dying and death. In former times, mourners were encouraged to have direct and sustained funerary witness of dead bodies before burial (think of the Irish wake for example). And this culture of death-denial is manifest today in all kinds of symptomatic avoidance behavior faced with the wounds of disabled and otherwise scarred persons. To take just one example: might not a mass social media phenomenon like Facebook—where we 'prepare a face to meet the faces that we meet' in a virtual climate of mandatory cheer—might this not also prove to be, deep down, a book of ghosts?)

Let me sum up. Because the son did not witness the father going down into his grave, this absence was engraved in his flesh. The loss, the lack, the gap of the empty grave, the missingness, all this was encrypted as a suppressed 'right of memory' waiting five full acts of 'procrastination' to be retrieved. This is,

perhaps, the reason T.S. Eliot described *Hamlet* as an 'artistic failure' if also the most written about drama in western culture. And it is also the reason why André Green describes *Hamlet* as the greatest literary performance of unconscious trauma and recovery, to which psychoanalysts have been endlessly drawn like kittens to a ball of wool.

In short: Fathers and sons—sons and fathers. Eventually it is Hamlet's own sacrificial surrender which enables the play's other fatherless son, Prince Fortinbras, to live on: to survive the fatal curse which ghosted the whole revenge cycle for generations. Hamlet's dying words to Horatio say it all, 'absent thee from felicity awhile/to tell my story'. The story that could not be told is finally told—though it took five acts. And the closing words of the Fifth Act are delivered by Fortinbras himself, finally set free—by Hamlet's sacrifice—to recover the crypted memory of his father: 'I have certain rights of memory to this kingdom', concludes Fortinbras, 'which now to claim advantage doth invite me'. Memory and story cross in mourning. And if there is catharsis, for us the audience, it is indeed a purging of pity and fear.

VII

Much more could be said here about narrative catharsis.

There is Aristotle's theory of cathartic affect in the *Poetics* and Joyce's rewriting of it in *A Portrait of the Artist*. There is the difference between catharsis as it effects the *author* and the *audience*: where Aristotle focuses on the purgation of the spectators' emotions, Joyce also applies it to narrators, real or implied. His own poetic persona included:

*Myself unto myself do give
This name Katharsis-Purgative...
Bringing to Tavern and to Brothel
The mind of witty Aristotle. ('Holy Office')*

Then there is the question of the respective therapeutic roles of *imagination*, *cognition* and *emotion* (Paul Ricoeur, for example, has much to say on this in his rereading of Aristotelian catharsis in *Time and Narrative*⁴). And there is, crucially, the difference between catharsis in lower case trauma—the 'originary traumas' of birth, loss and death—and in upper case trauma—torture, rape, abuse,

catastrophe and genocide. These latter examples of Big Trauma often involve such appalling terror (*Schreck*) that several experts claim—among them Judith Herman, Berel Lang, and Claude Lanzmann—that no catharsis is possible at all. This last point raises the critical question of the ultimate *limits* of catharsis: what traumas may, or may not, be subject to narrative healing.

I would like to repeat, in closing, that we need to think about the genuinely cathartic role of trauma stories as requiring open narratives that never end, rather than closed narratives that presume to wish away *wounds* rather than working through *scars*. Trauma narratives are by their very nature truncated, gapped, fractured, inconclusive. They may be great stories but they can never offer terminal solutions. There are no total cures. Writings can only work through traumas as *traces*, revisit them as hauntings; they can never fully retrieve such experiences or tell the full story. In the transposition from inexpressible wound to written scar there is something lost in translation. Invariably. Why? Because the 'wound' is precisely that which could never be properly registered or recorded in the first place. It was because it was 'too much' that trauma repeats itself as *lack*. Trauma narratives are scabs over the cavities left by inexperienced experience.

Recall, in conclusion, our three stories.

The trauma inherited by Hamlet—namely, his father's murder by Claudius on top of his father's sin committed on Hamlet's birthday—is something *hinted* at in the play; it is never openly stated. Moreover, the fact that his father's death and burial are 'missed' by Hamlet—who was absent in Wittenberg—is a further token of 'inexperienced experience'; and this is linked in its own murky way with Hamlet's mother's incest with Claudius. Secrets everywhere. Plays within plays. Cypherings and decypherings. (Which is why André Greene, Nicolas Abraham and other psychoanalysts have hunted obsessively to untangle the mystery—without success). Shakespeare's drama engraves traces of buried trauma which Hamlet resolves to exhume—as in the grave diggers' scene—but never finally exposes. Many bodies are rotten and rotting in the state of Denmark (from its eponymous King to the disappeared Polonius). But they are all hidden away. Behind walls and wainscotings, lies and disguise, screens and 'seems'. All we have are odors, ashes, allusions—oblique ciphers less deciphered than played with (like cotton-reels or gallows wit) and played out (in imitated suffering and action).

⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol 1, ch 2, Chicago UP, Chicago, 1984.

In this sense the play's very success is its failure. Hamlet's manic-melancholic words swarm like bees over the black hole of an empty hive. But they can never fill in the gaping wound; only, at best, conjure and confront the invisible ghosts within. The narrative catharsis comes ultimately not from the cognition of discovery (we never *know* exactly what happened) but a curiously liberating recognition of recovery. Failing to gain full knowledge of his father's unspoken crime (laconically mentioned in Act 1), Hamlet nonetheless comes to acknowledge the limits of his own finite, humble existence—his crucial lesson in the grave scene. Indeed, the fact that King Hamlet's hidden story (the real reason he is condemned to purgatory) *remains* buried throughout the play, only returning as spectral intimation, itself performs Prince Hamlet's inability to discover his own story and, by extension, our own inability, as audience, to discover the unfathomable story of the play. *Hamlet* is a tragedy of trauma: it recounts the impossibility of saying the unsayable.

Similar issues of 'unsayability' surround the unspoken traumas of Stephen and Odysseus. There are signs here as well but they too are equally crypted: Stephen's over-determined guilt, Odysseus' occluded scar. And we, as readers, may in turn hypothesize about the nature of the various *authors'* own engraved wounds. For instance: What Homeric trauma, personal or collective, lies behind the long forgotten story of Odysseus's infantile wound? How deep was Shakespeare's shame at missing his own son's funeral, currying favor with a barbarous Queen, abandoning his father's forbidden Catholicism? And, to give Joyce the last word: what traumas, little or big, may have been reactivated by his incidental mugging in a Roman night street? Guilt at abandoning his mother and family? The painful break with his city and culture? Or perhaps, father back still, the untold historical rupture inherited from the Great Irish Famine with its extinctions, evictions and exiles?

This last transgenerational wound is rarely acknowledged by Joyceans (itself arguably a symptom of elusiveness). But for all its neglect it is, I suspect, a key aspect of Joyce's native unconscious. Joyce himself was born in 1882 less than thirty years after The Great Hunger ended, a catastrophe that split Ireland into pre and post famine history witnessing a million dead and another million banished (almost a third of the population between 1847-1852). Joyce's father and grandfather lived through this unspeakable horror though like most witnesses who survived at home or abroad, the pain of *an Drochshaoil* (or 'bad

times' as they were elliptically known in Irish) went largely unwritten at the time. So if Stephen vows at the end of *A Portrait* to 'forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race', is it not logical that this massive gash in the national psyche would return in his next novel, *Ulysses*, as an irrepressible haunting? A stammering tale demanding to be heard?

This is, I submit, what happens. The references are oblique but they are pervasive, as Luke Gibbons and other critics have recently shown: from Stephen's dead mother's phantasmal returns to Bloom's frequent allusions to hunger, soup kitchens and potatoes—he even carries one in his pocket as talisman! 'You don't know whose thoughts you're chewing on', muses Bloom, 'Famished ghosts. Ah I'm hungry'. Or as the Daughters of Erin (also called the 'daughters of memory') sing in the 'Circe' episode: 'Potato, Preservative against Plague and Pestilence, Pray for us!' The allusions are multiple if characteristically muted. Much hermeneutic digging is required. Here as in Hamlet's graveyard or Odysseus' childhood. (Yorick and Euroclyea as child reminders). Throughout, wounded authors call for readers, traces for interpretations, hints for guesses, cyphers for thoughts.

To sum up: Joyce's narrative of his native psyche shows that past wounds are never completely past, no matter how much one prays. The psychic palimpsest of personal and historical abandonment finds expression in the ineradicable wounds of what Stephen calls 'banishment from the heart, banishment from the home'.⁵ Joyce identified similar experiences of 'sundering' in both Shakespeare and Homer whose traumatized heroes also carry indelible scars of exile and injury. Like his literary predecessors before him, Joyce grafted stories onto histories—forgotten, repressed, occulted or stolen. His narratives were secreted from those 'nightmares of history' which, by Joyce's own admission, made his writing 'the last word in stollentelling'. *Ulysses* is, I wager, a tireless literary effort to awaken, cathartically, from such historic nightmares by restoring forfeited stories and bringing ghosts back to life. It is, in short, a work of mourning and recovery. A writing which translates wounds into scars, flesh into fiction. A working through of trauma.

⁵ Michael D Higgins and Declan Kiberd, 'Culture and Exile: The Global Irish' in *New Hibernia Review*, vol 1, no 3, 1997, pp 10-11.