Inscribing James Joyce's Tombstone

BERNARD BENSTOCK

Preamble

A reexamination of literary modernism, and Joyce's role as a modernist, might well concern itself with the relationship between inscription and description, between the spoken and the written word, the living and the dead, the voice and the written text. "Inscribing James Joyce's Tombstone" isolates the tombstone as a simulacrum of the literary artifact—both as claimed by the individual artist and as attributed by an external audience—and as a device for questioning the status of narrative voice as opposed to narration.

Modernists have been credited with opening up a new relationship with the past (Pound's MAKE IT NEW and Gertrude Stein's "continuous present" and Joyce's "continuous present tense" of "cyclewheeling history"), implying a rethought relationship between the past and the present, the ancient and the modern. Modernists were especially sensitive to the degree to which the present will soon fade into the past, the living voice (heard throughout all modernist texts) will soon be deadened into the written epitaph. In "The Preludes" T. S. Eliot isolated "grimy scraps / Of withered leaves about your feet / And newspapers from vacant lots," and in "East Coker" the same wind shakes "the tattered arras with a silent motto." Later in "East Coker," Eliot comments on "a lifetime burning in every moment / And not the lifetime of one man only / But of old stones that cannot be deciphered." I will be turning over old stones and attempting to read silent mottoes, employing Joyce as a test case of the ways in which writing emerges in modernist works as both subject matter and writing practice, and investigating differences in status between various kinds of written texts within the larger text: postcards, letters, newspaper notices, tombstones.
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We are all aware that James Joyce has had the honor of having been buried twice, the first time as a pauper, the second as a celebrity. It is that first flat, embedded tombstone that interests me at the moment, a small, simple rectangle that marked his burial in Fluntern cemetery on 15 January 1941, with the laconic inscription: JAMES JOYCE 1882–1941. So terse a commentary seems hardly worthy of so overwhelmingly verbal a writer, who himself scratched endless additions on galleys and placards of his endlessly extendable Ulysses. How disproportionate compared to the commemorative awarded a totally insignificant Dubliner in Ulysses, who is granted a whole quatrain:

It is now a month since dear Henry fled
To his home up above in the sky
While his family weeps and mourns his loss
Hoping some day to meet him on high.

(U 91)

Dear Henry's epitaph, however, is not that which had been engraved in stone, but merely set in type on the pages of the Freeman's Journal, and in this meandering quest for the perfect Joyce inscription, I will be gravitating between the printed and the engraved, the scriptural and the sepulchral. The easy modulation between the two was apparent within a year of Joyce's death, when Louis Gillet published Stèle pour James Joyce, the Grecian stele-stone serving as prototype for the book title—a book itself structured along the lines of a stele. Where the context shows itself to be indeterminate—as in the list of Finnian characteristics in the riddles chapter of Finnegans Wake—the gap between print and embossing diminishes: "his birth proved accidental shows death its grave mistake" (FW 134.20–21). Here the succinctness and the subject matter conspire to make this grave statement as apt as the dates 1882 and 1941, the boundaries of the message clearly set.

Nowhere has the potency of a tombstone inscription been as sanctified (and simultaneously derided) as in William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!, where Mr. Compson comments about the family of mourners, noting that "to them their funerals and graves, the puny affirmations of spurious immortality set above the slumber, are of incalculable importance." Puny affirmations are apparent to Bloom as he glances at the Freeman's Journal, noting the pathos of "dear Henry fled." The obituary verse, that printed remembrance a month after the funeral, seems pathetically transitory to Bloom: "Inked
characters fast fading on the frayed breaking paper” (U 91), he comments. From paper then to stone: soon after, the funeral carriage that carries Bloom and the other mourners nears the cemetery, and he muses:


Puny affirmations have not as yet expressed themselves, since the unbought, unmarked stones are silent, awaiting the appropriate death, and there is no message there for Bloom to read. As an advertising canvasser, however, Bloom reads the message of the living, the self-advertisement of the monumental builder and sculptor Thos. H. Dennany, who is responsible for the sign that claims The best obtainable. In his hyperbolic description Dennany emerges as an avatar of God—and of James Joyce the Creator, monumental builder and sculptor.

After the funeral service, the casual mourners “moved away slowly, without aim, by devious paths, staying awhile to read a name on a tomb” (U 112), Bloom among them. And he now allows himself some random thoughts on funeral literature, the writings on the stones:

Who passed away. Who departed this life. As if they did it of their own accord. Got the shove, all of them. Who kicked the bucket. More interesting if they told you what they were. So and so, wheelwright. I travelled for cork lino. I paid five shillings in the pound. Or a woman’s with her saucepan. I cooked good Irish stew. Eulogy in a country churchyard it ought to be that poem of whose is it Wordsworth or Thomas Campbell. Entered into rest the protestants put it. Old Dr Murren s. The great physician called him home. (U 113)

Bloom’s botched attributions are themselves diagnostic: William Wordsworth may not have been responsible for Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”—and neither was Thomas Campbell—but Wordsworth did indeed write an “Essay on Epitaphs.” Even more significantly, Bloom has shifted the emphasis from the elegiac to the eulogistic, and in the process domesticates the specific pieces of information.

Had Joyce sought a similar style of immortality for himself, he need only to have waited until the memorial plaques began appearing
on the walls of his cities of residence and refuge, in Dublin on the houses where he was born and where Bloom lived (one of them at least probably the correct address) and on a park bench for himself and his father; and in Trieste, Rome, Zurich, and St. Gérard-le-Puy. A street staircase in Trieste, for example, was renamed Scala James Joyce, with the familiar opening and closing dates, but a bit more largesse than the pauperstone: “Scrittore Irlandese,” it reads, which Bloom might translate as “He cooked good Irish stew.” At one of his Triestine residences the information recorded is that he wrote the first chapter of *Ulysses* there (which is a start), while at the house in Rome where his brief odyssey had once taken him the plaque reports that Joyce evoked the story of Ulysses. Knowing as we do that “Not marble, nor the gilded monuments of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme,” it is not surprising that the city of Zurich chose the most enduring of the eight Joyce residences there for the single plaque, what is now a dormitory for nurses and therefore least likely to be bulldozed for urban renewal. It was disappointing that no plaque was placed at Elsinore, during the Symposium, since the castle there also looked as if it might withstand the temptation for urban renewal.¹

Tombstone literature provides a form of post-creation, a filling in of the blank, but within a restrictive space. Nietzsche’s declaration that God is dead serves as an epitaph, neither elegiac nor eulogistic; Roland Barthes’s contention that the author is dead (Joyce might have preferred “refined out of existence”), placed alongside Nietzsche’s, neatly parallels God and the author, a parallel that already has a Joycean imprimatur. The ways in which the creation outlasts the creator—and even retrospectively mocks the Creator—are suggested at various instances and in various manners throughout the Joyce canon. When he sent *Chamber Music* from Trieste to Elkin Mathews, the live inspiration was in full force, yet when it was accepted for publication, Joyce regretted the death of that inspiration, and even considered cabling London to have the poems retracted, labeling them “dishonest,” having essentially outlived them. The telegram, had it been sent, would have served as a death notice, or even a death warrant, but Joyce’s ultimate revenge was already destined to be engraved on the cover of the book, the title having been chosen both for its suggestion of restrained lyricism and its allusion to chamber pot tinklings.
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The history of the *Finnegans Wake* title, a title that spells the death of poor Finnegan (but not for long), is accepted as a commonplace by Joyceans, but can still cause a raised eyebrow when reported to normal people. During the sixteen years of composition that title, known only by its creator, was mysteriously and superstitiously withheld from public knowledge, until the tentatively titled *Work in Progress* was completed and the epitaphic statement was about to be embossed on the book. The hundreds of pages of galleys now in the Lucie and Paul Léon/James Joyce Collection at the University of Tulsa library indicate that even the printers in Glasgow thought that the ultimate title was *Work in Progress*: every signature page has its WiP. From 1923 to 1938 the hypothetical cover of the book was a blank, like Thomas Dennany’s hewn stone, in white silence, awaiting completion, awaiting a death, for a lasting inscription.

No matter how minimal or condensed the memorial message may be, there is often the possibility that it says *more* than intended, or more than should have been intended. Triestine pride of place credits the city for being the site where Joyce began *Ulysses*, while the Roman plaque addresses Romans who may never have heard of the wandering Joyce, but certainly heard of the wandering Ulysses, the Latinized Odysseus. What would one expect, for instance, as an epitaph for the creator of as famous a literary personage as Sherlock Holmes, and what does his epitaph actually specify?

**STEEL TRUE**
**BLADE STRAIGHT**
**ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE**
**KNIGHT**
**Patriot, Physician & Man of Letters**

A grateful nation had knighted him for his propagandistic pamphlet justifying the British action in the Boer War. At the tag end he is, however, remembered as a “man of letters.”

With the same degree of calculation, James Joyce was himself quite skillful in writing the extended death notice, the overly informative but concise capsulization of a life. On the opening pages of his first story, an important message replaces the notice that appeared on “ordinary days... *Umbrellas Re-covered*.” Instead, the boy in “The Sisters” reads from “a card pinned on the crape”:
The story of Father Flynn is the story of a man who has died twice: how absolute is that telltale "formerly of S. Catherine's," insisting on the first death, which the boy will only learn about after he has absorbed the message of the second death of a priest whose first coffin was a confession box.

Leopold Bloom spends his time at Glasnevin cemetery "reading" coffins, and hits upon a concept of post-creation that involves the recuperation of some aspect of the newly deceased, discovering the possibility of the voice as the medium of retaining the living experience by gramophonic re-creation:

Have a gramophone in every grave or keep it in the house. After dinner on Sunday. Put on poor old greatgrandfather Kraahraark! Hellohellohello amawfullyglad kraark awfullyglada-seeragain hellohello amawf kopthsth. Remind you of the voice like the photograph reminds you of the face. (U 114)

No such creaking recording exists for Bloom of any of his ancestors, and it is with alacrity that he transfers the "speaking epitaph" out of the grave and places it in the home. In his own home, of course, he keeps various memorabilia of his dead father (whose speaking voice will pursue him later through Nighttown). The written recordings of his father's words are retained in the old man's suicide note that Bloom retrieves (not for the first time) in Ithaca from the bureau drawer. The broken phrases retrieved from that retrieval serve as the dead man's own funeral inscription, his attempt to write the posthumous message of importance ("it is of no use" or "with your dead mother" or "all for me is out"), but most graphically in the italicized final fragments:

\[ \text{das Herz. . Gott...dein. (U 723)} \]

(The great hotel proprietor called him home.) Carefully preserved, and handled only by the intended recipient, the suicide note withstands the onslaughts of time better than the "inked characters fast fading on the frayed breaking paper"—a paper, incidentally, that Bloom was intent on throwing away.
Far more substantial and permanent are words carved in stone (Shakespeare’s “unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time”), and none is as monumental as the Commandments, celebrated by Professor McHugh conjuring up the voice of John F. Taylor (and available to us in a gramophone recording made by greatgrandfather Joyce). Taylor is quoted as intoning: “He would never have spoken with the Eternal amid lightnings on Sinai’s mountaintop nor ever have come down with the light of inspiration shining in his countenance and bearing in his arms the tables of the law, graven in the language of the outlaw” (U 143). The Mosaic tablature marks not a death and interment, but the birth of a religion, a people, a race, a civilization. The gravity of that engraving allows for no measure of levity, yet the Joycean perspective is often tempered by tables of a different color, particularly the Smaragdine Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus, where Joyce found that “that which is below is like that which is above” (or, in Finneganeanese, “‘The tasks above are as the flasks below, saith the emerald canticle of Hermes’”—FW 263.21-22). Bloom’s tendency to trivialize, or perhaps merely to domesticate, reflects the temptation to reduce exalted properties to the mundane, and the Tables of the Law return in Ulysses to just a reduction. In Aeolus the subject had been the subjected Gaelic and Hebrew races, but in Ithaca it is the Gold Cup, and Bloom’s awareness that he had inadvertently tipped Throwaway as the winner:

when Frederick M. (Bantam) Lyons had rapidly and successively requested, perused and restituted the copy of the current issue of the Freeman’s Journal and National Press which he had been about to thrown away (subsequently thrown away), he had proceeded towards the oriental edifice of the Turkish and Warm Baths, 11 Leinster street, with the light of inspiration shining in his countenance and bearing in his arms the secret of the race, graven in the language of prediction. (U 676)

The Ascot race replaces the Hebrew race, the newspaper the tablets; Bloom replaces Moses, the language of prediction the language of the outlaw.

The Tables of the Law come replete with an implied author, whose name remains ineffable and whose signature a constant in the landscape. Bloom’s sense of caution prevents him from uttering the name of Jesus Christ, and that of Blazes Boylan (things above and things below), a moral censoring that may have less to do with his discomfort with the Christian religion, which had been so ineptly
assigned to him, than a carryover from the older faith that prohibited the use of the Ineffable Name. Moses had requested a signatory name for the tables and received instead the epigraphic "I am that I am." On the level of things below, Bloom attempted the signature of self-identification on a tablature even less permanent than paper or stone, the sandy beach at Sandymount, printing in virtual darkness with a wooden stick "I...AM. A."—the message remaining incomplete, the signature absent. Even as he begins, he realizes the futility of the writing, simultaneously recognizing that a more permanent script already exists around him: "All these rocks with lines and scars and letters." His final verdict on the transitory nature of his effort is that "All fades," an echo of his verdict on "Inked characters fast fading" (U 381). His intended inscription might have been more identifying, individuating, confessing, conjecturing, complaining than merely "I travelled for cork lino" or "paid five shillings in the pound."

On the same strand Stephen had mused, "Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot" (U 37). Were he to repeat his stroll on Sandymount Strand the next day, his might be the "flatfoot" that Bloom assumes would "tramp" on his writing "in the morning," which he prevents by tramping on it himself, effacing "the letters with a slow boot" (U 381). If it was God's signature Stephen was intent on reading, he had already proven himself master of that reading when the writing was on material even more transitory than sand: he had identified the combination of "whirring whistle" and preceding cheers from the hockey field as "God...A shout in the street" (U 34). The shout and the whistle are then transcribed on the printed page, in imitation of auditory effects, as "Hooray! Ay! Whrrwhee!"—on close inspection these prove to be the Tetragammaton, containing Y.H.W.H. in abundance, Yahweh written on the wind. Stephen later attempts to codify his own identity, a historical continuity of shifting selves from past into future:

But I, entelechy, form of forms, am I by memory because under everchanging forms...

I, I and I. I.
A.E. I. O. U.
(U 190)

In each case the self-signature represents a transitional stage of selfhood, potentially seeking realization, nonetheless under the final
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rubric of the accomplished self. Thereafter, Stephen codifies the interrelationship of that Self with an Other, in this mundane instance that of theosophist George Russell, his creditor. Russell had determined that most minimal of signatures in the digraph AE—in itself reflected in that small word of vastness, aeon—but to both Stephen and Bloom the linked letters are separated into commonplace initials, so that Bloom can conjecture on "Albert Edward, Arthur Edmund, Alphonsus Eb Ed El Esquire" (U 165), a further exercise in trivialization, a means of reducing the augmented and auspicious to human and mundane commodities—common names. Stephen has done precisely the same in "signing" an I.O.U. to AE—"haggling over money."

In A Portrait Stephen learned early on that proper names were boxes into which people were put—or put themselves. "Victoria and Stephen and Simon, Simon and Stephen and Victoria. Names" (P 92). Boxed in between his father and the name of the hotel where they are staying, he is boxed in between the Name of the Father and the Name of the Queen, "a servant of two masters." To re-name himself posits a way of escaping from a preordained box, so when invited to consider a vocation as a Jesuit, "His new name in that new life leaped into characters before his eyes": "The Reverend Stephen Dedalus S. J." (P 161). The face he imagines as accompanying the name is not his own, however, but "a mental spectre of the face of one of the jesuits whom some of the boys called Lantern Jaws and others Foxy Campbell." Even the augmented and reverend name is externally determined, preordained and determining by ordination, so that in Ulysses he realizes that names are "impostures...Cicero, Podmore, Napoleon, Mr Goodbody, Jesus, Mr Doyle" (U 622). Names are externally imposed, and the act of naming a part of the process of literary creation. Having slipped past the trap of a clerical calling, Stephen passes a "squad of Christian brothers," and hears one of them addressed as "Brother Hickey" (P 165), and having decided that "Their piety would be like their names, like their faces," he goes on to impose names on the others:

Brother Quaid.
Brother MacArdle.
Brother Keogh.

(P 166)

"Low" Irish names box them in, diminish them, despite the elevation
of their calling. In effect, Stephen is engraving their tombstones—irrevocably—as he does for all those who have betrayed him.

Of the three “friends” who span A Portrait and Ulysses, Cranly, Lynch, and Mulligan, each is disposed of with a unique method of entablature. Stephen effectively decapitates the unfaithful Cranly in the diary pages, “a stern severed head or deathmask” (P 248), and writes his epitaph at two stages in Ulysses: “Cranly’s arm”; “Cranly’s smile” (U 7, 184), relics of the dead friend (the embracing arm and the disarming smile designate the betrayer). Lynch is renamed as Judas and condemned to hanging (“Exit Judas. Et laqueo se suspendit”—U 600). But for Mulligan three affixing nails are chosen: looking at his golden teeth, he pronounces “Chrystostomos” (U 3); turning his back on the renter of the tower, he assigns “Usurper” (U 23); and mistrusting the intentions of Mulligan’s embracing arm, he decides “Catamite” (U 204). In contrast to such serious and stately applications of summary accusations, we can turn to that of the Alf Bergan (or possibly Richie Goulding) deathnote for the pathetic Denis Breen, the devastatingly dismissive “U.P.: up” (U 158) and read that as Breen’s epitaph.

The postcard sent to Denis Breen serves as a paper tombstone, equivalent in size and shape, one supposes, to those library slips that Stephen keeps forgetting to appropriate for the writing of his verse. Stephen had, on at least one previous occasion, found himself without the necessary sheet of writing paper, foolscap, sheepskin, parchment, papyrus, without which no writer since Homer could long survive: in A Portrait he awoke with nocturnal inspiration and no bedside tablet:

Fearing to lose all, he raised himself suddenly on his elbow to look for paper and pencil... He stretched his arm wearily towards the foot of the bed, groping with his hand in the pockets of the coat that hung there. His fingers found a pencil and then a cigarette packet, placed the last cigarette on the window ledge and began to write out the stanzas of the villanelle in small neat letters on the rough cardboard surface. (P 218–19)

In Ulysses an alternative expediency presents itself: on Sandymount Strand, reading the signature of all things, he is inspired to write his “pale vampire” quatrain, and like Hamlet calls for “My tablets.” Again he searches his pockets:

Paper. The banknotes, blast them. Old Deasy’s letter. Here. Thanking you for hospitality tear the blank end off. Turning
his back to the sun he bent over far to a table of rock and scribbled words. That's twice I forgot to take slips from the library counter. (U 48)

When the poem resurfaces in Aeolus, Miles Crawford makes the obvious assumption and nastily asks, "Who tore it? Was he short taken?" (U 132).

The cloacal inference, assuming that the missing piece was used as emergency toilet paper, establishes the relationship between poetic inspiration and the excremental, just as the villanelle had fixed the relationship between poetic inspiration and nocturnal emissions, leading directly to the making of ink out of feces in *Finnegans Wake*. The formula for making "indelible ink" by producing "nichthemerically from his unheavenly body a no uncertain quantity of obscene matter not protected by copyright in the United Stars of Ourania" (*FW* 185.26–31) almost all Joyceans have now accomplished in their own laboratories, but what Shem uses in lieu of library slips is also significant in the inscribing of the Joycean tombstone: "every square inch of the only foolscap available, his own body" (*FW* 185.35–36).

Writing on the body not only transcends such prosaic materials as cigarette packets and the bottoms of letters, or even Baudelairean bottoms, but places the Joycean inscription within a taboo area, violating the proscription in the Old Testament. Whereas Exodus 32.16 proclaims what God wrote and on what surface ("the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables"), Leviticus 21.5 specifies a surface that may *not* be engraved: "They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh." Those who have been fortunate to have heard Jane Marcus’s paper, "Laughing at Leviticus," will be familiar with the text that she explicates in the light of a violation of this prohibition, Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood*, in various ways a companion text to *Ulysses*, or perhaps a work that negotiates the space between *Ulysses* and the *Wake*.

In *Nightwood* Dr. O’Connor recalls a circus bear-fighter, tattooed over every square inch of his own unheavenly body:

There he was, crouching all over the arena without a stitch on, except an ill-concealed loin-cloth all abulge as if with a deep-sea catch, tattooed from head to heel with all the *ameublement* of depravity! Garlanded with rosebuds and hackwork of the devil—was he a sight to see! Though he couldn’t have done a
thing (and I know what I am talking about in spite of all that has been said about the black boys) if you stood him in a gig-mill for a week, though (it’s said) at a stretch it spelled Desdemona.

O’Connor spares us none of his descriptive powers, reading ad infinitum that writing on Nikka’s body, ending with the inscription on the bottom:

And just above what you mustn’t mention, a bird flew carrying a streamer on which was incised, “Garde tout!”

O’Connor’s concern with Nikka’s genitalia—in both tumescence and detumescence—is hardly casual, as he himself exposes his own in the Church of St. Merri, bewailing its very existence and giving it an appellation that serves as its death knell: Tiny O’Toole. At a stretch Nikka’s tool spells Desdemona (he therefore signs himself as Othello the Moor), but at its far more usual repose, one can only speculate that a variant of the hoary joke makes it a mere Mona. Tumescence and detumescence bother the mind of Bloom-the-Scribe on Sandymount Strand: his own masturbation he aligns with the pyrotechnics: “My fireworks! Up like a rocket, down like a stick,” (U 371). His attempted message in the sand, written with a “Bit of stick,” proves impossible, after which “He flung his wooden pen away. The stick fell in silted sand, stuck” (U 381). He observes the phenomenon with awe, and comments: “Now if you were trying to do that for a week on end you couldn’t.” The wooden pen, the Roman candle, the erect penis: Bloom, whose own body is undoubtedly innocent of any carvings proscribed by Leviticus, has in effect written with his wooden pen on the naked flesh of Gerty MacDowell, just as Nikka, himself a parchment for any and every tattoo artist, is maligned as phallically unable to write on the body of Desdemona.

What literature offers regarding the esoteric art of tattooing may be minimal—and marginal at best—but several instances are worth noting, keeping in mind the able-bodied Murphy who shows off the nautical and numerical carvings on his chest, also admitting that his body is constantly in the process of being written upon by lice and other vermin. In García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude José Arcadio emerges from the jungle covered with tattoos: “there was not a square inch of his body that was not tattooed, front and back, and from his neck to his toes.” (Compared to Nikka and Shem and José Arcadio, the Marine who has “Mother” inscribed on his bicep is a minimalist.) José Arcadio has been written upon
by his exile, his wanderings, his experiences in the jungle. In Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" the method of punishment employs a machine that carves its message into the flesh of the convicted felon, a sadistic analogue to God's brand on the forehead of Cain. The seafaring tradition accounts for the incredibly memorable Queequeg in Melville's *Moby Dick*, whose "dark, purplish, yellow skin" is covered with tattoos of "large, blackish looking squares"; and of the protagonist of John Hawkes' *Second Skin*, whose daughter Cassandra forces him to have a name tattooed on his chest in green, but not the name he expected. And in Shakespeare's *King John*, the dying monarch makes no secret that it is Death that is writing on his entire body:

> I am a scribbled form, drawn with a pen
> Upon a parchment, and against this fire
> Do I shrink up.

Almost in the same breath that God prohibits carving on the body, He also insists on circumcision, His own carving on every male body, of which Bloom is also innocent. Under that guise God is referred to by Mulligan as "the collector of prepuces" (*U* 13), and he underwrites the Nietzschean death notice by asserting that "Jehovah, the collector of prepuces, is no more" (*U* 201). Circumcision serves as God's signature on all things, and the Dedalian/Shemian insistence on writing on any available surface, even the human flesh, pronounces the open defiance of God's exclusive privilege. The artistic creator rivals God the creator, despite the awful threats from a Deity described in the *Wake* as "Him Which Thundereth From On High" (nonetheless capable of "abundant mercy"—*FW* 62.13-14). Shem, consequently, is characterized as "Tumult, Son of Thunder, self exiled in upon his ego, a nightlong a shaking betwixteen white or reddr hawrors, noondayterrorised to skin and bone by an ineluctable phantom (may the Shaper have mercery on him!) writing the mystery of himsel in furniture" (*FW* 185.36-186.2). Carving one's initials or name in furniture ("'I, I and I. I'"—or the word "'Foetus'") is minimal immortality compared to the message on the tombstone, and the transportation of the letter "F," missing from "'himself,'" changes the tablature from furniture to funereal urn.

Shem insists that he has been denied "romeruled stationery," and must resort to making "synthetic ink and sensitive paper for his own end out of his wit's waste" (*FW* 185.5-8), yet in *A Portrait*, where such deprivations originate, the surfaces for inscriptions are as
numerous as they are ubiquitous; the desks in schoolrooms, the bulletin boards on school walls, the flyleaves of books, the walls of toilets, the signs on street walls, the slates in a school yard. From his first days at Clongowes, Stephen claims his territory as the world, inscribing himself as a resident of that world in his geography book, yet Fleming usurps that privilege and rewriting Stephen's inscription—"for a cod" (P 16). Also for a cod, the "thick slabs of slate" in the Clongowes square are anonymously inscribed, and

Behind the door of one of the closets there was a drawing in red pencil of a bearded man in Roman dress with a brick in each hand and underneath was the name of the drawing:

Balbus was building a wall.

Some fellows had drawn it there for a cod. It had a funny face but it was very like a man with a beard. (P 43)

The bearded face is the obvious parody of the feminine genitalia, the male "writing-over" of the woman's body, and Stephen comes very close to reading the palimpsest. And a subsequent piece of graffiti declares itself in palimpsestic punning, that 'Julius Caesar wrote the Calico Belly' (P 43). To achieve his own immortality, Lynch admits to having written his name "on the backside of the Venus of Praxiteles in the Museum" (P 205).

The maniacal insistence on transcribing oneself persists throughout the Penman chapter of the Wake, Shem having intoned the Vulgate Psalm 44 while manufacturing his fecal encaustic: "Lingua mea calamus scribae veliciter sribentis"—my tongue is the reed of a scribe swiftly writing. Tongue/reed/wooden pen/moving finger (that have writ moves on)/penis: the implement with which he "scrabbled and scratched and scribbled and skrevened nameless shamelessness about everybody ever he met" (FW 182.13–14) and to "stipple endlessly inartistic portraits of himself" (FW 182.18–19). Pariah Shem represents the extreme outpost of the lonely artist, and the act of writing on his own body displays itself as masturbatory. In A Portrait Stephen had awakened from an erotic dream, a dream he had already recorded on his own body, before he sets out to record its "literary" translation on a cigarette packet, and when his inspiration flagged, and mundane thoughts intruded, Stephen restimulated that inspiration through masturbation in order to complete the villanelle, to write its envoi. In Ulysses Bloom follows his masturbatory act with the added gesture of writing in the sand, a replication of the futility of lonely self-expression. And in his own
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life James Joyce wrote a series of letters to Nora, letters he saved and later worried about, letters of "nameless shamelessness," but letters that clearly delineated its Sender and its Receiver. Not on his own body, but on the body of the beloved, the writer writes the mystery of himself, using the penis as his pen, and, as he indicated in those letters, his tongue as well.

The erotic letters to Nora would not have fared well if they had been exposed in 1909 to the bourgeois Edwardian world, a world nicely depicted in Ulysses, its genteel pretentions apparent throughout Stephen Hero as well, as witnessed in the Irish language class Stephen attends:

It was a beginners' class and its progress was retarded by the stupidity of two of the young men. The others in the class learned quickly and worked hard.... The class was very serious and patriotic. The only time Stephen found it inclined to levity was at the lesson which introduced the word "gradh." The three young women laughed, finding something very funny in the Irish word for "love" or perhaps in the notion itself. But Mr Hughes and the other three young men and Stephen were all very grave. When the excitement of the word had passed Stephen's attention was attracted to the younger of the stupid young men who was still blushing violently. (SH 60)

Writing on the delicate fabric of genteel Irish society in late Victorian and Edwardian times required careful circumventions around the Irish word for love, a delicacy that Joyce displayed again in Exiles, where Robert Hand pens a clandestine note to Bertha that reads: "There is one word that I have never dared to say to you." When Bertha asks to hear the word (written communication had obscured, rather than revealed it), Robert merely reports "that I have a deep liking for you" (E 34). The word, which had remained unwritten, also remains unspoken, and Robert is offered a second opportunity to speak the word, this time by Richard: "Explain to me what is the word you longed and never dared to say to her. If you can and will" (E 75). Robert's second venture is no better than the first: "I admire very much the personality of your...of...your wife. That is the word. I can say it. It is no secret." Neither "liking" nor "admiring" is quite the same word as "love," and the potent word itself was destined to lie dormant for quite a while.

Reticence over the word love may have remained a Joycean concession to a verisimilitudinistic representation of his age had it not surfaced recently, many decades after the world had given up
on it. The new "Critical and Synoptic" edition of *Ulysses* has restored some missing lines from that text, including the privileged positioning of the banned word: "Love, yes. Word known to all men" (*U-G I, 419*). Love, then, in all senses, voices, connotations, declensions: over which stupid young men blush and for which seducers seek euphemistic substitutes. Those of us who might have despaired of anything other than elliptical and indeterminate statements from James Joyce (except perhaps for "Love that dare not speak its name"—*U* 202) now hailed the advent of the word LOVE, if not exactly carved in stone, at least lofted on high. The answer is especially welcome since we have always known that there was a question, and it was asked by Stephen of the ghost of his dead mother: "Tell me the word, mother, if you know now. The word known to all men" (*U* 581). Mrs. Dedalus, however, rattles on about her care and concern for her wayward son, repeating her belief in the efficacy of prayer, and insisting that Stephen repent. (If it were left to Mrs. Dedalus, the Word would either have been Prayer or Repentance.)

Stephen's question derives from his mother's recollection of the song he used to sing to her, "*Love's bitter mystery,*" so Love engenders the question and perhaps anticipates the answer. The associations in Circe derive from the earlier appearance of Mrs. Dedalus in Telemachus: Mulligan's admonition to "Give up the moody brooding" brings Stephen's thoughts to the Yeats lyric—"And no more turn aside and brood/Upon love's bitter mystery"—which in turn invites thoughts of singing the song for his dying mother, and her reaction then: "For those words, Stephen: love's bitter mystery" (*U* 9). The confrontations between Stephen and his mother in the morning and midnight scenes are mirror images of each other, and whereas Mrs. Dedalus concerns herself with the words ("*love*" and "*bitter*" and "*mystery"), Stephen strives for the single, all-inclusive word, without bitterness and no longer a mystery. The restored passage, occurring as it does between these two confrontations, demonstrates that Stephen knows the word in the afternoon—why then is he asking to know the word late at night? Within the context of Shakespeare's *Pericles* "*love*" functions as the word, but only temporarily and within a given context that soon changes. The one word that has no prevailing significance as the word known-to-all-men may well be that overworked and slippery word, LOVE.

As the incomplete last sentence of *Finnegans Wake* may indicate, Joyce could be exceedingly reticent to put the last word on anything.
Inscribing James Joyce's Tombstone

His attitude toward epitaphs generally may be gleaned from the status of Robert Emmet's epitaph as the final words of Sirens, Emmet himself a reluctant epitaphist. His last words from the dock after his sentence of death are historically read as an epitaph for a dead Ireland, as well as a harbinger of a resurrected Ireland. Bloom sees a printed version of Emmet's words in a shop window:

When my country takes her place among...
Nations of the earth...
Then and not till then...
Let my epitaph be...
Written. I have...
Done.

(U 291)

Bloom experiences gastric upset leading to flatulence as he reads these potent words, and he waits for the sounds of a passing tram to cover his farting, so that the Emmet epitaph vies with both the gurgling flatulence and the clanging tram for auditory privilege, causing the insignificant word "the" (destined to be the last word of Finnegans Wake) to be lost from the Emmet statement, a victim of contending nonverbal sounds, the noise of the tram and of broken wind.

Several Joyceans, notably Clive Hart, have commented on a tendency toward sentimentality that Joyce obscured with irony and irreverence, and the concept of LOVE conquering all, sweeping the country, making the world go round, might even be embarrassing to Leopold Bloom, who, compelled to deal with the word, defines it as "the opposite of hatred," and quickly adds, "I must go now." The enraged Citizen reacts with: "Love, Moya! He's a nice pattern of a Romeo and Juliet"—while the parodic narratives that evolve from the discourse in Barney Kiernan's provide a mocking commentary, beginning, "Love loves to love love," and concluding with: "and this person loves that other person because everybody loves somebody but God loves everybody" (U 333).

Not to be put off by irony and irreverence, as readers we search for the Joycean signature of all things, aware of the search that is in operation within the Joyce texts. At the dawn of protohistory, in the opening chapter of the Wake, the unswept stones of earliest civilization are being read by humans not quite erect on two feet: "He who runes may rede it on all fours" (FW 18.5–6). And we are invited to read along:
(Stoop) if you are abedminded, to this claybook, what curios of signs (please stoop), in this allaphbed! Can you rede (since We and Thou had it out already) its world? It is the same told of all. Many. (FW 18.17–20)

Rather than the words, the concentration is on the individual letters of the alphabet, the "root language," from which all words and names evolve in myriad patterns. Reading the runes, we uncover in the Wake a footnote to the Doodles family, a series of seven signs, sigla that represent members of the family and contiguous outsiders, and even the book itself, the outline of a square that Joyce used for his untitled mamafesta, his claybook, Finnegans Wake. The quest for the signature of the individual author, or the individual character, leads to the hieroglyphics of ancient inscription, the signs of the human family.

The Doodles family, ₫, △, —, X, □, ∧, □. Hoodle doodle, fam.?

NOTES

1. On the building next to the Pakhus where the Symposium took place a brass plaque high up announced that it had been erected in 1882.

2. An epitaph to Stephen Dedalus's terminated youth is the sign Lotts near the morgue (P 86). Breathing in the "good odour" of "horse piss and rotted straw" calms his heart—but that is the subject of a companion essay, "James Joyce: The Olfactory Factor."