The Language of *Exiles*

CLIVE HART

I am simply using the language of people whose opinions I don't share

—Robert

Robert, the journalist, the glib professional, bases his hopes of an affair with Bertha on the utterance of a "word": "There is one word which I have never dared to say to you" (34.7). Superficial, conventional, false, the language which he manipulates is nevertheless the vehicle by which he hopes to achieve gratification of the flesh: "Your eyes... I want to speak to you. Will you listen to me? May I speak?" (35.10-11). Incapable of saying the true, simple word "love," he has recourse to lame paraphrase: "I have a deep liking for you" (34.10). However clumsy, the avowal brings the reward of the first kisses. There follows a curious passage:

BERTHA
(closes her eyes and kisses him quickly) There. (puts her hands on his shoulder) Why don’t you say: Thanks?

ROBERT
(sighs) My life is finished—over.

BERTHA
O don’t speak like that now, Robert. (40.27-41.2)

I begin with this because the language is double-edged. Rather than wince at the exchange, trying to imagine it as the potential speech of real people living in Dublin in 1912, we might feel more comfortable responding to the dramatic artifice. The "thanks" which Bertha proposes he offer would be at once an expression of Robert’s linguistic conventionality and of the essentially self-seeking emotional bargaining in which he indulges. He responds, instead, with a still more conventional piece of emotional melodrama, which attracts Bertha’s mild protest: "O don’t speak like that now." Hear! Hear!: one is inclined to voice warm agreement. This passage is as much about possible modes of speech, desirable and undesirable ways of
relating words to emotions and situations, as it is about the experience of two dramatic characters.

Critics have often been troubled by *Exiles*, the trouble arising in many cases, I believe, because the dialogue has been understood as an attempt at pure realism. There are at least three good reasons why that should have been so: first, the play is in the "well-made" tradition, in direct line of descent from the realism of Ibsen's middle period; second, most readers and theatre-goers are influenced by the undeniable realism of the dialogue in nearly all of Joyce's prose before *Finnegans Wake*; third, the play is tricked out with realist settings and props, and bears many stage directions having a flatly documentary tone. We would nevertheless do better, I believe, to look beyond these comparisons and assumptions and to recall, on one hand, that Joyce had early shown an immediate sympathy with the double vision of Ibsen's last plays, and, on the other, that he had only recently finished work on *A Portrait of the Artist*, one of the most salient stylistic characteristics of which is the "Uncle Charles Principle": "the narrative idiom need not be the narrator's" (Kenner 18). That principle is at work in the play also: the dramatic tone need not be the dramatist's. Nor, of course, entirely that of the characters: the idiom of *Exiles* is curiously poised between the two, leaving the characters and their actions half real, half reinterpreted with a critical, ironic voice. Clearly aware that our responses are baffled if we try to locate the play within any of the familiar dramatic categories, Mr. Kenner writes:

Unhappily *Exiles* refuses to be farce; it wants to be a strenuous drama of ideals. Drama is more ritualistic than Joyce appears to have supposed. If it is not to enact straightforwardly the ritual of farce or the ritual of pathos, then its recourse must be, as Shakespeare knew, to the ritual of a formal language which can hold the farcical and the tragic in suspension. (25–6)

He goes on to say: "But Joyce wanted his actors to exchange sentences of plain decent prose" (26). Here I begin to differ. *Exiles* is conceived, it seems to me, in a thoroughly mixed genre of a new kind, both farce and strenuous drama simultaneously, the two not held in suspension but welded together by subtle manipulations of language. If we take full note of its manifold uses of reflexive techniques we begin to see that the prose is neither so plain nor so straightforwardly decent as we first thought. Although unusual in the theatre, the
mixture is familiar enough to readers of *Ulysses*, who experience a similar double vision in some of the later chapters.

Mr. Kenner says of Joyce's apparent intentions: "He needed to write something with no point of view, no narrator, whatever: something wholly 'objective': something in which the only point of view would be that of the spectator" (24). It may well be that Joyce set out to do something of the kind; in the event, his rapidly developing sense of multiple vision led him to a somewhat different execution. Unable, except in the stage directions, to deploy his own wide range of third-person voices, Joyce resorted to a texture of reflexions and inversions which radically qualify the play's apparent objectivity. Speaking of the characters, Ruth Bauerle rightly says that they "often echo one another in speech, and appear to have been conceived by Joyce as complex double images of one another" (x). Similar statements could be made about most other elements of the play.

I shall examine the language of *Exiles* in relation to the play's governing polarities: speech and silence, bondage and freedom, certainty and doubt. Returning to the passage with which I began, I take up the matter of self-reference by comparison with another, earlier passage. According to the stage direction, Richard speaks "fiercely" about his dead mother, using highly colored, emotional, and histrionic phraseology. As in the later exchange, the female interlocutor, in this case Beatrice, asks him not to do so. He nevertheless persists, growing ever more clichéd:

**RICHARD**

(*fiercely*) How can my words hurt her poor body that rots in the grave? Do you think I do not pity her cold blighted love for me? I fought against her spirit while she lived to the bitter end. (*he presses his hand to his forehead*) It fights against me still—in here.

**BEATRICE**

(*as before*) O, do not speak like that!

**RICHARD**

She drove me away. On account of her I lived years in exile and poverty too or near it. I never accepted the doles she sent me through the bank. I waited too. Not for her death but for some understanding of me, her own son, her own flesh and blood. That never came. (24.7–19)

The motif "Do not speak like that" closely associates these two passages of false male speech, both about love and death. Here, as on many other occasions, both men say too much and with too little
effect. The theme is further developed through another motif, the opening stage direction "fiercely." Of no great weight when considered here in isolation, the word gains powerful connotations through its later association with Swift, in whose saeva indignatio Robert sees a model for Richard’s character: "You have that fierce indignation which lacerated the heart of Swift" (51.34–52.1). Both in Richard’s unavailing speech about his mother, and in the vision of him as an escapist which lies at the core of Robert’s newspaper article (128.28–129.12), it is nevertheless an impotent verbal ferocity capable of achieving only pain for others and wholly lacking Swift’s creative energy.

Less directly associated with Swift, the phrase “almost fiercely,” which occurs twice in stage directions, forms an independent motif with a life of its own. Both occurrences are embedded in the intense dialogues of Act II, and both are used in association with the idea of freedom in love. First Richard speaks “almost fiercely” about the need to allow Bertha the possibility of personal development:

RICHARD
(turns towards him, almost fiercely) Not that fear. But that I will reproach myself then for having taken all for myself because I would not suffer her to give to another what was hers and not mine to give, because I accepted from her her loyalty and made her life poorer in love. That is my fear. That I stand between her and any moments of life that should be hers, between her and you, between her and anyone, between her and anything. I will not do it. I cannot and I will not. I dare not. (87.5–13)

Towards the end of the act, Robert adopts the same tone to pursue the subject to his own advantage:

ROBERT
(still more warmly) I am sure that no law made by man is sacred before the impulse of passion. (almost fiercely) Who made us for one only? It is a crime against our own being if we are so. There is no law before impulse. Laws are for slaves. Bertha, say my name! Let me hear your voice say it. Softly! (112.30–34)

While Robert’s ferocity is applied as a melodramatic dramatization of his sensuality, Richard is trying to hold himself in check, to maintain control. Acutely aware of the danger and difficulty of words, he is oppressed by his heavy responsibility to use their power correctly or not at all. At times he seeks to be silent rather than to involve himself in unsatisfactory exchanges. When Bertha herself takes up his talk about emotional freedom, she challenges him "hotly" with "You
love her.’’ He ‘‘throws out his hands with a sigh’’ and responds: ‘‘Love! [. . .] I cannot argue with you’’ (67.5–9). When Richard is at his most human, is most like the others—when emotion gets the better of him and he relaxes his grip—he is able to use language most freely. At such times, however, he capitulates to the words which lie outside him, is unable to escape from the accents of the market place. When, by contrast, he is most aware of words, he is paradoxically reduced to silence, can generate nothing from within. We learn that he has written a book, but in his present phase he appears paralyzed, sterile, his control over language having been reduced to little more than the power to throttle it.

For the others, silence is a threat, a trap. As soon as Richard confronts Robert, in Act II, with his awareness of betrayal, Robert says: ‘‘Listen to me, Richard [. . .] Let me speak frankly, will you? Let me tell you everything’’ (74.21–2). When assured that Richard already knows everything, he takes up the motif of his approach to Bertha, saying that ‘‘a word,’’ which had the power to start the train of events, could also have stopped it: ‘‘And you never spoke! You had only to speak a word—to save me from myself’’ (75.30–31). Now, at last, the word has been uttered: ‘‘I cannot tell you what a relief it is to me that you have spoken—that the danger is past [. . .] Because. . .there was some danger for you too [. . .] if you had not spoken’’ (77.15–22). Later in the act he makes a similar point to Bertha: ‘‘Why did you not stop me? You could have—with a word’’ (97.29–30). The motif appears for the last time in Act III when Richard contemplates the bitter possibility that freedom may entail separation. After Bertha has cursed the day that she met him, he says ‘‘I am in the way, is it? You would like to be free now. You have only to say the word’’ (134.28–29). In the next exchanges of this low-leveled quasi-marital dispute, there is irony at Richard’s expense as Bertha repeats his taunt about her ‘‘lover,’’ using the word in ways which he fails to recognize.

In a wry moment in Act II, Robert comments to Bertha: ‘‘We all confess to one another here. Turn about’’ (106.2–3). But it is rare for confession to flow freely. Early in the play, when interrogated by Richard about her awareness of her inspirational role, Beatrice says that she can respond only to direct inquiry: ‘‘I cannot say it. You yourself must ask me, Mr Rowan’’ (19.9–10). Invited thus to pursue his questioning, Richard attributes to Beatrice the same fear of uttering a word which has inhibited her cousin Robert: ‘‘Could not because
you dared not. Is that why?’’ (19.18–19). Much later, discussing the same subject with Bertha, he invites her to act as her own interrogator: ‘‘You know why, Bertha. Ask yourself’’ (95.8). Even when handing the words over to others, Richard always assumes that he remains in charge of them.

The repeated acts of confession, ‘‘turn about,’’ form one of the ways in which the play exploits symmetry and inversion. Readily apparent in the relationships of the principal characters and in the a–b–a structure of the three acts, this architectural harmony is a fundamental feature of the play’s design. A cyclic pattern, establishing an inverse relationship of beginning and end, was Joyce’s norm. A major shaping force in Dubliners, A Portrait, and Ulysses, it is also dominant in Exiles, the last act of which may be seen as a shortened mirror-image of Act I. Acts I and III both explore a daytime world of social order, in contrast to the potential misrule of the night of Act II. Although all three acts take place indoors, Act II, with its garden, its rain, and its relatively remote location, offers a somewhat sardonic parallel to the green-world experience at the center of much Elizabethan comedy and romance. Like Act IV of The Winter’s Tale, Act II of Exiles is in a sense a dream: ‘‘You dreamt that I was yours last night’’ (138.2–3). As we enter Act III, the sense of return to reality is immediate, the contrast with the previous night being unwittingly underlined by Brigid’s question to the now exhausted Bertha: ‘‘Had you a bad dream that woke you?’’ (115.23). The pattern of return is developed not only through thematic parallels in the dialogue, but also by recurrences of stage business, such as Bertha’s offering and being offered tea, and by incremental repetition of image and motif. Recurrences in Act III of the language used in Act I are often quite detailed. In the third speech of Act I, Brigid solicitously asks Beatrice ‘‘[ . . ] Were you long in the train?’’ (14.5), a question echoed at the equivalent point in Act III, when she asks Bertha: ‘‘Are you long up?’’ (115.19). In Act I she comments to Beatrice: ‘‘You’re tired out, I’m sure’’ (14.10), while in Act III she says to Bertha ‘‘[ . . ] you must be dead tired [ . . ]’’ (115.28). In her first speech about Richard in Act I, Brigid says of him ‘‘Up half the night he does be’’ (14.27), which, as soon as he is mentioned in Act III, she echoes with ‘‘[ . . ] he does be in there [ . . ] half the night at his books’’ (116.16–17). Most poignant of all is a growth in resonance of the thematically important word ‘‘back.’’ First heard in the play’s opening speech—‘‘Did you send word you were back, Miss Justice?’’
The Language of Exiles

(13.31–32)—it is soon repeated by Beatrice, whose life is little more than a long and hopeless waiting; "I can wait here till they come back if they are not long" (14.30–31). The tensions surrounding absence and return are hinted at a few moments later by Richard when he speaks of the two women in succession: "Bertha will be back any moment [. . .] I had begun to think you would never come back" (16.2–6). In Act III, however, Richard is the one who is emotionally absent, in voluntary exile, Sensing this, Brigid tries in vain to comfort Bertha: "Leave him alone. He'll come back to you again" (116.17–18). Although Richard professes to be unaware of his emotional distance, Bertha puts the matter plainly before him: "You left me: and I wanted for you to come back to me" (145.8). As we hear in the highly charged last lines of the play, she must nevertheless continue her vigil: "O, my strange wild lover come back to me again!" (147.18–19).

Important echoes bear on the theme of truth and falsehood. The Italian newspapers of which Brigid is faintly dismissive and which at first seem to be introduced merely to fill out Richard's adopted foreignness, serve as a valuable preparatory gloss on Robert's journalistic betrayal in Act III. Both are implicated in the language of disguise, a theme emphasized by the secretiveness inherent in Richard's keeping the domestic letterbox locked. The half-disguised quality of the attack in the leading article is entirely appropriate to Richard's personality. Although wishing to establish himself as the proponent of total openness and truthfulness, in contrast to the "liar, thief and [. . .] fool" (63.29) which he deems his friend to be, he is himself tortuous, evasive, and capable of outright lying. Although Bertha would not mean to be understood literally when making her anguished statement "Every word you say is false" (133.28–29), there is more truth in her criticism than Richard is willing to recognize. His fallibility as the custodian of language and honesty is clearly demonstrated when Act I closes, a few minutes after his outburst to Bertha, with the very painful little scene in which he lies to his son. Bertha leaves, reminding Richard that she "did not deceive" him (70.30) immediately after which Richard unashamedly deceives Archie:

ARCHIE

(quickly) Well, did you ask her?

RICHARD

(starting) What?
Can I go?

Richard

Yes.

In the morning? She said yes?

Richard

Yes. In the morning.

[He puts his arm round his son's shoulders and looks down at him fondly] (71.5–17)

Richard did not ask her.

Richard's evasiveness contaminates others. Unwilling to confront Robert in Act I, he invites Beatrice to lie on his behalf: "I cannot see him now. Say I have gone to the post" (26.9–10). In another context, this formal social excuse might well pass for relatively innocent; in the context of such intense care for nuances of meaning and honesty as permeates the world of *Exiles*, it can only be seen as culpable evasion, a denial by Richard of his primary role as truth-teller. Although Beatrice, who lives on the fringes of that world, is willing to cooperate with Richard's excuse (29.31–32), she is not seriously tainted by it. Bertha, on the other hand, suffers a nightmarish period during which she succumbs to it wholly. Parallel to Richard's lie in Act I is her panic-stricken response to the arrival of Beatrice in Act III: "Say I'm not up, that I'm not well [...] No, say I'm in [...] Say I've just got up" (120.7–19).

More important than straightforward lying is the pervasive uncertainty as to the relationship of appearance and reality, statement and intent. The tension is most clearly felt in the case of Robert, the conscious deceiver. The gap between the surface of his words and the thoughts that lie beneath is developed in a little motif coupling the words "saying" and "thinking." It first occurs in Act I, after his avowal of affection for Bertha, who wonders "if that is what you say—to the others" (35.29–30). Robert reassures her, after which she adds, rather cautiously, it seems: "Thank you for saying it—and thinking it" (36.17). Already made a little doubtful of Robert's sincerity (though his physical desire is real enough) we are given an open expression of the distinction between words and thoughts during the subsequent confrontation between Robert and Richard. Adopting a wholly theatrical style at a moment of great stress, Robert pauses, "strikes his forehead with his hand," and continues: "What am I saying? Or what am I thinking? I wish you
would upbraid me, curse me, hate me as I deserve. You love this woman [. . . ]'’ (78.26–28).

For Robert, the gap between saying and thinking appears briefly to close at the moment when he believes he has won Bertha. The moment is neatly signaled by his use of an endearment which is both caressive and possessive: Bertha says, with downcast eyes, ‘‘I too want to speak to you,’’ to which he responds ‘‘tenderly,’’ with the phrase ‘‘Yes, dear, I know’’ (41.21–23). That he does not in fact ‘‘know,’’ is almost immediately indicated by a painful and ludicrous blunder:

ROBERT
(tenderly) Yes, dear, I know. (he kisses her again) I will speak to you, tell you all then. I will kiss you then, long long kisses—when you come to me—long long sweet kisses.
BERTHA
Where?
ROBERT
(in the tone of passion) Your eyes. Your lips. All your divine body.
BERTHA
(repelling his embrace, confused) I meant where do you wish me to come. (41.22–33)

The irony attaching here to the inadequacy of Robert’s knowledge of human responses casts an interesting and cautionary light on the scene between Richard and Bertha which follows soon afterwards. Richard is guilty of a similarly ludicrous if less painful misunderstanding:

BERTHA
He asked me to give him my hand.
RICHARD
(smiling) In marriage?
BERTHA
(smiling) No, only to hold. (58.20–25)

In the middle of his inquisition about Robert’s physical behavior, Richard reveals himself more seriously when he twice asserts his control of the whole situation in a tone of emotional arrogance:

BERTHA
[. . . ] (she breaks off suddenly)
Tell me, Dick, does all this disturb you? Because I told you I don’t want that. I think you are only pretending you don’t mind. I don’t mind.
RICHARD
(quietly) I know, dear. But I want to find out what he means
or feels just as you do.

BERTHA
(points at him) Remember you allowed me to go on. I told you
the whole thing from the beginning.

RICHARD
(as before) I know, dear... And then? (59.15-27)

There is little to choose, it seems, between Robert’s and Richard’s
knowledge of Bertha.

Among the most resonant motifs in the play is the reason
offered by Beatrice for her visit to Richard’s house: “Otherwise I
could not see you” (18.8). At first an apparently straightforward
statement of fact, it acquires a mysterious quality through repetition
and modulation. Immediately after she has first uttered it, Richard
repeats the phrase, “uncertainly.” Thrown into confusion by Richard’s
attention to her words, Beatrice threatens to leave but is persuaded
to stay and to listen to Richard’s comments on his literary relationship
with her. At the approximately equivalent point in Act III, Richard
again repeats the phrase, this time attributing it to malevolent
demons:

RICHARD
(stands in the doorway, observing her for some moments) There
are demons (he points out toward the strand) out there. I heard
them jabbering since dawn.

BEATRICE
(starts to her feet) Mr Rowan!

RICHARD
I assure you. The isle is full of noises. Yours also. Otherwise I
could not see you, it said. And her voice. And his voice. But,
I assure you they are all demons. I made the sign of the cross
upside down and that silenced them. (127.27-128.5)

Inability to see is an important theme. “I cannot see him
now,” says Richard of Robert (26.9-10); “I cannot see her now,”
says Robert of Bertha (91.6); “I can’t see anyone,” says Bertha,
tired and in distress (120.8). Physically unable to see Robert in Act
II, Bertha experiences a moment of undefined panic—“I feared
something. I am not sure what” (102.26-27)—from which she feels
secure only when Robert reappears: “O, now you are here. I can
see you. Now it has passed” (102.31). But it is Richard’s raising of
the motif to an almost metaphysical level by his parable of the
demons which most firmly establishes the failure of people to see
The Language of Exiles

each other clearly. The demons on the strand, impersonating "the voices of those who say they love me" (142.12-13), tell Richard to despair. Although he refuses to do so, silencing the demons by the use of their own symbolic weapons, he himself has chosen to avoid what the inhabitants of the everyday world consider immediacy and clarity of focus. Out of touch with Bertha, he gazes at her "as if to an absent person" (147.4). In the final words of the play, Bertha, unseen, unable to penetrate Richard's mask, "closes her eyes" (147.20).

Reflecting the self-conscious role-playing of many of the characters, an appropriate degree of theatricality pervades the stage directions. Indeed, the actors are guided by so many stagy adverbs—"darkly," "moodily," "earnestly," "desperately," "bitterly"—that readers have sometimes wondered whether Exiles should not after all be played as burlesque. While many of the directions have to do with physical action—"half closing her eyes" (21.24)—or are directly expressive of manner—"intensely"—others exhibit an interesting interplay of language, personality, and implicit authorial comment. A simple example is found in the description of Brigid's first action in Act III: "she halts suddenly and blesses herself instinctively" (115.11). Fresh from writing A Portrait, Joyce well knew the meaning of "instinctively." Indeed, still with a trace of the Uncle Charles Principle but this time applied more correctly, the word is used again later in the act, in relation to Beatrice: "[...] instinctively) It is true then!" (127.20). Prone to appeal for sympathy because of his "fight," his "struggle," Richard is twice described as "struggling with himself" (87.34, 95.27). Apparently nurtured, like others of Joyce's women, on the naive style of magazine stories, Bertha "tosses" her head, "flings" a slip of paper on to the couch, gestures "impulsively." Robert, who fears the "torture" of an emotional trap, and who sentimentally describes Richard as "torturing" himself, adopts a "tortured expression."

Interesting distinctions may also be seen in the longer, more descriptive stage directions. Beatrice is introduced on the first page with grace of language and clarity of focus: "BEATRICE JUSTICE is a slender dark young woman of twentyseven years" (13.25-26). This contrasts both in rhythmic quality and precision of statement with the clumsy description of Robert: "ROBERT HAND is a middlesized rather stout man between thirty and forty" (26.24). We learn still less about Richard's age, but once again the prose, assured and
fluent, is expressive of character: "He is a tall athletic young man of a rather lazy carriage" (15.4-5). Of Bertha also, introduced in simple, pleasing rhythms, we learn that she is "young," but her age is left imprecise: "BERTHA is a young woman of graceful build. She has dark grey eyes, patient in expression, and soft features" (30.10-11). Although relatively unassertive, the language of the stage directions is by no means featureless. As in the case of the dialogue, much of the meaning arises from echo and antithesis.

Only once, at the beginning of Act II, is there any significant period of dumb show. Joyce takes the opportunity to tune his prose to the curious blend of lumpiness and high color which characterizes Robert:

[ROBERT HAND, in evening dress, is seated at the piano. The candles are not lit but the lamp on the table is lit. He plays softly in the bass the first bars of Wolfram's song in the last act of Tannhäuser. Then he breaks off and, resting an elbow on the ledge of the keyboard, meditates. Then he rises and, pulling out a pump from behind the piano, walks here and there in the room ejecting from it into the air sprays of perfume. He inhales the air slowly and then puts the pump back behind the piano. He sits down on a chair near the table and, smoothing his hair carefully, sighs once or twice. Then, thrusting his hands into his trousers pockets, he leans back, stretches out his legs and waits.]

A knock is heard at the street door. He rises quickly (72.16-27)

It is entirely appropriate if at this stage the audience is, as Mr Kenner suggests, "helpless with laughter" (25). But the farce coexists with seriousness and pain. Deaf to rhythmic and other subtleties, Robert assuredly does not realize how much irony he addresses to himself by evoking the strenuous clash of sacred and profane loves in Tannhäuser. Nor is it for nothing that in the verbal model of Robert's movements on stage the word "then" should appear so often. Marking off the successive phases of his preparations with a heavy, unsubtle narrative hand, the word is an echo of Richard's insistent questioning of Bertha toward the end of Act I: four times Richard asks "And then?" urging her to continue her anatomy of the wooing. Even in performance, Robert's step by step arrangement of the scene in his love nest may remind us of the tone of the previous analysis. The pattern of repeated "then," expressive of Robert's manipulative approach to life, turns up again, and for the
last time, in the "story [ . . ] not very nice" (141.9), which he tells of his night out with "the divorced wife of a barrister." Joyce's sensitivity to the word is further shown by his having deleted it from the last stage direction of Act I, which originally read "[He puts his arm round his son's shoulders, and then looks down at him fondly]" (MacNicholas 1979:66, 91). Rendering Richard's movements less consecutive, less mechanical, the change softens the tone, increases the sentiment, and further distinguishes the relationship of father and son from that of father and mistress.

Do people really go on in that embarrassingly flamboyant way? Considering each scene in isolation and without reference to the distancing effect of the artistic context, many might be prepared to agree that the personal encounters dramatize something not far from everyday truth. But the interest of Exiles lies neither in the realism of the action nor in the psychology of the characters, expressed in language which is by turns stiff, overlush, trite, or muted to extinction. It lies, rather, in the curious blending of a serious plot about freedom and bondage, creativity and sterility, with a gamut of language which explores, without, as it were, sparing the characters' feelings, how to talk about it all, how not to talk about it, how to engage with each other, how to make a mess of personal relationships. Selecting, juxtaposing, counterpointing the registers, an "arranger" makes the play as much an artifact as a slice of other people's lives. The distancing created by that comparative linguistic exercise allows the work, however painful it may sometimes seem, to be perceived as essentially comic. As in Ulysses, the comedy collaborates with rather than attenuates the seriousness of the thematic content.

Living inside this subtle verbal framework, the characters of the play are isolated as much by words and silence as by their personal circumstances. For much of the time Beatrice is almost unable to speak; Bertha's prelapsarian simplicity of language fails to connect with the complex world into which she has been drawn; Robert's ready-made narrative glibness gives him only the illusion of communication. Richard's many-sided difficulty is in a sense a superfluity of communication. Only partly aware of his own tendency to degrade language by histrionics and cliché, he acts as though he were the sole custodian of words, often using them in attempts to mold others to his liking. He admonishes Bertha: "do not say things you will be sorry for" (65.5-6), and his first reaction to the news of Robert's latest sexual advances is to "Tell him [ . . ] A few words will do"
In cringing support of Richard’s self-assessment, Robert twice alludes to Bertha as if she were one of Richard’s verbal creations: “She is yours, your work” (78.29); “You have made her all that she is” (84.21–22). In similar vein, Richard speaks of himself as a godlike artist, pre-existent, unchanging: “I did not make myself. I am what I am” (133.24). Asserting his authority over the power of words, he poses as if he may utter when he pleases, be silent when he pleases. Others suffer accordingly. But while enjoying his position of power, Richard also suffers. Sensing, with half-justified arrogance, that everyone else looks to him for guidance and strength, he seeks a means of escape from the unwelcome role of a fallible god whose creatures appear to lack free will. By urging on Robert and Bertha the freedom to act, he arranges for himself the gap between words and truth which troubles all the others but which he sees as a necessary condition of liberation for the artist. In place of the physical wound in which Thomas found assurance, Richard seeks an intangible wound of doubt in the soul, a wound which, unlike that of Amfortas, will never be healed: “You will tell me. But I will never know” (133.8); “Yes, yes. The truth! But I will never know, I tell you” (133.13–14). Richard’s last self-imposed exile is from the certainty of language.

NOTES

1. Page/line references in parentheses are to the edition of Exiles published by Penguin Books, Harmondsworth and New York, 1977, corrected in accordance with the information supplied by MacNicholas (1979). Suspension points within brackets are my own; others are authorial. I do not deal with Joyce’s notes to the play, nor with the fragments reproduced in MacNicholas. I am grateful to Simon Evans for many useful comments on an early draft of this essay.

2. Cf. its appearance in GJ:

“Why?”
“Because otherwise I could not see you.”
Sliding—space—ages—foliage of stars—and waning heaven—stillness—and stillness deeper—stillness of annihilation—and her voice (16).

3. In Joyce’s notes to the play her age is given as 28 (148.13).

4. For further discussion of the relevance of Wagner, see MacNicholas (1975).

WORKS CITED