

## 10 Interior Monologue

On the doorstep he felt in his hip pocket for the latchkey. Not there. In the trousers I left off. Must get it. Potato I have. Creaky wardrobe. No use disturbing her. She turned over sleepily that time. He pulled the halldoor to after him very quietly, more, till the footleaf dropped gently over the threshold, a limp lid. Looked shut. All right till I come back anyhow.

He crossed to the bright side, avoiding the loose cellarflap of number seven/five. The sun was nearing the steeple of George's church. Be a warm day I fancy. Specially in these black clothes feel it more. Black conducts, reflects (refracts is it?), the heat. But I couldn't go in that light suit. Make a picnic of it. His eyelids sank quietly often as he walked in happy warmth.

\* They came down the steps from Leahy's terrace prudently, *Frauzzimmer*: and down the shelving shore flabbily their splayed feet sinking in the silted sand. Like me, like Algy, coming down to our mighty mother. Number one swung loudly her midwife's bag, the other's gamp poked in the beach. From the liberties, out for the day. Mrs Florence MacCabe, relict of the late Patk MacCabe, deeply lamented, of Bride Street. One of her sisterhood jugged me squealing into life. Creation from nothing. What has she in the bag? A misbirth with a trailing navelcord, hushed in ruddy wool. The cords of all link back, strandentwining cable of all flesh. That is why mystic monks. Will you be as gods? Gaze in your omphalos. Hello. Kinch here. Put me on to Edenville. Aleph, alpha: nought, nought, one.

\* Yes because he never did a thing like that before as ask to get his breakfast in bed with a couple of eggs since the *City Arms* hotel when he used to be pretending to be laid up with a sick voice doing his highness to make himself interesting to that old

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faggot Mrs Riordan that he thought he had a great leg of and she never left us a farthing all for masses for herself and her soul greatest miser ever was actually afraid to lay out 4d for her methylated spirit telling me all her ailments she had too much old chat in her about politics and earthquakes and the end of the world let us have a bit of fun first God help the world if all the women were her sort down on bathingsuits and lownecks of course nobody wanted her to wear I suppose she was pious because no man would look at her twice

JAMES JOYCE *Ulysses* (1922)

THE TITLE of James Joyce's *Ulysses* is a clue — the only absolutely unmissable one in the entire text — that its account of a fairly ordinary day in Dublin, 16 June 1904, re-enacts, mimics, or travesties the story of Homer's *Odyssey* (whose hero, Odysseus, was called Ulysses in Latin). Leopold Bloom, middle-aged Jewish advertising canvasser, is the unheroic hero, whose wife Molly falls far short of her prototype, Penelope, in faithfulness to her spouse. After crossing and recrossing the city of Dublin on various inconclusive errands, as Odysseus was blown around the Mediterranean by adverse winds on his way home from the Trojan war, Bloom meets and paternally befriends Stephen Dedalus, the Telemachus of the tale, and a portrait of Joyce's own, younger self — a proud, penniless aspirant writer, alienated from his father.

*Ulysses* is a psychological rather than a heroic epic. We become acquainted with the principal characters not by being told about them, but by sharing their most intimate thoughts, represented as silent, spontaneous, unceasing streams of consciousness. For the reader, it's rather like wearing earphones plugged into someone's brain, and monitoring an endless tape-recording of the subject's impressions, reflections, questions, memories and fantasies, as they are triggered either by physical sensations or the association of ideas. Joyce was not the first writer to use interior monologue (he credited the invention to an obscure French novelist of the late

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nineteenth century, Edouard Dujardin), nor the last, but he brought it to a pitch of perfection that makes other exponents, apart from Faulkner and Beckett, look rather feeble in comparison.

Interior monologue is indeed a very difficult technique to use successfully, all too apt to impose a painfully slow pace on the narrative and to bore the reader with a plethora of trivial detail. Joyce avoids these pitfalls partly by his sheer genius with words, which renders the most commonplace incident or object as riveting as if we had never encountered them before, but also by cleverly varying the grammatical structure of his discourse, combining interior monologue with free indirect style and orthodox narrative description.

The first extract concerns Leopold Bloom leaving his house early in the morning to buy a pork kidney for his breakfast. "On the doorstep he felt in his hip pocket for the latchkey" describes Bloom's action from his point of view, but grammatically implies a narrator, however impersonal. "Not there" is interior monologue, a contraction of Bloom's unuttered thought, "It's not there." The omission of the verb conveys the instantaneity of the discovery, and the slight sense of panic it entails. He remembers that the key is in another pair of trousers which he "left off" because he is wearing a black suit to attend a funeral later in the day. "Potato I have" is totally baffling to the first-time reader: in due course we discover that Bloom superstitiously carries a potato around with him as a kind of talisman. Such puzzles add to the authenticity of the method, for we should not expect to find another person's stream of consciousness totally transparent. Bloom decides against returning to his bedroom to fetch the key because the creaky wardrobe door might disturb his wife, still dozing in bed — an indication of his essentially kind and considerate nature. He refers to Molly simply as "her" (and in the last sentence as "she") because his wife looms so large in his consciousness that he does not need to identify her to himself by name — as a narrator, with a reader's interests in mind, would naturally do.

The next, brilliantly mimetic sentence, describing how Bloom pulled the house door almost shut, returns to the narrative mode, but it maintains Bloom's point of view and remains within his

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vocabulary range, so that a fragment of interior monologue, "more", can be incorporated in it without jarring. The past tense of the next sentence "Looked shut" marks it as free indirect style, and provides an easy transition back to interior monologue: "All right till I come back anyhow," in which "All right" is a contraction of "That will be all right." None of the sentences in this extract, apart from the narrative ones, are grammatically correct or complete by strict standards, because we do not think, or even speak spontaneously, in well-formed sentences.

The second quotation, describing Stephen Dedalus catching sight of two women as he walks on the beach, displays the same variety of discourse types. But whereas Bloom's thoughtstream is practical, sentimental and, in an uneducated fashion, scientific (he gropes uncertainly for the correct technical term for the reaction of black clothing to heat) Stephen's is speculative, witty, literary — and much more difficult to follow. "Algy" is a familiar reference to the poet Algernon Swinburne, who called the sea "a great sweet mother", and "lourdily" is either a literary archaism or a coinage influenced by Stephen's bohemian domicile in Paris (*lourd* being French for "heavy"). Mrs MacCabe's calling prompts Stephen's wittily imaginative to evoke his own birth with startling concreteness: "One of her sisterhood lugged me squealing into life," another miraculously mimetic sentence that makes you feel the newborn infant's slippery body in the midwife's hands. The slightly morbid fancy that Mrs MacCabe has a miscarried foetus in her bag diverts Stephen's stream of consciousness into a complex and fantastical reverie in which the navel cord is likened to a cable linking all human beings to their first mother, Eve, which suggests why oriental monks contemplate their navels (Greek, *omphalos*) though Stephen does not complete the thought, his mind leaping on to another metaphorical conceit, the collective human navelcord as a telephone cable, by means of which Stephen (nicknamed Kinch by his associate, Buck Mulligan) whimsically imagines himself dialling the Garden of Eden.

Joyce did not write the whole of *Ulysses* in the stream-of-consciousness form. Having taken psychological realism as far as it would go, he turned, in later chapters of his novel, to various kinds

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of stylization, pastiche and parody: it is a linguistic epic, as well as a psychological one. But he ended it with the most famous of all interior monologues, Molly Bloom's.

In the last "episode" (as the chapters of *Ulysses* are called), Leopold Bloom's wife, Molly, who has hitherto been an object of his and other characters' thoughts, observations and memories, becomes a subject, a centre of consciousness. During the afternoon she has been unfaithful to Leopold with an impresario called Blazes Boylan (she is a semi-professional singer). Now it is late at night. Bloom has come to bed, disturbing Molly, and she lies beside him, half-awake, drowsily remembering the events of the day, and of her past life, especially her experiences with her husband and various lovers. The Blooms have not in fact enjoyed normal sexual relations for many years, following the trauma of losing their son in infancy, but they remain tied to each other by familiarity, a kind of exasperated affection and even jealousy. Bloom's day has been overcast by his awareness of Molly's assignation, and her long, almost entirely unpunctuated monologue begins with the speculation that Bloom must have had some erotic adventure, since he has uncharacteristically asserted himself by demanding that she bring him his breakfast in bed the next morning, something he hasn't done since a distant time when he pretended to be an invalid in order to impress a widow called Mrs Riordan (an aunt of Stephen Dedalus, in fact, one of many little coincidences that knit together the apparently random events of *Ulysses*) from whom he was hoping to receive a legacy, although in fact she left them nothing, all her money going to pay for masses to be said for the repose of her soul . . . (In paraphrasing Molly Bloom's soliloquy one tends to fall into her own freeflowing style.) Whereas Stephen's and Bloom's streams of consciousness are stimulated and made to change course by their sense-impressions, Molly, lying in the darkness, with only the occasional noise from the street to distract her, is borne along by her own memories, one memory triggering another by some kind of association. And whereas association in Stephen's consciousness tends to be metaphorical (one thing suggests another by resemblance, often of an arcane or fanciful kind) and in Bloom's metonymic (one thing

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suggests another because they are connected by cause and effect, or by contiguity in space/time), association in Molly's consciousness is simply literal: one breakfast in bed reminds her of another, as one man in her life reminds her of another. As thoughts of Bloom lead to thoughts of other lovers, it is not always easy to determine to whom the pronoun "he" refers.