

**LITERATURE AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY**  
**IN JOYCE AND VICO<sup>1</sup>**  
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**Vico's Philosophy of History and Transcendental Value**

In *Principles of New Science of Giambattista Vico Concerning the Common Nature of the Nations*, usually known as *Vico's New Science* (Vico 1976),<sup>2</sup> Vico establishes a philosophy of history referring to transcendental cycles and repetition (Book V).<sup>3</sup> The view of history as a cycle was not new, and was dominant until the Enlightenment established the idea of continuous historical progress based on increased knowledge and emancipation from superstition, tyranny and so on.<sup>4</sup> Vico brings such Enlightenment concerns into the cyclical theory of history, since each cycle of the ideal eternal history moves towards greater liberty and rationality, before the highest stage where it dissolves and we return. There is a lack of a clear return of absolute beginning in Vico though. The fall of the Roman Empire is the end of one cycle, but it is not clear that the barbarian recourse is a return to the first beginning. The first beginning follows on from the Biblical, and other sacred, stories of the flood.

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1. A version of this paper was presented at a seminar in June 2001 in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Yeditepe University. Thanks to participants for their questions and comments.

2. References to *The New Science* will follow the following form: (Vico, page number [Vico's paragraph number]).

3. "On an Eternal Natural Commonwealth, in Each Kind Best, Ordained by Divine Providence".

4. See *Republics, Nations and Tribes*, (Thom 1995): 281-283. The issue of remembering in recollection and in repetition in *History as an Art of Memory*, (Hutton 1993): 48.

According to Vico, after primeval floods some individuals on high ground establish sanctuaries and build communities based on marriage and burial. Those not on high ground become wanderers who find refuge in the sanctuary. The founders are the heroes of ancient mythology and patrician rulers of ancient cities, the refugees are the plebeians of the ancient cities, free men with natural liberty only (freedom from physical constraint only) and no political rights (Vico, 12 [§ 18]). The first moments of community after the floods are a divine stage of history, where everything in nature is seen as the outcome of divine forces and personified divinely (Vico, 80 [§ 250]). The divine stage is followed by the heroic stage, when refugees from the floods find sanctuary with inland communities. These are travellers, wanderers and sea voyagers who encounter a settled community. Within that community they are subordinated to the giants/gentes (noble families) as plebeians (Vico, 226 [§ 611]). The plebeians are able over time to assert themselves so that a democratic age arrives. However, democracy does not best represent the people. Monarchy subordinates the will of nobles to itself and best follows popular will.

The beginnings of history are in fable and myth and the same applies to the beginning of law (Vico, 350-51 [§ 953]. Homer represents the defeat of wanderers searching sanctuary after the floods in the deaths of Odysseus' companions (Vico, Book III).<sup>5</sup> Early history is poetic (Vico, Book II)<sup>6</sup> and can be reconstructed first through philosophy and then confirmed through philology (Vico, 105-106 [§§ 351-60]). Modern history must be rational, public, written in prose, not symbols. It follows an eternal ideal recourse (Vico, 57 [§ 114], 104 [§ 349]), which must also be followed by language as they are on the same path of repetition. The ideal eternal recourse only arises through the violence of lightning (Vico, 119 [§ 379]), the spontaneity of the first name and the uncontrolled violence of the giants/gentes. Divine history is what can only be known through heroic history (Vico, 128-9 [§ 403]), since there is no record of divine history possible at that time (Vico, 127-8 [§ 401]). Poetic history is itself what condenses multiplicity into a single symbol. The divine is only present as what cannot be known directly and the heroic works through a poetry and metaphor, that is perversely purely metonymic and rigid with

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5. "Discovery of the True Homer".

6. 'Poetic Wisdom'.

regard to what is designates. History is the containment of violence and then its re-eruption. Violence is what cannot be excluded from history though the ideal goal of history should be just that. History begins with the divine, which is its inspiration, but the beginning precedes the appearance of law and writing, which is where the divine cannot appear, where it is left behind as fabulous. The ideality of ideal history requires its ideal goal in monarchy and rational law to crumble in decadence. The reduction of violence is a loss of bond. Law should bind the passions, but the most rational law is what cannot bind the passions. The loss of violence in rational law is a weakening of its binding strength on the passions.

Law is fictional in origin because it relies on pretending that what is, is not, and that what is not, is. Therefore law is based on fable (Vico, 390 [§§ 1036-7]). Story telling itself is bound up with law. The creation of a generality detached from particular cases is law. Law is both what depends on the story but leaves it behind. The original heroic stories are themselves lacking in distance from reality and from natural objects, because according to Vico there was no reflection or irony (Vico, 131 [§ 408]). In the age where law becomes distinct, the story has become part of vulgar characters which allow irony and reflection, so law must be differentiated. The heroic story still remains within law. Law is the adoption of empty masks, a form of story telling where it is not clear that there is a natural object. Vico is thinking of the dramatic persona and its relation to the legal person in Roman law. Law requires a rationalisation of the fable, but it must rest on the legal fictions of personality and the courtroom drama. Originally the city is the polis where there is war (Vico, 240 [§ 638]). It is the polemos, war against the plebeians by the gentes which gives the name polis (Vico, 226 [§ 612]). The polemos against the plebeian, impious, wanderer (Vico, 12 [§ 18]) who is the hostis of the legal case, the legal enemy (Vico, 240 [§ 638]). The concept of the legal contestant rests on a joint exclusion of the plebeian and wanderer. The legal enemy is the one who does not follow the buried ancestors.

All language refers to the same mental institutions (Vico, 106 [§ 355]), and these arise in all histories in all peoples. For Vico language originates in the names given to thunderbolts after a primordial flood. The name is father and becomes the

name for law (Vico, 10 [§ 14]). However, language is also said to begin with mute objects and signs, the divine language. There is a duality and uncertainty in the origin of language. The first noble heroes spoke but had a silent language. What Vico seems to be doing here is to refer to the secret rituals of old nobilities, in particular the Roman patricians, and to the origins of language as the spontaneous speech of the original nobles, in a confused way. A heroic age of fable, and myth emerges, in symbolic language. The final stage is the written language of the people. Language previously had concealed the secrets of the auspices from the plebeians because of the process in which the plebeians were descended from refugees in the time of the floods, who sought sanctuary with the giants who had named lightning and in which the patrician giants considered the plebeians to be enemies, and a wanderer to be an enemy and an outsider. In its heroic form language gives us Homer, who represents historical truths in fable. Collective characteristics are represented by one individual. There is no possibility of irony as there is no reflection here. Metaphors derive from metonymy. Natural objects provide a fixed signification. At first language is communication by means of natural objects and then the heroic language produces substitutions for them in symbolism and heraldry. This is the schema of the development of language within which Vico discusses history, law, poetry and metaphysics.

Vico accounts for the metaphorical power of language through objects. Metaphor comes from the absence of objects. The emergence of language is associated with the growth of law and money, and the overcoming of heroic or savage violence. The speculative stages of language in Vico give us three components of language: physical objects, symbols and writing. It also gives us metonymy. It gives us the divine, the heroic-mythical-fabular and the democratic-monarchical plebeian. It gives us violence and law. The law is contained in violence and divinity, at the moment the giants say *jus* in reaction to the lightning, which is where the problem emerges of how this spoken utterance fits in with the stages of language in Vico. There is a speech before speech and natural signs. The progress of language is to writing and the giving of law.

It is the fixing of a boundary by the gentes on their land that requires signs, the signs of natural objects, and this is a beginning to language (Vico, 274 [§ 722]). There is a stage of divine hieroglyphics, which precedes heroic poetry and the characters of vulgar language. The hieroglyphs are imaginative universals from the time that humans could not imagine abstract universals (Vico, 341 [§ 933]). The gods represent marriages, auspices and so on. In heroic poetry individuals become imaginative universals of a class (Vico, 341 [§ 934]). Vulgar languages are imagined to be divine in origin but are not (Vico, 341-2 [§ 935]). It is not clear how the imaginative universals fit in with the periods for natural signs, symbols and characters.

### **Language and Death in Vico**

The paradoxes of Vico give expression to way in which he tries to rationalise the contradictions in language through dividing its aspects into different stages. We can read his theory of history and language, as the representation of the oppositions and differences within language. Language contains: violence and rationality; the object and the symbol; the imaginative universal and the abstract universal; the symbol and the character; the emblem and the script; metonymy and metaphor; irony and literalness; reflection and determinateness. That is language contains the force with which it has concrete existence and general rational conditions of existence, singular moments of material force and abstract universality. The object is what language contains as what it communicates; the symbol is the communication of that object. The symbol is the representation of the object in language and the character is the negation within language of any externally existing objects as a self-contained system. The emblem is the materiality in language of some representation and the script is the non-representational nature of language. Imagination is the concretisation of the universal, the abstract is the universality in itself of the universal. Metonymy is the way in which linguistic expressions replace objects, and metaphor is the way we see a word as something. Irony takes away meaning as a condition of communication and literality insists on the stability of meaning as a condition of communication. Reflection makes self-awareness a condition of

language and determinateness presumes that the unconscious following of a rule is the condition of language. The moment of divine naming, lightning becoming 'jus,' contains contradiction. Material object becoming language, singular event becoming universal meaning, force becoming law, object becoming symbol.

The conditions of language must be the conditions of writing history and the problems of writing history. The relation between the materiality of events and their representation, the relation between singularity and general laws, the possibility of multiple interpretations in relation to the goal of truth, history as objective facts and the attempt to represent them in a discourse. History contains these problems both because it is something that must use language and because the questions of history must arouse them. This might cast some doubt over Vico's own attempt to distinguish between a mythical-heroic age and a rational-democratic age. The questions of representing and transforming the contingency of events into a story remain the same, even if the forms change. Vico relies on a highly rationalised version of Homer, in which a philosophical scheme is imposed and then justified by a schematic philology in order for there to be progress towards rational written history. The Homeric contains a determinateness of reference, a non-metaphoricity of its metaphors that is their rigid reduction to literal metonymic substitution. The divine and the heroic have already been rationalised, so that the democratic-monarchical history follows on from them.

Civilisation is burial according to Vico. There is territory where there is a graveyard. The giants/gentes defend the land of their buried ancestors and define themselves as autochthonous, that is they define themselves as born from the earth because the ancestors are buried there (Vico, 9 [§ 13]).<sup>7</sup> The institution of burial obliterates its own institutional origin and presents itself as the consequence of a natural, pre-institutional relation with the land. The idea of immortality also appears in the burial of the dead. With the burial of the dead body the belief is institutionalised that dead individual is being transported to another world. The community itself can be seen as immortal and as having a historical existence beyond the contingencies of individual lives and the contingent relations between

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7. For an important early sociological classic on the discussion of the role of burial and ancestors in antique culture see, Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City* (Coulanges 1980).

them. The flux of life becomes monumentalised in the grave and in theological poetry. Language itself must be the freezing of life as an eternal monument.

### **Vico and Romantic Aesthetics**

Vico's concern with burial, and monuments to the dead, anticipates the concerns of Romantic aesthetics, as in Wordsworth's 'Essay upon Epitaphs' (Wordsworth 1969). An implicit Romantic identification of poetry with the sarcophagus has a manifesto in the 'Essay upon Epitaphs'. Poetry is considered as defining culture through its role in epitaphs. Humanity is human in the wish to commemorate the dead: "Almost all the Nations have wished that certain external signs should point out the places where their dead are interred. Among savage tribes unacquainted with letters this has mostly been done either by rude stones placed near the grave, or by mounds of earth raised over them" (Wordsworth 1969, 728). Literate culture is distinguished from savagery by the epitaph on the monument, "as soon as nations had learned the use of letters, epitaphs were inscribed upon these monuments; in order that their intention might be more surely and adequately fulfilled" (Wordsworth 1969, 728). The monument is distinguished in its purpose through writing, otherwise it might be mistaken for a naturally occurring stone or mound. Writing distinguishes the human from the natural, with savagery as an intermediary. Poetry enters into the origin of writing in commemorating death in a rupture with nature. Poetry is the form of writing closest to death, which is celebrated in the emergence from savagery. The commemoration of death in writing is bound up with a belief in immortality. The belief in immortality itself refers to what exceeds writing: "And the spirit of the answer must have been, though the word might be sea of ocean, accompanied perhaps with an image gathered from a map, or from the real object in nature — these might have been the *letter*, but the *spirit* of the answer must have been as inevitably, — a receptacle without bounds or dimensions; — nothing less than infinity" (Wordsworth 1969, 729). The letter or the word summons up images which invoke infinity and eternity. Eternity is a notion of spirit which exceeds the word struggling to find images matching spirit itself. As such the letter is the sepulchre of spirit exceeding the word, which struggles to find images matching spirit itself. As

such the letter is the sepulchre of spirit. The poetic epitaph is the tomb of the immortality which inspires it. It is spirit frozen in the limitation of the letter.

### **Romanticism, Vico and Joyce**

The aesthetics of Romantic poetry tends towards a tension between the spirit and the letter, between the infinite possibilities of language and the frozen nature of particular linguistic marks. This becomes encoded in many Romantic poems as the constant death of the old and its appearance as the perfect forms of poetry, undermine by the flow of poetic inventions itself. Keat's *Endymion* is a good example, as is Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*. Shelley's poem is the occasion for Paul de Man's 'Shelley Disfigured' (in de Man 1984), which expands on these aspects of Romantic poetics. De Man's work on Yeats in 'Image and emblem in Yeats' (in de Man 1984) and 'Symbolic Landscape in Wordsworth and Yeats' (in de Man 1984) are very suggestive in relating the Viconian themes with Joyce. The concern with the tension between living image and rigid emblem in Yeats, as discussed by de Man, appears in Joyce, where it is again the emblems of poetic tradition and Celtic nostalgia that come into tension with the infinite productivity of aesthetic imagination. The issue of the emblem leads us back to Vico's concerns with the language of natural objects, hieroglyphs and heraldic emblems in contrast with the openness of spoken language.<sup>8</sup>

The life of the city is based on death. If burial is what separates us from the most savage stage it must also be what separates us from the primal appearance of divinity. The living divinity is now monumentalised. The burial of the dead along with law, writing and money defines rationality. The giants/gentes identified themselves as the descendents of those who have been buried. Burial becomes the means of turning the founders into gods and defining the living as owners of the earth. Here we have the beginnings of piety where there are the beginnings of law. Law is based on the death of the enunciator of law. Law is defined by Vico as what rises above cases; it is the death of the speaker of the first judgement in the first case. Law is founded on the respect for that dead judge. Law is founded on what is not law, since

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8. Issues central for language in Walter Benjamin from his essay "On language as Such and on the Language of Man" (in Benjamin 1996) onwards.

law belongs properly to the rational plebeian age, not the divine or heroic age of natural signs or symbols. There is a second birth of law, transformed from the immediacy of thunder word to piety for the dead. Nietzsche describes this process in *On the Genealogy of Morality*<sup>9</sup> (Nietzsche 1989), where Essay II, “‘Guilt,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like’, gives an account of the emergence of law from the violence of early culture, as human consciousness directs forces against itself in order to regulate itself according to law and culture, thereby subjecting such law to critique. The critique is in the form of a genealogical approach outlined in the preface, which contains many echoes of Vico’s unification of law, poetry, language and violence, studied through etymology, in history<sup>10</sup>.

Modernist aesthetics is concerned with the re-evaluation of this piety: Eliot’s *Wasteland* has a section on ‘The Burial of the Dead’ and *Ulysses* contains a graveyard chapter, neither of which suggests the idealisation of the dead though they do confirm that the relation with death and burial is fundamental to the existence of the city. Joyce somewhat parodies the pious deification of the dead in the belief of the mourners in *Ulysses* that the grave of the dead nationalist hero Parnell is empty, and that he will return again. The satire of the cult of Parnell and its weight on the living of Dublin is quite marked in Joyce’s literature, even as he recognises the necessity of mourning for the community.

### **Law, History and Language in Vico**

Vico presents law before law, and language. Law and language in their origin are required to contain what does not exist in their earliest stages. They must die so that the contingency of law, its force can have its place. The birth of law is the bringing about of the god-father and the father of the community, but that transcending figure can only transcend by dying. Language itself is the death of the object, emblem, metonymy, literalness, determinateness, symbol. The law can only progress through the death of its original condition as an instrument against the plebeian-outsider, its

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9. The Kaufmann and Hollingdale translation is preferred but not their choice of “On the Genealogy of Morals” as the translation of “Zur Genealogie der Moral”.

10. For a useful discussion of Vico and Nietzsche see, “Vico and Nietzsche” (Parry 1989).

original condition as an instrument of war, of *polemos* against the *hostis*.<sup>11</sup> The law demands the death of its enemy and the death of its founder, the death of its enunciator and the death of its object. The members of the city are dead, autochthons who possess that territory because of a non-legal, non-linguistic and preconscious rootedness in the earth. It is the condition of death, what cannot reach the condition of conscious life and what transcends finite life in the monument of the grave. The death of violence and myth is the death of law, and the death of the last father: the monarch of the plebeian-monarchical age. In transcending the particular force of the patricians the monarch becomes void of force.

The second occasion of law still leaves us with an odd chronology, how can the law be enunciated in a divine age? Is law enunciated for the second time in a heroic age of burial? It is the loss of immediacy, fear of a father-god and the death of the original judge which allows there to be law as what law is supposed to be, rational law. However, divinity and violence cannot be excluded from law since these are its origins. Law is the triumph of a divine plan and violence must always appear in the operation of law. It originates in the fear of the father-god and the fear of uncontrolled violence, a simultaneous fear of transcendental power and the flux of contingent events. Law is what tries to control these, so that sovereignty itself is bound by its own laws and the polemical city becomes a community of peace. However, deprived of a sacred boundary where there is an enemy the law collapses. The monarch as an agent of law lacks the force to hold the city and its territories together.

Vico's account of origins leaves every origin doubled, repeated and contradictory. The scheme of ideal history should not distract from the underlying paradoxes of trying to establish the absolute origin of the contingencies of history, the attempts to establish the rationality of law and language which must derive from contingency as what resists contingency. A monumental object is created in Vico's architecture which must be the obliteration of what is monumentalised. What is literal history must always be literary, the law itself must be fable, myth and drama. The end of the literary in law, language and history is the end of history as collapse

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11. See: Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Schmitt 1996); Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship* (Derrida 1997b) and "Hostipality" (Derrida 2000).

rather than fulfilment. If history is history it can only be what contains the irreducibility of fiction, irony and reflection within all law and language and the death of whatever they claim to represent or wherever they originate. Vico himself must have written a fable, which the more rational it claims to be the more fabulous it must become. The rationalisation presumes an abstraction from factual investigation in abstract universals, in the empty mask of the legal persona. The abstract universal must return to the condition of figurative universal, which is the return of the concrete singular event as fiction.

Language and law in Vico are troubled by the tension between an eternal, ideal, divine existence as the necessary essence of language and law. That essential language exists in the contradictory positions of the thunder word and the mute language of the divine age. The purity of speech and symbol cannot be reconciled with each other and come into conflict with language as communication. The original language is marked as what excludes the legal enemy: plebeian, *hostis*, wanderer. This is a negation of what is essential to language, its communicability. Vico's explanation of how language can be excluding is vague and coincides with a belief that Homer's heroic epics contain popular elements. What is given is the conflict between the universal communicability of language and its contextual nature. Language is necessarily what is both given universally and what can only occur in particular contexts as interpreted in a contextual way. Law is caught in the same contradiction between necessary universality and the specificity of the moments of its enunciation, the judgement of cases. The ideal of law is that it rises above specific cases, the ideal is what both defines a concept and is what a concept cannot achieve. It is not surprising then that for Vico, law and language collapse in the monarchical culmination of history and that history must begin again.

The insistence on repetition leads forward to Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (Hegel 1956), for which the reality of history depends on repetition between epochs and the Nietzschean eternal repetition in *The Gay Science* (Nietzsche 1974)<sup>12</sup> and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (in Nietzsche 1976).<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche rejected history as a weight, and put forward the moment where I will

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12. § 341.

13. Part III, "On the Vision and the Riddle".

every moment to be repeated again eternally as the most difficult and most dangerous moment, in which I say yes to every moment. This particularly opaque and paradoxical thought in Nietzsche opens up a perspective on history in which I will its repetition and become its author. The legacy of Vico is a polarisation between a progressive repetition of spirit in history and the perspective of the subjective moment. The point of such a moment in Nietzsche is to overcome resentment of our inability to change the past and make the past what I willed.<sup>14</sup> The point of Hegel's repetition is that mind and spirit become more and more concrete and many sided with every repetition, overcoming the separation between subjectivity and universality which afflicts humanity. For Nietzsche, this is the death of individuality which is restored with the repetition of the moment of individual existence and the escape from universal history. Universality could only come from a community of self-willing individuals not from absorption of individuality into spirit. Law and language in Nietzsche exist in the contradiction between universality and individuality, avoiding the need for a Viconian collapse of universality as language and law die from one-sided universality; or the Hegelian fixing of individuality in the manifestation of absolute spirit. For Nietzsche, history emerges from the struggle of forces which create law and language in the struggle to regulate and name for the sake of conflicting interests of power. This contingency and force should not be abolished, but recognised as what allows freedom.<sup>15</sup>

### **Joyce's Literature and Philosophy**

Joyce's *Ulysses* (Joyce 1971)<sup>16</sup> makes one explicit reference to Vico, and even that has a disguise. Stephen Dedalus is giving a history lesson and addresses a boy called Armstrong, who lives in 'Vico Road, Dalkey'(Joyce, 30). Dedalus' thoughts give this some context with reference to Romantic aesthetics: "Fabled by the

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14. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part II, "On Redemption".

15. The importance of Vico in these issues, and the comparisons to be made with Rousseau are emphasised, though briefly by Derrida in *Of Grammatology* (Derrida 1997a). This should be read in the light of papers by Trabant (Trabant 1989) and Frankel (Frankel 1983) on the reading and significant misreadings Derrida has of Vico. Another notable discussion of Vico as a thinker important for contemporary discussions of literature and history can be found in Said's *Beginnings* (Said 1985).

16. Future references will be in the form (Joyce, page number).

daughters of memory. And yet it was in some way if not as memory fabled it. A phrase then of impatience, thud of Blake's wings of excess. I hear the ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry, and time one livid final flame. What's left us then"(Joyce, 30). And then in the context of history: "*Another victory like that and we are done for*. That phrase the world had remembered. A dull ease of the mind. From a hill above a corpsestrewn plain a general speaking to his officers, leaned upon his spear. Any general to any officers. They lend ear" (Joyce, 30). The reference is Pyrrhus and his victory of Tarentum which was so costly it was a defeat, and is the origin of the phrase "Pyrrhic victory". These excerpts establish certain aspects of *Ulysses*: the eternal aspect of literature; the melancholic aspect of the rejection of lived time in favour of eternity; the futility of historical struggles; the repetition of historical events which establishes their eternal aspect. The repetition and the sense that establishes eternal order show that the mention of Vico Road cannot be accidental or trivial.

The very name of the novel gives us the sense of historical repetition: *Ulysses* gestures back to the conventional beginning of western literature in Homer's *Odyssey*. *Ulysses* is the Latinised form of Homer's hero Odysseus. The use of the Latinised form itself raises other issues of repetition, since this form is referred to by Dante in the *Divine Comedy*, Shakespeare in *Troilus and Cressida*, Tennyson in *Ulysses* etc. Joyce's novel both refers us to the supposed beginning of literature and the life of that beginning in its repetition. Homer's epic exists in the allusions to it in Latin, Italian, English etc. Then there are the English translations of Homer by George Chapman and Alexander Pope, which are themselves notable events in the history of English Literature. The status and influence of translations is still a marginalized and underrated area of literary studies. However, *Ulysses* which is one of the dominant works of Twentieth-Century literature, makes no sense outside the transmission of tradition through translation, part of the transformation through repetition.

For Vico, Homer has a special status because the Homeric epics reveal the origins of society. They are the poetic expressions of early heroic society, of the adventures of the original patricians (gentes/giants) and plebeians. Joyce brought

this into *Ulysses* and we can make some sense of the novel with reference to language and literature in Vico. Joyce is clearly not bound, however, by Vico's suggestion that Homeric poetry is lacking in irony and reflection. The time of Vico was one in which the poetics of classicism was under strain from the appearance in literature of what would previously be regarded as grotesque and formless, and the canonisation of such works. We can see this in Burke's *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Burke 1990), and the way the grotesque and irregular in Shakespeare and Milton is taken up in a revised form of the classical notion of the sublime. This development is taken further in the philosophy of German Romantic Irony for which the aesthetic and poetic provide a point of irony and reflection which unites the empirical with the transcendental, the experienced world with the ideal world, particular forms with form as such, the scientific world with the ethical world.<sup>17</sup> Vico opens up this path because the role he gives to Homer elevates the literary above mere ornamentation into what is necessary for understanding history. However, Vico can only conceive of this by depriving literature of what can be regarded as its literariness. Homer is even deprived of the kind of rationalised poetics conceived by Aristotle, which reduces literariness to metaphysical and logical theoretical knowledge, and the categories of political-ethical practical wisdom. Aristotle does at least allow for irony, in the concealments of literary action and reflection on values, within very deterministic rules. The Romantic aesthetics which emerged with idealist philosophy take irony and reflection in unlimited forms as the essence of literature. Literature merges with philosophy, not as historical narrative but in the constitution of self-consciousness. For Friedrich Schlegel and the other Romantic Ironists who developed such conceptions, literature has a historical role in the sense that the infinite irony of aspects undermining each other in literature is equated with republican freedom and equality between all individuals. Cervantes and Shakespeare appear as ideal representatives of this irony. *Ulysses* contains passages which suggest that it is a

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17. For texts and an introduction, see *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: The Romantic Ironists and Goethe* (Wheeler 1984); and for Kierkegaard's discussion of the movement, see *The Concept of Irony* (Kierkegaard 1989).

deliberate attempt to create a national epic for Ireland of equal status with the British and Spanish works.

*Ulysses* should certainly be regarded as a work of Viconian history-literature but as mediated by Romantic and Idealist aesthetics, probably known by Joyce through Samuel Taylor Coleridge's popularisation of German philosophy, including his lectures on Shakespeare; along with the writings of Symbolist Romantics and decadents on pure poetry and words creating a space distinct from historical reality. Joyce both takes up and rejects the emphasis on an aesthetics abstracted from the material and popular worlds. *Ulysses* unifies the purity of imagination and playfulness of words with an emphasis on gross physical reality in sexuality, birth, death, eating, digestion, excretion and bodily effusions in general. If Vico can be seen as identifying democratic, heroic and divine aspects of language so does Joyce in way which mingles them. As far as historical reference is concerned, the political events of Joyce's times are well recorded and we don't need to decode *Ulysses* as an account of the constitution of the state, law or people.

What *Ulysses* contains is the everyday consciousness of religious and political forms and ideologies. These are ironised through the use of epic references, which become a mock epic style. The pretensions of Irish nationalists are mercilessly satirised, not because Joyce opposed Irish nationalism, he also mocks British colonialism, but because of the deadening effect of formalised ideologies. Irish nationalists are shown either as pompous intellectuals using language in a vacuous manner, or as uneducated bigots. The satire itself introduces the elements of historical nationalism: a simultaneous wish for idealised 'revival' of an imagined heroic Celtic past; and a wish to appropriate the elevated parts of high European history and culture. These all absorb into a flow of language which turns these claims into part of a flow in which they are just aspects of lived reality. The Viconian contrast between sacred or heroic language and democratic language is acted out in the contrast between consciousness and ideology. Consciousness cannot be free of ideology, if it is to have any existence. Consciousness can only exist in the inter-subjectivity which requires ideological organisation. However, the ideology is shown to be contingent.

### **Joyce, History and Immanent Value**

The claims of ideology to reduce history to the history of ideologically determined positions, where all individuals are institutionalised into some ideology which is the real actor of history, are questioned by the prevailing alienation. The alienation belongs to the young artist-intellectual Stephen Dedalus and the self-educated advertising salesman Leopold Bloom. The names themselves arouse historical associations: Daedalus refers to Greek mythology and literature, Bloom is a well known Jewish name adapted from the German-Jewish Blum. The relation of Greek and Jew itself refers to an influential work of Nineteenth Century cultural-historical interpretation: Matthew *Culture and Anarchy* (Arnold 1960). This was itself an adaptation of German Romanticism-Idealism to Victorian Britain aiming to find a way out of pure materialisms and individualism. For Arnold, European history was the history of conflict between Greek sweetness and light; and Hebraic morality and seriousness. These could be reconciled if liberal society accepted the need for institutions to preserve cultural tradition and social cohesion. Joyce uses and transforms Arnold in the aesthetic-intellectual Dedalus and the ethical-pragmatic Bloom, both of whom are however aware of the absence of an ideal world. They have corresponding lacks, Dedalus is alienated from his father; Bloom's son died (and his father committed suicide). The novel shows their parallel lives and then their meeting during one day and night of Dublin life. Their meeting provides no final reconciliation though, and the last chapter of the novel provides a female voice as a possible point of reconciliation.

Molly Bloom's night-time monologue repeatedly says 'Yes', in a somewhat Nietzschean manner as for Nietzsche 'yes saying' and the affirmation of life are fundamental. In a highly ironised way, Molly Bloom's position in the novel refers back to Goethe's Gretchen (in *Faust*) and Dante's Beatrice (in *The Divine Comedy*). The structure has a religious basis: Leopold Bloom as God the father, Dedalus as Christ the son, and Molly Bloom as the Virgin Mary. The whole of *Ulysses* deals with the value of Christian tradition. Dedalus is preoccupied with the issue of the identity of God and Christ, Father and Son in Christianity. As a lapsed Catholic, he still seeks a union of father and son in lived reality and regrets the lack of this in his own

life. So *Ulysses* shows the secularisation of history, as part of a general collapse of ideology. Tradition loses its place in the infinite many-sidedness of *Ulysses*, but is in some way reinstated through the repetition of the past.

The repetition of the past does not allow an eternal ideal history in the sense of turning history into an ideal object of knowledge. The eternal repetition becomes the impossibility of reality which is not repetition, the impossibility of structure which does not repeat some model. However, the language used and the nature of the structure relies on the accidental, the void, the contingent and error. The consubstantiality of father and son is a void at the macro and micro-levels of a kind that is necessary from the intellectual point of view, according to Dedalus. According to Dedalus, the role of the Virgin Mary in the Catholic church is an illusion imposed on the population by the Catholic Church. The Catholic tradition does strongly emphasise veneration of Mary as a mediator with God and Christ, providing a less abstract source of spiritual inspiration than God. Joyce seems to implicitly reject Dedalus as anti-feminine, by giving the last word to Molly Bloom. From Joyce's point of view, we can only conceive of society and overcome alienation by combining aesthetic-intellectual purity of form with lived sensual life. This requires a repetition of pre-existing ideology and institutions as part of life rather than as separate 'divine' or 'heroic' language and law.

The secularisation of religious forms, mocking the institutionalised church, is combined with an appeal to an ethical universal-humanism in which nationalist violence is condemned, partly with reference to the anti-Semitism which Bloom has to encounter from some of his fellow Dubliners. The ethical universal-humanism, which looks very compatible with Vico, combines with tragedy: in the sense of the rejection of lived history by ideal history, the lack of Greek or Jewish ideals in the real world. Both Dedalus and Bloom are troubled by a pessimism with regard to the loss of traditional forms. Dedalus regards himself as a horrible example of non-belief and Bloom feels the lack of a son and the Jewish traditions associated with that. When Bloom sees an advertisement for a Zionist project, he associates the Dead Sea with grey despair, so that he seems conscious of Jewish consciousness as melancholic in its exile and the lack of hope in the land from which there has been

an exile. However, exile and the traveller are idealised by Joyce in comparison with the persecution of the plebeian/traveller/hostis in Vico. Joyce matches Vico's overcoming of that in the democratic world. It is Bloom the 'wandering Jew' of anti-Semitic imagination who can match the universal humanism Coleridge attributed to Shakespeare, sometimes alluded to by Joyce, and harmonise with Dedalus. Dedalus refers to the Greek myth according to which Daedalus, the master creator of labyrinths flew towards the sun, killing his son Icarus who flew too near the heat of the sun melting his artificial wings. Stephen Dedalus is a fallen angel, that is someone with Satanic pride. Bloom's universality enables him to change the alienation of non-belief to a universality of sympathy. This is not just the utopian triumph of consensus over antagonism because Joyce does not eliminate the antagonism or produce a final harmonious reconciliation.

From Vico's point of view, the moment of universality, law and peace is the moment of dissolution because there is no force to bind society any more. Since Joyce avoids the Viconian monarchical utopia he is able to suggest an antagonism compatible with universality, alienation and conflict do not end. As Nietzsche might say, the master and slave may disappear, the ascetic priest who denies life may become a philosopher-artist, there must still be distance, struggle, overcoming, tension and self-denial. Viconian-Hegelian repetition as stasis may be overcome by the use of history for life, the recognition of the uncontrollable metaphoricity of language, variety of possible interpretations, and the creative antagonisms these produce. The neighbour as category of universal-humanity which denies difference; and the warrior as a category of destruction may be replaced by the friend as Nietzsche suggests.<sup>18</sup>

The possibilities of language form the subject matter of *Ulysses* to a very large degree. The possibilities of language necessarily show its breakdown. *Ulysses* frequently breaks down into pure physical noises and onomatopoeia. An example can be seen in a chapter situated in a newspaper office. Bloom is trying to place advertising and Dedalus is trying to place a story about foot and mouth disease, which leads his jester friend Mulligan to label him "bullock befriending

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18. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part One, "Of War and Warriors", "Of the Friend", "Of Love of One's Neighbour".

bard". There is a strong contrast, implicit in this joke, between the ideal of poetic language and the reality of newspaper communication. The advert Bloom is placing emphasises the word 'Keyes', which is an indirect allusion to the House of Keys in the Isle of Man, a self-governing domain of the British monarchy, and therefore a coded call for Irish Home Rule. In the newspaper office a particularly pompous academic is orating on the Irish national struggle, with a particularly portentous emphasis on its status as the repetition of history: Moses against Pharaoh. The grandiose claims are undercut by the insertion of newspaper headlines. The whole chapter is constructed on the basis of mock newspaper headlines which divide up the text. These progress from Victorian sententiousness to tabloid vulgarity, itself a parody of the Victorian progress from patrician to democratic society. Professor McHugh's oration is undermined by the headlines and its conjunction with other forms of communication. There is a period interruption throughout the chapter of "sllt, sllt" suggesting both the noise of the printing press and the sound of human breathing. The mechanical and organic undercut the rhetorical claims of oratory. Language is seen as something that is used for commercial as well as political purposes in a newspaper and as what establishes a city. The chapter begins with a reference to the transport networks that deliver the *Freeman's Journal*, and implicitly turn language into the physical motion which takes people across a city.

Dedalus demonstrates language and story telling as opaque and uncommunicative in "A Pisgah Sight of Palestine or the Parable of the Plums" (Joyce, 150). This carries on from the riddle in the school chapter:

The cock crew  
The sky was blue  
The bells in heaven  
Were striking eleven  
Tis time for this poor soul  
To go to heaven.  
(Joyce, 32)

The 'answer' is "the fox burying his grandmother under a hollybush", bemusing and disappointing the school boys. The riddle relates to Dedalus's state of mind, mourning for his mother, guilt at refusing to acknowledge the Catholic Church on her death bed (Joyce, 14). Language and poetry is shown collapsing into private meanings and disguise. The metaphorical processes of literary language are in collapse, something often alluded to in *Ulysses*. The metaphor and determinate irony of classical literary thought is always collapsing. The ironies are too obscure or vague, literariness is turned into a chaotic looking flow of vulgar thoughts and vague cultural references. Bloom's equation with Ulysses/Odysseus is clearly bizarre. He is highly unheroic and disappointed, but is nevertheless established as a heroic wandering consciousness possessed of universal sympathy.

The whole notion of literary repetition and inheritance is alluded to through the issue of metempsychosis. Molly Bloom has asked Leopold what "met him what" (Joyce, 66) means, and Leopold explains the idea of transmigration of souls. Molly's reply is 'rocks' and her original mispronunciation is itself an indication of language communicating through material resemblances between words, the materiality of words in general, and errors of transmission rather than as pure communication. The claim that *Ulysses* is the repetition of the *Odyssey* in some respects invites the same reply. The form of history through repetition is mocked. However, there is not so much a complete rejection as a relativisation of such claims. History occurs in this novel as the intersection of an infinite number of language uses, emphasising misunderstanding, vulgarity and physical functions; at the same time as the freedom of infinite variety. For T.S. Eliot, myth imposes unity on the chaos of *Ulysses*, but Joyce really creates myth out of chaos showing the emergence of micro-rituals and myths in the process of language. Bloom reads while defecating and listening to church bells, Dedalus receives a feeling of spiritual uplift from watching a ship while walking along Sandycove Beach in a depressed mood (Joyce, 56). Chapter endings particularly, tend to suggest some moment of clarity and aesthetic perfection, even in a very vulgar context which is what Joyce described as epiphanies in a development of Romantic Symbolist aesthetics. Previous myth is mocked, parodied, ironised, satirised and transformed into a modern myth. In comparison with earlier

myth, this mythology is composed of indeterminate metaphor and irony. This might also encourage us to read earlier myth in a different way.

History can be conceived with reference to Dedalus' remark that 'God is a shout in the street' (Joyce, 40). The clear transcendental structures of Vico's philosophy of history have to be abandoned in favour of a chaotic looking immanence. That is the existence of structures, which are in the ideal, eternal pattern of recurrence, is shattered by the complexity of history as the interaction of meanings and ideologies. The speculative readings of Homer in Vico cannot stand such a perspective. What can be understood is that Vico's philosophy provides the source of a pluralized genealogical account of forces in history, particularly through language and law, and that *Ulysses* is a model of this. A model which emphasises the opacity, paradoxes and uncertainty of language, meaning, myth and law, which is the condition of their productive power.

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