

Joyce the Playwright

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INTRODUCTION

Joyce and the Irish National Theatre

I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated consciousness of my race

(*Portrait* 252).

Stephen Dedalus ends *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* determined to leave his home in Catholic Ireland for a new life in Paris. Here, through a life of exile, Stephen hopes to re-encounter experience. It is this foreign life, and not the experience of Ireland, that will yield “the uncreated consciousness of [Stephen’s] race [the Irish].” Stephen’s desire to leave his homeland, to *forge* rather than to discover a national consciousness stands in stark opposition to the dominant ideas of Cultural Nationalism at the turn of the century in Ireland. This movement, which sought to forge an Irish identity through the creation of a national literature, characterized the period of both Joyce and his character, Stephen’s, intellectual awakening. From roughly 1891 to 1915, Anglo-Irish interest in Celtic mythology and the Gaelic language grew as artists and writers attempted to discover the true seat of the Irish culture and the Irish consciousness. As an author, James Joyce, like the young artist of his novel, refuted the notion that a real Irish identity held its roots in a mythical pastoral past. His approach denied William Butler Yeats’s claim that modernity acted as a corruptive force in Ireland, and instead used this very modernity as the “experience” out of which he would forge the consciousness of his own countrymen (Nolan 23). Joyce would create two plays,

Exiles and “Circe,” as a response to the Cultural Nationalism movement incited by Yeats. For Joyce, there could be no single Irishman, no restricted pastoral consciousness. Instead, the consciousness of the race and, therefore, the art that embodied that consciousness, must be the stuff of modern concern.

Joyce is most often considered a novelist, but throughout his career as an author and writer, he maintained an active interest in theatre, especially Irish theatre. His first obsession with the drama came shortly after having seen Henrik Ibsen’s *When We Dead Awaken*, but as Joyce grew older, his interest narrowed in scope, honing in on the works of his countrymen. He reviewed many Irish playwrights, including Yeats, John M. Synge, and Edward Martyn. While in Zurich, Joyce even founded his own acting troupe, the English Players, as a means of bringing Irish plays to the continent (Bulson 11). Joyce wrote three plays, only two of which survive today. His earliest play, *A Brilliant Career*, was destroyed by Joyce himself shortly after its completion. The other two, *Exiles* and “Circe,” remain as evidence of Joyce’s interest in the theatre (Bulson 65). These projects take on a heightened concern with the Irish nation, perhaps, in part, because of the nationalist fervor of Irish playhouses, perhaps because Joyce himself thought the theatre to be the best place from which to sound a political agenda. Whatever the case, these plays remain as a lens through which one can investigate the modernist Joyce’s relationship with a largely anti-modern concept of Irishness.

The following pages will establish Yeats’s Cultural Nationalism as a mythical construction of the Irish identity and introduce Joyce’s irreverent, modernist answer to the Nationalist question. A short history of Irish Cultural Nationalism will provide a

clear picture of the theatrical trends against which Joyce's plays react. Yeats's mission to create a, Irish National Theatre fostered the growth of the restrictive theatrical climate surrounding Joyce's dramas. I will argue that, as a playwright, Joyce rebels against the National theatre and the climate it created, mirroring, instead, larger continental trends in experimental theatre. Within this larger context, Joyce's two extant plays demonstrate a hostile relationship with Nationalism and the theatre: they embody and reject the moral and social implications of the Irish National Theatre and its form.

Yeats's National Theatre gained momentum in 1891 with the death of Charles Stewart Parnell, the longstanding, much criticized figurehead of the Irish nationalist movement. The death of this unifying leader, and his fall from grace which preceded it, opened up a space for what is often referred to as Cultural Nationalism. According to Ben Levitas's book, *The Theatre of Nation*, Yeats saw the demise of Parnell and the fracturing of the Nationalist party as an opportunity for a "disillusioned Ireland" to create a nationalist movement fundamentally based on the creation and revival of a distinctly Irish culture (Levitas 2). Yeats and the Cultural Nationalism movement saw the stage as the crucial component for this literary re-birth, as L.H. Platt recognizes in his essay, "*Ulysses* 15 and the Irish Literary Theatre":

During the first decade of the twentieth century, according to the Anglo-Irish directors of Ireland's cultural rebirth, the success of revivalism was crucially dependent on the creation of a theatrical space in which the ceremony of Irish nationhood could be performed. (Platt 34)

Yeats thought that through the reinvention of the Irish theatre, he and other like-minded artists could revive a cohesive national identity that would eventually lead to orchestrated physical resistance. He and Lady Augusta Gregory formulated a proposal to accompany

their pleas for financial support; this proposal would come to be understood as a working manifesto for the movement. It read, in part:

We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome and that freedom to experiment which is not found in theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. (Gregory 8-9)

For Yeats and his movement, this national identity relied on a close identification with the country's Celtic past and the "uncorrupted" mind of the pastoral peasant. Cultural Nationalism, then, was a movement that placed the Irish soul, "the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland," at the center of the Nationalist agenda. Yeats hoped that through the collective acknowledgement of the quickly fading Celtic mythology of rural Ireland, the Irish populace would be able to reach a state of unity in which "a nation-wide multiform reverie" would take hold "no matter how distant the minds, how dumb the lips" (*Autobiographies* 263). With this end in mind, the movement developed a theatre, which would eventually be called the Irish National Theatre. In this space, Yeats and other playwrights, notably John Milton Synge, Lady Gregory, and Sean O'Casey, could stage their version of the Irish Nation. This exclusive movement represented the Irish with a drastically anti-modern bent, retreating from the lived grit of the city to a fictive pastoral past.

While the Irish National Theatre was originally conceived of as a form of resistance against English stereotypes of the Irish stage man, it soon garnered criticism as yet another colonizing force. Many of the movement's plays were met with riotous criticism, the chief complaint being that rather than usurping English authority, Yeats

and his Anglo-Irish colleagues were in fact reinforcing a view of Ireland in which those who held the land (the Anglo-Irish) retained the power. Colm Tóibín explains the root of this criticism: The Irish National Theatre expressed its Nationalism by “inventing and discovering a rich past for her [Ireland], and imagining a great future, and managing to ignore the muddy and guilt-ridden history in between this ancient glory and the time to come” (Tóibín 65). Yeats created an Ireland that conveniently ignored the current state of Irish affairs, and insisted that this revision of Ireland would be the incitement of revolution.

Many literary critics have also come to understand Yeats and the Cultural Nationalist movement as the product of a highly biased anthropology. Taking the Irish peasant as the subject of its plays, the Abbey Theatre (home to the Irish National Theatre), often inadvertently exploited the very Irish types they were fighting against, such as the benevolent and wise peasant living the simple country life. The Irish National Theatre also often imbued these peasants with an affinity toward the mystical, the fairy-folk, legends of a Celtic past. Wes Davis, in the introduction to *The Leonard L. Milberg Irish Theatre Collection*, tentatively argues that Yeats and Lady Gregory, among others, specifically chose the peasantry of Western Ireland as the subject of their plays, “because most of the Irish knew relatively little about the life lived in the West, making the peasant a kind of blank slate for the artists’ usually romantic ideas” (Davis 31). Yeats justifies his use of these archetypes and mythologies in his essay, “The Tragic Theatre,” as he expounds on his theory of bad art:

I found no desirable place, no man I could have wished to be, no woman

I could have loved, no Golden Age, no lure for secret hope, no
adventure with myself for theme out of the endless tale I told myself all
day long. (“Tragic” 404)

Yeats opposes any art that reiterates “the endless tale” of the everyday. For Him, the
only appropriate artistic role models were those forged from the stuff of fairytales.
Instead, he harks back to a mythical world, from which he can create role models and
objects of affection that transcend reality. Joyce, and others after him, would criticize
this conception of art as pedaling whimsy as the real representation of an Irish people.

On October 15, 1901, James Joyce voiced his opinion on the Irish Literary
Theatre, as it was then called, in a short essay entitled, “The Day of Rabblement.” Joyce,
having once stood against his classmates as they attempted to shutdown Yeats’s *The
Countess Cathleen*, now offers his own indictment of the movement:

The Irish Literary Theatre gave out that it was the champion of progress,
and proclaimed war against commercialism and vulgarity. It had partly
made good its word and was expelling the old devil, when after its first
encounter it surrendered to the popular will. Now, your popular devil is
more dangerous than your vulgar devil. Bulk and lungs count for
something, and he can gild his speech aptly. He has prevailed once more,
and the Irish Literary Theatre must now be considered the property of
the rabblement of the most belated race in Europe. (*OPCW* 50)

Joyce saw the Irish drama of his youth and young adulthood as a tool for the
dissemination of artistic ideas, a tool that was now being abused by the un-artistic
propagandists and the balking masses. The “rabblement” to which Joyce refers is
undoubtedly the riotous Irish crowd that met Yeats’s play with cries of “A libel on
Ireland! Made in Germany! Blasphemy!” in Stephen’s fictionalized encounter with the
theatre in *Portrait* (*Portrait* 226). Joyce’s reference to the Irish as “the most belated race in
Europe” implies that his people, the Irish people, have already fallen behind the curve

culturally and have no authority over their own modes of artistic representation. Joyce bemoans the potential of the Irish Literary Theatre and curses the populism that would come to characterize a movement that had once prided itself on progress. Joyce recognizes the political implications of theatre as well. He indicts the Irish Literary Theatre for falling short of its proclaimed role as “the champion of progress” and warrior “against commercialism,” which implies that Joyce also sees the theatre as a means of disseminating and even motivating social change. The theatre fails, however, when those responsible for it fail to live up to their claim and give in to the whims of a public whose political and artistic goals are not those revolutionary ideas of progress.

As Yeats’s plays at the Abbey attracted increasingly negative criticism, various factions such as The Gaelic League, *United Ireland*, Sinn Fein, and the Irish Theatre began to forge opposing models of Irish nationality. Under the influence of these ideological movements and The Irish Literary Theatre, playhouses swelled with political propaganda pieces, each attempting to simultaneously appease and sway the public. Drama increasingly became vehicle for a national agenda, rather than the embodiment of an organic national identity. For instance, many playhouses insisted that an Irish play must be written in Gaelic instead of the oppressive English; others restricted their repertoire to plays by Irishmen or plays that took place in Ireland; the strictest upheld that both must be true. Ultimately, the idea that all theatre must be both an embodiment of and a statement to Ireland created an exclusive theatrical environment, in which politics took precedence over art.

This Nationalist movement also involved the revival of older Irish melodramas, which the Anglo-Irish directors thought to be an embodiment of some innately Irish

quality. Perhaps the most pervasive of these plays belong to the Irish playwright, Standish O'Grady, who took up many of the main political and social concerns of the Irish people as they approached the turn of the century. Stephen Watt, in *Joyce, O'Casey, and the Irish Popular Theatre*, notes the prevalence of these plays: "*The Eviction* (1879), *Emigration* (1880), and *The Fenian* (1888) are among the most enduring of O'Grady's melodramas...they were revived frequently during the 1880s, 1890s, and first two decades of this century" (Watt 57). These plays address serious political issues in an extremely didactic and one-dimensional way, through a formulaic plot development and the adaptation of stereotypical, flat characters. The plays, while arguably entertaining, cannot be categorized as revolutionary art. Yeats's movement, rather than subverting these types, adopted them toward its own ends. The plays maintained the melodrama and the stereotyping, all the while, making explicit the theatre's role as cultural producer: the Irish Nation must first be played out on the Irish stage, then, and only then, can a real revolution be possible.

The revival dramas took on a propagandist bent in the context of the Cultural Nationalism movement. Even Watt, who unabashedly praises the Irish National Theatre, notes that O'Grady's plays were not literary masterpieces, nor were they historically accurate. They were, however, politically incendiary. History plays during this period comprised a tale of the Irish Nation that consisted largely of melodramatic anecdote. While describing the plays of this period, Watt uses the term melodrama in a broad, and yet very telling way; for him, the "melodrama" "describes a history or a means of relating historical materials...[the plays] tend, unlike tragedy, to locate opposition in a public world rather than in the internal conflicts of a tragic hero" (Watt

63). This drama is political in nature, creating a skewed version of history from out of which one might arrive at a skewed version of Irish nationhood. Watt also notices that despite some change in the level of sophistication, these plays continued to employ colonizing stereotypes such as “The Wild Irish Boy” (Watt 68). Yeats’s movement set the pace for a national theatrical climate that advocated gross misrepresentation of Irish history as a tool toward the creation of a new Ireland.

Yeats’s Cultural Nationalism and Joyce’s indictment of the movement can both be seen as a reaction to the crisis of modernity, which stimulated experimental theatre throughout Europe at the turn of the century. As increasing urban migration and new industrial technology took hold, thinkers and artists began to question basic assumptions about human subjectivity and social interaction. Peter Szondi, in his book *Theory of Modern Drama*, explains how this crisis of subjectivity led to a crisis in the theatre. He contends that all forms are historical; they embody a culture’s fundamental assumptions about the world and its relation to that world. The Drama and the classical culture that gave rise to it take for granted a direct correlation between action and character. Ideas of interiority as distinct from a physical acting body did not become dominant philosophy until the Enlightenment; it is not coincidental that the theatre entered a state of chronic decline at this time. At the turn of the century, psychological realism began to take hold across Europe and the novel rose into realm of high art, and the given reality of the stage became all but obsolete. The Drama, in Szondi’s formulation, is “not a (secondary) representation of something else (primary); it presents itself, is itself” (Szondi 9). This classical understanding of the Drama draws on Aristotle’s poetics, creating an art form that is not referential or symbolic but rather a presentation of a self contained world—

the world of the play. Aristotle's formula calls for continuity of time, place, and action, all of which cling to an unproblematic relationship between language and reality. The form weakens as the unreliability of language and the gap between external and internal worlds become part of the modern understanding; "The drama is possible only when dialogue is possible" (Szondi 10). In other words, as psychological realism and, with it, relativism and solipsism came into vogue as the thematic of the twentieth century, the Drama as an absolute reality could no longer function: actions were no longer equated with character, dialogue became impossible, and the reality of the stage fell into doubt. This drama is replaced by what Szondi calls "the epic theatre;" a theatre that makes the inadequacy of Drama its central concern.

In light of this contemporary phenomenon, Yeats's approach to the theatre takes on an extremely conservative bent. Yeats looked to the model of theatre as a staging ground for popular modes of thought, unlike the burgeoning playwrights of the Continent, who used the stage-space as a means of undermining the audience's basic assumptions. Outside of Ireland, an entirely different theatrical movement was forming: that of the symbolists and the avant-garde. Plays such as Alfred Jerry's *Ubu Roi* incited riots in the theatre. Playwrights took up Ibsenesque and Chekhovian pens as well, creating a realism that bordered on the absurd. These plays were characterized by a parallel manipulation of content and form. Unlike the theatre of Ireland, the European playhouses shed many of the political restraints of the theatre, creating, instead, a medium in which the human condition (not the Irish, English, or French condition) could be explored. Each of these movements concentrated on the experience of the stage and the theatre—the ability of the audience to see the world through someone

else's eyes. This motif was taken to new extremes in Expressionism and Symbolism, both of which sought to create a mood or an emotion through sensory perception outside of the visual and aural. The plays took as their central focus the ability to communicate genuinely between two people, unlike the Irish plays, which were bound up in the dissemination of Nationalist ideals. Cultural Nationalism necessitated the unproblematic communication of an entire Irish race and therefore required the reenactment of an unquestioned relationship between language and understanding. This anti-modern stage prevented Irish playwrights from participating in the continental movements, and, according to the young James Joyce, reinforcing British dominance in the arts.

Joyce, like his first artistic idol, Ibsen, thought that the theatre had become too “stagey” and, in his youth, began to look outside of Ireland for more inspiring forms of drama. Joyce saw in Ibsen something of a kindred spirit. His reading of *When We Dead Awaken* would go on to influence not only Joyce's own writing, but also his entire aesthetic understanding. Despite his harsh words against the contemporary theatre in “The Day of the Rabblement,” Joyce holds some hope for a theatre in which true art, such as Ibsen's, can prevail. In his essay “On Ibsen's New Drama” Joyce refers to this new kind of realism as “the naked drama—either the perception of a great truth, or the opening up of a great question, or a great conflict which is almost independent of the conflicting actors, and has been and is of far-reaching importance” (*OPCW* 45). Joyce sees this “opening up” not as the revelation of human beings in extreme situations, but rather a psychological opening of the everyday that serves to expose what he believes to be fundamental truths about the human condition. His is not the drama of famine or

eviction, in short the drama of trauma, but rather the revelation of underlying social truths as they occur in our daily lives. Throughout his career, Joyce's work continued to pursue "opening up of a great question," which he so admired in Ibsen, however, with time Joyce would develop a more vexed relationship with "the perception of a great truth."

Ibsen's influence predisposed Joyce to a critical understanding of Irish Cultural Nationalism and the Irish National (or Literary) Theatre. He found the Gaelic league absurd and hinted that by restricting itself to only "Irish" art, the art movement of Ireland was lagging behind in the competitive world of European theatre. Joyce, instead, advocated for an art movement that would take into account the burgeoning experimental art forms of the rest of Europe and subsequently participate in an artistic relationship. The Revival allowed itself to be defined by what it was not: firstly, English and secondly, European. Unlike Joyce's ideal theatre, which "has to do with underlying laws first, in all their nakedness and divine severity," the Nationalist Theatre created a drama that ultimately ignored these larger questions in favor of a simple representation of a fictive pastoral past. These plays were about the creation of a people and not about the laws that guide them.

Joyce's stubborn individualism also served as an impetus toward his denouncement of the Irish Literary Theatre. He saw the artist as a tortured man who submitted to nothing outside of his self. Seamus Deane describes this characteristic in *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, writing:

Joyce...sees his role as that of the artist who will not...be distorted in the glass of communal desire. He will be the true artist. He will escape false representation and, in doing so, come to terms with the medium of a

language which carries within itself the idea of re-presentation in one form of a culture which initially existed in another, earlier for. (Deane 33)

This artistic isolationism is corroborated in Joyce's own writing, where he criticizes the art of Cultural Nationalism, saying, "If an artist courts the favor of the multitude he cannot escape the contagion of its fetishism and deliberate self-deception, and if he joins a popular movement he does so at his own risk" (*OPCW* 51-2). In this way, Joyce separated himself not only from Cultural Nationalism, but also from the European avant-garde. He, like the avant-garde described by Szondi, saw the correlation between form and "self-deception" and in order to subvert this correlation, manipulated not only the content but also the underlying structure of his writing.

Joyce seeks to displace this dominant theatrical mode through parody and pastiche, creating instead an art form that comments in its own role as a mode of cultural reproduction. The Irish National Theatre established its claim on the Irish soul to the exclusion of other forms of representation, creating a solidified image of the perfect Irishman and, with it, a drama that was anti-modern insofar as it sought to maintain traditional ideas of communication within the drama. This form harked back to a fictional pastoral as the time of Irish splendor and, subsequently, branded the present stage of Irish development as an aberration in the history of the race. Joyce thought that the lack of creative freedom created "dwarf dramas," dramas that ignored the needs of art in favor of a political agenda or "have for their central figure that legendary person, who is vagabond and poet, and even saint at times" (*OPCW* 75). In defining themselves against English and European drama, the leaders of the Irish National Theatre cut themselves off from an invaluable artistic exchange. This isolation created a very narrow

representation of the world and (perhaps more importantly for Joyce) limits the artist's raw materials.

This thesis will examine two plays by Joyce, *Exiles*, and "Circe" as a direct response to the Irish National Theatre. I will argue that Joyce, like Szondi, saw a disconnect between the classically minded theatre, a theatre that took communication for granted, and the needs of his country. In his work, Joyce seeks to expose the flaws of such a formulation, creating a thoroughly modern drama, *Exiles*. This work relies on the comparative power of pastiche, exposing the flaws of disparate theatrical forms by placing them in juxtaposition. Joyce appropriates common theatrical techniques, strips them of any authority, and, ultimately, exposes the gap between character and communication. The result is a play that is obtuse, stilted, and incredibly unpopular. "Circe," the closet drama nestled in the middle of Joyce's epic, *Ulysses*, achieves the same effect through a carnivalesque hallucination. In this genre, Joyce can more adeptly reenact these tired conventions and expose their destructive nature. "Circe" becomes an exhaustive indictment of the theatrical conventions of Ireland that Joyce called "stagey." In exposing and, I will argue, subverting, these commonplaces of the Irish National Theatre, Joyce actively seeks to create a notion of the Irish collective unconscious that stands in opposition to the "soul" formulated by Yeats and his cohorts. Joyce's Irishman, unlike Yeats, admits his status as a colonized individual struggling to find adequate modes of representation in a repressive world. His plays implicitly acknowledge their place on the Irish, national stage.

GENRE PLAY

Three Genres in James Joyce's *Exiles*

Not the least vital of the problems which confront our country is the problem of her attitude towards those who, having left her in her hour of need, have been called back to her now in the eve of her long-awaited victory, to her whom in loneliness and exile they have at last learned to love. (*Exiles* 99)

Exiles, Joyce's only extant stage play, can be understood as the product of this "vital...problem" of displaced Irishmen facing the Irish nation. Joyce, one of those exiles who left Ireland in her most wanting hour, sought refuge in his home country in the form of a stage for his play. Like the exiles mentioned by Joyce's character, Robert Hand, in the above, Joyce's attempt to contribute to the Irish culture he left behind was met with discouragement and hostility, arguably because of the play's difficulty. In *Exiles*, Joyce uses conventional forms in an unconventional context in an attempt to create an unraveling effect similar to the panoply of genres and styles that jeopardize the novel in *Ulysses*. Having once acknowledged this continuity, one becomes inclined to see what are usually regarded as *Exiles*'s failings—the "sexual frankness, tedious pace, essentially static quality, plodding domestic realism...predictable love triangles...melodramatic gesture, uninspired clichés, and strained symbolism"—as a strategic critique of the current state of the theater rather than the characteristics of a failed play (Shepherd-Barr 171). Joyce's play uses these tired conventions to dismantle of the Irish National Theatre and the artistic climate that he had come to despise.

In *Exiles*, Joyce creates a dramatic form that mirrors his plot's central concern: the irrevocable exile of an individual consciousness. The characters of *Exiles* strive to understand one another's hearts and minds but are ultimately unable to bridge the gap between two souls. *Exiles*'s stage history suggests a similar isolation between the work and its audience. Critics have struggled to place the play within a single genre, claiming that its form creates unnecessary confusion. Audiences, like the characters, often cannot discern any definitive meaning within the context of the play, leaving the play largely exiled from Joyce's oeuvre. Joyce creates this world of isolation by intertwining three distinct dramatic forms—melodrama, Ibsenist Realism, and Maeterlinck's Symbolism—each of which calls the validity of the others into question. The melding of these three genres is most evident in Joyce's use of dialogue. The play disassembles every mode of communication, from the normal conversation of a drawing room, to the interrogative exchange of a confessional, to the imperative commands of a desperate lover. *Exiles* creates a theatrical form in which the play, the characters, and the audience exist in a state of irrevocable exile. This representation of communication flies in the face of the Irish National Theatre's entire project—the representation of a collective Irish soul—and instead forces the audience or reader to accept the impossibility of a shared consciousness, let alone a shared Ireland.

This chapter will first demonstrate how Joyce's play was itself both exiled from Joyce's canon and exiled from the theater, receiving dismal reviews from theater and literary critics. Despite their consistently negative tone, these reviews (perhaps unknowingly) point directly to Joyce's experimental mix of various traditional and contemporary drama genres. The following section will provide a brief survey of the

play's stage history, or lack thereof, and demonstrate how the work's difficult relation to the theatre stems from a mixing of genres within the work.

The combination of genres in Joyce's play led to the work's long exile from the stage. It was not until 1970, when Harold Pinter, noted English playwright, brought James Joyce's *Exiles* to London's Mermaid Theatre, that the play was staged with any success—fifty-five years after Joyce finished writing it (MacNicholas 14). Over the course of these years, the play developed a reputation as a failed experiment, a cathartic exercise, an Ibsenist facsimile—anything but a work of high drama. The play debuted in a 1918 print edition, three years after its completion and roughly seven years before it made its English-language debut (MacNicholas 11). Despite the play's discouraging reception, Joyce tirelessly sought a home for his *Exiles*. These efforts produced little result and, in 1941, Joyce died without ever having seen his play staged. Critics of *Exiles* commonly explain this theatrical delay by turning to the inadequacies of the script itself, but such a dismissive explanation glosses over the complexities of both Joyce's work and the theatrical world in which he was trying to place it. Indeed, the play's extended exile from the theatrical world hinges largely on the genre-bound repertoires of most contemporary playhouses.

Exiles received numerous rejections from directors, critics, even friends of Joyce, each of whom seem unable to place the play in any genre and instead chose to define it as simply “unstageable.” Even Ezra Pound, a friend and admirer of Joyce, could not recommend the work. Pound, who read the play in a single evening, responded to the work in a letter to its author, which said, “[y]es it is interesting. It won't do for the stage. (No, it is unsuitable for the ‘Abbey,’ as mebbe ye might kno'aw fer yourself, Mr J'ice)”

(Pound 45). The fate of the play was obvious to Pound: it would not find a playhouse amidst the Gaelic Revival of Cultural Nationalism because its characters did not speak with the proper Irish brogue or embody the proper Irish ideals. Outside of Ireland, Pound found the plays prospects equally dismal, “[r]oughly speaking, it takes about all the brains I’ve got to take in [the] thing, *reading*. And I suppose I’ve more intelligence that the normal theatre goer (god save us)” (Pound 45). Pound saw the theater and literature as diametrically opposed concepts; the theater represented a maelstrom of base entertainment whereas literature served as the playground of the intellect. Joyce’s play lay outside of this dichotomy, attempting to bring a cerebral literature to what had become an uninspired stage.

Much of the play’s lack of success, according to Pound, depended on the baseness of the theatre itself, rather than any defect of the script. Pound published a review that simultaneously praised *Exiles* and offered a scintillating condemnation of the playhouses and theatergoers. He wrote, “[i]t is a ‘dangerous’ play precisely because the author is portraying an intellectual-emotional struggle, because he is dealing with actual thought, actual questioning, not with clichés of thought and emotion” (Pound 52). Despite Pound’s obvious bias, his basic sentiment was shared by the theater world at large: *Exiles* was too heady, too elitist, and too subversive for the stage of 1915. From this reaction, one might conclude that Joyce simply lacked the proper skills as a playwright: the ability to create intrigue, suspense, and action. However, this reception also points to another possibility: both Pound and the audience he criticizes are bound to an understanding of theater that is contingent on popular genres. Joyce’s play refuses to

adhere to this limited view of the theatre and, consequently, remained without stage, without audience.

Joyce's own attitude toward the play and his continuing efforts to stage it demonstrate the playwright's understanding of his own work as an amalgamation of different genres. He sent *Exiles* to the Pioneer Players, the Manchester Repertory Theatre, London's Stage Society and was rejected by each (MacNicholas 10). Yeats also briefly considered the play for the Abbey, but ultimately felt it was not "folky or Irish enough" (Bulson 63). Joyce's early efforts to stage the play in Ireland seem natural given his own status as an exile and the critique of Irish society inherent in the play. *Exiles* addresses a specifically Irish audience: it refers to the Parnell and Post-Parnell crisis, the conflict between Catholics and Protestants, and the much broader topic of English colonization. However, the Abbey Theater (and the Cultural Nationalism movement as a whole) stood by a slim definition of Irish art that allowed for little more than caricatured pastoral plays. Joyce expresses his ongoing frustration with this climate in his essay, "The Day of Rabblement." "The Irish Literary Theatre," he writes, "by its surrender to the trolls has cut itself adrift from the line of advancement" (*OPCW* 51-2). Despite his low opinion of his own national theatre, Joyce first turned to the Irish stage—a move that suggests that he, himself, saw *Exiles* as a play that might redefine the theatrical climate of Ireland.

After *Exiles* failed to find a home in Ireland, Joyce embraced the play's experimental tendencies and approached the European playhouses of the avant-garde. He worked to have it translated into German and Italian and, in 1919, *Exiles* premiered as a German translation (Joyce was unable to secure a visa and could not attend a single

performance of the show's truncated run) (MacNicholas 10). In the same year, Joyce also approached the traditionally Symbolist company of Lugné-Poë in an attempt to see the play staged in Paris, a move which suggests that Joyce himself considered his play to be, in part, a Symbolist work (Shepherd-Barr 172). This shift from Ireland to mainland Europe echoes a pattern in Joyce's own life: when his writing was ill received in Ireland he moved to the continent and attempted to place the Irish situation within the greater European context. Joyce's turn to Europe in both situations signifies his appeal to broader culture; in Joyce's view Irish art, like the Irish people, should achieve greatness not by the mere fact of being Irish but rather through the embodiment of aesthetic integrity.

Still struggling with the genre-bound mentality of these playhouses, Joyce created a theater of his own that he hoped might some day stage his play. He teamed with Claud Sykes, an English actor, to found The English Players in Zurich (Bulson 11). However, this attempt also failed when Joyce was forced to leave the company after a legal battle with one of the English actors, Private Henry Carr, over the cost of a costume and the proceeds from a few tickets (Bulson 11). The English players attempt can also be seen as a sort of perverse statement: to have English playing the Irish is a reversal of a reality that Joyce knew all too well. Every effort to stage the play and the inevitable rejection that followed demonstrate the complexity of genre within *Exiles*. The play is similar enough to each theater's repertoire for Joyce to attempt a staging, but too foreign to actually find a home.

Exiles did not meet an English audience until its New York premier at the Neighborhood Playhouse on February 19, 1925; ten years after Joyce completed the

script (MacNicholas 11). The play baffled house managers; some thought it too daring while others found it unforgivably conservative in matters of form. Its central themes of isolation and trust intrigued, even captivated, many critics; however, they found Joyce's writing inexcusable. For example, Stark Young of the *New York Times* called the Neighborhood Playhouse's production "a doubtful experiment" while simultaneously praising the "unexpected or at least unusual transcriptions of intense emotional analyses" (MacNicholas 11). The play was criticized as the epitome of inaction; George Jean Nathan of the *American Mercury* bemoaned this stagnancy, commenting, "[the] play becomes a mere dialectic operetta: three hours of talk in a single monotonous key" (MacNicholas 11). *Exiles* was stilted, dramatically flat, had very little character development and yet, adhered to classical melodramatic devices. It addressed the issues of cuckoldry and adultery with a tone that left one critic from the *Observer* "with the impression that [he] had strayed into the consulting room of a psycho-pathologist" (MacNicholas 12). Many thought that the play lacked the linguistic genius and ironic wit of Joyce's other works; Robert Benchley held this position, attacking the play for its "ordinary writing. Very very ordinary writing" (MacNicholas 11).

It was not until Pinter's 1970 staging of the play at London's Mermaid Theater, that audiences and critics finally met the play with predominantly positive sentiment (MacNicholas 15). Pinter's earnest production presented an intensely deliberate and strenuously quiet performance (Attridge 186). The critical response to Pinter's staging commends the director's ability to find the underlying mystery in what had become a "museum piece;" however, couched in this praise is an often unforgiving critique of Joyce's ability as a playwright (MacNicholas 16). Keith Dewhurst of *Variety* exemplifies

this tendency, calling Pinter's production of *Exiles* both "an awkward play" and "a work of genius" (MacNicholas 16). While some critics did find inherent value in Joyce's script, the majority of criticism seems to favor Pinter's stagecraft and characteristic style above Joyce's playwriting. John Barber of the *Independent* made this distinction explicit: "The success of Pinter's production is that it generates the cold tension of a play by himself. A more friendly treatment might have helped the audience to warm to the characters and understand them better" (Shepherd-Barr 169). In many ways, Pinter's successful production gave the play an even more troubling reputation: that of a difficult, needy work in want of a director genius. The work seems to evade the normal "friendly" treatment, needing instead the cold distance of a post-modernist director like Pinter. The play is still seldom staged.

The lackluster and at times hostile reviews of Joyce's *Exiles* appear to expose a discrepancy in his *oeuvre*. Joyce's reputation as a master wordsmith does not seem to allow for "ordinary writing" or an ignorance of dramatic language. However, most Joycean scholars agree that *Exiles* is a "bad play, opaque to both reader and viewer" (MacNicholas 9). Some literary critics have explained the question away, dismissing *Exiles* as nothing more than a simple literary exercise, a sort of watershed that would separate Joyce's earlier works from *Ulysses*. This view also becomes problematic, however, in light of Joyce's extensive struggle to stage the play. Joyce's perceived ineptitude becomes even more perplexing when one considers the date at which the play was written: 1915, a year after he had begun work on *Ulysses*. Through a close examination of *Exiles*' stage history, it becomes evident that the Joyce of *Exiles* is not a young writer struggling to find a unique voice, but rather a seasoned author, prepared to

test the bounds of language and the forms that shape it. This experimentation has led to the play's ongoing exile from both theatrical and literary worlds.

The problem of *Exiles* becomes even more disconcerting when one takes into account Joyce's opinion that the theater, the play, has the potential to become the highest of all art forms. In his lecture "Drama and Life," which he gave as a student in 1900, Joyce writes, "[i]n an art-loving and art-producing society the drama would naturally take up its position at the head of all artistic institutions" (*OPCW* 26). For Joyce, drama held the potential to be the ultimate show of artistic prowess, however he thought that society, specifically a society that valued entertainment over art, prevented the drama from serving its natural role as a vehicle for disseminating aesthetic values. Instead, the philistine call of the crowd becomes the artistic voice of the play. Joyce sees in the theater a wealth of unrealized potential—a population clamoring for clownishness and buffoonery cripples the ideal stage, which if allowed, would open up the great truths of humanity. His vision would later prove true for his own play, *Exiles*; Joyce dreamt of silencing the fickle audience, but instead the crowd silenced him. The theatre-going crowd, conditioned by a barrage of pastoral melodrama and Nationalist propaganda, received his play with confusion and, at times, contempt. Joyce believed that his play transcended the "claptrap" of the theater (and perhaps it did), but the voice of the crowd condemned him, labeling him a poor playwright: a man who mastered neither the craft of dramaturgy nor the use of his own language.

Both theatre critics of Joyce's time and Joycean critics today inadvertently elucidate a number of the play's experimental qualities, for example, Joyce's use of ordinary writing instead of the lyrical prose found in Symbolism or the emotionally

heightened language of the melodrama. Nathan's comment that the play becomes a "dialectic operetta," points to Joyce's use of Symbolist dialogue. His reference to the play's "emotional analysis" and the tenor of a "psycho-pathologist," mentioned in the *Observer* evince Ibsen's influence in the form of a discussion play. Even the unoriginal, melodramatic plot is given attention as Benchley comments on the "ordinary writing." However, each of these critics fails to see the presence of these tired structural characteristics as part of a larger whole. Instead of creating a critique that notices the presence of disparate stylistic methods, these critics hone in on one particular genre at a time while writing elements from other styles off as blunders and bad art.

The controversial form that lead to these mixed reviews, centers around a seed of doubt, which is established through the play's plot and echoed in its use of genre. Kristen Shepherd-Barr attempts to reconcile *Exiles*'s failure with the success of Joyce's other works in her study, "Reconsidering *Exiles* in its Theatrical Context." Her analysis concludes that, "Joyce, surprisingly, wrote neither a 'bad' Edwardian play nor a slavishly Ibsenist one, but a pastiche of Victorian and Symbolist drama that roots the play firmly in the theatrical currents of the 1890's" (Shepherd-Barr 169). Shepherd-Barr's critique departs from previous criticism by shifting her focus from a comparison with Joyce's other, narrative, works to a study of theatrical genre, "since his play does not employ a narrative voice" (Shepherd-Barr 170). While noting Joyce's use of multiple genres, she reinforces the idea that *Exiles* fails because it creates a sort of experimental theater that does not resemble that of the early twentieth century avant-garde—it does not contain the "disruptions, abstractions, and radical scenic experimentation" that audiences of the

time expected of radical theater (Shepherd-Barr 169). Joyce's play lacked the success of his other works because it refused to play to the theatrical genres of its moment.

Shepherd-Barr limits her focus to genre placement, which she achieves through a comparison of Joyce and the avant-garde. *Exiles*, according to Shepherd-Barr, builds on the fin-de-siècle Symbolist theater. These productions were marked by a dream-like aesthetic and at times employed a gauze scrim suspended between the actors and the audience to suggest "a dream-like, misty quality; the actors moved as if in slow motion, and spoke in a peculiar monotone, a sort of hieratic chant" (Shepherd-Barr 172).

Shepherd-Barr draws a parallel between these works and *Exiles* noting the plays monotonous tone and repetitive silences as well as the ethereal quality of the dialogue. These nods to the symbolist movement are combined with melodramatic gestures and stage directions that "rehearse rather hackneyed conventions of nineteenth-century melodramatic acting" (Shepherd-Barr 176). She concludes that, "although Joyce's dialogue looks backwards to the Victorian stage and especially to Wilde, his stage directions point towards this 'new kind of theatre' – one that relies heavily on a new kind of actor who can convey the prescient postmodernist ambiguities implicit in the language" (Shepherd-Barr 178). Joyce's new drama does draw on the "postmodernist ambiguities" of the English language. It also, I will argue, takes a postmodernist approach to genre creating a play that reveals not only the ambiguity of words themselves, but also the ambiguities of any aesthetic form.

Exiles demonstrates the internal conflict of Richard Rowan upon his return to Ireland and his inability to communicate that turmoil with those around him. This exile returned home attempts to redefine his relationship to country, friends, and family

throughout the play. Richard encourages his common-law wife Bertha to explore the possibility of a relationship with his best friend, Robert. The love triangle becomes increasingly complicated as Richard strives to reveal the hearts and minds of those he loves most through a discussion of each character's motivations in the play. He often says such things as, "I cannot read in your heart" and asks if scorn or jealousy or love drives the actions of those around him, as in, "[i]s that the reason?" or "[a]re you afraid of me?" (*Exiles* 73, 19). These conversations are constantly crippled by Richard's inability to know. Cheryl Herr describes this complication in her essay, "Subworlds Props and Settings in Joyce's *Exiles*:" "Because each of the four major characters constructs his or her own narrative, and because all four in some sense exclude the other three, all are finally exiled into mutually exclusive worlds" (Herr 190). Despite the characters' best efforts, they fail to fully communicate with Richard, leaving a lingering doubt in his heart as to the fidelity of both Bertha and Robert.

This element of doubt about truly being able to understand another's words and actions centers the play's plot and, perhaps, provides its morality: no one can ever know another completely. For example, in the third act, after Robert and Bertha have spent a night alone, the two discuss if and how they will tell Richard what happened:

ROBERT: Has he asked...what happened?

BERTHA, *joining her hands in despair*: No. He refuses to ask me anything. He says he will never know.

ROBERT, *nods gravely*: Richard is right there. He is always right.

BERTHA: But, Robert, you must speak to him.

ROBERT: What am I to say to him?

BERTHA: The truth! Everything!

ROBERT, *reflects*: No, Bertha. I am a man speaking to another man. I cannot tell him everything.

(*Exiles* 105)

Bertha and Robert grapple with the mental and emotional distance that lies between them and Richard. Robert puts the situation bluntly: “a man speaking to another man. I cannot tell him everything.” Richard seems aware of his permanent position as an outsider as well, saying “he will never know.” In the play, the mental exile of Richard, Bertha, and Robert, is not a matter of choice, but rather an inexorable condition of humanity. Each character refers to a unique script, or history, which composes the workings of an isolated consciousness and serves as a guideline for action in the present. The individual takes his or her cues from a slightly discordant script while simultaneously assuming this unique script is generally applicable to all human interaction. The communal script is an illusion. There is no common language. The title, *Exiles*, refers not only to the Rowan family’s return to Ireland, but also to the pervading exile of an individual consciousness.

A sense of exile is fostered in the audience as well; Joyce’s play denies the onlooker a familiar structure by refusing to adhere to one single genre. The play introduces familiar, tired, conventions of the theatre in order to expose their flaws. The play’s basic melodramatic plot recalls the deeply entrenched populism that Joyce despised in the theater and recreates the social coded environment forwarded by such populist projects as the Irish National Theatre. Joyce then goes on to evoke Ibsenist Realism and French Symbolism, both of which were born out of frustration with the melodrama. Ibsen’s Realism rips open the melodrama by exposing the psychological drama hidden beneath its neat bourgeois fantasies. Maurice Maeterlinck’s French Symbolism creates yet another system of meaning that appeals to neither the physical nor the psychological. Instead, Symbolist dramas seek to expose the tumult of the soul

through a “secondary” or unnecessary dialogue, which exists independently of ordinary interactions. Joyce employs these three opposing creative models in the service of a play that exposes the artificial communication within each conception of the theater and subsequently, the whole of society.

The Melodrama serves as the bedrock on which Realist and Symbolist conventions are juxtaposed in *Exiles*. The play invokes a number of melodramatic conventions, calling attention to his play’s departure from this norm. *Exiles*’s plot, in which the love between Richard and Bertha Rowan is threatened by Robert (the robber), replicates the melodramatic convention that Bernard Shaw defines Ibsen’s new drama against. In his essay, “The Technical Novelty in Ibsen’s Plays,” Shaw writes: “a villain tries to separate an honest young pair of betrothed lovers to gain the hand of the woman by calumny; and to ruin the man by forgery, murder, false witness” (Shaw 172). Joyce also noted his play’s melodramatic plot, describing the plot of *Exiles* as “three cat and mouse acts;” each of which develops a conventionally melodramatic love triangle (*Exiles* 123). The plot sets up an opposition between good and evil men: Richard Rowan, the embodiment of intellect and artistry, takes on the role of hero while Robert Hand plays the bawdy villain. Richard’s best friend Robert romantically pursues his common law wife Bertha. Robert Hand, the journalist, completes Shaw’s formula by offering to “set...rumours afloat” about Richard’s life abroad; he acts the villain by “ruin[ing] the man by forgery, murder, false witness” (Shaw 172). This love triangle and the threat of Robert’s betrayal of Richard constitute the central action of the play. Richard heroically confronts Robert in the second act, guaranteeing Bertha’s eventual return to her betrothed, creating the classic climax of the melodrama. Robert is then cast out; he

leaves to “foreign parts” and the audience is left with the portrait of two lovers. Richard, the hero, regains his young love and the world is set aright again, thus completing the play’s melodramatic arc.

Joyce strengthens the play’s melodramatic foundation through the exhaustive use of melodramatic gesture. The “stagey” element of drama is embodied in the actors’ physicality, for example, at the emotional peak of the above excerpt, Richard “*passes his hand over his brow*”—a gesture that is common throughout the play. Later, in Act Two, Robert also reverts to the melodramatic; he “*strikes his forehead with his hand*” and says, “What am I saying? Or what am I thinking?” (*Exiles* 62). Shepherd-Barr, in “Reconsidering Joyce’s *Exiles* in its Theatrical Context,” describes movements such as this one as “hackneyed conventions of nineteenth-century melodramatic acting” (Shepherd-Barr 176). These “hackneyed conventions” include extensive hand gestures and awkwardly contrived tableaux during moments of heightened passion. Joyce himself criticizes these trite conventions of such staging in his essay, “On Ibsen’s New Drama;” “the common lot of plays,” he writes, “are for the most part reheated dishes—unoriginal compositions, cheerfully owlish as to heroic insight, living only in their own candid claptrap—in a word, stagey” (*OCPW* 31). Given Joyce’s distaste for this type of theatre, it is reasonable to assume that Joyce would not recreate them in his own play without purpose.

In *Exiles*, Joyce replays these “stagey” elements with irony, drawing attention to the inadequacy of common theatrical devices for conveying emotion. Gestures such as Richard’s “*nervous movement of the hands*” are accompanied by removed, often unemotional language like, “Your advances to her, little by little, day after day” (*Exiles* 60). Richard’s

rational language stands in contrast to the jittery movements of his hands, suggesting that either the movement is inadequate or the words themselves are not true. The same effect is achieved when characters' words far surpass the accompanying gesture in emotional complexity. For example, Robert, "[p]asses his hand again over his forehead" as he tells Richard, "[y]ou were trying me... [i]t was a terrible trial" (*Exiles* 60). Robert's words point to a feeling of betrayal, of being cheated, of having broken the trust of his one good friend. His emotional state seems rather complex, however, the play calls for him to repeat this singular gesture of desperation, even angst. These gestures, when paired with Joyce's more experimental dialogue, become a testament to the inability of theatrical tropes to convey real human emotion.

Joyce inserts the most the basic component of Ibsen's Realism, the discussion, into the Melodramatic base, leading to both a reevaluation of the socially constructed dichotomy between good and evil and an examination of Bertha's agency within the love-triangle plot (Shaw 172). This discussion exposes nuances in the relationships between characters, complicating motives and gesturing toward psychological complexity. For example, Richard plays the hero against Robert's villain; however, he is implicated in a more villainous role as he forges a pseudo-romantic relationship with Beatrice. Joyce also implies throughout the play that Richard has been unfaithful to Bertha in the past, undermining his protagonist's heroic status. The formula is also challenged by Bertha's own agency in the play; unlike melodramatic heroines, Bertha is repeatedly told that she is free to choose whomever she wants to love. However, Richard also asks that Bertha report back to him everything that happens between Robert and her, which, in effect, re-establishes Richard's original ownership of Bertha.

The conventions of Ibsenist Realism add another set of formal assumptions through which the audience attempts to understand the action of the play. This form aims to expose the social codes of bourgeois European society by inserting a discussion into the play. The discussion is meant to reveal the psychological turmoil that lies behind the façade of a middle class home. The plays present a domestic situation, most often a conflict between husband and wife, and proceed to dramatize the situation through the complex development of a psychological dilemma. This model can be easily applied to the middle class family of Richard, Bertha, and their son Archie who constantly attempt to break beyond the niceties of social convention through intense emotional discussion. The dramatic conflict in these plays is removed from a physical action or accident (as in the melodrama) to “a conflict of unsettled ideals” (Shaw 176). The central action of the play is no longer a death or the impending threat of death, but rather, as Joyce himself says, “the opening up of a great question;” in *Exiles* it is the question of communication (*OPCW* 45).

Joyce inserts a discussion into overtly dramatic situation of the melodrama, exposing the ridiculousness of each through juxtaposition. Shaw noted the absurdity of this gesture in his explanation of the Ibsen’s discussion play, claiming that within the melodramatic form, “the introduction of a discussion would clearly be ridiculous” (Shaw 172). Joyce plays on the disparity between these two forms, allowing Richard to confront Robert about the affair with a discussion instead of a duel. Through this conversation, Robert becomes aware of Richard’s compliance in the affair, which brings the notion of betrayal itself into question. Richard again insists on Bertha’s freedom and

relieves Robert of all guilt, however, the conversation leaves one wondering to what extent Richard himself is masking aggression with passive interest:

ROBERT: I acted in the dark, secretly. I will do so no longer. Have you the courage to allow me to act freely?

RICHARD: A duel—between us?

ROBERT, *with growing excitement*: A battle of both our souls, different as they are, against all that is false in them and the world. A battle of your soul against the spectre of fidelity, of mine against the spectre of friendship...Is this not the language of your youth?

RICHARD, *passes his hand over his brow*: Yes. It is the language of my youth.

ROBERT, *eagerly, intensely*: Richard, you have driven me up to this point. She and I have only obeyed your will. You yourself have roused these words in my brain. You own words. Shall we? Freely? Together?

RICHARD, *mastering his emotion*: Together no. Fight your part alone. I will not free you. Leave me to fight mine.

(*Exiles* 71)

At this, the height of Richard and Robert's conflict, Joyce's play alludes to the traditional resolution of the melodramatic plot (the duel), but rather than placing the two love interests in violent opposition to one another, he places them in an alliance. Their two souls are at war against the illusions of the world. However, this battle is also rejected, leaving the two love interests in complete isolation from one another. Later dialogue in the play casts doubt on the efficacy of this conversation—at the end of the play the audience, like Richard, remains unsure whether Robert and Bertha ever actually consummated their affair. This continuing discussion causes the melodrama to end uncharacteristically, with very little closure: the extent of Robert and Bertha's affair remains ambiguous and the audience is left with the portrait of two lovers separated by mutual doubt.

This form differs from melodrama not only in its focus, but also in its choice of setting and characterization. Shaw contends that Ibsenist drama succeeds because “[it] gives us not only ourselves, but ourselves in our own situations,” removing the need to create intrigue through extreme action or spectacle. The audience does not need to be enticed into sympathy, they already identify with the characters on the stage because of a perceived physical and psychological affinity (Shaw 182). The characters share class status, location, vocabulary, situation, etc. with the audience. In *Exiles*, this effect is achieved by placing the action of the play in a suburb outside of Dublin, using a conversational tone, and relatively common social events, such as a piano lesson. Realism forces the audience to examine the ordinary actions of their own lives and so the conversation subsumes the action of the drama; the play itself becomes a discussion of the situation it presents. Joyce uses these techniques of Ibsenist Realism to create in his audience the expectation of a fully wrought, *real* theatrical world.

Exiles recreates an Ibsenist set, staging the overall appearance of what Shaw called “our own situations.” The Rowan’s drawing room in Merrion serves as the setting for the play. Joyce describes the room extensively:

On the right, forward, a fireplace, before which stands a low screen. Over the mantelpiece a giltframed [sic] glass...Near it a wicker chair...On the wall above the sideboard a framed crayon drawing of a young man...Chairs, upholstered in faded green plush, stand round the table. To the right, forward, a smaller table with a smoking service on it...Cocoanut [sic] mats lie before the fireplace...The floor is of stained planking...The lower sash of the window is lifted and the window is hung with heavy green plush curtains. The blind is pulled down to the edge of the lifted lower sash. It is a warm afternoon in June and the room is filled with soft sunlight which is waning. (Exiles 15-6)

Even this severely abridged quotation of Joyce's stage directions seems exhaustive—he goes so far as to describe the type of flooring and the exact level of the shade over the window. Unlike most playwrights, who use open-ended descriptions to suggest such factors as class and time in their stage directions, Joyce writes this description as if he were referring to a real place, creating an inventory of the actual room in Merrion. Minute details, like the “*fireplace*,” “*smoking service*,” and “[*c*]ocoanut mats” are not essential to the plot; instead, they work toward the composition of a realistic drawing room. The audience is meant to feel as if they have just stepped into a neighbor's living room, not the theatre. This effect fosters the audience's expectation that an Ibsenist play will take the stage.

The realism of Ibsenist technique in *Exiles* is complicated by the insertion of Maeterlinck's Symbolist dialogue, a form that attempts to create a theatrical universe that mirrors the interiority of human subjectivity. The Symbolist play avoids any direct replication of the existing society and instead establishes a world in which the moving, acting, and speaking body represents a soul or idea rather than a realistic character. If in the melodrama characters consisted of the sum of their actions, and in Realism they became a psychologically complex subject, in Symbolism the character is merely the totality of his words. Maeterlinck clarifies this relationship in his essay, “The Tragical in Daily Life,” by drawing a distinction between the secondary dialogue of his plays and the normal, necessary dialogue of the everyday. He writes, “you will almost always find another dialogue that seems almost superfluous...this is the only one that the soul can listen to profoundly, for here alone is it the soul that is being addressed” (Maeterlinck 387). In these plays, Symbolism employs this “secondary dialogue” rather than the

common dramatic dialogue in order to create a world in which the characters are recognizable because of their humanity rather than their social role. The drama becomes a representation of the transcendent soul rather than the replication of a social dilemma.

In *Exiles*, this technique appears at moments of extreme emotional turmoil. Richard, Bertha, Beatrice, and Robert all inquire into the states of each other's soul, even pitting that soul against the world as in the previously discussed conversation between Richard and Robert. In a truly Symbolist play, characters no longer function as individuals, the set no longer represents any place; instead, all of these elements symbolize pieces of a collective unconscious. In Maeterlinck's Symbolism, the language is the character and vice-versa: the language of the play denies conventional modes of drama while coinciding exactly with the action of the Symbolist stage that it composes. In *Exiles*, this dialogue promises the creation of a bridge between two consciousnesses; a promise that Joyce set out to break.

Even in the seemingly realistic opening stage direction, Symbolist elements undermine the audience's inclination to view the stage as a Realist space. For example, the prominence of "*faded green plush*" in both the curtains and the upholstery could suggest symbolic meaning outside of the normal suburban décor. They recall the pallor of a fading, sickly Irish Nationalism (Joyce uses similar symbolism throughout *Ulysses*). The play opens at dusk, which further suggests the fading Ireland Joyce left behind. Herr points out several of *Exiles*'s other abstract symbolic stage pieces, including the "*framed crayon drawing*" of Richard's father described in the setting of the first act. She cites this portrait as a symbol of one model for Richard's behavior: his "forever-youthful father, soon revealed to have provided his son with a touchstone memory of lighthearted

and gracious behavior” (Herr 191). The picture is not solely symbolic—it is entirely feasible that Richard would have a crayon drawing of his father—however, Joyce does use other less realistic symbols. These cryptic set pieces are scattered through the second act as well; for example, the “*many framed black and white designs*” that appear in Richard and Robert’s former get away in the second act (Exiles 72). These might suggest Robert’s black-and-white vision of the world or the opposition of Richard and Robert (the cottage used to play host to both Robert and Richard’s escapades). Herr also recognizes the symbolic significance of these designs and posits that they might “suggest the black-and-white relationships among the interpretive frames that divide Robert, Richard, Beatrice, and Bertha” (Herr 191). The use of these symbolic images within an otherwise realistic set suggests a reality that mirrors the characters’ interiority, much like the Symbolist stages.

This Realist and Symbolist stage sets the pace for a play in which communication is crippled by codes of communication that are as disparate as the three genres from which they spring. The clearest way to see these mixed genres and the easiest way to see the characters’ central conflict is through an examination of the play’s dialogue. Like Ibsen before him, Joyce places emphasis on the characters’ reactions to the central conflict of the play instead of the physical conflict itself. Joyce inserts essential properties of Melodrama, Realism, and Symbolism into each of the frames of normal, interrogative, and imperative conversation, forging a system of meaning that is necessarily contradictory and essentially self-defeating. By utilizing these three modes of conversation, Joyce demonstrates the pervasiveness of miscommunication and obfuscation. The most basic mode of conversation, the normal mode, most closely

resembles melodrama and Ibsenist Realism in that it replicates the social conventions of bourgeois Europe while suggesting a more significant *real* subtext. The second mode, the interrogative, replicates the soul-dialogues of Maeterlinck's work and with it, the language of art (the aesthetic). The third form, the imperative, reifies the aporia that has been created by the other two modes of dialogue. While both types of dialogue seem to privilege one genre above the other two, all three allow for a significant intermingling of communicative codes. Joyce's *Exiles* replicates and complicates these various forms of communication in order to use them in their own disassembly.

In the most socially scripted of conversations, Joyce employs the techniques of both Realism and Symbolism to create uncertainty among the characters of the play. In Act One, Bertha, Robert, Archie (Richard and Bertha's son), and Beatrice Justice (Robert's cousin and Richard's not quite platonic friend) conduct a normal conversation in the Rowan drawing room. The four adults discuss Beatrice's unexpectedly early return from her father's home in Youghal and debate the appropriateness of Beatrice's request to give Archie a piano lesson.

BERTHA: O, never mind the lesson. You must sit down and have a cup of tea now. *Going towards the door on the right.* I'll tell Brigid.

ARCHIE: I will, mama. *He makes a movement to go.*

BEATRICE: No, please Mrs. Rowan. Archie! I would really prefer...

ROBERT, *quietly*: I suggest a compromise. Let it be a half-lesson.

BERTHA: But she must be exhausted.

BEATRICE, *quickly*: Not in the least. I was thinking of the lesson in the train.

ROBERT, *to BERTHA*: You see what it is to have a conscience, Mrs. Rowan.

ARCHIE: Of my lesson, Miss Justice?

BEATRICE, *simply*: It is ten days since I heard the sound of a piano.

BERTHA: O, very well. If that is it...

ROBERT, *nervously, gaily*: Let us have the piano by all means. I know what is in Betty's ears at this moment. *To BEATRICE.* Shall I

tell?

BEATRICE: If you know.

ROBERT: The buzz of the harmonium in her father's parlour. *To*

BEATRICE. Confess.

(Exiles 29-30)

In the above section, very little action takes place on stage (Archie moves toward the door in the most physical moment); instead, the drama is conveyed through conversation. The emphasis on dialogue over action (this debate about the piano lesson continues for several pages) recalls the discussion that Shaw so valued in Ibsen's plays. The characters communicate in a style that resembles the mimetic pretense of the set: the discussion, like the scenery, might easily belong to any bourgeois, suburban family in Ireland in 1912. The performance on stage embodies the expectations of the audience; they are given themselves in their own situations. Throughout this dialogue, Bertha parrots a series of social niceties—she insists that Beatrice sit for tea, that Beatrice must be exhausted, etc... In characteristically Ibsenist fashion, the more spontaneous language of Beatrice and Robert undermines the legitimacy of these bourgeois tropes. Beatrice insists that she does not want tea, she is not tired, and she will perform the lesson. Robert's language goes one step further by not only refusing to accept social niceties, but also exposing the hither-to-now unspoken subtext of the conversation. The overarching tone of the scene resembles that of Ibsen, encouraging the audience's anticipation of a "discussion play."

Robert espouses a style of dialogue that resembles the psychological realism of Ibsen's drama, however, unlike Ibsen's work, Joyce's play creates a discussion that refuses to lead to any actual communication. Robert repeatedly brings attention to the underlying meaning of Beatrice's lines, for instance, "You see what it is to have a

conscience, Mrs. Rowan,” and “I know what is in Beatty’s ears at this moment... Shall I tell?” (*Exiles* 27). Whereas the women in Ibsenist plays often speak their own minds in order to reveal a thought process that has been stymied by cultural expectations, here in Joyce’s play, Robert exposes his cousin’s psyche for her. Over the course of the play, Robert continues to introduce the secret thoughts of others. The audience and the characters cannot tell whether Robert is discovering meaning beneath the words of others or imposing it on them, because, as Beatrice says to Richard earlier in the act, “It is hard to know anyone but oneself” (*Exiles* 19). Robert’s words seem to impose ownership over Beatrice’s voice, rather than free it from social conventions. The stage directions further complicate the sincerity of Robert’s utterances by invoking conflicting emotions. Robert delivers his line “*nervously, gaily,*” making him seem both comfortable in the truth of his assertion and unsure of its validity. The audience remains unsure whether Robert is revealing Beatrice’s thought or simply impressing his own thoughts upon her. Joyce invokes and corrupts the Ibsenist form, bringing into focus a seemingly valid form of communication only to show its shortcomings as a means of conveying truth.

The interrogative form of conversation also proves ineffective in the world of Joyce’s play as differing frames of reference impede the characters’ understanding. Earlier in this same act, Beatrice and Richard perform a confessional conversation in which the two approach a dialect similar to that of Maeterlinck’s plays and yet again fail to achieve any true communication. Beatrice is upset because he has recently told her that his writing centers on her:

RICHARD, *joins his hands earnestly*: Tell me, Miss Justice, did you

feel that what you read was written for your eyes? Or that you inspired me?

BEATRICE, *shakes her head*: I need not answer that question.

RICHARD: What then?

BEATRICE, *is silent for a moment*: I cannot say it. You yourself must ask me, Mr. Rowan.

RICHARD, *with some vehemence*: Then that I expressed in those chapters and letters, and in my character and life as well, something in your soul in which you could not—pride or scorn?

BEATRICE: Could not?

RICHARD, *leans towards her*: Could not because you dared not. Is that why?

BEATRICE, *bends her head*: Yes.

RICHARD: On account of others for want of courage—which?

BEATRICE, *softly*: Courage.

RICHARD, *slowly*: And so you have followed me with pride and scorn also in your heart?

BEATRICE: And loneliness.

(*Exiles* 19-20)

An emphasis on mental states and inner monologue characterizes Beatrice and Richard's conversation, creating a dialogue that closely resembles that of a Catholic confessional. In both the Catholic ritual and the above conversation, a dominant man questions a repentant sinner in hopes of discerning and somehow saving her soul. In Padraic Colum's introduction to *Exiles*, he notes this trend as well, writing, "In its structure, *Exiles* is a series of confessions; the dialogue has the dryness of recitals in the confessional; its end is an act of contrition" (Colum 11). Even the small action of Beatrice bending her head as she says "yes" in agreement with Richard's assessment of her actions suggests an atmosphere of reverence and piety. Here, Richard represents the arbiter of justice, while Miss Justice herself must take on that penance in her own life.

Joyce alludes to this form of Symbolist dialogue in order to demonstrate its ineffective portrayal of any collective soul, indeed the impossibility that any such thing

might exist. The importance of the soul, heart, or mind in Joyce's confessional conversations closely resembles the "soul-dialogue" Maeterlinck uses in his Symbolist plays. Richard seeks the motivations for Beatrice's actions; he begs to understand what is in her heart. According to Shepherd-Barr, both *Exiles* and French Symbolists use "language...to go beyond the surface of everyday speech and into the mysterious realm of the soul... an unspoken spiritual communication takes place beneath even the flattest and most uninspired commonplaces" (Shepherd-Barr 174). For instance, Richard asks Beatrice if he expressed "something in [her] soul which [she] could not" and later, questions if she carries "pride and scorn...in [her] heart." The goal here, as in the Symbolist theater, seems to be the creation of a stage space that mimes the interior space of the soul through dialogue.

Unlike Symbolist dialogue, however, the conversation between Richard and Beatrice takes place in a world that is rooted in reality, which complicates the truth value of every utterance. The soul-dialogue to which Joyce alludes performs a constitutive function in Symbolist plays: the language is the character and vice-versa. However, in Joyce's play, language becomes a much more indefinite entity as various genres compete to create a valid understanding of the world. Joyce introduces his play as an offshoot of the Ibsenist tradition in which language serves both a revelatory and a camouflaging function. By bringing the internal, soul monologue into an external dialogue, *Exiles* only further complicates the nature of communication. Here, the pregnant pauses so often found in Symbolist drama imply a moment of solipsistic thought rather than a direct communication between souls (as in Symbolism). Because of the dialogue's juxtaposition with a Realist set and a seemingly mundane situation, the audience is

inclined to believe that Richard (like Robert before him) is espousing his own beliefs and not Beatrice's. When Richard makes such inquiries as, "Then that I expressed...something in your soul in which you could not—pride or scorn?" the audience approaches the statement with skepticism. Richard holds power over Beatrice as both a man and an inquisitor, which casts doubt on his ability to divine Beatrice's actual feelings. Without the Symbolist context from which the audience would construe the dialogue as a conversation between two souls rather than people, these mental states are subject to ironic interpretation from the moment they are put into language.

One cannot take Beatrice's word when she says that she feels exactly like Richard suspects she does, because, as in many an Ibsenist play, her actions do not always corroborate her words. The characters muddle our ability to understand them through their frequent declaration and inquiry of intention. If it were not for Richard's inquiries, like "[on] account of others or for want of courage—which?" or Beatrice's insistence that she lacked courage, the audience would allow the characters' actions to represent their intention. The subtext of the play would remain unspoken and therefore, unquestioned. In the play, the very act of trying to understand the heart, mind, or soul of another person prohibits such an understanding. Rather than unearthing hidden meaning behind the dialogue, the characters simply impose their own assumptions onto otherwise opaque language. One can imagine the play without any such inquiries—Richard would be the jealous cuckold, Bertha would be the oppressed adulteress, and Robert would be the betrayer. By invoking contradictory generic conventions, such as Symbolism's soul dialogue and Realism's discussion, Joyce undermines the direct

signification one usually imagines in the theater, creating instead, a conflict between interior and exterior states.

When the interrogative mode fails to create a meaningful interaction, Joyce's characters turn to imperative conversation. Having accepted that they may never be able to fully comprehend the consciousness of another, the men of the play begin to enforce their own desires on the women they once sought to understand. The most striking example of this imperative discourse occurs between Robert and Bertha late in the first act. Robert has brought roses for Bertha as a token of his affection and the two have stolen a moment alone in order to discuss their feelings for one another.

ROBERT, *sitting beside her*: Are you annoyed with me?

BERTHA: No.

ROBERT: I thought you were. You put away my poor flowers so quickly.

BERTHA, *takes them from the table and holds them close to her face*: Is this what you wish me to do with them?

ROBERT, *watching her*: Your face is a flower too—but more beautiful. A wild flower blowing in a hedge. *Moving his chair closer to her*. Why are you smiling? At my words?

BERTHA, *laying the flowers in her lap*: I am wondering if that is what you say—to the others.

RICHARD, *surprised*: What others?

BERTHA: The other women. I hear you have so many admirers.

RICHARD, *involuntarily*: And that is why you too...?

BERTHA: But you have, haven't you?

ROBERT: Friends, yes.

BERTHA: Do you speak to them in the same way?

ROBERT, *in an offended tone*: How can you ask me such a question? What kind of person do you think I am? Or why do you listen to me? Did you not like me to speak to you in that way?

BERTHA: What you said was very kind. *She looks at him for a moment*. Thank you for saying it—and thinking it.

(*Exiles* 32)

Robert begins this conversation with Bertha much like Richard began his with Beatrice earlier in the act: he inquires as to her emotional state, saying, “Are you annoyed with me?” It seems, at first, that the conversation will proceed in the confessional, mirroring Symbolist soul-dialogue much like the one at the beginning of the act. However, all hopes of revelatory dialogue are quickly averted by Bertha, who categorically dismisses Robert’s poetic language and gestures. She responds to Robert’s insecurities about the roses by mimicking an appropriate romantic gesture. Bertha recognizes, as Cheryl Herr notes, “the flowers further allude to the general cultural code-systems governing marital relations...They do so by adopting...their typical connotations of love, chastity, and fidelity” (Herr 198). Bertha combats what she sees as an overblown social cliché by re-enacting one herself, showing both Robert and the audience the meaninglessness of convention. Bertha questions Robert's intentions, bringing up his other admirers, and even takes a sarcastic tone toward the end of the above excerpt, saying “Thank you for saying it—And thinking it.” Bertha notes the gap between thought and speech and makes Robert acutely aware of her ability to discern the difference between his words and his intentions. The characters of the play are unable to trust their initial impressions of each other’s actions, they must constantly ask for the correlative emotion.

Again, the play calls attention to the gap between action and thought, when, having once accepted the impossibility of actual understanding, Robert attempts to script Bertha into his ideal object of affection, creating a simulacrum of his desire. This shift in tactics is most evident toward the end of their conversation, at which point Robert begins to ask Bertha to allow him to kiss her and then commands her to kiss him, “Give me a kiss, a kiss with your mouth,” and later “Your lips, Bertha!” (*Exiles* 35). This

imperative form continues in Robert and Bertha's interactions throughout the play; Robert no longer attempts to know Bertha but instead forces her to physically perform the part of his lover. Bertha kisses Robert, however, it is impossible to discern the emotion behind the kiss. The physical actions of love become removed from the emotion they usually signify.

Beneath this opaque, confounding play lies a serious statement about the (in)ability to communicate through speech and gesture. The play is stilted, dramatically flat, and has very little character development and while that may not make for very interesting theater, it does comment on one's inability to express emotions clearly. Joyce combines the Melodramatic, Realist, and Symbolist techniques of the theater in such a way as to render each mode of communication impotent. The Melodramatic becomes hackneyed; the Realistic appears flat; and the Symbolic darkens to opaque.

Joyce created in *Exiles* a distinctly Irish play. Like the Realists and Symbolists before him, Joyce reacted to a stagnant theater that no longer adequately fulfilled the demands of great art. The Cultural Nationalism Movement sought to revive old forms and re-enacted tired stereotypes, which in turn created, what Joyce saw as an artistic climate that fell below the English standard, reinforcing British dominance in the Irish arts. Joyce's play, on the other hand, examines the ability to communicate genuinely between two people and in doing so forges a new kind of drama—one that remains distinctly Irish while refraining from a rehearsal of pastoral clichés.

Exiles directly refers to and attacks many of the conventions of the Irish National Theatre and the Cultural Nationalism movement that it incited. The play's very title, *Exiles* echoes those of the revival's "dwarf dramas," specifically O'Grady's *The Eviction*

(1879), *Emigration* (1880), and *The Fenian* (1888) (Watt 57). These plays embodied the very melodramatic techniques that Joyce's play pits itself against. *Exiles* also reverses the thematic concern of these plays, examining the return to Ireland rather than an emigration or eviction. His use of a similar title, when considered with the ironic use of melodramatic gesture and thematic inversion, suggests that this play is, in some ways, a parody of these propaganda pieces.

The same phenomenon can be seen in relation to Yeats's particular form of pastoral Symbolism. Yeats's plays often take place in a mythical Celtic past, as in *On Baile's Strand*, which opens in "[a] great hall at Dundevalgan, not 'Cuchalain's great ancient house' but an assembly-house nearer to the sea" (*Strand* 166). Alternately, Irish National Theatre's plays might take place in the extremely rural areas of Western Ireland, which were idealized by Yeats's notion of the pastoral. *Exiles* alludes to this mythical space as well: Richard greets Bertha "gaily" at the door of his old stomping grounds with "Welcome back to old Ireland!" (*Exiles* 72). Richard ascribes a mythical past, like Yeats's, to the cottage in which his best friend is about to sleep with his wife, the cottage in which he also slept with many women. The irony of Richard's declaration is not easily overlooked. The "old Ireland" of Joyce's play is a living room haunted by an adulterous past, instead of an unadulterated representation of Irish purity. Through ironic use of the Irish National Theatre's well-known tropes, Joyce's play blatantly attacks the repressive environment created by Cultural Nationalism.

Most importantly, *Exiles* attacks the Irish National Theatre's central mission, the communication of a collective Irish soul. Through a pastiche of the three genres of Melodrama, Realism, and Symbolism, Joyce's play attempts to create a world in which

isolation of consciousness is insurmountable. This new form culminates in what Szondi calls the modern drama: it is a play in which the Dramatic fails, giving way to the epic, interior world. Action and communication are impossible, making each human being an exile even among the closest of friends. This shift, claims Szondi, characterizes all theater of the twentieth century and in that, *Exiles* is anything but exceptional. However, within this play, Joyce recreates the fatigued dramatic modes that were in vogue at the time of his writing: Melodrama, Realism, and Symbolism. These movements struggled to cling on to the old modes of conveying meaning only to watch them fail in their attempt to present a modern notion of the individual. By continually contrasting these modes (which he has elevated into a nearly grotesque state) with the epic drama that was to follow it, Joyce exposes the inadequacy of the dramatic technique offered to him. In *Exiles*, Joyce achieves his own definition of high-art, “the naked drama—either the perception of a great truth, or the opening up of a great question, or a great conflict which is almost independent of the conflicting actors, and has been and is of far-reaching importance—this is what primarily rivets our attention” (*OPCW* 45). *Exiles* opens up the conflict between consciousness and communication, undercutting our assumption that language is ultimately understandable. Joyce presents his audience with the great dilemma: “It is hard to know anyone but oneself” (*Exiles* 19).

WORD PLAY

“Circe” and Constricted Performance

But I say: Let my country die for me. Up to the present it has done so. I didn't want it to die. Damn death. Long live life! (U.15.4473)

The sentiment expressed by Stephen Dedalus above appears to be an indictment of his country: Ireland. Stephen, unlike the Nationalist hero, refuses to die for country, insisting instead that his country die for him. This sentiment can and has been ascribed to the Modernist movement as a whole; it is sometimes understood as a solipsistic, extravagant, indulgent movement in which the artist turns away from the populist concerns of Realism. However, Stephen, and, I will argue, Joyce's works as well, are not so simply boxed in. The death they speak of is stagnancy, fixed meaning, the prohibitive ideas necessarily bound up in any large political or social movement. Joyce, like Stephen the artist-hero, saw his country falling beneath restrictive formulations of an Irish Nation, which had been forced onto the populace. The Cultural Nationalism movement, the English, and the complacent population that met these two dominant forces caused the death of the country, as in, the end of free-play, the establishment of a fixed identity. Joyce has Stephen recognize the detriment of these restrictions on the idea of an Irish Nation, saying, “I didn't want it to die.” Joyce reverses this death by opening up the process of signification. His work displaces the Irish National Theatre's

authority over Irish identity by replaying and rethinking the movement's restrictive assumptions.

In "Circe," the very types that led to what Joyce saw as the death of the Irish soul are now put into endless repetition and variation, through an extravagant closet drama. By moving these common cultural symbols out of the privileged sphere of the Nationalist Theatre, Joyce exposes the imprisoning identities forwarded by the movement and unfixes them in such a way as to allow the creative impulse to thrive. In "Circe," Joyce makes it very clear that these types are the tools, which the creative mind must draw from. However, the myth accompanying these types (that they are innate, true images of Irishness) must be disregarded to the best of our ability. Joyce's play encourages the dismissal of a united Ireland. Only after it has moved beyond illusion, can Ireland truly become aware of its own agency in the creation of an individual identity, created from a history rather than enslaved by it.

Joyce's *Ulysses* provides an exhaustive (if biased) catalogue of the written English language, mimicking the vocabulary, style, and generic restrictions of everything from Chaucer to ladies' magazines. Each chapter presents the reader with a distinct lingual project, which tackles a specific style or characteristic of the language itself; for example, the pervasiveness of commercial language or the use of physical appetite as a catchall metaphor for desire generally. The "Circe" or "Nighttown" chapter of *Ulysses* is one of the most complicated and extensive of these lingual projects; written as a play, the chapter acts as a stage on which most of the book's themes play freely, creating new meaning through repetition and variation. This mental stage space, which Joyce invokes

deliberately in the “Circe” chapter, can easily be categorized as closet drama: a genre that necessitates contradiction and subversion in every element from typography to rhetoric.

The closet drama, from its inception, has been the preferred form of theatrical radicals, those who seek to redefine and displace the dramas of their time. In his article, “The Theater in Modernist Thought,” Martin Puchner traces this form to the pages of Plato; he writes, “[c]onceived by the declared enemy of the theater, the closet drama is a form specifically designed to keep the theater at bay, but also, and more importantly, to take its place” (*TMT* 523). Puchner sees Plato, the father of the closet drama, as an artist creating a new form in order to defame and ultimately eliminate his competition, by shifting the locus of cultural production from the mimetic stage to the philosophical or abstract page. Political and cultural dissidents have picked up this form in almost every major artistic period including Lord Byron, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Margaret Cavendish, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Henrik Ibsen, T.S. Eliot, and Gertrude Stein. Over time, the term “closet drama” has come to signify disparate motives within the drama, however, as Nick Salvato so aptly observes in his essay, “Gertrude Stein and the Wooster Group,” all of these plays “deliberately (and paradoxically) resist performance” (Salvato 37). Later in his essay, Salvato asserts, “the term closet drama may be assigned to Stein’s work simply because of her refusal to follow the rules – anyone’s rules – of how to write a play” (Salvato 40). I propose that this formulation of the closet drama is not unique to Stein’s work, but rather the defining characteristic of closet drama generally; it is a form that simultaneously invokes and rejects generic categorization and the rules that such distinction implies.

In the last chapter, I argued that *Exiles* performs the rules of various genres of staged theatre in a pastiche, which exposes the flaws in each system of communication, acknowledging the mental exile shared by both characters and audience. In this chapter, I will attempt to make a similar and yet distinct argument. I will establish “Circe” as a closet drama, a work that refuses the Aristotelian definition of drama in favor of a more Platonic drama of ideas (or language). In “Circe,” Joyce explores the same motif of language as an inadequate system for communication or truth-bearing that defines *Exiles*; however, here he is free from the restraints of practical staging, including the biases of the playhouse. In his closet drama, the words themselves become the impetus for all action in the play, giving way to a network of free association. Joyce uses this system of free association to demonstrate the colonization of the Irish mind (perhaps even the human mind) by exposing the cultural contamination of even the simplest words and phrases. Andrew Gibson notes this phenomenon in his article, “‘Strangers in my House, Bad Manners to Them’: England in ‘Circe;’” he writes, “[i]n its emphasis on self-definition, on contradictions and complicities, part of what “Circe” ends up telling us is that this particular colonized culture is a culture of imposture” (Gibson 201). In other words, the various identities presented in “Circe” are not genuine representations, but rather performances of a foreign culture, masquerading as truth. The resulting play, like *Exiles*, displays the complications of everyday communication, demonstrating the Babel-like quality of individuated systems of meaning within the English language. This multiplicity of meaning prevents the characters from achieving unqualified communication, resulting in a state of exile that can only be overcome through artistic expression.

In order to establish this motivation for the “Circe” chapter, I will first place “Circe” within the tradition of closet drama, outlining the historic use of the genre as a means of compromising the theatre’s political and cultural dominance. I will then explore the relationship between the “Circe” closet drama and *Ulysses* as a whole, noting the presence of multiple frames of reference (as both drama and prose) and the subsequent instability of language in the chapter. This instability, I contend, allows Joyce to create a closet drama that is simultaneously referential and fantastically constitutive: the words both convey and create the action of the chapter. The language of “Circe” is critically aware of its own cultural and historical implications. For Joyce, the Irish National Theatre’s claim that Irishness was derived from some mythical, pastoral past, only served to authenticate the dichotomy between Irish and English forwarded by his colonizers. He manipulates these associations, focusing largely on the images and types created by the Irish National Theatre as part of cultural nationalism. Joyce removes these types from the system that validates them, exposing a history of imposture and propaganda that Yeats’s movement would cloak behind the myth of an Irish soul.

The closet drama, as a genre, simultaneously recreates and undermines the theatre, encompassing and refuting all of the necessary trappings of a performance. It suggests the existence of a stage while self-consciously denying the possibility of any theatrical production. Elinor Fuchs, like other critics of anti-theatricality, credits Plato with the creation of the closet drama. In her essay, “Anti-Theatricalist Theatricalism in Four Twentieth Century Plays,” she explains the methodology behind the genre’s perplexed relationship with the theatre: “As in the allegory of the cave...[anti]theatricalist plays multiply dramatic complexity by bringing different planes of reality into the same

dramatic structure” (Fuchs 41). In the closet drama, the reader, unlike the audience of a performed drama, is given “different planes of reality” or what I prefer to call multiple frames of reference from which to view the action of the play. In seeing the text laid out as a written script, the reader becomes acutely aware of the construction of the play itself. The written nature of the play forces the reader to acknowledge the act of acting and the methods of performance become clear as the reader simultaneously creates and interprets the drama at hand. In “Circe,” this effect is multiplied by the play’s status as a chapter within the larger work of *Ulysses*. The reader must consider “Circe” as both a break in the novel (it is, after all, a play) and a continuation in Bloom’s day, causing a conflation of these two distinct frames of reference: the fiction of the play and the fiction of the novel.

Joyce amplifies this interplay of forms by elevating the dramatic elements of the chapter to a grotesque state. Martin Puchner, in his book, *Stage Fright*, categorizes this particular approach to the unstageable play as “exuberant closet drama,” he explains:

The exuberant closet drama also resists the stage, but it does so through an excess of theatrical action...free-floating, often-allegorical theatricality, whose constant changes of scenes, large casts of characters, sudden appearances and disappearances, and strategic mixture of hallucination and reality willfully exceed the limits of theatrical representation. (*Stage Fright* 15)

This “exuberant closet drama,” as Puchner terms it, creates a hyper-theatrical play that exaggerates the basic elements of staging. By inflating these common conventions, the closet drama draws attention to its own artifice. In every step, through extensive stage directions, costuming, and dialogue, Joyce insists that the reader maintain an awareness

of the chapter's status as play and begs her to consider the ramifications of such a method of representation.

In one of his schematics to the chapter, Joyce described the technique of "Circe" as "hallucination," noting the conflation of real and imagined events that characterizes the chapter. Fuchs explains this technique as a characteristic of all anti-theatrical, writing, "[c]utting through the exaggerated display, declamatory rhetoric, and absurd fiction of the on-stage performance, however, is a deliberately non-theatrical text, whose setting is somewhere 'off'" (Fuchs 44). The same can be said of "Circe," which deliberately conflates the 'real' objective series of events in Bloom's day (the space "off") with an extravagantly fantastic (phantasmagoric) stage-space. The "Circe" play begins where "Oxen of the Sun" left off, creating continuity of action and place between novel and play forms. The final paragraph of 'Oxen' signals the characters' movement into the Nighttown setting of 'Circe,' "Denzille lane this way. Change here for Bawdyhouse" (U.14.1572-3). As readers begin the "Circe" chapter, then, they must contend with two frames of reference: the non-theatrical space of "Bawdyhouse," as mentioned in "Oxen" and the theatrical Mabbot street entrance established in the opening stage direction of "Circe." Both the theatrical quality of the chapter and the novel status of the book as a whole are placed in jeopardy as the reader struggles to juggle Stephen and Bloom's arrival in Nighttown with the dramatic intrusion of the play.

The conflict created by the melding of these two frames undermines notions of being and performing within the work. "Circe" asks the reader to view all action within the chapter as both real (within the frame of the play) and contrived (within the frame of the book). By placing the "Circe" closet drama in the midst of a larger epic novel, Joyce

complicates the reader's relationship to the text: the Bloom of the play becomes Bloom playing Bloom, the city acts as both stage and setting, and the actions themselves must be read as stage directions, mandated rather than spontaneous. The Bloom of the play must be read as real within the context of the drama, however, the reader cannot fully discard the referential frame created by the novel as a whole. Identity becomes unstable; reality and hallucination are indistinguishable.

Patrick McGee, in *Paperspace: Style as Ideology in Joyce's Ulysses*, notes this contradictory style as a technique for displacing the agency of both text and reader:

Bloom appears to the reader as both more and less than he is, he appears as an imaginary figure not simply because he is a fiction but because the reader has no stable position from which to view his fiction. Without a stable frame not only are the author and the character reduced to indistinct, undecidable relations, but readers also lose their distinction, that is, their privilege over the text. (McGee 121)

As McGee notes, "Circe" consciously cultivates the reader's inability to discern which events belong to the play and which are actually occurring in the context of the novel. For instance, soap bars, gas jets, and moths speak within the frame of the play; however, in the context of the novel, these characters must be interpreted as an interpretation of the narrator's physical surroundings. Artifice and reality become irreparably intertwined, making the reader acutely aware of her inability to distinguish fact from fiction, even within the fictional world of the book.

Throughout the chapter, Joyce provides plot guideposts as a means of maintaining these dual frames. Readers of the novel can be reasonably certain of the 'reality' of a few basic plot developments, for instance, Bloom, Stephen, and Lynch enter Nighttown and enjoy the company of several working ladies. Joyce also refers to other,

subtler, events in the play later in the novel in order to maintain the presence of the novel frame over the duration of the play. For instance, in the midst of what can otherwise be categorized as a hallucinatory sequence:

(Bloom half rises. His back trouserbutton snaps.)

THE BUTTON

Bip!

(U.15.3439-41)

A button snaps off of the back of Bloom's trousers, a seemingly unimportant event that will be referred to later in the course of the novel, the text outside of the play. This lost button renders Bloom "handicapped" as he walks home at the opening of the "Eumaeus" episode and is recontextualized in Molly's closing speech, in which the proper noun "Buttons" appears again in reference to men generally and, in a more specific sense, to the phallus. The button, which at first appears as a simple "Bip!" comes to signify Bloom's simultaneous infidelity and loss of masculinity. Joyce sustains the reality of the novel over the course of the play, constantly reminding readers that they can no longer expect either a direct correlation between text and reality or a completely fantastic departure from the story as a whole.

The stage directions in "Circe" also blur the gap between prose and theater, adopting a style that is both prescriptive and descriptive. The closet drama opens much like *Exiles*, giving a detailed description of the stage space in which the drama of the play unfolds. However, the chapter quickly moves into more ambiguous territory. The opening stage directions, set off in italics and parenthesis, read:

*(The Mabbot street entrance of nighttown, before which stretches an uncombed
tramsiding set with skeleton tracks, red and green will-o'-the-wisps and danger signals.
Rows of grimy houses with gaping doors. Rare lamps with faint rainbow fans...*

(U.15.1-4)

This stage setting seems normal enough: it recalls the gestural stage directions of *Exiles*, “*The drawingroom...at Merrion, a suburb of Dublin. On the right, forward a fireplace...Over the mantelpiece a giltframed glass...*” (*Exiles* 15). Both settings refer to specific, plausibly real places and then proceed to characterize those settings through a list of objects, which are to be placed within the stage space. However, unlike in *Exiles*, in “*Circe*,” the dramatic status of the work becomes complicated by the insertion of a point of view in what is traditionally an objective reality (the stage space). The stage directions originally call for “*stunted men and women*,” who are later referred to as “*children*,” who “*scatter slowly*” (U.15.5,7). A point of view is inserted into the stage direction as what originally appear to be men and women are transformed into children. Joyce’s poetic prose style moves the stage directions beyond the simple directive style of the drama into a more complicated narrative form.

According to R.G. Hampson in his article, “‘Toft’s Cumbersome Whirligig’: Hallucinations, Theatricality and Mnemotechnic in V.A.19 and the First Edition Text of ‘*Circe*,’” this “delayed decoding...hovers uneasily on the border of the metaphoric and the literal” (Hampson 148). This shift from the literal to the metaphoric is indicative of a greater shift in Joyce’s role as playwright, as the stage directions paint a more vivid, “real” picture of Mabbot street. The stage directions maintain their association with the physical stage itself, creating a Mabbot street that is both authentic and a stage set with props and actors. Language no longer stands in for actions that will later be played out

in the public theater. The language of Joyce's play ceases to be referential; instead he creates a play in which all language gives rise to metaphorical or metonymic meaning. By conflating the literal and rhetorical in a whirligig drama, Joyce asks the reader to abandon any attempt to discern the "real" from the "imagined."

The confusion caused by the competing frames of reference allows Joyce to undertake a series of semantically fueled performances, which expose the relationship between the English language and Irish identity. Aware of its dual status as both play and book, the language of "Circe" comments on its own (in)stability. The chapter's efficacy relies on the establishment of an aesthetic matrix: the action of the play is not realistic, but rather semantic. It is as much a language play as it is a play on language, the words themselves not only referring to specific events, but also (or rather) creating the action of the play. Action is most often created through the association of words and their corresponding ideas, rather than through the physical interactions of characters, creating a drama which can be played out entirely on the reader's own mental stage. Like many closet dramatists before him, Joyce uses the closeted drama to critique the prominent dramatic system of his time. Here, in the closet, Joyce is able to inflate various dramatic techniques, demonstrating the gross misrepresentation that, for him, constitutes the Irish National Theatre and Cultural Nationalism as whole.

Even from the very first lines of "Circe," this shift from psychological realism to semantic free play begins to take hold. Words in the stage direction give rise to characters, establishing language's unique role in the chapter. The opening stage direction closes with, "*Whistles call and answer,*" setting the stage for the first character to deliver the opening line:

THE CALL

Wait, my love, and I'll be with you.

THE ANSWER

Round behind the stable.

(U.15.10-3)

Intangible ideas deliver the first lines of “Circe.” “The Call” mentioned in the stage direction becomes a character, as does “The Answer.” Joyce chooses to replace human beings, the acting bodies of the stage, with words, their meanings, and the performances that such meanings incite. This development also throws the grammatical structure of the stage direction into question; both “call” and “answer” can now be understood as nouns, while “whistle,” which at first seemed to be the acting subject of the sentence, may in fact be functioning as a verb. In this way, words no longer serve their ordinary function—referring to objects, signifiers conjuring up signifieds—instead Joyce chooses to allow the multitude of meanings encompassed by a single term to play freely on the stage of his play of ideas. This ambiguity of meaning continues throughout the play as language itself gives rise to an increasingly complex set of characters and actions.

The constantly shifting meaning of words in “Circe” can be easily understood as a demonstration of the process of meaning making that governs the individual’s relationship to his or her own language. McGee notes this dramatization:

The dance of death captures desire by bringing about the reader’s discovery of a (fictive) lack in the critical understanding animating the drive toward meaning, finality, death...the reader is overwhelmed by the signifier that subverts his central position in the interpretive act. (McGee 138)

McGee recognizes the way in which “Circe” problematizes its own status as text.

Through a constant subversion of meaning, for instance the move from “*men and women*”

to “*children*,” the reader is forced to acknowledge her own role as reader. One can no longer take for granted the referential role of language or picture a clear fictive world through the text. As the reader participates in the drama of the play, he is also forced to dramatize the normally unconscious process of creating meaning from language. The reader cannot claim authority over his own act of interpretation. The play becomes about the Sisyphian struggle to find meaning, the dance of death, the search for signification that lies outside of culturally influenced metaphor or experience-based metonym.

Bloom’s character mimics this drive toward meaning as he attempts to give an adequate representation of himself to the Watch. Every alternate attempt at self-identification is accompanied by a secondary character that simultaneously proves and disproves Bloom’s claim of self:

SECOND WATCH

Prevention of cruelty to animals.

BLOOM

(enthusiastically) A noble work! I scolded that tramdriver on Harold’s cross bridge for illusing the poor horse with his harness scab. Bad French I got for my paons. Of course it was frosty and the last tram. All the tales of circus life are demoralising [sic].

(Signor Maffei, passionpale, in liontamer’s costume with diamond studs in his shirtfront, steps forward, holding a circus paperhoop, a curling carriagenhip and a revolver with which he covers the gorging boarbound.)
(U.15.696-706)

Bloom tries to present himself as an upstanding, *moral* citizen: a man who firmly supports kindness to animals. However, in Nighttown, this distinction gives Bloom the

ability to claim a role outside of the derelict society of Dublin's red-light district. Signor Maffei appears as a response to the very cruelty to circus animals that Bloom is denouncing in order to prove his moral fabric to the Watch, proving the legitimacy of such a stance. However, Maffei himself is also associated with Bloom and speaks on behalf of the interrogated in defense of such cruelty. Bloom cannot make a clear defense of his own character because the words he chooses on his own behalf rise up into characters that defy him and undermine his struggle for self-definition. Language itself plays rather than referring to a play or a reality outside of itself.

As words give rise to action over the course of "Circe," Joyce unfolds a complex system of signification that relies heavily on metaphor and metonymy, recalling the other chapters of his epic. Simple words or phrases conjure characters from earlier chapters, phrases we have heard before, etc. As Katie Wales notes, in her essay, "Bloom Passes Through Several Walls': The Stage Directions in "Circe,"" cross-referencing with the rest of the novel creates a matrix of signifiers unique to *Ulysses*: "referentiality is intensified by cross-referencing, intra-textual allusion... This technique of cross-referencing [contributes] to a carefully 'staged' artifice... the 'reality' of description has no 'real' foundation." (Wales 258). Later in the interrogation scene, such intra-textual cross-referencing begins to dominate the language play, for instance, in the appearance of Paddy Dignam:

BLOOM

No, no. Pig's feet. I was at a funeral.

FIRST WATCH

(draws his truncheon) Liar!

(The beagle lifts his snout, showing the grey scorbutic face of Paddy Dignam, He has gnawed all. He exhales a putrid carcass-fed breath. He grows to human size and shape. His dachshund coat becomes a brown mortuary habit. His green eye flashes bloodshot. Half of one ear, all of the nose and both thumbs are ghoul-eaten.)

(U.15.1200-8)

At the mention of “funeral,” Paddy Dignam himself emerges from the guise of the beagle/dachshund (note that the dog’s breed also constantly changes, again highlighting the a-referential role of language here). Dignam, whose funeral Bloom attended in the “Hades” episode, appears far more decrepit and death-worn than the actual Dignam could have possibly been so soon after his death, but because he appears here as the manifestation of a series of associations and meanings related to “funeral,” he takes on all of the markers of human mortality. By using Dignam, dead and ghoul-eaten, as the manifestation of funeral, Joyce forwards a theory of language as based on experience, rather than absolutes.

The chapter’s inter-textuality refuses any ontological argument about language and instead examines the pathways by which a single consciousness (here I think it is best that we ascribe this consciousness to Joyce or the book itself rather than Bloom) creates meaning. For example, the dog carries with it a series of connotations: Bloom’s father’s dying wish that the dog Athos be taken care of in “Hades;” the citizen’s dog in the newsroom described by one of the men in Kiernan’s Pub as having stared down Bloom during an argument about capital punishment; and a dead dog bloated on the beach in “Proteus.” All of these previous references to the hound ally closely with the concept of death. The citizen’s dog, however, also becomes associated with an old view of Ireland, as the man in Kiernan’s pub says, “Talking about new Ireland he [the citizen]

ought to go and get a new dog so he ought. Mangy ravenous brute sniffing and sneezing all round the place and scratching scabs” (U.12.484-6). This dog, the citizen’s dog, also shares specific physical characteristics with the emerging Dignam; the citizen describes it as “[g]rowling and grousing and his eye all bloodshot froth the drouth” (U.12.709-10) corresponds directly the stage direction, “*His green eye flashes bloodshot.*” This net of intertextuality, triggered by the mention of a funeral, suggests that the word “funeral” itself can simultaneously signify fatherlessness, the death of a friend, an Ireland that has become mangy and decrepit, and the singular, limited vision of a new Ireland. “Circe” not only acts out Bloom’s personal process of meaning making for such terms as “funeral,” but also demonstrates the novel’s capability to refer to multiple phenomena with a single word. This process of meaning-making ultimately leads to a struggle, not only for conveyance of an external reality through language, but also, and more importantly, to the struggle for selfhood. Bloom, Stephen, perhaps even the play itself, all struggle to use these slippery signifiers to self-define, ultimately leading to the recognition that all representation remains inadequate.

Most of the events of “Circe” examine a particular “performance” in society: clown show, circus, carnival, courtroom, brothel, kingdom, etc. Each of these episodes reenacts the language’s association of a certain signifier/word/role/category with a specific performance. Here, I will be relying on Judith Butler’s formulation of performativity as laid out in *Gender Trouble* to explain the relation between these performances and Joyce’s project, which, I will argue, seeks to displace the dominant theatrical modes of representation in Ireland at the time of his writing. As I have already established, the language in “Circe” has been removed from any system of direct

signification, shifting emphasis to the process of meaning making. Butler recognizes this process as part of all language use; she writes:

In a sense all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; ‘agency,’ then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e. new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible. (*GT* 145)

Butler sees all attempts at signification as a repetition of cultural codes and assumptions, however, within this compulsion to repeat there is also a space for variation. It is through this variation that the performance is recognized as such, decoupled from its hierarchical structure, and the capability to create new cultural codes arises.

“Circe” examines the construction of this repetition and performance, separating the everyday actions of Bloom from his psychology and insisting that they come from a larger, outside source: language—hence, the shift from psychological realism to semantic language play. This play consists of a series of performances, each of which serves to reenact and displace the types established by Cultural Nationalism. At the same time, the chapter also recognizes one’s inability to fully escape such types. Butler explains this phenomenon in *The Psychic Life of Power*; she writes:

[I]t is not simply that one requires the recognition of the other and that a form of recognition is conferred through subordination, but rather that one is dependent on power for one’s very formation, that formation is impossible without dependency, and that the posture of the adult subject consists precisely in the denial and reenactment of this dependency. (*PLP* 9)

Butler sees the very process of identity formation as dependent upon this process of repetition and variation—a phenomenon much like that explored by Joyce in *Portrait of*

the Artist as a Young Man. The individual's identity is created through his or her compulsion to repeat the performances of the dominant culture. These performances eventually solidify into the illusion of an innate personality or social role. The child-subject is inundated with cultural knowledge and prescribed social roles that he or she will later come to view as his or her innate personality rather than a prescribed posture.

Butler's theory provides a useful lens through which we can understand the performances of both Bloom and Stephen in the chapter as a struggle to create and recreate their very identities. In "Circe," Joyce presents us with adult characters that are fully embedded in a language that simultaneously serves as the only tool for communication and identification while reinforcing a colonized culture. The many types created in the Nationalist Movement become the performed definitions of the many attributes that the characters in the chapter would like to possess. Through the repetition of culturally prevalent performances, both struggle to gain power over their surroundings and themselves.

Over the course of the play, Bloom takes on an array of identities as he attempts to adequately represent himself to those around him. These identities cross racial, gender, and class boundaries: Bloom plays a woman in response to the matron Bella's transformation into Bello. He acts the part of a young boy in the face of his father or a king before the vagrants of the street. These stereotypes are taken from the experiences of Bloom and Stephen as Irish citizens. They appear in the literature that Stephen has read or the sights and people that Bloom has seen walking down the street. Each of these performances evinces a culturally defined power-dynamic, which Bloom attempts to use to his own advantage, but to no avail.

The performances tend to become more prevalent as Bloom attempts to define himself and represent himself to those around him. A particularly long and contradictory series of performances aimed at self-representation occurs during the interrogation/court scene. Two members of the Watch appear and begin to interrogate Bloom as to his identity and purpose, spurring what begins to increasingly resemble the proceedings of a courtroom. This shift from simple dialogue to the conventional dialogue of the justice system reinforces Bloom's position as defendant and draws a parallel between the performed status of both courtroom and the simplest acts, such as walking down the street. As an immediate response to the Watch's entrance, Bloom appeals to his kindness to animals, a move which, as has already been discussed, is subverted by the appearance of Signor Maffei, the lion tamer. This performance is followed by a shift in Bloom's costume, signifying and supporting a shift in Bloom's performance of himself:

FIRST WATCH

Proof.

(A card falls from inside the leather headband of Bloom's hat.)

BLOOM

(in red fez, cad's dress coat with broad green sash, wearing a false badge of the Legion of Honour, picks up the card hastily and offers it) Allow me. My club is the Junior Army and Navy. Solicitors: Messrs John Henry Menton, 27 Bachelor's Walk.

(U.15.728-9)

Just as the First Watch is insisting that Bloom offer proof as to his identity, the card bearing his pseudonym "Henry Flower" falls out of his hat, triggering Bloom's change in tactics. As his identity already appears to be compromised, Bloom takes on various

symbols of authority. For example, the “cadi’s dress coat” symbolizes the authority of a judge in an Islamic country (Gifford 461). The “badge of the Legion of Honour,” while fake, conjures associations with the French order of merit with which Bloom attempts to ally himself (Gifford 461). His appeal to the “Junior Army and Navy” ties his character to one of London’s major clubs, which limited membership to those who had served in the armed forces, which Bloom had not (Gifford 461-2). These various symbols and speech acts represent Bloom’s attempt to claim some authority in the eyes of the Watch through alignment with a foreign system of recognition or merit. He appeals variously to Islamic, French, and English societies but, significantly, does not ally himself with any Irish societies, or any societies of which the Bloom of the novel is a member. In donning the fez, dress coat, and badge, Bloom undermines his appeal to the English Junior Army and Navy, placing the falseness of his performance on display. Despite the fact that Bloom speaks in English (and of English things), he is no more an English citizen than he is an Islamic magistrate or a French hero.

Having once accepted his inability to command any power through prestige, Bloom appeals to an outsider status, demonstrating “Irishness” through its opposite. Later, in this same sequence, after a number of attempts to claim a British identity, Bloom embraces his prescribed role as an incompetent foreigner. J.J. O’Molloy, a lawyer friend of Bloom’s who defended him against criticism in Kiernan’s pub in the “Cyclops” episode, unannounced to Bloom, appears “*in barrister’s grey wig and stuffgown, speaking with a voice of painted protest,*” in order to represent the faltering Bloom in a character trial. His long speech, the end of which is included below, incites yet another performance by Bloom.

His submission is that he is of Mongolian extraction and irresponsible for his actions. Not all there, in fact.

BLOOM

(Barefoot, pigeonbreasted, in lascar's vest and trousers, apologetic toes turned in, opens his mole's eyes and looks about him dazedly, passing a slow hand across his forehead. Then he hitches his belt sailor fashion and with a shrug of oriental obeisance salutes the court, pointing one thumb heavenward.) Him makee velly muchee fine night
(he begins to lilt simply)

(U.15.954-61)

Having at once realized that he is not allowed access to any prestigious or even respectable identity, Bloom reenacts the performance of a submissive Oriental peasant. Bloom takes on the physical appearance of an Orientalist stereotype of the East, developing a “pigeonbreasted” posture and “mole’s eyes,” in order to adequately embody his role as a person of “Mongolian extraction” who is “[n]ot all there in fact.” He also alters his relationship to the English language by shifting from the command of a man lying claim to English heritage, to that of a foreigner perverting the language with his own mother tongue. The extreme, even offensive, performance of this prevalent stereotype, is an attempt by Bloom to access to outsider status as a means of evading the dominant British power structure. Bloom is drawing on the mythical Eastern past of his own Jewish heritage in order to create a role for himself outside of the laws and culture of Ireland. Despite his best attempts, however, Bloom is again booed—he is denied access to yet another identity. These two opposing responses to the Watch’s continuing interrogation, one commanding, the other submissive, replay the various identities, both positive and negative, provided by Dublin society within the singular person of Bloom.

Given “Circe’s” competing frames, the reader must acknowledge the presence of these various types within the singularity of the Bloom of the novel; signification of self, like the signification of events and objects in the play, becomes unfixed. Bloom’s competing performances are not merely examples of roles one might hold in Irish society, but rather carefully chosen performances, which arise out of the Bloom of the novel’s interactions with others throughout the day. The reader must reconcile the extravagant costumes and typified speech patterns of the Bloom of the play with the ordinary man she has come to know over the course of the novel. These various, conflicting identities are offered as potential identities for Bloom as a citizen of Ireland living in Dublin, however, each identity fails.

These contradictory performances challenge the ideal of a whole, singular Irish identity. Each of them includes within its self, the assumption that the actions performed are indicative of an innate soul or psyche, however, by ascribing these contradictory traits to the singularity of Bloom, Joyce exposes their constructed status. Hampson recognizes Bloom’s vacillation in the face of the Watch as a self-conscious assessment of these roles as performance; he writes:

Bloom’s self-representation constantly subverts itself. For, example, the way in which presents himself differently to the two members of the Watch (alternately grave and gay, simultaneously ‘responding to’ and creating their respective characters) clearly undermines both performances by emphasizing their performative status. (Hampson 169)

Like Butler, Hampson notes the way in which variation and repetition are utilized as a means of exposing the performative nature of social interactions that are generally assumed true. Bloom’s performance of self is continuously altered to meet the needs

and desires of both his supporters (as in J.J. O'Molloy who casts him in the role of Oriental) and his interrogators. The performances here are more than simply “grave” and “gay;” they are in fact the hosting of multiple exclusive identities within a single host—a phenomenon that renders each of the attempts at self-representation equally false. Bloom reenacts the types provided him by his surroundings, because the various people around him ascribe him to competing types, his identity becomes a cacophonous, fantastical variety show of sorts. Bloom is unable to lay claim to an Irish identity, an English identity, or even an Oriental identity because he does not and could not fully embody the performance prescribed by any of these various groups.

For Joyce, the Cultural Nationalism movement was the chief proprietor of the myth of the “true” representation of a collective Irish soul. In “Circe,” Joyce adopts many of the conventions that underlie this movement in order to establish his own work’s opinion of and opposition to this dominant political aesthetic. For example as L.H. Platt notes in his essay, “*Ulysses* 15 and the Irish Literary Theatre;” “Hallucinations, dreams, masking, fantasy are common to Joyce, massive extravaganza and the revivalist texts which he dubbed ‘dwarf dramas’” (Platt 34). Performance, then, becomes an indictment of performance; Joyce recreates these types, so commonly found in the revivalist movement, and pits them against one another in the single character of Bloom. As Wales notes, “In an important sense, the whole ‘Circe’ is a symbolic dramatization of social-role playing, and of the roles enacted on our subconscious, whether desired or feared” (Wales 267). “Circe” insists that these social roles are the product of a larger movement, Cultural Nationalism, and goes on to demonstrate the performative status of these roles.

Magic and ritual play an important role in the closet drama's reconfiguration of an Irish identity. Here, like the Revivalist theatre he criticizes, Joyce invokes the power of ritual. Platt explains, "[Yeats] understood the theatre to be a temple, the actor to be a priest ('a reverent reciter of majestic words') and the play to be a ritual which celebrated the 'sacred' history and culture of Ireland, often through enactments of ritualistic death and rebirth" (Platt 43). For example, in another extended "hallucinatory" sequence, after having commanded the love, admiration, and control of an entire nation, Bloom takes on the role of Martyr. He appears "*in a seamless garment marked I.H.S. stands upright amid phoenix flames*" (U.15.33-4). Even here, as Bloom stands in for Christ, Joyce blends various religious codes: both the Jesus of Christianity and the phoenix of pagan mythology figure as symbols of death and rebirth. These two mythological structures ordinarily appear in opposition to one another, and yet Joyce combines them in a singular if contradictory symbol of regeneration and salvation. He acknowledges the mystic as a type of the Irish National Theatre and goes on to place it within a Catholic and Greek context rather than a Celtic one.

Joyce undermines the theatre as church model, as set out by Yeats, through the replacement of a mythical past with a cult of street life. The appearance of a Bloom-Christ is quickly toppled by the appearance of the Daughters of Erin, whose prayer overthrows any hope of rebirth leaving only the resigned acceptance of mortality. Bloom himself conjures up these semi-religious symbols of Nationalism, crying out "Weep not for me, O daughters of Erin" in a reconfiguration of Christ's "Daughter's of Jerusalem, weep not for me" (Gifford 485). Bloom, then, acts as the savior of "Erin," or

Ireland, however, unlike the transcendent rebirth of Christ or the phoenix, Bloom's attempt at martyrdom ends in death.

THE DAUGHTERS OF ERIN

Kidney of Bloom, pray for us
Flower of the Bath, pray for us
Mentor of Menton, pray for us
Canvasser for the Freeman, pray for us
Charitable Mason, pray for us
Wandering Soap, pray for us
Sweets of Sin, pray for us
Music without Words, pray for us
Friend of all Frillies, pray for us
Midwife Most Mericiful, pray for us
Potato Preservative against Plague and Pestilence, pray for us.

(A choir of six hundred voices, conducted by Vincent O'Brien, sings the chorus from Handel's Messiah Alleluia for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, accompanied on the organ by Joseph Glynn. Bloom becomes mute, shrunken, carbonized.)

(U.15.1940-56)

The prayer recited by the Daughter's of Erin reenacts (with deviation) a Catholic Litany, allying the pious of Ireland with a ritual of the Catholic church. Here, we see the Yeats's model of the theatre reenacted: Nighttown (theater) becomes a chapel, Bloom (actor) becomes priest and "Circe" (the play) alludes to a mystical, sacred church of Ireland, founded on the death and rebirth of Bloom as Christ. However, Joyce's rendition of the Nationalist foundation makes a number of telling departures. While the members of Cultural Nationalism sought a mythical past in Celtic mythology, Joyce embraces the common manifestations of Irishness readily available to them on the streets of Dublin. Specifically, Joyce refers to Ireland's Catholic past, a past that is itself defined by colonization, and in so doing, creates a mythology that is simultaneously defined by and against that history.

By reconfiguring the Catholic litany, Joyce creates a personal prayer that appeals to the mundane happenings of Bloom's day. The prayer of the Daughters of Erin appeals to various events throughout Bloom's day, names him through metonym (such as the Kidney, the Flower, the Soap), and calls him by his role in society (Canvasser for the Freeman, Charitable Mason). In this way, the prayer paints a complex even contradictory portrait of Bloom as savior: he is not the pure Irish man, speaking Gaelic and embodying the Celtic Spirit, but rather a pastiche of various disparate elements composing the semblance of a whole. As the Daughters of Erin recognize the Bloom-Christ's duplicity, Bloom himself "*becomes mute, shrunken, carbonized,*" in short, he loses his status as Messiah, as archetype, and is instead reduced to something barely human.

Joyce deprives the Irish National Theatre of its most central figure through the subversive reenactment of an Irish peasant, the mythical seat of the Irish soul. Fantasy and reality are blatantly blurred here as well, as Zoe, one of the prostitutes in Nighttown (arguably existing more in the frame of the novel than the fantastic role-play of the drama) responds to the "*shrunken, carbonized*" Bloom, saying:

ZOE

Talk away until your black in the face.

BLOOM

(in caubeen with clay pipe stuck in the band, dusty brogues, an emigrant's red handkerchief bundle in his hand, leading a black bogoak pig by a sugaun, with a smile in his eye) Let me be going now, woman of the house, for by all the goats in Connemara I'm after having the father and mother of a bating. *(with a tear in his eye)* All insanity. Patriotism, sorrow for the dead, music, future of the race. To be or not to be. Life's dream is o'er. End it peacefully. They can live on. *(he gazes far away mournfully)* I am ruined. A few pastilles of aconite. The blinds drawn. A letter. Then lie back to rest. *(he breathes softly)* No more. I have lived. Fare. Farewell.

(U.15.1958-78)

Bloom now appears as yet another figure of the revivalist theatre: the Irish Peasant or rather the “stage Irishman” (Gifford 486). He stands “*in caubeen with clay pipe*” and wears “*dusty brogues*,” all of which signal his new role as an Irish peasant. Yeats himself described his idealized conception of the pastoral to Joyce in a letter dated 1902, writing, “The folk life, the country life, is nature with her abundance, but the art life the town life, is the spirit which is sterile when it is not married to nature” (Ellmann 107). Out of this dichotomy arose the figure of the Irish peasant as host of the authentic Irish culture. Here, however, Bloom stands in peasant’s costume, “*in caubeen with clay pipe...dusty brogues...an emigrant’s red handkerchief bundle*.” Bloom as peasant is not the noble repository of Irish culture, but rather a self-pitying, washed-up, failure. This version of Bloom, triggered by the earlier Catholic-Irish-Bloomean prayer, which exposed the fractured identity of Ireland’s saving grace, highlights the shortcomings of yet another Nationalist figure. “All insanity,” this Bloom claims, referring to several of Cultural Nationalism’s greatest tenets: “Patriotism, sorrow for the dead, music, future of the race.” This peasant Bloom is not willing to accept his role as a symbol for “Irishness” and instead stands on the verge of leaving the country, either through emigration or suicide. He echoes Hamlet’s famous soliloquy with “to be or not to be,” alluding to the English theatrical tradition while physically embodying this Irish stereotype. However, this blatant reference to the English theatre as part of Bloom’s stage performance of an Irishman aligns Yeats’s pastoral utopia with the colonizing English. In adopting and perverting these types, Joyce jeopardizes Cultural Nationalism’s monopoly on the Irish soul, creating various flawed performances, which emphasize his conception of a fractured, colonized Irish consciousness.

In “Circe,” Joyce takes on some of the most egregious offenders in Irish culture are the members of the Gaelic Revival, specifically, the Irish National Theater. As in *Exiles*, Joyce re-presents the audience/reader with multiple forms of representation used by the theaters of Dublin to create a cohesive cultural nationalism, in order to expose their lack of ontological grounding. Joyce seeks to expose this method of cultural reproduction as a fraud by replacing the mythological foundations of an Irish past, with the often grotesque performances of an Irish present. Through repetition and variation of a number of revivalist types, Joyce exposes the performative status of the notion of the Irish soul forwarded by Yeats and his Cultural Nationalism. Platt recognizes the indignation underlying this project; he writes, “But above all, as far as Joyce was concerned, revivalist theatre had the audacity to speak for Ireland and, more than this, claimed to represent its very soul” (Platt 39). Through a pastiche of competing performances, Joyce deprives this claim of status, insisting instead on a mobile Irish identity that is open to and deserving of cultural exchange with the rest of Europe.

Ultimately, “Circe” takes on the role of all closet drama. It challenges the dominant form of cultural representation by reverting to a private performance, free from the stringent rules of playhouses. In this closeted space, Joyce creates a play that is chiefly and self-consciously aesthetic. He creates an environment in which the reader is constantly made aware of her participation in an artifice through the competition of two disparate aesthetic frames. This reliance on artifice allows Joyce to expose the culturally constructed status of a collective Irish identity, while reenacting the conflation of such artificial types with notions of selfhood. Bloom, the everyman, and Stephen, the artist hero, continually struggle to adequately represent themselves, espousing a variety of

contradictory social roles and artistic references. Individually, these performances cannot fully represent the characters' self-conceived identity, however, each composes a piece of the fragmented self. By focusing on the artifice of the everyday, Joyce is able to expose the (im)postures of Irish culture, asking the reader to reconsider, to acknowledge, the foreign nature of their own communication, their public identity.

However, more than simply subverting this false representation, Joyce seeks to replace the fixed idea of Irishness provided by the revivalist theater with a diaphanous reinvention of the collective unconscious. This intention is perhaps most clearly illustrated in a moment of cosmic communication between Bloom and Stephen. The two stare into a mirror, which Lynch refers to as “the mirror up to nature” in affirmation of the reflective surface’s use as a symbol of art (U.15.3820). The two reflections of Bloom and Stephen merge, as “*the face of William Shakespeare, beardless, appears there, rigid in facial paralysis, crowned by the reflection of the reindeer antlered hatrack in the hall*” (U.15.3821-3). Art, or the mirror, transforms both Bloom and Stephen into the singular figure of Shakespeare, crowned with antlers, taking the form of the cuckold (Gifford 512). In other words, the two merge in the artistic representation of a corrupted ideal. For Joyce, this is the role that art must play—it must acknowledge its role as a tool of colonization and cultural reproduction, while simultaneously conveying its own imperfection. Joyce’s art reflects the individual’s struggle with this assemblage of culturally coded material. It does not embody the art that came before it, but rather the processes by which that art has come to be understood as such.

While Joyce attempts to create a new Irish identity, he is forced to reconcile his criticism of universals with his role as artist, which necessarily involves cultural

dissemination. He navigates this complicated terrain through the constant subversion of culturally created norms, undermining not only the truth status of Cultural Nationalism, but also the role of all art as “a mirror up to nature.” Finally, Joyce replaces the propagation of a mythical Irish collective unconscious with an Irish soul that is necessarily corrupted, the product of a colonial past.

CONCLUSION

Joyce, Stage, Nation

Was not a nation, as distinguished from a crowd of chance comers, bound together by this interchange among streams or shadows; that Unity of Image, which I sought in national literature, being but an originating symbol? (Yeats 263)

A nation? Says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place. (U.12.422-3)

Joyce's plays respond to Yeats's formulation of the nation and his determination to solidify a singular image of the Irish people through the Irish National Theatre. Yeats envisioned a nation united by the singular image of itself and utilized the national theatre as an "originating symbol" out of which this image might take shape. His movement centered itself on the notion that "the crowd of chance comers" lacked purpose, but a nation, particularly Ireland, could access the "streams or shadows" of a collective soul. Joyce, on the other hand, provides his audience with an alternative idea of the nation through Bloom's conversation with the citizen at Kiernan's pub in *Ulysses*. Bloom sees little difference between a nation and a crowd; they are both "the same people living in the same place." There is no "Unity of Image" in Bloom's world, only the plain circumstance of sharing the same address. Both *Exiles* and "Circe" undermine the singular image, presenting, instead, a cacophony of images and languages through which the Ireland attempts, and fails, to communicate.

Benedict Anderson, whose work, "Imagined Communities" has set the town for colonial and post-colonial critiques of nationalism, sees the nation in yet another light.

He defines the nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson 5). The nation, then, according to Anderson, is, as Yeats would have it: “not a crowd of chance comers,” but a group unified by the singular image of itself. Unlike Yeats, however, Anderson’s definition of nation recognizes a sort of Marxist notion of cultural reproduction. It acknowledges “the streams or shadows” of a national soul, but insists that these unifying ideals are necessarily artificial. The nation has no origin, but is instead created through modes of cultural reproduction—the arts, print-media, political systems, education, etc. These systems create a paradigm through which the nation comes to view itself. It imagines borders, both geographical and social, and imagines itself to be self-governing. The arbitrary constraints of a national identity are implicit in Anderson’s definition as is impossibility of ever fully escaping those bounds.

Joyce’s plays emphatically criticize these artificial constraints as they appeared in the Irish National Theatre. He not only demonstrates the restrictive language, characterization, and plotlines of the Irish National Theatre, but also illustrates the individual’s struggle to create a fitting, original identity from this limited cultural material. Richard Rowan returns to Ireland, in *Exiles*, only to find it corrupted by imposture, embodied in the person of Robert Hand. Every character in the play fails to communicate his or her interior state through stage conventions and staged language. In “Circe,” Bloom struggles to find an identity that will give him claim to an Irish culture, only to find that none quite fits. Bloom is unable to retain his identity and still feel comfortable in the role of “Irishman.” The audience is presented with a protagonist who exists both inside and outside of the Irish notion of nation and is ultimately unable

to find any place within the artificially narrow definition of the Irish Nation, despite the fact that he think of himself as Irish.

Despite his emphatic critic of the Irish National Theatre, his distaste for populism, and his works' rejection from the Cultural Nationalism movement, Joyce's works do participate in a Nationalist project. Joyce's print history evinces a serious concern for the national image of Ireland. In each of his works, from the short stories of *Dubliners*, to the un-categorizable *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce is involved in the representation and recreation of the Ireland he left behind. It seems as if, no matter how much the man Joyce attempted to escape his Irish identity, the author Joyce could not help but participate in the creation of an Irish national literature. It is in these works, that we see Joyce, like Yeats before him, forwarding a singular image through which the Irish people might unite.

Joyce's plays, far from the pastorals of the Irish National Theatre, imagine a new Ireland that aggressively refutes simple categorization. Joyce's use of pastiche, whether through the melding of genre, the juxtaposition of disparate types, or the inclusion of the outsider, expands the definition of "Irishness" to include that which it has historically defined itself against. The aesthetic of his plays mirrors his plight and the plight of all Irishmen excluded by the Nationalist ideal. That is, it becomes the demonstration of Cultural Nationalism as a restrictive force. Through language and stereotype, those aspects of the individual and his art that do not agree with the imagined nation. By exposing these false constraints, Joyce infinitely multiplies the possibilities of artistic representation in Ireland and the self-representation that such a project involves.

Joyce's drama is the embodiment of what Szondi called the epic theatre. It takes its form and the underlying assumption of direct communication as its subject. Like in the epic novel, *Ulysses*, in the drama, Joyce seeks to unmake his own project by attacking the theatre through theatre. The epic, historically, also defines a hero's journey, a cultural cornerstone through which a people can come to a better understanding of itself. The long arduous journey, here through the caveats of a colonizing language, results in a better understanding of home, here Ireland. Joyce's plays attempt to create the same effect, resulting in a Unifying Image, through which Ireland can see that it is anything but unified.

In his notes to *Exiles*, Joyce explores the ability of an individual to fully understand his or her own self. He writes of Bertha, "[her's] is the soul of a woman left naked and alone that it may come to an understanding of its own nature" (*Exiles* 115). Joyce attempts to create the same situation for the very soul of Ireland. By exposing the various impostures of the Nationalist movement, Joyce strips his country bare, leaving it without any of the usual social crutches. In his essay, "On Drama and Life" Joyce makes this position explicit, writing, "But it were well we had in mind that those eternal conditions are not the conditions of modern communities. Art is marred by such mistaken insistence on its religious, its moral, its beautiful, its idealizing tendencies" (*OPCW* 27). His Ireland is an Ireland of disillusionment, an Ireland that has come to understand the lies out of which it built up its own identity. Joyce can be seen as a Nationalist himself in this respect. He asks the people of Ireland to imagine a community in which they, not the Church, not the English, but the Irish people, through all of their country's resources, not simply "its religious, its moral, its beautiful, its

idealizing tendencies,” can imagine a community in which they feel at home. Joyce’s plays stage a new Ireland composed of disparate voices, each struggling to overcome their exile.

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