

# *Ulysses* Rearranged for the Stage: Dermot Bolger's *A Dublin Bloom*

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## Introduction

Undertaking an adaptation of any of James Joyce's works is, indeed, an extremely challenging enterprise, partly because of the dangers involved in tampering with a piece of literature whose status resembles that of a cultic text and whose writer's standing is so exceptionally high in world literature. All this entails very high expectations, and suspicions whether it is possible for the new creation to be on a par with the original. The still often uncertain status of adaptations in the eyes of critics and audiences poses an additional problem. It is a challenge, though, which for many has proved too irresistible. A book titled *Missed Understandings* (1988) by José Lanterns undertakes the study of numerous stage adaptations of Joycean works. Alongside mentioning a great number of unpublished adaptations, the plays discussed in more detail are Hugh Leonard's *Stephen D* (1964) (adapted from *A Portrait* and *Stephen Hero*) and *Dublin 1* (based on short stories from *Dubliners*); Mary Manning's *The Voice of Shem* (1957); Desmond O'Sullivan's *Finnegans Wake* adaptation with an identical title; two adaptations of the "Circe" episode, *Ulysses in Nighttown* by Marjorie Barkentin and Padraic Colum (1959), and *Circe* by Paul O'Hanrahan (1983); Joseph Carroll's adaptation of the "Cyclops" episode, *Mr Bloom and the Cyclops* (1982), and also plays based on several episodes or the whole of *Ulysses* like *Bloomsday* by Allen McClelland (1958), *Joycemen*, a one man show by Eamon Morrissey (1980), and *Ulysses* by Stephen Rumbellow (produced in 1981). There are two more adaptations of *Ulysses* not discussed in Lanterns, Anthony Burgess's musical play, *Blooms of Dublin* (1986), and the more recent *A Dublin Bloom* (1994) by Dermot Bolger.

Although dramatic adaptations of all the Joycean works, including even *Finnegans Wake*, abound, they very rarely elicit wholesale appreciation. The title of Lanterns' book, *Missed Understandings*, hints at her overall evaluation of adaptations, regardless of whether they strive to be faithful to the original or attempt to tackle it in a radical, innovative way. Referring to the almost impossible task of transferring *Ulysses* onto the stage she claims that "whatever methods and techniques the adapter uses, the result will always be a drastically cut and much impoverished *Ulysses*" (Lanterns 130). Fintan O'Toole ponders on the issue of originality in similarly sceptical terms in the *Irish Times* (9 June 1990), expressing his opinion that a "play inspired by a novel is either an original work of art in itself, in which case it goes well beyond the dramatization, or it is not, which case, why bother?" He severely criticizes one of the stage adaptations of the "Circe" chapter (Marjory Barkentin's *Ulysses in Nighttown* staged in 1958), saying that it is an example for "an exercise in cutting up Joyce, [ . . . ] which adds to confusion" as a result of "small talents' messing about with big ones" (O'Toole 11).

Nevertheless, there are examples, if rare, for more successful reworkings of Joycean texts. Dermot Bolger, one of the most popular and prolific contemporary Irish writers, has even been compared to Joyce by the very same critic quoted above. O'Toole in his introduction to Bolger's *A Dublin Bloom* (1994), a dramatic adaptation of the whole of *Ulysses*, writes: "Bolger shares much with Joyce, a wildly inclusive vision, a great sense of humour, a rich feeling for language, a quest for the mythic in the everyday, and, above all, an attachment to Dublin as a city forever suspended between heaven and hell" (qtd. in Pelletier 255). This suggests that Bolger might be the writer capable of doing justice to his great predecessor when endeavouring to turn *Ulysses* into a "free original adaptation," as the subtitle of Bolger's play claims it to be. However, in an interview the author implies that there were difficulties involved in the rewriting mainly due to the lack of freedom "having to please a difficult literary estate," while trying to satisfy the demands of good drama. As a result, the author gives voice to a certain degree of skepticism regarding what he sees as the "messy and not very successful" (Kurdi) nature of the commission he undertook.

Putting aside the author's own reservations and looking at the product itself, one tends to agree with the praise for Dermot Bolger the dramatist, since his version is far from being an example of senselessly increasing the intricacies and complexities of the book by cutting it up, despite the fact that he does a lot of cutting up. But these, on the whole, succeed in serving his dramatic purpose. He attempts to paste together the bits and pieces of the great puzzle that is *Ulysses*, and doing so he aims to draw "as clean a line as possible through the book" with the intention of "unravel[ing] the story of Mr. Bloom's day" (Bolger 5), and, importantly, in the hope to lead people back to reading the novel itself.

### Rendering the Plot in Theatrical Terms

Merely unravelling the plot of *Ulysses* would not be an achievement or even anything new, as many other adapting authors had done that much before. Although Bolger claims his aim partly to be this, he goes further in his adaptation than staging the intricate plot of the original. Unlike the greater part of former adaptations, Bolger's stage version attempts to render the text's idiosyncrasies into theatrical terms, and he succeeds in transferring some of the unique structural, stylistic, and conceptual features of the novel onto the stage.

This is rather skilfully and amusingly done already in the prologue of the two-act play. The prologue, where we see Bloom climbing into bed and kissing his wife's bottom, is made up of lines taken from various places in *Ulysses*. They are not arranged in the form of a dialogue but spoken by unidentified voices, and at first sight seem to be randomly flung together. The randomness is deceptive, however, as there is an underlying pattern of anticipating the main themes of the book. For instance, as early as here a passage of Molly's monologue is inserted, and in the few lines chosen the word "bottom" occurs three times together with its synonym "behind," hinting at the centrality of the theme of flesh/sexuality in "Penelope" and, indeed, in the whole book. The theme of father-son relationship is hinted at already in one of the merely visual elements of the prologue, the apparition of "THE BOY (as angelic eleven-year-old Rudy) caught in beam of light behind Bloom [. . .]" (10), and also by the final, lulling lines of the actresses alluding to both son figures, the lost Rudy and the surrogate son, Stephen:

ACTRESS B. Sandycove, the snotgreen sea . . .  
 ACTRESS A. The windy parapet of a tower . . .  
 ACTRESS B. The voice you could not have heard . . .  
 ACTRESS A. Of a son in mourning . . .  
 ACTRESS B. Not your son, no son will mourn you. (11)

The thematic allusions are coupled with structural ones. The structure of the prologue strongly recalls the overture of the "Sirens" chapter. Just like in "Sirens," where similar introductory lines function as a musical overture anticipating the main themes, the prologue in Bolger's play is made up of snippets of conversation heard, read, or imagined by Bloom during his long day, and they pop up seemingly inconsistently and unconnected. Yet all echo reflections of the major anxieties and irritations Bloom suffered (or, during the play's time, is about to suffer) consciously or unconsciously throughout the day.

THE CITIZEN. By Jesus, I'll crucify that bloody jewman, so I will.  
 MARTHA. Are you not happy in your home you poor naughty boy?  
 M'COY. Who's getting it up? Blazes Boylan?  
 REST OF CAST. Trembling calves. Butcher's buckets. Rawhead and  
 Bloody bones.  
 LENEHAN. What's your hurry Boylan? Got the horn or what?  
 ACTRESS A. (*Reciting*) Her mouth glued on his in a voluptuous kiss . . .  
 PUB NARRATOR. And Bloom's old fellow before him, the robbing baman  
 that poisoned himself . . .  
 HYNES. A dark horse himself, the same Bloom . . . (9)

Climbing into bed, as if in retrospect, Bloom hears these mocking voices from within his memory of the past day. Their role in the play is to introduce all his major sexual and social anxieties. The citizen's vociferous anti-Semitic outburst against him; one line from Martha's letter reminding him of his marital problems and minor guilt of infidelity; M'Coy's asking about his wife's tour and blurting out the organizer's, i.e. Boylan's name, which has embarrassing connotations for Bloom; as well as the pub narrator gossiping about his father who poisoned himself. In this, they function as an expression of Bloom's inner world full of anxieties about being an outsider, and a failure as a husband. The random, fragmented lines of the prologue, which are apparently the cavalcade of Bloom's half-conscious thoughts, evoke another conspicuous feature of *Ulysses* and transfer it to the play, namely the stream of consciousness technique, one of the main devices Joyce applies in representing the content of the mind.

Still in the prologue, Bloom is finally drawn into a dream-world by the actresses, while the rest of the cast recites the sleepy chant of Sinbad the Sailor. True to the spirit of the intertextual allusions not only within but also among individual works of Joyce's oeuvre, in the prologue Actress B's last words to Bloom before his falling asleep after his trivial day of nonetheless mythical proportions are: "Dream it all again, Leopold Bloom" (10). This is Bolger's addition, not found in the original text, and it rings a Wakean bell.

The prologue is followed by two acts, which stage the events of *Ulysses* by retaining the chronological sequence of the episodes. The events of the novel are rendered one after the other so that they follow the order of the plot of *Ulysses* consistently. Thus, for instance, the first three chapters that feature Stephen and the following three

that feature Bloom are rearranged in a way that parts of Bloom's and Stephen's day taking place simultaneously are performed in the same scene, or directly follow each other. Scene 1 based on "Telemachus" (8 a.m.) is followed by scene 2 staging "Calypso" (8 a.m.).

The overall structure of the play conveys the rhythm of a long day of walking-wandering around the city of Dublin. Act 1 is made up of eighteen scenes, whereas act 2 consists of only seven, which seems to be a strikingly disproportionate arrangement. Nevertheless, the balance is maintained, as the eighteen scenes in the first act are very short, while the seven scenes of the second act tend to be lengthy. As a result, the quick succession of short scenes creates a sense of fast pacing action in act 1, which is then followed by the longer and fewer scenes of act 2, an arrangement generating the effect of slowing down in the second half of the play. This conveys the illusion of a day whose first half, daytime, is filled with events, however trivial ones, which the characters move through full of energy, but as the day is nearing to its end in act 2, the action slows down, suggesting a sense of tiredness and exhaustion. The method produces an effect resembling the one that the style of narration in the "Eumaeus" chapter evokes, as well as corresponds to the tendency that the later chapters become longer and more complex.

### Transposing Spatiality from Novel to Stage

Another conspicuous feature of the novel is, at least partly, transferred to the play, which is its spatiality. The spatial nature of *Ulysses* has been noted by readers and critics as one of its most interesting features. The "temporal sequence of narration is replaced by, or combined with, a spatial orientation" as a result of the narrative technique Joyce applies in *Ulysses*, "creating a flexible network of interrelations" (Zeller 141) by scattering the book with seemingly meaningless fragments of larger episodes, which gain sense only from the vantage point of a later passage or chapter where their interrelation is revealed. To describe this method Hugh Kenner coins the term "aesthetics of delay" (72).

Reading the novel, our comprehension of several important episodes depends on our perception of such instances of interrelations or parallax, i.e. seeing the given episode from (at least) two standpoints. Such literary parallax produces an effect close to stereoscopic vision, and consequently "the uncanny sense of reality that grows in readers of *Ulysses* page after page [. . .] fostered by the neatness with which versions of the same event, versions different in wording and often in constituent facts—separated, moreover, by tens or hundred of pages—reliably render one another substantial" (Kenner 75). When information is given in this fragmented manner, a sense of spatiality arises, and "in order to understand the earlier passage, one should, at the same time, already be somewhere else" (Zeller 141). Being at different places in the book at the same time would be the ideal for the reader. In Bolger's dramatic adaptation the simultaneous presence of all the characters on stage during the whole play serves to transfer the spatiality of the book.

Apparently, however, the shift between genres does not facilitate the direct transfer of this important feature, the method of literary parallax generating the spatiality of *Ulysses* is not, or perhaps cannot be, directly transposed from the page to the stage. Even so, in line with the attempt to unravel the plot, the parallactic episodes are presented to the audience by means of rearrangement. The interconnected episodes origi-

nally separated by hundreds of pages are placed one after the other, forming a unit. The Milly-Bannon relationship, for instance, requires careful reading and good memory on the part of the reader of the book to be understood clearly. In the "Telemachus" chapter we read of a card received from Bannon mentioning a "photo girl" (unidentified at this stage), whom he met in Mullingar. By the time we reach "Calypso," where Bloom reads Milly's letter, which mentions Bannon, the name is most probably forgotten, and we might or might not put the two occurrences together and identify Milly as Bannons "sweet young thing" (*U* 1.684). In the play, however, it is all put straight for us: Bloom slits open the envelope to read his daughter's letter and "*Milly Bloom caught in light begins to recite*":

MILLY. Dearest Papli, Thanks ever so much for the lovely birthday present.

Everyone says I'm quite the belle of Mullingar in my new tam . . . (17)

After a few lines, in which Bloom is reminiscing about his children,

*Mulligan unfreezes, [ . . . ] calling back to Stephen:*

MULLIGAN. Got a card from Bannon in Mullingar, Dedalus. Says he found a sweet young thing down there. Photo girl he calls her. (17)

This, in the play, is directly followed by Milly's reciting the final part of her letter, disclosing the interrelation: "A student comes here some evenings named Bannon he sings Boylan's song about seaside girls. Tell him silly Milly sends my best respects. Must now close with fondest love. Your fond daughter" (17). There are similar rearrangements of Molly's and Bloom's words, which reflect that in the novel their words are often seen as "parallactically interlaced in many points" (Zeller 151), since in a subtle way Molly's monologue often comments on Bloom's version of an event.

BLOOM. (*Writing as if to Gerty with a stick in sand*): I . . . AM . . . A . . .

MOLLY. (*Mocking whisper*): Stick in the mud, Poldy. (66)

Bolger's method of staging two such interconnected, but originally spatially separated and seemingly independent fragments within one scene hands on a plate the solution of the puzzle to the audience, who could not be expected to instantly recall and link together such minor pieces of information if scattered through the sweeping dialogue of a play. Instead of the reader's virtual location in two places at the same time, (which is the case with the aesthetics of delay), here the characters, and, consequently, the parallactically connected incidents are put in the same theatrical space, and do the work of dropping elements of the puzzle into place for the audience. When two originally parallactic episodes, or two points of view converge in this way on the stage, the audience comes close to what the ideal reading experience and the aesthetic of delay would yield, but without the pleasure of discovery. This means that most of the intriguing and rewarding challenges that *Ulysses* has in store for the reader are lost, because they are presented ready-made for the theatre audience.

For readers intimately familiar with the novel, there is bound to be a sense, however vague, of the loss resulting from the smoothing and raking out of meaning hidden in the knots of the intricate net of the original text. This entails a deflating of the pleasures of the book where the intricacy and the richness of the text in allusions require a highly conscious involvement on the readers' part and, in return, provide them with various rewarding challenges.

**Moving the Characters**

One of the most conspicuous re-arrangements of the chapters in the adaptation is carried out in the reworking of the “Penelope” chapter, which becomes dispersed over the whole play. Originally the closing chapter the book, Molly’s monologue is divided into pieces which appear as nearly every third scene in act 1 and feature regularly, if less often, in act 2 as well. Her very first and last word is the famous YES, which as a loose frame hints at the original unity of the monologue, and at the same time emphasizes this emblematic word. The passages of her monologue distributed over the play interrupt the chronological sequence of the scenes, but Molly’s lines often enter into a dialogue with scenes preceding and following them, as most of the time there are thematic echoes reverberating between her lines and the surrounding text.

Molly’s recollection of “the grand funeral in the paper Boylan brought in” (24) and her thoughts on Dignam’s death in scene 8 are soon followed by the journey from Sandymount to Glasnevin Cemetery in “Hades” in scene 10. Scene 1 in act 2 is based on “Nausicaa” and shows Bloom after his sexual climax saying: “Tired I feel now” (66), which theme is echoed by the following scene, a “Penelope” passage, where Molly is musing on her sexual experience and renders its similar aspects in a similar vocabulary, “I felt lovely and tired myself afterwards and I fell asleep” (66). Here she mentions Gibraltar, repeating the word uttered by Bloom just a few seconds before. Also, after Cunningham whispers the gossip about Bloom’s father’s suicide in scene 10, the theme is picked up by Molly in scene 11, at the very end of which her thoughts shift to dwelling on newspapers and Freemasons, anticipating scene 12, set in the office of *The Freeman’s Journal*. Her memories of Josie Breen’s involvement with Bloom are recalled in scene 13, and are directly followed by Bloom and Mrs. Breen’s encounter in scene 14 based on the “Lestrygonians” chapter.

Bolger in an interview talks about the dramatic considerations behind his cutting up and distributing Molly’s monologue over the whole play, saying it was done with the intention to satisfy the demands of good drama, as in the theatre, unlike in the case of reading, “an audience need to be constantly engaged, and surprised, and confronted” (Kurdi). Apart from its functionality, the effect of scattering the very last chapter of the book through the play may be seen as a subtle reflection on the feature of *Ulysses* that Joyce referred to as writing “without beginning-middle-end” (qtd. in Zeller 141). In addition, the fact that her monologue is constantly intertwined with the action enhances the theme of Molly’s ever-present influence on Bloom’s thoughts and behaviour. Her being the guiding star during his wanderings is emphasized in turn also by the arrangement of stage properties, her bed constantly in focus on a raised platform at the centre back of the stage.

Molly’s bed placed in the centre of attention is only one example of Bolger’s clever organization of theatrical space. In fact, Bolger’s plays have been praised for their “highly imaginative use of stage space, of lightning, of props, of masks, of sound effects” (Pelletier 251), almost all of which have an important role in this play as well. The description of the stage setting reads: “All props and costumes should be kept to the absolute minimum, with effects created mainly by voices, music and lighting” (5). Getting rid of or at least minimalizing the role of props, thus turning attention away from the objects of external reality might serve as a means to attempt to draw the audience into the inner, emotional and psychological world of the characters. This is even better achieved by the use of music, voices and lighting, which all generate emotions, associations, allusions more powerfully than objects or props may do, illustrating in

theatrical terms, again, Joyce's fascination with the workings of the mind while rendering action and plot secondary.

Interestingly, all the major characters stay on stage during the whole play, and instead of moving and removing them with instructions of ins and outs, Bolger operates with alternating spots of light cast on characters in action and blackout on the ones momentarily out of action, and also by freezing and unfreezing them to shift attention from one character (or scene) to another. Instructing characters to "freeze" while others are acting draws attention to the fact that their action, though artificially suspended, should be perceived as taking place simultaneously. All the more so, as they seem to sense the presence of the others acting in another place. In scene 4 parts of "Telemachus" and "Calypso" are presented on stage in a way that emphasizes their taking place at the same time. Though Bloom is in blackout while Stephen and Mulligan are talking, when it is his turn to act, "his innocent song takes over from Mulligan's" song mocking Jews (16). There are other instances whereby, though Bloom is frozen or in blackout, often "his eyes flicker towards" (11) Mulligan, or "gazes towards" Stephen (25). The characters' continuous presence on stage reminds us of the reading experience of *Ulysses*: one should keep in mind all the subplots, and how they reflect on each other. This unorthodox and strategic use of stage space and lighting, and the manipulation of character-movement on stage serve as a means to suggest the spatial quality of the original.

Bolger finds it easy to infuse the Joycean subversive humour into the play, and at points it is done in a way that the contemporary audience can find allusions to issues of interest to them. In the scene based on the "Nausicaa" chapter, the priest and the congregation's role becomes more central than in the book, taking a more active part in the beach scene where Bloom and Gerty are flirting. Instead of "reciting the litany of our Lady of Loreto" in "the old familiar words" (*U* 13.287), the priest himself becomes the narrator of the sexually charged encounter of Bloom and Gerty. The priest and the congregation take turns in describing the scene and narrating the action in the form of a litany, but it is the priest himself who mouths the juiciest bits of their long-distance, nonetheless highly erotic activity:

PRIEST. It was getting darker and he was looking all the time and then he put the watch back and put his hands in his pockets. A kind of sensation rushed all over her and she knew by the feel of her scalp that the thing must be coming on. . . . (64)

*Congregation begin to pant and moan softly.*

PRIEST. [. . .] Whitehot passion was in his face, and it made her his. At last they were alone. His hands were working and a tremor went over her. (65)

PRIEST. [. . .] and she wasn't ashamed and he wasn't either. And then a rocket sprang and burst and it was like a sight of O! (*Bloom crumbles forward, gasping, lifting his hand from pocket*) and everyone cried O! (*Gerty slowly straightens herself*) Then all melted away, all was silent. She glanced at him, shy reproach. (*Colder voice*) Leopold Bloom, for it is he, stands silent, with bowed head, before those young guileless eyes. At it

again! (65)

In the novel in Molly's recollection of confession ("he touched me father [. . .] where and I said on the canal bank like a fool but whereabouts on your person my child on the leg behind high up was it yes. . .") (*U* 18.107) the over-curious father Corrigan is a comic representation of the traditional, anecdotal figure of the sexually repressed but harmless priest. Placing the priest figure in such a focal role in the dramatic scene based on "Nausicaa," by making him and the congregation not only narrate the lengthy erotic scene but also illustrate it with intense panting and sighing as if they themselves were physically involved in it, leads to further associations. Such a realization of the episode in the play is not only a wildly comic and roguish allusion to Joyce's fiercely subversive attitude towards the Church but, at the same time, is a means to bring the play more up-to-date. The image of a priest indulging in scenes of eroticism so intensely strikes a chord of topicality for contemporary audiences aware of the changing public view on the shattered authority of the Catholic Church in Ireland, partly due to the numerous recent sex scandals in the ranks of the clergy. This innuendo in the play reflects on the obvious perils of the Catholic Church's repressive attitude towards sexuality, insisting on the strict division between the sacred and the secular, the soul and the body—issues that Joyce in his works addressed on more than one levels.

The theatrical realization of the same scene affects the characterization of Bloom as well. Although the staging of the "Nausicaa" chapter is, on the whole, rather successful in rendering Joyce's subversive humour with the use of the ingenious technique of lending the narrator's role to the priest, one important scene is interpreted in a way that it somewhat alters Bloom's character by denying him a demonstration of his compassionate nature and, what is worse, by presenting him as a rather unfeeling creature. All this hinges on the interpretation and contextualization of a single word, which in reading can retain a playful double meaning. Bloom, according to the stage direction, realizes "in bitter disappointment" that it is not tight boots that make Gerty limp away after the climax of their flirtatious encounter on the beach, but because "She's lame!" (66). If on stage Bloom is made to say this "in bitter disappointment" (which has no trace in the book itself, where his immediate reaction is: "Poor girl! That's why she's left on the shelf and the others did a sprint. [. . .] Jilted beauty" [*U* 13.772]), then his following line in the play, "That little limping devil" (66), can be interpreted as an unfeeling reference to the girl. Thus we do not only lose sight of the double meaning of Joyce's expression whose original context "makes it not entirely clear whether the phrase refers to Gerty or his own exhausted member" (Bishop 192), but also, if only for a moment, of the gentle, compassionate Bloom.

### Limitations and Losses

Adapting *Ulysses* for the stage involves a series of difficult decisions to make about selection, and, out of necessity, its content can be presented only in a severely reduced form. The difficulty of staging the plot is coupled with the more serious challenge of how to present the great variety of styles employed in the book. So as to save as much of the original stylistic bravura as possible, Bolger does not force the text of each chapter to fit the form of a realistic dialogue at all costs where it would result in a serious distortion of the style or narrative technique. Such instances are the rewriting of the "Oxen of the Sun" or the "Ithaca" chapters, where creating a dialogue between the two



protagonists would be false, since the words we read in the novel are not literally Bloom's or Stephen's. Thus in the "Oxen of the Sun" episode of the play, Actor B fulfils the role of the narrating voice and "at different stages his posture and delivery will suggest changing personas" (67). The attempt to at least partly preserve the original style leads to an unusually lengthy monologue, but the halting of the dynamism is compensated for by the swirling action in the next scene based on "Circe." Similarly, to render the "Ithaca" chapter as faithfully as possible, its catechism style is retained by the analogous form of regularly alternating mini-dialogues between the following characters: Sailor-Jarvey, Keeper-Veteran, Actress A-Actress B, Actress C-Actress D. In the case of "Aeolus," however, we have only the bare bones of the original chapter in the drama, as Bolger found it impossible to provide a theatrical analogue for what is seen on the page, i.e. the newspaper headlines the dialogue is hidden in and unfolds from.

The staging of the "Circe" chapter in its complexity also presents obstacles bordering on the insurmountable, mainly because its dramatic form is misleading. It is not drama in the traditional sense, but the dramatization of the mind, where what passes is objectified and displayed by being acted out on a stage. Not on a real one, however, but on the stage of the reader's mind. In the "Circe" play of the novel, hallucinations and fantasies are not mere illustrations but constitute a mode of representation of inner life, both conscious and subconscious. It is an ingenious method of representing the mind since it seems to overcome the limitations of the stream of consciousness technique, which blends the conscious and subconscious or preconscious contents of the mind and expresses them through language. But the subconscious operates on a preverbal level, and by means of language it can be represented only at the expense of depriving it of its most distinct characteristic feature, the preverbal quality. In contrast, the method of dramatizing such verbal and preverbal contents is a way of overcoming this limitation inherent in language (Sarbu 226). However, if the chapter is treated as a real play, as it is in Bolger's adaptation, it becomes the very thing it is not meant to be, and loses the essence of its function.

Another problem is posed by the fact that although "Circe" is written "in the most objective of literary modes, drama, it is in this episode that the objectively real is most difficult to discern" (French qtd. in *Lanterns* 84). Bolger, however, opted for staging not just action that seems to be the core of the plot on a realistic level, but also fragments of the world of hallucinations, fantasies. To indicate the surrealistic nature of parts of the action, he operates with lighting that "switches, highlighting and distorting the raised bedstead, creating a surreal arena" where Bloom's fantasies are acted out (71), with the realistic action taking place under it. In addition, to indicate the switch between the surrealistic and the realistic planes, surreal lights and street lights switch on alternately. For instance, during the action taking place between Zoe's two probably consecutive sentences: "Make a stump speech out of it" (79) and "Talk away till you're black in the face" (82), the stage "becomes bathed in surreal light" (79). Obviously, all this brings up the question of selection and interpretation, but the issues that have been puzzling critics, whether, for instance, a clear-cut distinction can or should be made between hallucinatory and real events, are not the privileged ones to be addressed.

An adaptation, however, is unavoidably, by its nature, one particular interpretation, and restriction of meaning and the reduction of the possibility of multiple interpretations inevitably occur in it. It is doubly so when a novel is put on stage, and the solitary reading experience allowing the readers freedom to ponder on and return to any

episode is replaced by the realization of one of the possible readings acted out in front of the audience. This reduction might lead to drastic alterations of the spirit of the original, especially in the case of a book whose very essence is that it constantly and uncannily challenges our expectations of a definitive or comprehensive reading. This striking feature of the Joycean works originates from the author's habitually fighting the either/or conclusions. As a critic put it, "His was the both/and attitude, and he preferred to leave many things inconclusive [. . .] he allowed maximal scope for the reader's interpretative powers" (Knuth qtd. in Lanfers 146). Knuth calls the method Joyce uses to achieve this inconclusiveness "phatic communication," which conveys meaning with the help of riddles, puns, allusions. This is one of the aspects of *Ulysses* that obviously tends to suffer the greatest loss in most adaptations of it, including Bolger's as well.

To find an instance of the inevitable limitation brought about by the interpretation of the adapter playwright, we can turn to the famous ending of Bloom's day, the breakfast request scene. In the play it is given the most traditional and optimistic realization or reading, showing Bloom's assertion of his gender role as husband, which points into the direction of the revival of the marital bond between him and Molly. This reading, in fact, is questioned by some critics of *Ulysses* as the incident is merely alluded to and never described directly in the book. There are arguments that Molly might have misinterpreted certain words Bloom muttered half asleep. "Molly's recall of Bloom's words may be her interpretation of what the cryptic text renders as "dark bed . . . roc's auk's egg' (*U* 17.2328), in the last, least articulated answer of 'Ithaca' " [. . .] We know she misconstrues words all the time." (Senn 105). Opting for the most conventional reading of such a central episode results in a more conventional play than the original text would perhaps allow.

## Conclusion

While appreciating the adaptation's successful reworking of certain elements of the original, it is impossible not to find fault with an adaptation of *Ulysses*, because the adapter is bound to lose whichever way he chooses to go. If he strives to remain faithful to the original, it is inevitable that there will be shortcomings in achieving fidelity, in view of the complexity of the novel on all the levels of plot, style, genre, language and intertextuality. On the other hand, if the adapter makes an attempt at creating something entirely new on the basis of Joyce's groundbreaking novel, he might be seen as struggling in vain to surpass the unsurpassable in originality, experimentation and sophistication. In either case, the adaptation is bound to stay behind the original, however ingeniously the transfer of certain numerous elements is realized. Thus it might be safer to remain somewhere between the two extremes, which is Bolger's choice.

Concerning the strikingly central role of dramatic adaptations in contemporary theatre, but narrowing the discussion down to the remaking of modern plays, Christopher Innes talks of a variety of motives for remaking modern classics. None of them seems to be too relevant as a general guideline in the case of Bolger's Joyce-adaptation. *Ulysses* is a classic so timeless and yet so up-to-date that there is no felt need for "radical revisionism [. . .] to restore the original vision" (Innes 249), neither does it need updating or to be given completely new relevance, for the very same reason. *Ulysses* itself can be seen as an adaptation that translates a classic into a totally different context, but it is carried to such an extreme that outdoing it is hardly imaginable.

Why to adapt, then, *Ulysses*, yet again? The (re)introduction of this exceptional literary work to newer generations seems to be a relevant goal in itself, and Bolger achieved this, on the whole, rather successfully. He kept as much as could be kept on the levels of plot and style when shifting from one genre to another, and added, cut out, and rearranged enough to produce an enjoyable and rich piece of drama, not attempting to, therefore not being expected to rival the original.

There might be another motive lurking behind adaptations of Joycean writings. His oeuvre having the status of a national, cultural icon may raise some sort of an anxiety of influence in the writers of subsequent generations. Especially his fellow-countrymen might feel an urge to grapple with their great predecessor, and making an adaptation constitutes an appropriate means of doing so.

## Note

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