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Luca Crispi. *Joyce's Creative Process and the Construction of Character in 'Ulysses'*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. xxi + 368 pp. £60.00. ISBN 978 0 1987 1885 7

Leopold Bloom leaves the other Dubliners in *Ulysses* a little confused about his identity. He doesn't seem to fit neatly into the clear racial or sectarian categories by which they are used to negotiate Irish society: 'Is he a Jew or a gentile or a holy Roman or a swaddler or what the hell is he?' asks Ned Lambert. To which Martin Cunningham answers Lambert by describing Bloom as 'a perverted Jew' (12.1630-35). Bloom himself seems to hold contradictory views on this: in his public clash with 'the citizen', a violent anti-Semite, he describes Christ as 'a Jew like me' (12.1808), but in private conversation with Stephen Dedalus, Bloom qualifies this, remarking 'though in reality I'm not' (16.1084-85). One way to determine whether Bloom is a Jew or just a bit Jew-ish is to piece together what the novel tells us about this character's history and family background, as Luca Crispi does in *Joyce's Creative Process and the Construction of Character in 'Ulysses'*. Much of this information is condensed in the question and answer form of chapter seventeen, the 'Ithaca' episode, where we learn that Bloom's father, Rudolph Virag, converted to Protestantism shortly after arriving in Dublin from Hungary and the continent. So, in Dublin parlance, his son may be a 'swaddler', after all - except that we also learn that Bloom underwent conversion to Catholicism as part of his marriage to Marion (Molly) Tweedy during 1888. To the irritation of his wife, by the time of novel's events in 1904, Bloom seems to have lapsed from Catholicism into some sort of free-thinking. Ned Lambert's confusion may be justified.

In addition to the complexities of his lived experiences and background, it can be difficult to grasp the identity of this character because, instead of conventional novelistic exposition, such details from Bloom's past are dispersed throughout the novel. Crispi's book goes beyond previous attempts to recreate the history of the characters in *Ulysses* by re-tracing how it was that Joyce determined the release of this information during the course of writing the novel. Poring over Joyce's notes and drafts, Crispi is able to establish that, for example, the date of Bloom's Protestant infant baptism can be found upon the earliest surviving version of 'Ithaca' (p.85), but Joyce added details about the conversion of Bloom's father to a subsequent draft of the episode during the late summer of 1921 (p.76). Joyce

used 'Ithaca' in this way to consolidate hints about Bloom and his background from the gossip of Ned Lambert and Martin Cunningham that he had written two years previously.

Joyce's Creative Process is a triumph of clarity here, laying out complex and diverse materials in such a way that the reader can follow Crispi's reconstructions of Joyce's intentions and working processes. For, as Michael Groden has shown previously in *Ulysses in Progress* (1977), the pattern of Joyce's work on his novel was far from linear. Joyce began writing *Ulysses* for serial publication at the start of the First World War, before a prosecution for obscenity in 1920 forced serialisation in the *Little Review* magazine to stop. From that point up to the publication of his book in February 1922, Joyce not only completed the chapters he had yet to write, he also radically revised the chapters he had already published. In the process, these revisions inspired him to further revise the whole novel during the proof stages of printing the novel.

Whilst these complications delayed the publication of *Ulysses*, the overlap between Joyce's work on different parts of the book facilitated the interconnecting textual weave of the published novel. In the mid-morning, for example, Bloom notices a compositor at work in the printing office of the *Evening Telegraph*. The reversed letters of type prompt a memory of his father:

Poor papa with his hagadah book, reading backwards with his finger to me. Pessach.
Next year in Jerusalem. Dear, O dear! All that long business about that brought us
out of the land of Egypt and into the house of bondage *alleluia*. (7.206-9)

The quotation from the Book of Exodus here holds a multiple value in the book. Derived from his father's reading at a Seder meal to celebrate Passover ('Pessach') it reminds us of Bloom's Jewish heritage; the hint about exodus recalls the novel's mythopoeic relationship to the travels of Homer's Greek hero, Odysseus; and it evokes Ireland's political captivity under British rule at the time of the novel's setting. But this resonant allusion didn't appear in the serial version of the text, when it was published in October 1918. Joyce first composed an allusion to Bloom's father reading about the 'house of bondage' for a manuscript draft of the later 'Nausicaa' episode around the end of 1919. Revising *Ulysses* for

book publication in 1921, Joyce decided to strengthen the resonance of the Book of Exodus within *Ulysses* and add further detail to Bloom's memories of his father by incorporating this allusion into the earlier scene at the newspaper offices.

Although Crispi doesn't cite this passage, *Joyce's Creative Process* abounds with similar examples. In addition to a scrupulous scholarly familiarity with the spectrum of publication materials relating to *Ulysses*, Crispi's advantage over previous accounts of the novel's composition history lies in his expert knowledge of manuscripts by Joyce acquired by the National Library of Ireland during 2002. (These drafts were unavailable to Groden in the 1970s.)

Whilst this knowledge of manuscript materials places Crispi at the cutting-edge of Joycean textual scholarship, the critical perspective of *Joyce's Creative Process* is less sure-footed. For Bloom's father, Rudolph, the painful feelings associated with adopting Protestantism found expression in the representation of a similarly regretful Jewish apostate within a performance of the play *Leah* that he attended in 1866. Crispi pieces together the composition of Bloom's memories of his father's memories of this performance as they become intercalated with other details from Bloom's past, such as his father's suicide:

A genetic reading of this kind of story explores how Joyce correspondingly constructed the textual and fictive subjective spheres of *Ulysses* as well as the rhetoric of intersubjectivity in the book. Thus, we can better delineate and comprehend the various ways in which these related discursive spheres operate contrapuntally in the text. (p.79)

Talk of 'textual and fictive subjective spheres' acknowledges the broader patterning of allusion and verbal connection that operate within *Ulysses*. This often seems to function at a level that is, as Stephen Dedalus puts it, 'behind or beyond or above' the awareness of characters like Leopold Bloom, whose lives and experiences are represented in intimate detail. Similar to the Book of Exodus, allusion to *Leah* both speaks to Bloom's personal experience and the resonance of his Jewish heritage beyond his personal circumstances in the book.

Critics have tended to split between those who see *Ulysses* as the apogee of representational fiction and those who see within Joyce's formal experiment and complex networks of allusion a figure for the decentring of language. The 'house of bondage' example is a case in point: the fact that Bloom has mistaken the text of the Old Testament (Mose led the Israelites *out of* not *into* captivity) might epitomise the intensity of Joyce's imaginative engagement with his fictional creation, so that the error reflects the attenuation that has occurred between Bloom's lived experience and his Jewish roots. But equally it might represent a point of linguistic play intended to open up this phrase to Joyce's broader cynicism about the likelihood of Irish political or cultural independence.

Crispi's reference to his 'genetic reading' of *Ulysses* ought to align him with the latter approach. For, in its emphasis upon the text-in-progress, genetic criticism is a branch of textual study with strong affinities to post-structural theories of the text as a source of endlessly deferred meanings. So, addressing similar territory in *I do I undo I redo: The Textual Genesis of Modernist Selves* (2010), Finn Fordham correlates the evermore increasing complexity of Joyce's writing processes with his increasing experimentation with literary forms in the 'Circe' episode of *Ulysses*. The writing of 'Circe' becomes inextricable for Fordham, with Joyce's presentation of multiple and split personalities and increasing doubts about the very notion of character or stable identity.

In contrast with Fordham, however, Crispi's description of 'this kind of story' represents a more fundamental approach to fiction. Rather than Derrida or Heidegger, who inform Fordham's work, *Joyce's Creative Process* turns instead for its bearings to the less-fashionable *Character and the Novel* (1965) by W.J. Harvey. Crispi's book approaches Joyce's novel through 'stories' – clear sequences of events or identifiable moments that can be reconstructed as they feature in *Ulysses*. Thus, Crispi begins with the appearance (and non-appearance) of Blaze Boylan, Milly's lover at limited intervals in the book, from early drafts of the 'Sirens' chapter (some of the earliest draft material to have survived). Crispi pieces together what we know of Bloom and Molly's parents, how the couple first met, where they lived, and when Molly may have begun to cheat on her husband. His recreation of Rudolph

Virag's memory of seeing the play *Leah* in the year before his son's birth falls into this same pattern.

Crispi acknowledges theoretical debate and critics who view art as 'an autonomous creative production that bears only an abstract relation to the world' (p. 17), but asserts:

I have purposely not engaged with the more general, conceptual questions about what a fictional character is, should, or even can be [...] the core of this book is an inductively empirical descriptive study of the manifest methods Joyce employed in the construction of two of the most iconic characters in modern literature. (p.20)

Whilst it is true that Crispi focuses upon inductive and 'empirical' evidence from the manuscripts, this rejection of 'conceptual questions' is not a strong or convincing position to adopt, nor does it do justice to the strengths of *Joyce's Creative Process*. For Crispi's recreation of the major events in the lives of Leopold and Marion Tweedy Bloom relies on a conception of character as knowable and shaped by events. Focussed upon reconstructing what can be known about particular events, *Joyce's Creative Process* occasionally overlooks how much the presentation of those events is shaped by the circumstances in which they are recalled. Bloom's misquotation from the Book of Exodus indicates how much his memory of his father is dynamic and shaped by present circumstance, from the slow erosion of the correct wording over time to the pressure of his present 'bondage' in his marriage to an unfaithful wife. But Crispi's researches are premised upon a 'conceptual' model of human character that accommodates such depth of imaginative engagement with ease,

A deep understanding of character as the saturation of lived experiences within daily life underlies *Joyce's Creative Process*, which is also thoughtful about the contingencies that shaped this aspect of Joyce's approach to writing. Much of the information about Bloom's family life only found a place within *Ulysses* at a very late stage in the novel's composition, As Crispi remarks, Joyce's treated his own plans and notes as highly 'malleable': dates shifted within drafts of the novel, as did the attribution of views and experiences. An abrupt note such as 'Left Lombard street because Rudy † [died]' produces a short sentence that Joyce added to the proofs of chapter eight: 'When we left Lombard street west something

changed. Could never like it again after Rudy' (8.609-10). But this reverberates across the novel, connecting two particular events: the death of the Bloom's young son and the historical point during which they lived in a house on Lombard street. The fact that this era marked the end of full sexual relations between Bloom and Molly also impinges upon their present life together as it is represented in *Ulysses*. It becomes part of the curious mixture of denial, compromise and secrecy which characterises their marriage and Bloom's acceptance of his wife's infidelity. At the same time, as Crispi notes, Joyce incorporates this observation into syntax and tonalities of Bloom's internal monologue (p.223). Such expansion is characteristic of Joyce's methods whereby 'often-terse phrases in his notes illuminate the striking ways in which he conceived the characters and his work' (p. 192). Indeed, it's a tribute to Crispi's engaging enthusiasm for the material he works with that he occasionally sounds taken aback by the complexity Joyce could apparently spin from such small notes and observations.

And Crispi's emphasis upon the 'stories' at the heart of *Ulysses* not as retrograde or old-fashioned as it might appear. His methodology recalls the claim of Joyce's biographer, Richard Ellmann, who suggested that *Ulysses* was inspired by the married life of a man called Alfred Hunter, who rescued Joyce from a drunken brawl, just as Bloom rescues Stephen Dedalus. (Ellmann picked up this rumour from a friend of Joyce's father.) The role played by stories and gossip, then, in the shaping of *Ulysses* points to a deep affinity with *Finnegans Wake* in which the world's history is presented as an uncertain set of stories which attract the gossiping attention of a variety of figures. The *Wake's* formal experimentation is more pronounced than that of *Ulysses*, but these shared structural origins have important implications. They point to the fundamentally social presentation of character and identity within Joyce's work, which is sometimes obscured by the obvious attention that is demanded by his representation of characters' inner lives. Bloom's status as a Jew (or not) is undoubtedly an intimate matter. It depends upon his parentage; it is affected by the degree to which he is observant in his daily life of the rituals and practices associated with Judaism (he regrets that he doesn't); likewise, it is closely associated (as Crispi shows) with deeply personal memories of his father. But it is also out of his hands: if his mother, Ellen Higgins (daughter of Julius Karoly and Fanny Hegarty) should turn out not be Jewish, Bloom would lack the matrilineal descent required by more orthodox Jewish

communities. Likewise his Jewish background is also the subject of gossip and rumours which determine the behaviour of the Dubliners he meets, according to their prejudice. Crispi may reject 'conceptual questions', but the dense and impressive expertise in textual matters witnessed by *Joyce's Creative Process* will have a broad and long-term impact on our understanding of these complex issues in *Ulysses*.

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