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## JAMES JOYCE, MINIMALIST

everything is less than  
as it is  
everything is more.

Paul Celan, 'Cello Entry' (1967)<sup>1</sup>

Minimally less. No more.

Samuel Beckett, *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981)<sup>2</sup>

As Dirk Van Hulle observes, the German Letter of 9 July 1937 sent by Samuel Beckett to Axel Kaun is now more frequently than not preceded by the epithet "oft-quoted".<sup>3</sup> We are nonetheless beholden, while acknowledging that frequency of quotation, to also repeating it, bound to the concision with which it both outlines a Beckettian poetics and announces a volta in modernism through the distinction of that poetics from the Joycean mode. According to Beckett, his 'literature of the unword'<sup>4</sup> would differ from that of Joyce by exploiting 'impotence, ignorance' instead of 'tending toward omniscience and omnipotence'.<sup>5</sup> Rather than 'making words do the absolute maximum of work', he would attempt a 'kind of work [...] in which I am not master of my material'.<sup>6</sup> This reading identifies an epochal difference between the two that would later become a critical commonplace, situated in a valorization of the appropriation of language and excesses to which Joyce finally extends it, leading to his designation as a virtuoso of language, a 'maximalist' writer; or, in the words of John Gross (echoing those of Beckett), 'a modern, or modernistic, master' who revels in and celebrates a sheer proliferation of words.<sup>7</sup> This view of Joyce as a maximalist writer, of a Joycean maximalism that is axiomatic of the work, gained significant traction not only in Joyce studies but in the entire field of modernism and beyond. Indeed, it is his example that is invoked in the seminal definition of literary maximalism and minimalism by John Barth, in his 1986 *New York Times* review, 'A Few Words About Minimalism', for which Barth famously advances his proposition of 'two roads to grace':

The medieval Catholic Church recognized two opposite roads to grace: the *via negativa* of the monk's cell and the hermit's cave, and the *via affirmativa* of human affairs, of being in the world whether or not one is of it. Critics have aptly borrowed

those terms to characterize the difference between Mr. Beckett, for example, and his erstwhile master James Joyce, himself a maximalist except in his early works.<sup>8</sup>

In contradistinction to maximalism, minimalism is figured by Barth as ‘a radical economy of artistic means’, an ‘artistic austerity’, the phraseology indicative of a semantic field that can easily be traced to modernist studies as it conceptualizes Beckett and, through oppositional polarization, Joyce. In what follows I wish to ask, through a close reading of examples from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, to what extent Joycean writing exhibits a more ambivalent relation to the word than Beckett’s attribution would suggest, proposing a further nuancing of Joycean maximalism and, by extension, an interrogation of the terms of maximalism and minimalism.

As Barthian taxonomies, ‘maximalism’ and ‘minimalism’ first gained purchase with the emergence of American postmodernism in the late 1980s: exemplified by the short stories of such as Raymond Carver, minimalists were typified as working in the short story or novella form and combining brevity of length with a concomitant economy of style, whereas maximalist writing, exemplified by works such as Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, was conversely typified by an excess in both length and form. In the years since Barth popularized them the terms arguably however became accepted to the point of being rendered passé. But, very recently, signs of a resurgence of interest have been registered in two distinct but related critical fields.

One of those fields in which the binary has re-emerged and been nuanced is in the current debate that focuses on the new realism in the North American novel as a renaissance of literary maximalism; in fact, two contemporary monographs, Stefano Ercolino’s *The Maximalist Novel: from Thomas Pynchon’s ‘Gravity’s Rainbow’ to Roberto Bolaño’s ‘2666’* and *Maximalism in Contemporary American Literature: The Uses of Detail* by Nick Levey testify by their very entitling to the currency of the term.<sup>9</sup> Ercolino identifies in his text what he presents as ten distinguishing features of the American maximalist novel from the 1970s to the new millennium, specifically their length; encyclopaedic mode; dissonant chorality, or plurivocity; diegetic exuberance; completeness; narratorial omniscience; paranoid imagination; intersemioticity; ethical commitment; and hybrid realism<sup>10</sup> At least eight of these traits could, however, be said to be equally common features of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, and are moreover discernible in Beckett’s implicit distinction between his approach and that of Joyce in the 1937 letter: an emphasis on length; encyclopaedic mode; plurivocity; diegetic exuberance; completeness; narratorial omniscience; intersemioticity, and ethical

commitment are characteristic of readings of Joyce as maximalist, or perhaps more accurately what might be termed maximalist *readings* of Joyce, a differentiation to which I will later return. What is most striking in his account is that, when discussing the encyclopaedic mode – one of the paradigms of which is the ‘modern epic’ (the others being the ‘systems novel’ and the ‘mega-novel’) – Ercolino has recourse to Joyce, not simply as an example of the paradigm but as the exemplar by which it is defined:

After the World War II [*sic*], when the ideological apparatus of modernity inexorably collapsed under the blows of history, a certain brand of postmodern literature remained stubbornly anchored to the encyclopedic and universalizing dream of modernism. A dream of utopian power, which seemed, and still seems, without limits. [...] Let us try to give a brief account of this, starting with the masterpiece of modernist encyclopedism: Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

The encyclopedism of *Ulysses* is a commonly recognized fact.<sup>11</sup>

Ercolino affirms Joyce as definitional of the encyclopaedic modern epic and therefore of a maximalist paradigm, drawing upon the earlier and foundational figuration of literary maximalism and minimalism by John Barth, in whose analysis the *Ur*-poles for these typologies are Joyce and Beckett.

Meanwhile, within Joyce studies there has also been a renewed interest in maximalism, as evidenced *inter alia* in discussions by Jeremy Colangelo, Dirk Van Hulle, P.J. Murphy and Friedhelm Rathjen.<sup>12</sup> This work, however, tends to nuance the binary distinction between a Beckettian ‘art of impoverishment’ (as Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit term it) and a Joycean mastery.<sup>13</sup> Van Hulle, for example, acknowledges the perpetuation of Beckett’s reception of Joyce while seeking to shade the terms of engagement:

[...] Beckett told James Knowlson that the core of his poetics was a “lack of knowledge” (Knowlson 1996, 352) and he insisted on presenting his own way as opposed to James Joyce’s. Beckett’s insistence on this dichotomy has often been adopted in Beckett studies and the difference between the two authors has been presented as the antithesis of Joycean encyclopedism versus Beckettian “anti-encyclopedism” (Baker 1996, xiv). But it is becoming increasingly clear that this contrast is too black-and-white.<sup>14</sup>

The contemporary poet Alice Fulton writes of high modernist maximalist poetry that ‘[m]odernist maximalism, as practised by Pound and Eliot, was a structure of depletion [...] To risk a generalization, their modernism beautifully encountered what-is-not and gave ample voice to absence’.<sup>15</sup> The difference between modernist poetry and a modernist prose

poetics, as perceived in Joyce, is that his maximalism is conventionally identified as a totalizing drive rather than as an aesthetics of exhaustion. The implicit and unexamined link lies in the equivalence between formal signifiers of a maximalist aesthetic, whether visual – such as length, size, or, on the level of the syntactical unit, sentence structure – or technical – for example, in the use of interior monologue and free indirect discourse, or in the adumbration of quotidian detail – with a maximalist philosophy reflected in the writing. This implication can again be identified in Beckett studies and derived from Beckett’s own reception of Joyce, whom he credited as ‘making words do the absolute maximum of work’ while attributing that ‘maximum’ to a proliferation of the word itself, contrasting it with his own divergent aesthetics wherein words would be whittled down to a minimum in order to bear the maximum pressure, thereby signifying an eschewal of the mastery that he ascertained in Joyce.<sup>16</sup> For Beckett a loss of mastery is not merely technical but indicative of a philosophical position that rejects a metaphysical vision of the world and ontology founded in presence, and of the capability of language as a medium to represent and transmit that presence. The Beckettian position is analogous to that of Martin Heidegger, for whom ‘language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell’.<sup>17</sup> For Heidegger, it is not man who speaks language, but ‘language that speaks man’: ‘[m]an acts as though *he* were the shaper and master of language, while in fact *language* remains the master of man’.<sup>18</sup> People are constituted by language rather than in control of it, and language so conceived is no longer initiated from an originary presence but rather marked by an originary absence. With its formal predilection towards brevity, attenuation and dimunition, minimalism is linked to a philosophical piercing of the veil; maximalism, by contrast, remains connected to an ‘authoritative, even redemptive’ potential for literature to recuperate absence and dissolution in a grand narrative or synthesising vision.<sup>19</sup>

While Joyce’s early works are regarded as formally minimalist, an interrogation of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* indicates how elements of his later work that are recognized as formally maximalist may be disarticulated from a co-extension to a metaphysical worldview implicated by mastery, encyclopaedism and totalization. From the very beginning, the first lines of *A Portrait*, announce Stephen as a political subject in language, in that they demonstrate that language subjects us to power and we are therefore made as political subjects through language, which subjects us to the power structures of the world that are themselves constructed and maintained in discourse. , The reader sees that Stephen’s world is made present by articulation and extends only as far as his language reaches? . He is subject first to the Father, who names him ‘baby tuckoo’ (*P* 5), and that is

how he comes to understand himself in relation to the world and to the paternal? .He understands the contours of the world through story and song, and by material appropriation; his mother is known to him by three things, the oilsheet; her smell; and the hornpipe that she plays. His world encompasses his relatives, who are relative to each other: Uncle Charles, older than Dante, both of whom are older than his mother and father, and there is a revelatory moment when he realizes that mother and father are universal nouns and categories of relation ('The Vances lived in number seven. They had a different father and mother. They were Eileen's father and mother' [P. 5-6]). Throughout the novel, Stephen's world expands or is estranged according to his command and understanding of language. When at Clongowes, this incipient tension grows as Stephen becomes aware of the semiotic structure of difference and the plurality of the signifier: '[h]e kept his hands in the side pockets of his belted grey suit. That was a belt round his pocket. And belt was also to give a fellow a belt' (P 7). In this homonymic disjunction between signifier and signified, there is the realization that one word does possess only one meaning, leading Stephen to question faith in language even as he recognizes its inescapability. At points this tension seems to resolve only to return further amplified:

God was God's name just as his name was Stephen. *Dieu* was the French for God and that was God's name too; and when anyone prayed to God and said *Dieu* then God knew at once that it was a French person that was praying. But though there were different names for God in all the different languages in the world and God understood what all the people who prayed said in their different languages still God remained always the same God and God's real name was God (P 13)

Stephen here tries to reconcile the structuration of language through a sign system with the desire to return to a stable meaning in the transcendental signified: 'God's real name was God'. Even as he rehearses this logic, however, 'different' is repeated three times and marks the singularity of the word. He intuitively knows it not to be sustainable, understanding that the concept of the proper name, and hence the act of naming itself, is an unstable one: God's name is only God in English, therefore it is not his 'real' name, therefore God no longer correlates to a stable truth that can be named in and as language. Stephen elides the difference of language for stability, yet it keeps on returning; here, quite literally, in the repetition of difference.

This tension is made explicit in a commonly-cited example from chapter five, when Stephen states that '[t]his race and this country and this life produced me [...] I shall express myself as I am' (P 178). Although this is most often read as a statement of liberation and a

temporal shift between past and present states (in other words, ‘I will now express myself, free of the forces that have heretofore bound me’), it may instead be interpreted as a temporal continuum; in this view there is a recognition of being ontologically constituted by those forces, yet driven necessarily to express oneself while being aware that the self is not autonomous but limited and formed by those modes of production. Stephen is not expressing a lack that can potentially be made whole through the exercise of his art, but a constitutive lack: there is no possibility of being made whole, since one is produced as an exile in language, a stranger to oneself. The awareness of self-alienation realized in language is both a general principle and attains a specific historical aspect in *A Portrait*; for example, when conducting his conversation with the Dean of Studies, Stephen considers his political subjection to the ‘acquired speech’ of the colonizer through which he is brought into the world in an *a priori* state of subjugation (*P* 166). This thematic position in *A Portrait* generates an understanding of the connection between ontology and language that is more commonly identified with a later, Beckettian, aesthetics, wherein the coexistence of necessity and limitation, persistence and stasis, are mimetically mirrored in the visuals of the form – the brevity of length, the diminution of the syntactical unit, and the poverty of language – and made the subject of the prose.

While Alice Fulton’s account of modernist poetics tempers its maximalist impulse, it nevertheless retains a sense of upholding structure by rendering absence in full (‘ample’) voice and retains a belief in plenitude by virtue of a memorializing of plenitude lost. The implication is that there is something to be lost, an erstwhile presence – and, potentially, to be recovered. In Joyce’s work absence is extended beyond representation to form, such that it problematises the equation of whatever excess or stylistic maximalism exists in the later texts with plenitude and totalization. Were we to disarticulate the equation between that excess and philosophical presence, we could begin to consider how, even though words proliferate, they inscribe an originary difference and absence into the text and counter the synonymy of maximalism with mastery at the same time as they t complicate the identification of a philosophical, aesthetic, and formal convergence in minimalism. Duncan McColl Chesney explains Beckett’s minimalism in these terms when he equates the ‘modern impossibility of realism’ as expressed in ‘the minimal abstractions of [his] great works’ that exhibit ‘resistance of the medium’ itself, with ‘the dark truth of the poverty of experience offered up unwaveringly’.<sup>20</sup> Chesney discusses the dilemma of the artist compelled to express the inexpressible with insufficient means in terms of minimalism; as in accounts of maximalism, he acknowledges that the term is developed first in other disciplines before entering into

literature, and that its critical application remains underdeveloped and its tenets positivistically derived from a small number of exemplars. Following Carla Locatelli's expression of Beckett's 'subtractive' mode<sup>21</sup> (itself a Beckettian coinage in relation to Joyce), Chesney identifies this ever-attenuating aesthetics with a self-reflexivity in the prose, which makes of it both subject and performative form; he juxtaposes this with Pascale Casanova's reading of Beckett proffering that she situates him 'within a tradition of modernist purism' and that 'this form of purism in Beckett is certainly a form of minimal or minimalizing art'<sup>22</sup> The equivalence between 'purism' and minimalism suggests a teleological progression from high to late modernism whereby the latter is purged of the naïve excesses of the former even as it also reaffirms an equivalence between formal reduction, aesthetic minimalism, and philosophical sophistication located in an eschewal of metaphysical certainty.

While my reading of *A Portrait* seeks to problematize this equation, there remains the question of how *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* can be perceived to support an interrogation of 'maximalist' Joyce and, from that interrogation, a subversion of the minimalist and maximalist categories. Maximalist readings of *Ulysses* accord the novel, as a facet of its encyclopaedic realism, a humanist mode focused on the realization of character psychology and interfamilial relations. Perhaps the most high-profile example of such a reading of recent years is that promoted by Declan Kiberd, in *'Ulysses' and Us: The Art of Everyday Living*, the stated mission of which is to 'reconnect *Ulysses* to the everyday lives of real people', positioning it as a humanist novel against theoretical readings and effacing the text in favour of utilizing it as a self-help manual for learning 'lived wisdom'.<sup>23</sup> A discourse reverberates across Kiberd's accounts: that of everyday lives, real people, the ordinary mind, 'complex' but 'affirmative', a representation of humanity as a collection of 'simple souls' and *Ulysses* as the simple story of those souls.<sup>24</sup> Although their methodologies are dissimilar, this is also the version of *Ulysses* critiqued in Leo Bersani's 'Against *Ulysses*', an essay which disparages Joyce for what Bersani posits as an apparently conservative humanism masquerading as avant-garde experiment.<sup>25</sup> Where Kiberd promotes this *Ulysses*, Bersani regards the style as a Trojan horse that reveals at its centre a novel with traditional properties:

If we were unaware of the avant-gardist claims made for Joyce's novel, we would, I think, have little hesitation in speaking of it as a psychological work, as a novel of character. We might of course be bothered by what an old-fashioned critical discourse has called a disproportion between the technical machinery and the psychological or

“human” content, machinery that frequently obscures our view of what is happening.<sup>26</sup>

For Bersani this is the truth, in all senses, of the novel. His analysis enters logically into the rhetoric from which it borrows and denigrates as ‘snobbish’ (Bersani 1990, p. 157) any inquiry that would seek to read *Ulysses* in any way other than to corroborate it as a novel of personality.<sup>27</sup> Its technique ceded to the power of expression that characterizes the social realist novel and is implicitly indicative of Joyce’s maximalism.<sup>28</sup> This view returns to *Ulysses* as a type of the classical nineteenth-century realist novel made contemporary by the ornamental stylistics of modernist mimesis, rather than as a new form that would challenge the grounds of the novel itself, its conceptions of plot and character representative of a communal reality external to language but transmitted through language. Of *Ulysses*’ central protagonist Bersani writes:

Bloom is eminently appealing and eminently ordinary. In one of the exchanges that constitute the impersonal catechism of “Ithaca,” Bloom is called “Everyman or Noman.” In any case, he is a Sweet Man, and if Joyce has inspired a kind of attachment and anecdotal curiosity (about him, about the streets of Dublin) evocative of that affection for Jane Austen which was for so long an obstacle to her being thought of as a serious writer, it is largely because of his success in creating Bloom. [...] The Blooms are an identifiable couple, and it is an extraordinary tribute to Joyce’s power of realistic evocation that all the fancy narrative techniques of *Ulysses* are unable to dim the vivid presence of Poldy and Molly.<sup>29</sup>

In order to argue that *Ulysses* belongs to the modernist ‘culture of redemption’ that he critiques, Bersani engages in an excess of the banal disguised as celebration that must first separate form from content, designating the former as ‘fancy narrative technique’ and the latter as truth, which here takes the form of the self-present and fully realized psychological character – the symbol of the high modernist novel in its humanist mode – in the form of Joyce’s ‘realistic evocation’ that renders the ‘vivid presence of Poldy and Molly’, the diminutive familiarity of Bloom’s name suggesting the ideological territory he considers the novel to be occupying.

Barbara Reich Gluck tacitly presumes this link between the perceived power of the word as the foundation of a humanist worldview when she states that ‘[f]ailure to communicate, or to believe in the possibility of doing so, entails alienation. Beckett’s characters increasingly divorce themselves from all human society [...] On the other hand, Joyce’s characters and his fiction, grounded in the word, soar ever upward and out’.<sup>30</sup> It follows for Gluck that Bloom is ‘a model of *l’homme engagé*’, the epitome of this

association between the stability of language, conceived as possessing positive and malleable properties, and a belief in the undivided communication of the self therein.<sup>31</sup> As this interpretation centres particularly on the character of Leopold Bloom, I wish to nuance it by forwarding a reading of what I propose to be an interconnected textual chain, the first instance of which is taken from ‘Cyclops’. The initial scene is that of Bloom and Joe Hynes in Barney Kiernan’s pub, discussing the late Paddy Dignam’s insurance policy:

- Same again, Terry, says Joe. Are you sure you won’t have anything in the way of liquid refreshment? says he.
- Thank you, no, says Bloom. As a matter of fact I just wanted to meet Martin Cunningham, don’t you see, about this insurance of poor Dignam’s. Martin asked me to go to the house. You see, he, Dignam, I mean, didn’t serve any notice of the assignment on the company at the time and nominally under the act the mortgagee can’t recover on the policy.
- Holy Wars, says Joe, laughing, that’s a good one if old Shylock is landed. So the wife comes out top dog, what?
- Well, that’s a point, says Bloom, for the wife’s admirers.
- Whose admirers? says Joe.
- The wife’s advisers, I mean, says Bloom. (*U* 12.758-69).
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In an elegant example of parapraxis, the reader is led to believe that while Bloom intends to say ‘advisers’, his unconscious is revealed through the Freudian slip and we are reminded that he is thinking about Molly’s assignation with Blazes Boylan – her ‘admirer’. There are further slippages still, in this passage; we know that one of the characters in ‘Cyclops’ is the dog Garryowen, and are invited to assume that Joe formulates his question to Bloom – ‘top dog?’ – because the dog is next to him in the bar and, by virtue of physical proximity and visual awareness, it is proximally syntagmatic in his speech as in his mind. This suggests the representation of a semiotically constructed consciousness implicated in language, rather than a humanistically rendered psychology conceived as prior to, and available for, expression in that language as a transparent medium. Closer reading reveals a further semiotic link in this chain, and suggests that it is not only Joe who is prompted by dogs in ‘Cyclops’. Here it is necessary to shift back to episode six, ‘Hades’, and to the moments before Bloom, who is travelling in the carriage, happens to see Boylan in the street, when he is thinking about the conception of Rudy and musing that it must have occurred on the morning when Molly was looking out the window watching two dogs copulating:

My son. Me in his eyes. Strange feeling it would be. From me. Just a chance. Must have been that morning in Raymond terrace she was at the window watching the two dogs at it by the wall of the cease to do evil (*U* 6.76-9)

Bloom then passes the dogs' home, which prompts him to think about the loyalty of dogs to their owners and his father's dog Athos, who pined away after Rudolph Bloom's suicide:

Gasworks. Whooping cough they say it cures. Good job Milly never got it. [...] Dog's home over there. Poor old Athos! Be good to Athos, Leopold, is my last wish. Thy will be done. We obey them in the grave. A dying scrawl. He took it to heart, pined away. Quiet brute. Old men's dogs usually are (*U* 6.121-8).

Just after this moment, Bloom begins to think about Blazes Boylan coming to visit Molly that afternoon and, almost as if he has materialized him, Boylan crosses their path. What is happening in the single example in 'Cyclops', when Bloom seems to inadvertently reveal his preoccupation with Molly's infidelity while discussing Mrs Dignam, has its genesis in these passages in 'Hades'. The figurative mention of the dog by Joe, which might be said to be already a moment of linguistic slippage on his part, prompted by the literal Garryowen, recalls to Bloom that period earlier in the day when he was thinking about dogs en route to Dignam's funeral. That, in turn, recalls the moment when his musings were interrupted by seeing Boylan, which thought recalls his wife to him and reveals his anxiety over her assignation in the slippage 'admirers'. What would otherwise be considered as a revelation of character psychology, of Bloom the family man and the complex but quotidian travails that render him a multi-faceted and rounded character in the humanist mode, is ultimately offered up as a pattern of signification revealed in a textual chain. It infers by implication that language in Joyce is not conceived as a stable and present, albeit malleable and experimental, medium that by extension allows for the representation of a self prior to language and available to full and present articulation within the world of the text, nor does it express a psychologically realist and self-present character available for portrayal. The condensation of Dignam and dogs that crystallizing around Molly and Boylan suggests further that Bloom, the apparent archetype of rounded character, stands as a challenge to the humanist Joyce he is made to enshrine and to readings that identify *Ulysses* as humanist by virtue of what they designate, implicitly or explicitly, as its maximalism.

The framework of one man on one day vaunted by maximalist and humanist reading that would reduce *Ulysses* to the tale of a simple soul traversing Dublin reveals itself instead to be indissociable from the linguistic processes from which such readings seek to sever it,

and from a fundamental incompleteness at and as the centre of Joyce's writing which refutes the possibility of offering a redemption of the modern world, the latter being dependent on viewing language as a self-present and transparent vehicle for the mimetic representation of a humanist worldview that would recuperate a fragmented culture. The liberal humanism identified with the maximalist mode and attributed to Joyce is determined by the view that people are in control of language, which is then simply a medium for the expression of an already-constituted self and world available to representation. This then allows us to re-examine what Joyce meant when he states, of *Finnegans Wake*, '[j]e suis au bout de l'anglais', and to consider that Joyce is at the end not only of English but of language as a medium capable of redeeming lack through its own plenitude, since he presents language itself as constitutive of that lack and in doing so rejects the totalizing and recuperative worldview attributed to high modernism.<sup>32</sup>

When discussing Beckett's search for an art that would express an 'authentic weakness of being', Michael O'Sullivan locates that quest in his 'syntax of weakness', achieved by writing in French.<sup>33</sup> By associating the linguistic aspiration towards reduction with a worldview, O'Sullivan relates 'a style of representation or [...] linguistic capacity' with 'a broader assessment of the human condition' and so unites formal weakness, expressive of 'the inadequacy of signification', to a philosophical interest in ontological weakness.<sup>34</sup> The dissolution of form reflects the correlative inadequacy of language and being, and is ordinarily identified in Beckett as both a reaction to, and emancipation from, what he perceived to be a Joycean control over form, reflective in turn of an omniscient and essentially metaphysical worldview located in a mastery of knowledge. If Joycean writing were instead to be considered as expressing the impossibility of mastery over and of language, rather than its control, both writers can then be regarded as postulating a similar connection between formal and ontological incompleteness. Such a reading would entail reviewing the standard perspective on the sheer proliferation of quotidian detail and ephemera in the later Joyce, figured as encyclopaedic in intent; it would also necessitate a revisiting of the length and scope of those works as maximalist and therefore completist, as well as of their polyphony of voice, which reaches a zenith in the linguistic overlaying of the *Wake* and its palimpsestuous puns. Maximalism encourages the identification of these signifiers of size, quantity, and length with correlative metaphysical abstractions (the *via positiva* delineated by Barth), and in literary terms with a humanist faith in the integrity of the individual. Were these signifiers to be disarticulated from that content, the axiomatic connection between formal excess and philosophical plenitude could in turn be disinvested.

Instead of being mutually exclusive of a sense of the inadequacy of language, this would entail reconsidering Joycean maximalism as an articulation of that inadequacy and would involve reading *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* as expressions of the superfluous rather than the replete, the excessive rather than the abundant. If, in the work of Beckett, the expression of insufficiency as a concomitant of the interrelation of ontological and linguistic weakness is correlated to a mimetic reduction in quantity of text, in Joyce it could be considered as finding expression in a proliferation indicative of a drive that cannot be satiated and is always already doomed to failure. Albeit from different positions, Beckett and Joyce can then be read as both attempting to express the same view of language as attenuated, performed in text; the difference between the two would be that, whereas in Beckett there is a visible mimeticism between form and content, in Joyce excess would be the symptom rather than the correlative. When Robert McAlmon detailed his reminiscences of Joyce he recalled particularly when the latter read *Ulysses* read to him one night: ‘he wept [...] while explaining his love or infatuation for words, mere words’.<sup>35</sup> Although in love with words to the point of tears, the view of the prison-house of language initiated in *A Portrait* indicates an ambivalence over its potential rather than a celebration thereof. This ambivalence is then carried through to the excessive accumulation of the later texts, motivated by a view of the simultaneous violence and poverty of language; this would allow excess in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* then to be interpreted as divorced from values of totality or mastery, and at best to be read as a compulsive realization of their inachievability.

Within recent discussions of Joycean maximalism, both Jeremy Colangelo and Friedhelm Rathjen endorse the principle in Joyce while seeking to nuance it. Colangelo’s Bakhtinian reading emphasises the polyphony of *Ulysses* and negotiates the Borgesian impossibility of representing the world in a book by arguing that incompleteness is paradoxically the generator of its maximalism:

The detail, in putting the text in direct confrontation with the world it represents in all its complexity, invests the text with that world’s overwhelming gigantism, which necessarily means that the representation of that world will be incomplete. However, this incompleteness is not a failure, but the mechanism by which the text’s maximalism comes to exist. The gigantic *depends* on the existence of an outside, on the drawing of a limit.<sup>36</sup>

While Colangelo reconciles the failure of completion with the aspiration towards it, Friedhelm Rathjen argues that Joyce and Beckett should be regarded in terms of a Bloomian

*clinamen* wherein the ‘radicalism’ of one impels that of the other.<sup>37</sup> Making analogy with the Brunonian ‘identity of opposites’ discussed in ‘Dante ... Bruno. Vico .. Joyce’, Rathjen cites Beckett in that essay in order to argue that the two writers meet at the point at which their extremes coincide:

The maxima and minima of particular contraries are one and indifferent. [...] The maximum of corruption and the minimum of generation are identical: in principle, corruption is generation”. [...] At least metaphorically, Bruno’s principle can be said to fit the Joyce-Beckett relationship: The maximum of Beckett and the minimum of Joyce are identical: in principle, Beckett is Joyce.<sup>38</sup>

( Although claiming that they can be reconciled through this diametric opposition, Rathjen follows Beckett’s own self-depiction by portraying him as ‘the great minimizer’ in reaction to ‘the maximizer Joyce’ , and pursues that logic to claim that Joyce functions in this dynamic to ‘collect fragments of reality which are to be added up to establish a complete world, whereas Beckett uses this movement negatively to make room for the unspeakable between fragments of language that lose their correlation to any worldly reality’.<sup>39</sup> . Other recent criticism postulates a more elaborated view of the fissure between the two; as can be seen, for instance, in P. J. Murphy’s claims that Joycean influence continued in Beckett beyond the early work through a series of echoes, allusions, and in particular an ongoing textual engagement with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.<sup>40</sup> Dirk Van Hulle also cautions that their projects are not as antinomic as Beckett himself claimed, utilizing a genetic approach to suggest a continuum that undermines the binary of control versus impotence and inferring a subversion of maximalist-minimalist predicates.<sup>41</sup> Stressing that ‘the circular structure of *Finnegans Wake* was a cunning trick to put an end to what essentially remains a process’, Van Hulle endorses H. Porter’s Abbott’s assessment of the importance of *Work in Progress* to Beckett’s own writing, particularly its ‘incompletion’, suggesting that the lack of telos in Beckett’s works finds its foundation in Joyce<sup>42</sup> Van Hulle similarly points to the degree of control exercised over the authorial process by Beckett, stressing to the extent this contradicts his claim of anti-mastery made to Israel Shenker: ‘Beckett's “no how” as a writer implies the know-how to create and carefully refine his composition in order to admit the decomposition to become part of it’.<sup>43</sup> . Ultimately, Van Hulle concludes

But in this respect, Beckett's nohow is not that different from Joyce's know-how. The idea to integrate decomposition in the composition process is inherent in “Work in Progress” and repeatedly mentioned in *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce's plan was to write a

history of the world. “But the world, mind, is, was and will be writing its own runes for ever” (*FW* 19.35–36).<sup>44</sup>

Maximalism conventionally relates the excess of the novel to totalization, its elaboration to exhaustion and, ultimately, a wholeness by which size (of syntactical unit, paragraph, lexicon, and finally text) is taken to be constitutive of a philosophy embedded and reflected by the text. Joyce might therefore be seen as an anomaly rather than an exemplar, in that his work exhibits a maximalist accumulation of size and a proliferation of words that are nonetheless axiomatically closer to the tenets that are thought to be formally constitutive of literary minimalism. If for Beckett every word is ‘like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness’,<sup>45</sup> a similar instinct can paradoxically be identified in Joyce, for whom the accretion of words can be interpreted not as a celebration but rather a drive to obliteration, the same drive that in Beckett finds expression in subtraction. The conflation of the addition of words with epistemological encyclopaedism is subverted if excess can be reconciled as insufficiency, and accretion as a factual detritus that shores fragments against ruin. This permits Joycean writing to be re-evaluated in these terms as both too much and not enough, displaying a surfeit or intemperance that nonetheless encode the same view of the limitation of language as expressed in Beckettian minimalism. In philosophical terms, both can be considered to evince a minimalism that is only subsequently identified in one by virtue of an appropriation of its literary effects. Though Beckett’s dream of being ‘without style’<sup>46</sup> is clearly another step on from the Joycean book of the night, both could be interpreted to be impelled by the same view of language in its relation to being, albeit that view finds diverse expression not only across their works but at different stages within the *oeuvres* of each writer. Although Beckett himself constructed his increasing asceticism in contradistinction to the Joycean project,<sup>47</sup> seeking instead to express the ‘experience of a non-knower, of a no-can-er’ in Joyce we find a plurality that nonetheless indicates inadequacy rather than repletion, and that in its suggestion of the impossibility of an *Ur*-language unites the younger writer, for whom the ‘not enough’ of language is expressed as paucity, on a continuum with Joyce, in whose work there is also the expression of an inherent lack in being, intimated as an artistic vision interlinked to language and its generation of the ‘human’.

When nuancing the popular attribution of encyclopaedism to Joyce, Van Hulle notes that the stance is undermined in the work regarded as its embodiment when he draws attention to the ironic pose adopted by Joyce in this ‘circular enterprise [...] “writing its own runes for ever”’ (*FW* 19.36).<sup>48</sup> . The ending of *Finnegans Wake*, in fact, underscores this

undermining, as in the echo of ‘Penelope’ in the monologue of Anna Livia Plurabelle it doubly and reciprocally inscribes the ending of *Ulysses* – an ending which is performatively infinite and thus without closure – and emphasises this ‘circular’ strategy that resists the conventional association signified in the term maximalism between a certain prodigality of writing and the invitation to a concomitant wholeness or totalization as the philosophy of the text. At the end of ‘Against “*Ulysses*”’ Leo Bersani identifies a yearning for Joyce, akin to Jacques Derrida’s ‘admiring resentment’, declaring that ‘to stop working on *Ulysses* is like a fall from grace’.<sup>49</sup> He need not mourn its loss, for *Finnegans Wake* suggests that as Joyce has no beginning, he also has no end. Its last words are not final, the two last words on that lacking finality – ‘Finn, again!’ (FW 628.14) – repeating the inconclusion of ‘a loved a long the’ as repetition itself, returning to the ‘riverrun’. There is no conclusion, as the punctuation of the stars gives way to the forgetting of an ending and a plunge back into the absence of a beginning. It is not clear, in the end, which are the final words, the first or the last; there is an incompleteness at the end as at the beginning, in fact an incompleteness at the end because there is one at the beginning, which is the absence of the origin at the end of the book. Tellingly, both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* end in increasingly impotent words; Joyce stated of the former that ‘I had sought to end with the least forceful word I could possibly find. I had found the word ‘yes’, which is barely pronounced, which denotes acquiescence, self-abandon, relaxation, the end of all resistance’, and concluded that in *Work in Progress*,

I’ve tried to do better if I could. This time, I found the word which is the most slippery, the least accented, the weakest word in English, a word which is not even a word, which is scarcely sounded between the teeth, a breath, a nothing, the article *the*.<sup>50</sup>

One might think here of *Breath*, and of an ‘[e]xpiration and slow decrease of light together reaching minimum together’.<sup>51</sup> The ending of *Finnegans Wake* demonstrates that there can be no last words in Joyce, and therefore that there is always something that is both unsaid and left to say. This textual strategy of simultaneous insatiability and incompleteness runs counter to maximalist absolutism, and the lack of a final word, in both senses, can be sensed at the end of the *Wake* where the monologue of ALP courses through its last pages. The flow of her reflections might equally be read as the presaging of a Beckettian minimalism: ‘[i]t’s something fails us’, she thinks, ‘[f]irst we feel. Then we fall’ (FW 627.11). Passing out into the sea, her ‘cold mad feary father’ (FW 628.2),

till the near sight of him, the mere size of him, the moyles and moyles of it, moananoaning, makes me seasilt saltsick and I rush, my only, into your arms. I see them rising! Save me from those therrble prongs! Two more. One two moremens more (FW 628.2-6).

As there are always ‘two more’ meanings, for ‘one two moremens more’, the infinite invitation to the possibility of ultimate satisfaction is one which can never be fulfilled, as a perpetual doubling of meaning prevents a totality of meanings. Tyrus Miller writes of the periodization of late modernism that

Our historical plots have beginnings, middles and ends; births and deaths occur; there are fixed settings and spaces of errancy; times of decision and dreamtimes in which the logic of the day seems suspended or deranged.<sup>52</sup>

A study of Joyce’s later work challenges definitions of maximalism and minimalism in so far as the terms imply a coincidence between form and textual value, demonstrating a tension between two dispositions at play in the novels. If *A Portrait* sets out a thematics that becomes formalized and, passing from an intratextual principle, becomes elevated to the level of a textual philosophy, we can reconsider that writing as an art of accretion but not of completion, and perceive in his work a kind of minimum that reorients readings of both Joyce and Beckett, placing their projects on a continuum rather than situating them as epochal exemplars. In Joyce we are confronted with ‘minimally less. No more’ even as each sweet word accrues, it is nevertheless that ‘sweet one word’ – ‘less’<sup>53</sup> – that affords the opportunity to hold together these twin pressures of a philosophical and formal minimalism coupled with an aesthetic maximalism, his books of the day and the night creating a space of errancy in the historical plot of modernism that upset a narrative of beginnings, middles and ends by which the period is constituted.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Celan, 'Cello Entry', in *Selected Poems*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 253.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho, Stirrings Still*, ed. Dirk Van Hulle (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Dirk Van Hulle, 'Beckett and Shakespeare on Nothing, or, Whatever Lurks Behind the Veil', in *Limit(e) Beckett* 1 (2010), 123-136 (p. 123).

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment by Samuel Beckett*, ed. with foreword by Ruby Cohn (London and New York: John Calder, 1983), p. 173.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman, 'Interview with Israel Shenker, *New York Times*, 5 May 1956', in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (London and New York: Routledge, 1979), pp. 146-49 (p. 148).

<sup>6</sup> Graver and Federman, p. 148.

<sup>7</sup> John Gross, *Joyce* (London: Fontana, 1971), p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> John Barth, 'A Few Words About Minimalism, *New York Times*, 28 December, 1986, [www.nytimes.com/books/98/06/21/specials/barth-minimalism.html](http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/06/21/specials/barth-minimalism.html) (unpaginated) [accessed 1.1.2018].

<sup>9</sup> Stefano Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel: from Thomas Pynchon's 'Gravity's Rainbow' to Roberto Bolaño's '2666'*, translated by Alberto Sbragia (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Nick

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Levey, *Maximalism in Contemporary American Literature: The Uses of Detail* (New York and Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Ercolino, pp. xii-xiv

<sup>11</sup> Ercolino, p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> See Jeremy Colangelo, 'The Grotesque Gigantic: *Stephen Hero*, Maximalism, and Bakhtin', *Joyce Studies Annual*, 2014, 63-92; Dirk Van Hulle, *Manuscript Genetics: Joyce's Know-How, Beckett's Nohow* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008); P. J. Murphy, *Beckett's Dedalus: Dialogical Engagements with Joyce in Beckett's Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), Friedhelm Rathjen, 'Maximal Joyce is a State of Beckett: Joyce, Beckett and Bruno's *Coincidentia Oppositorum*', in *In Principle, Beckett is Joyce*, edited by Friedhelm Rathjen (Edinburgh: Split Pea Press, 1994), pp. 99-112 and *The Abiko Quarterly with James Joyce Finnegans Wake Studies* 18 (1998), pp. 11-23; and Friedhelm Rathjen, 'The Magic Triangle: James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Arno Schmidt', *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 11, 2001, 92-99.

<sup>13</sup> Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> Van Hulle, *Manuscript Genetics*, p. 124.

<sup>15</sup> Alice Fulton, 'Fractal Amplifications: *Writing in Three Dimensions*', in *The Measured Word: On Poetry and Science*, edited by Kurt Brown (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2001), pp. 110-26 (p. 114).

<sup>16</sup> Graver and Federman, p. 148.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism' (1946), in *Pathmarks*, edited by William H. McNeill and translated by Frank A. Capuzzi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 239-76 (p. 239).

<sup>18</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'Building dwelling thinking', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 141-60 (p. 146).

<sup>19</sup> Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Duncan McColl Chesney, *Silence Nowhen: Late Modernism, Minimalism, and Silence in the Work of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), p. 140.

<sup>21</sup> See Carla Locatelli, *Unwording the World: Samuel Beckett's Prose Works After the Nobel Prize* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Philadelphia Press, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> Chesney, p. 137.

<sup>23</sup> Declan Kiberd, '*Ulysses*' and *Us: The Art of Everyday Living* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 11 and p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Kiberd, p. 11 and p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Bersani, pp. 156-78.

<sup>26</sup> Bersani, p. 156).

<sup>27</sup> Bersani, p. 157.

<sup>28</sup> Coincidentally, Kiberd also judges as 'snobbish' the modernists who 'resorted to difficult techniques' in order to 'protect their ideas against the newly literate masses', a position against which is contrasted what he presents as a Joycean embrace of the masses. See Kiberd, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> See Bersani, p. 157.

<sup>30</sup> Barbara Reich Gluck, *Beckett and Joyce: Friendship and Fiction* (Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1979), p. 112.

<sup>31</sup> Gluck, p. 121.

<sup>32</sup> *JIII*, p. 546.

<sup>33</sup> Michael O'Sullivan, *Weakness: A Literary and Philosophical History* (London: Continuum, 2012), p. 158. The phrase 'authentic weakness of being' is derived O'Sullivan from James Knowlson and John Haynes, *Images of Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 16, while the phrase 'syntax of weakness' stems from Pascale Casanova, *Samuel Beckett: Anatomy of a Literary Revolution*, with an introduction by Terry Eagleton and translated by Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2006), p. 95.

<sup>34</sup> O'Sullivan, pp. 158-9. This connection is also examined by James Knowlson in his discussion of the dilemma of being impelled to express the impotence of being and to construct an art that would be a sign of that weakness rather than, as it has heretofore been, 'a sign of strength': '[e]ven though he is

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part of that meaninglessness, the artist is constrained to speak of it and in a language that will itself therefore be necessarily inadequate'. See Knowlson and Haynes, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> Robert McAlmon, 'With James Joyce', in *James Joyce: Interviews and Recollections*, ed.ited by E. H. Mikhail (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 103-107 (p. 103).

<sup>36</sup> Colangelo, p. 70.

<sup>37</sup> Rathjen, p. 93.

<sup>38</sup> Rathjen, p. 92.

<sup>39</sup> Rathjen, p. 94 and p. 96..

<sup>40</sup> P. J. Murphy, *Beckett's Dedalus: Dialogical Engagements with Joyce in Beckett's Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> See Van Hulle, *Manuscript Genetics*.

<sup>42</sup> Van Hulle, *Manuscript Genetics*, p. 4). Van Hulle here draws upon H. Porter Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett: The Author in the Autograph* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>43</sup> Van Hulle, *Manuscript Genetics*, p. 120.

<sup>44</sup> Van Hulle, *Manuscript Genetics*, p. 120.

<sup>45</sup> 'Samuel Beckett Talks About Beckett', Interview with John Gruen, *Vogue*, December 1969, p. 210.

<sup>46</sup> Samuel Beckett to Niklaus Gessner, cited in Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 58.

<sup>47</sup> See Kevin J. H. Dettmar, 'The Joyce That Beckett Built', *James Joyce Quarterly*, Vol 35/36, Vol. 35, No. 4 – Vol. 36, No. 1 (Summer-Fall 1998), 605-19. Graver and Federman, p. 148.

<sup>48</sup> Van Hulle, *Manuscript Genetics*, p. 124

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Two Words for Joyce', translated by Geoff Bennington, in *Post-Structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French*, edited by Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 145-59 (p. 148). Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*, p. 178.

<sup>50</sup> Louis Gillet, *Claybook for James Joyce*, translated by Georges Markow-Totevy (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1958), p. 111.

<sup>51</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Breath, The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber, 2006), pp. 369-72 (p. 371).

<sup>52</sup> Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999),.p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho, Stirrings Still*, edited by Dirk Van Hulle (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 74 and p. 73.