

An Exordium to a Promise

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ABSTRACT. James Joyce’s fine shades of philosophy have been neglected in recent times, especially when it comes to fill either epistemological or ontological lacuna in taxonomy as to whereabouts of his canon. Epistemology and ontology are a couple of the core areas of philosophy. Since mirroring cognitive and post-cognitive questions in postmodern literature may invite a rereading of potential authors, a historiography of “theory of knowledge” and ontological nuances is reviewed in this paper not to represent literary examples, but to mind a hiatus in descriptive poetics. The idea is that Ulysses and Finnegans Wake gesture differently in their philosophical ‘dominance’. Analyzing the philosophical borders of the realm, it is sought to consult with literary critics beside canonical authors who dissected their mind in epistemology just to propound an initial disquisition about a novelist who never wanted his works to be prescribed by simple bounds due to their literary nature. This paper may be useful to those who pursue any link between literature and philosophy, specifically those who are willing to know more about postmodernist philosophical concerns of literature.

1. PROLOGUE

“Theology doubtless has its place;
and I suppose
Joyceology has its place...”
(*Huddleston, Back to Montparnasse*)

Literature is rooted in philosophy. The philosophical background of a literary masterpiece never fails to enrapture readers young and old. Since sieving one into other is the most fruitless direction one might take to serve each drastically, backing up a historiography of the overlapping nuances seems to be a helpful trend toward both sciences. Epistemological and ontological standpoints between high modernism and postmodernism creates a gap between Ulysses and Finnegans Wake with the consequence of leaving the latter realistically unreadable and the former devoid of a claim to be perceived idealistically. Lack of a close look in this respect, until present time, expects a body of research, done specifically to conclude whether studying the development of knowledge versus a speculative universal definitions of being responds an acceptable clarification of the aforementioned gap or not.

The purpose of this paper is an introduction to count Ulysses as a modernist fiction and Finnegans Wake as a postmodernist one whereas Brian McHale’s hypothetical opinion for the epistemologicality of the former and the ontologicality of the latter as their concern of understanding suggests to follow a philosophical approach towards both modernism and postmodernism.

Push epistemological questions far enough and they “tip over” into ontological questions. By the same token, push ontological questions far enough and they tip over into epistemological questions—the sequence is not linear and unidirectional, but bidirectional and reversible (McHale Postmodernist 11).

There are two distinct types of research questions concerning this study. The first set of questions are wholly epistemological ones, such as: “how can I interpret this world of which I am a part? What am I in it? Other typical modernist questions might be added: What is there to be known?

Who knows it? How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to the other, and with what degree of reliability? How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable? And so on” (McHale Postmodernist 9). The second type of questions are those “like the ones Dick Higgins calls “post-cognitive”: “Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?” Other typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world it projects, for instance: What is a world?; What kinds of world are there?; How are they constituted? And how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated? What is the mode of existence of a text? And what is the mode of existence of the world or (worlds) it projects; how is a projected world structured? And so on” (McHale Postmodernist 10).

The application of such fundamentally philosophical questions on Joyce’s masterpieces is the framework of questions this paper seeks to ask. The sets of questions are only to ask the main question: Do Ulysses and Finnegans wake differ philosophically as these two sets differ? The crucial aspect of the very epistemology of this study is that it does never want to prove any sort of epistemology as true or false. Prior to define epistemology, it might be helpful to quote our contemporary epistemologist, Richard Rorty:

In short my strategy for escaping the self-referential difficulties into which *the relativist* keeps getting himself is to move everything over from epistemology and metaphysics onto cultural politics, from claims to knowledge and appeals to self-evidence to suggestions about what we should try (Voparil 144).

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge, an important province of philosophical theory, the doctrine on man’s ability to cognize reality, on the sources, forms and methods of cognition, the truth and ways of attaining it” (Rosenthal and Yudin “epistemology”). Dividing philosophy into ontology and epistemology, J.F. Ferrier, the Scottish philosopher, introduced the term in his *Institutes of Metaphysics* in 1854. It seeks to depart from fundamental questions in philosophy and the objectivity of the world so that its place of being cognizable is recognized in *materialistic* epistemology. On the other hand, agnostics do not believe in the cognisability of the world. Since the terms go directly to the root of the most general laws governing the thought, “it includes what is now called the theory of knowledge, or, epistemology, which, too, must regard its subject matter historically, studying and generalizing origin and development of knowledge, the transition from non-knowledge to knowledge” (Lenin 24-25).

We ought to be careful to stay away from those ideas already categorized as right or wrong, instead, focusing on the justification itself and the very balance in the approach to the knowledge claims, knowers’ source and applications of knowledge, knowledge communities and the nature of knowing which are among the factors that transcend individual ways of knowing and areas of knowledge so that they make a theory of knowledge course which actually is vast in scope due to their philosophical history.

Aristotle interjected his doctrine in which ontology staged a fundamental concept. The philosophers of the Catholicism employed ontology to prove the Christian philosophical constructs in their religion in the late Middle Ages. The tradition to equate ontology to a sort of “speculative universal definitions of being” (Rosenthal and Yudin “ontology”) listed it as a part of fundamental branch in philosophy known as metaphysics. Thomas Aquinas who served Joyce as a model depended on the ontology in its Aristotelian metaphysical way to build and rationalize its theological system in terms of his philosophy. “The doctrine of supersensuous, non-existential structure of everything existing” has been understood as a special part of metaphysics since the 16th century. After being coined by the German philosopher, Rudolf Groclenius in 1613, ontology changed its shape in the philosophy of Wolff in a way that it was disconnected with specific sciences so abstract in its own deductions to analyze grammatically concepts such as: being, possibility and reality, quantity and quality, substance and accident, cause and effect. Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke and the French 18th century rationalists undermined ontology as a philosophical subject of the highest rank objectively, as *first philosophy*. Idealists such as Kant, Hegel and others criticized ontology considering it firstly to be

meaningless and tautological and secondly to demand a more perfect ontology, or better to put, a much better metaphysics. Kant wanted it to be replaced by a transcendental philosophy, Schelling by a transcendental idealism and Hegel wanted it to be replaced by logic. It was Hegel who anticipated idealistically the unity of ontology (dialectics), logic and the theory of knowledge to show a way beyond the framework of speculative philosophical constructions to real positive knowledge of the world.

Modernity is a term used synonymously with the Enlightenment or Age of Reason by many critics. Modernity holds to two basic premises: a belief that reason is humankind's best guide to life and that science can lead humanity to a new *promised land* (Bressler 350). M.A.R. Habib in his *From Liberal Humanism to Formalism* finds modernism "the result of many complex economic, political, scientific and religious developments over the nineteenth century, which culminated in World War I (1914-1918). The vast devastation, psychological demoralization, depression left by the war intensified the already existing reactions against bourgeois modes of thought and economic practice".

Bergson, the philosopher, psychologists and neoclassicists, such as T.E. Hulme, neo-Thomists like Maritain and the New Humanists in America attended Rationalism resulting language to be understood anew as nothing but a both conventional and historical construct, leaving a fragmented world where the world bourgeois ideologies of rationality, science progress, civilization and Imperialism had been somewhat discredited; where the artist was alienated from the social and political world, and where art and literature were marginalized; where populations had been subjected to process of mass standardization; where philosophy could no longer offer visions of unity and where language itself was perceived to be an inadequate instrument of expression and understanding (Habib 194-5).

William James, Freud, Einstein and Sir James Frazer pioneered strong experimental studies in their own disciplines to open the way such landmarks in English literature like Henry James, T.S. Eliot, Joyce, Pound, Yeats, Ford Madox Ford, Woolf, Faulkner and a list which would still be far from exhaustive. Ousby puts it:

Strictly speaking, modernism cannot be reliably characterized by a uniform style or even described as a movement, since it embraced a wide range of artistic movements including, symbolism, impressionism, post-impressionism, futurism, constructivism, imagism, vorticism, expressionism, dada and surrealism" (Ousby "modernism").

This renaissance of creativity during the last decade of the 19th century became an international disposition in the arts. Manipulation of both form and content distinguished its challenge to the traditional representation in a highly self-conscious manner.

Ihab Hassan distinguishes the experimental literature produced "during the period roughly between 1910 and 1930" (Habib 247), while literary historians locate the beginning of the modernist revolt as far back as the 1890s, but most agree that what is called high modernism, marked by unexampled range of rapidity of change, came after the first World War. The year 1922 was alone signalized by the simultaneous appearance of such monuments of modernist innovation as James Joyce's *Ulysses*, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, as well as many other experimental works of literature (Abrams 167).

Postmodernism is "signified as a poetics which is the successor of, or possibly a reaction against, the poetics of early twentieth-century modernism, and not some hypothetical writing of the future" (McHale 5). It is the "dominant cultural logic of late Capitalism" as Fredrick Jameson writes in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Jameson *Postmodernism* 32). Although it is characterized by experimentation and continues to apply some of the fundamentals of modernism like existentialism and alienation, it has gone a step further in rejection of tradition begun by the modernists by also rejecting traditional forms, preferring the anti-novel over the novel and the anti-hero over the hero (Galens 377).

There has always been an increase of interest in the theory of knowledge and the ontology of literary works so that the epistemology itself requires to be precisely defined again and again by philosophical references to have a starting point for the ontological review of the issue.

2. ENTERING THE PLATEAU¹ OF EPISTEMOLOGY

D.W. Hamlyn gives us a profound overview of the contemporary epistemological currents in his *The History of Epistemology* as an entry for Paul Edwards' *The Encyclopedia of philosophy* starting with Heraclitus. Due to the significance of the ontological boundaries of the methodology of fictionary worlds and the need to the history of epistemology of non-fictionary world, to be moving logically, a quick glance at Hamlyn's study is brought here.

Heraclitus believed in the dominance of the senses; "τὰ ὄντα ἰέναι τε πάντα καὶ μένειν οὐδέν"² (Heraclitus 7). Parmenides tried to make logic more topnotch, though. Yet, none doubted in the existence of the world itself inasmuch Protagoras found the human to be the measure of everything. Gorgias goes beyond this to believe that there exists nothing and even if there were something we could never have knowledge about it and even if we acquired that knowledge we wouldn't be able to transfer it. That is prior to Plato. Aristotle whom Joyce leans on Dante to recall as *maestro di color che sanno*³ focuses on the knowledge of *essences*. (Ulysses 37). Epicure, the successor, believed knowledge to be known through the encountering of the atoms of our soul to the outer atoms. Against this Atomist school, Stoicism and individualism were founded by Zeno.

Frederick Copleston write that Stoics separated logic into rhetoric and dialectic (Copleston 386). Within a few more pages by him, we will see how this *rhetorikos* is called back by our contemporary philosophers. Hamlyn goes on to St. Augustine, Aquinas and William of Ockam (1285-1349), who had their own epistemology prior to Descartes, an early example of the internalist approach to justification. Hamlyn points out that St. Augustine's *si fallor sum*⁴ (Hamlyn 35), ought not to be misunderstood with Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*⁵, since Descartes' epistemological justifications depended upon his indubitable belief in his own existence and his clear and distinct knowledge of God (Descartes Philosophical 23). So to speak, Descartes's idea is that we can doubt, everything other than the fact that we can doubt because we need an existence to doubt, hence *we are*. Those epistemic distinctions which cover the question of how knowledge is acquired lead to the empericality and non-empericality which lies at the heart of the matter, splitting knowledge into two distinct halves. First; *a priori* knowledge that is known independently of experience (that is, it is non-emperical or arrived at beforehand, usually by reason) so that it will henceforth be acquired through anything that is independent from experience. Second; *a posteriori* knowledge that is known by experience (that is, it is empirical, or arrived at afterwards).

Those who are after Descartes in their epistemology are Nicholas Malebranche, Baruch Spinoza, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz who are rationalists in their epistemology respecting reason as the chief source and test of knowledge.

Hamlyn starts with John Locke as the first British empiricist. Instead of going on to George Berkley, David Hume, Kant, Hegel Feuerbach and Marx he finds George Berkley, David Hume, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Bradley, Shopenhaur, Brentano, Alexius Meinong, Husserl, John Stuart Mill, Bergson, William James, Pierce, Dewey for the 19th century and for the Realism of the 20th century, G.E Moore, Russell and Whitehead are mentioned respectively. The theory of knowledge of Berlin Circle and Vienna Circle, according to Hamlyn, starts from Ernest Mach and after Wittgenstein he names Moritz Schlick, Otto Neurath and Rudolf Carnap just to move to the contemporary currents like Merleau-Ponty. Wittgenstein is important to Hamlyn, regarding his epistemological ideas, especially his notable idea of *private language* (Hamlyn 124). Gilbert Ryle's notion of *knowing how* and *knowing that* paves the way for J.L Austin, whose *speech acts* and *performative utterance* are the final epistemological ideas that Hamlyn talks about. Since this study is not to be meant to be focusing on the history of epistemology, it is useful to mention that philosophical viewpoints of

¹ The term *plateau* is taken from Deleuze and Guattari

² No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he is not the same man.

³ The master of them that know.

⁴ If I am mistaken, I am.

⁵ "I think, therefore I am", or better "I am thinking, therefore I exist". Descartes' original phrase, *je pense, donc je suis* appeared in his *Discourse on the Method* (1637), which was written in French rather than Latin to reach a wider audience in his country than scholars.

philosophers like Giambattista Vico, who are not mentioned by Hamlyn due to their status of not being considered as solely epistemologists, are rather neglected.

3. NEW SCINTILLATIONS

The dominance is the basis of the starting point by which we can describe how “one set of literary forms emerges from a historically prior set of forms” (McHale 6). Again, the core of what is to be reconsidered is the hypothesis that “postmodernist fiction differs from modernist fiction just as a poetics *dominated* by ontological issues differs from one *dominated* by epistemological issues” (McHale xii). Jurij Tynjanov is the Russian Formalist from whom Roman Jakobson got the concept of *the dominant* while lecturing in 1935 prior to the publication of *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views* in 1935:

The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure... a poetic work [is] a structured system, a regularly ordered hierarchal set of artistic devices. Poetic revolution is a shift in this hierarchy... the image of ... literary history substantially changes; it becomes incomparably richer and at the same time more monolithic, more synthetic, and ordered... (qut. in McHale 6).

Deconstructing Jakobson’s deterministic language, one moves from hierarchicality and monolithicality of literary scholarship to more certain elements of the dominance which in Jakobson’s own words:

In the evolution of poetic form it is not so much a question of the disappearance of certain elements and the emergence of others as it is the question of shifts in the mutual relationship among the diverse components of the system, in other words, a question of *the shifting dominant*. Within a given complex of poetic forms valid for a given poetic genre, elements which were originally secondary become essential and primary. On the other hand, the elements which were originally the dominant ones become subsidiary and optional (qut. in McHale 6).

Mythological boundaries, Homeric parallels and narrative structure of Ulysses, the shiftiness of the narrator and other aspects of the subsidiary dominant are all, sub-categories of a single technique -stream of consciousness- not until we are sure that if the *time* is the dominant here and there, or not. Time is the most controversial element of the dominant if we take even all the epistemology of history for granted swaying freely through the literal poetics of a novel as something fictitious, unreal and away from the ontological boundaries of reality. In its epistemological foundation, time, superior to other elements, sometimes, does not hesitate to overshadow the meaning. Losing the *meanings* of what is before us, doesn’t mean that we are allowed to overthrow the analytics of time to rationalize notions as *temporality*.

Paul Ricoeur presupposes a starting “pole of temporality” in Heidegger’s Being and Time as the second working hypothesis which intervenes the “structural reciprocity of temporality” in the “epistemology of history and the literary criticism of fictional narratives”. Following Wittgenstein, Ricoeur writes: “Philosophers writing on time, too, usually overlook the contribution of narrative to a critique of the concept of time” (McQuillan 256).

Epistemology of history, structural reciprocity of temporality, Jakobson’s “a priori of post-Saussurian linguistics” (McQuillan 8), Ricoeur’s *homo fabulan* which Fredric Jameson calls as “the central function or *instance* of human mind” are in harmony with the shiftiness of the elements which is the featuring basis of the dominant, but again, as Jameson quotes Wittgenstein, to place narrative as a socially symbolic act; “meanings must be described” (McQuillan 268). This description of the meaning which Wittgenstein is asking for, is also confronting with the way Wolfgang Iser finds “the centrality of consciousness in all investigations of meaning” (Lodge and Wood 294), being in debt to a Husserlian phenomenology, especially Ingarden’s aesthetics and Gadamer’s hermeneutics. In our inevitable cause of the perspective to interact or what Iser calls our “climb[ing] abroad” (Lodge and Wood 297) of the text, Ingarden in finds the sentence aiming “at something beyond what it actually says” in his reading of Iser. In Ingarden’s words, to annihilate the hiatus resulting from “a blockage in the stream of thought”, “the process of reading goes

effortlessly forward (Lodge and Wood 298-9). This single swing from one extreme limit to the other, from hiatus to hiatus, from being to being, from nothing to nothing, is in itself nothing but an ontological dilemma. What is at stake here is that this ontologicality of the shift of attention is not outside the fictional text and its world, rather as McHale states: “Ingarden gives us, for the first time, a picture of fiction’s intrinsic ontological complexity...first of all in its being heteronomous...secondly...polyphonic...” (McHale 30).

It is not always a shift of poetics generally represented due to a philosophical shift of the dominance, but as proved before by the help of Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher, in Mark O’Halloran’s play, a taxonomical interference in the form or genre of a work of art as a synthetic outcome of the aforementioned process is also possible to be represented.

If one associates his own expansive understanding of Bakhtin’s ideas, the sine-qua-none of novel, his concept of *dialogism* can be traced in even a play with an adequate nice amount of depth in style and poetics. Dialogic presence portrayed ... that *The Last Monologue* or *The Head of Red O’Brien* holds Bakhtin’s theory of novel within itself while in fact it is a play written for the stage to be played (Moslemi and Hemmati 60).

4. CONCLUSION

Ulysses and Finnegans Wake, works of fiction, cannot dismantle the borders of fiction in today’s poetics while logicians and philosophers of language, such as Bertrand Russell, Saul Kripke and John Searle, to define the borderline, have thrown around their “possible-world theories in poetics” logical and ontological boundaries or to be exact their *cordon sanitaire*. Hence, to feel the transition, intrinsically and extrinsically, from modernism to postmodernism, from Schlegel to Ingarden, from Bakhtin to *transworld identity* described by Eco and so on, “Hrushovski’s three dimensional model of semiotic objects...the reconstructed world (worlds), the text continuum (words), and the dimension of speakers, voices and positions” could be taken. This postmodern ontological perspectivism is on one hand near to that modern “iridescence” or “opalescence” of which Ingarden has written (McHale 39) while on the other hand, the changeability of the world itself in the *Scientific Revolutions* argued by Thomas Kuhn (Pyle think192), in non-fiction and by tradition, is the key to Perspectivism which Nietzsche has been always talking of; “It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against [emphasis added]. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm” (Nietzsche 481).

Interpreting Nietzsche’s *interpret(tion)* is in need of hermeneutics, not a brief, but a thorough one, *à la lettre*. Added to the different aspects of epistemological studies as Constructivism, Idealism, Rationalism, Particularism or Expericism, Sarah Kofman’s Nietzsche et la Métaphore, written under the supervision of Gilles Deleuze would suffice to be a summary of the theory behind which one can get free from poetical use in philosophy, because “the new philosopher does not put metaphor to rhetorical use, but subordinates it... to the strategic objective of using non-stereotyped metaphors in order to unmask the metaphors which constitute every concept” (Kofman 18). Jakobson’s distinction between metaphor and metonymy enters into the realm of literary theory from his own perspective, leaving us to the consideration of how postmodernist fiction exploits to its own ends the ontological *groundings*, which in Ingarden’s view guarantee the autonomous existence of the literary work of art. The literary work, according to Ingarden, subsists autonomously (that is apart from the reader’s constitutive consciousness) thanks to three factors: the language, which exists intersubjectively in the minds of the speakers, the material book and the biographical author who originally produced the work (McHale 39-40).

Hence, there is a hiatus which ought to be filled. The author will present well-read readers a sophisticated writing in which they can find dominant distinctions in essence.

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