

GEOGRAPHY OF DESIRE AND GUILT: JOYCE'S "CIRCE" IN THE TRADITION OF *THE TEMPTATION OF SAINT ANTHONY*

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The influence of numerous artistic works on the "Circe" chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, particularly Gustave Flaubert's 1874 *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, has been widely acknowledged.¹ Flaubert himself was highly influenced by the pictorial version of the *Temptation* by Breughel the Younger (c. 1616), who was in turn an imitator of Hieronymus Bosch's versions (c. 1490-1510). Bosch's pictorial influence reaches Joyce fully through Flaubert's novel. In fact, the number of communal elements between Joyce's "Circe" and Bosch's representations of Anthony's temptation is impressive. Like Saint Anthony, Leopold Bloom is judged, accused, subdued, tortured, and humiliated, in the infamously hallucinatory "Nighttown" episode of *Ulysses*. Political power, personal pride, and the alluring snares of the female flesh tempt both suffering men. Furthermore, as in the pictorial "Temptation," unearthly figures, monsters, devils, ghosts, and a tempting oriental 'queen' appear. Also heretics, a black mass, a simulacrum of Doomsday, and hellish machines, all framed by the henchmen of power, play a significant part in Joyce's surrealistic scenario. Beyond underscoring the echoes between representations of Bloom and Anthony's temptations, and acknowledging, for the first time in Joycean criticism, the influence of Hieronymus Bosch's painting on "Circe", this essay will demonstrate how this chapter constitutes a realm where monsters and torture emerge from the hidden side of desire.

According to the *Lives of Saint Fathers* and *The Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine, Saint Anthony was born in the third century AD and spent twenty years living as a hermit in a hut in the Egyptian desert. During this time he was visited by a host of devils that tortured and attacked him so viciously that he was once thrown into the air. Finally Satan, disguised as a beautiful, pious queen, tried to regain the saint's affections, but as soon as Anthony realised that she was another of the devil's tricks, he rejected her. These devils were, in fact, the dark projections of the mind of a saint who suffered hunger, tedium, chastity, and loneliness in the emptiness and heat of the desert.

1 See, for example, Chapter 6 of Richard K. Cross's classic 1971 study of Flaubert and Joyce.

The pictorial tradition of Saint Anthony's temptation depicts the double nature of his desires. On the one hand, projections of erotic drives, such as images of naked women, appear on trees, inside a flooded house, and in a pool to tempt him and make him submit. On the other hand, the devils become painful, torturing impersonations of his unbearable guilt and repentance, in an attempt to conquer the saint's will. This double nature of Anthony's torturous temptations is made clear by the exclamations of Flaubert's *Saint Anthony*. Remembering Amonaria, a childhood girlfriend, he thinks: "What! My flesh rebels again! Even in the midst of grief am I tortured by concupiscence? To be subjected thus unto two tortures at once is beyond endurance! I can no longer bear myself!" (166). Devils and monsters appear thus as the dark forces the saint carries hidden deep within himself. When he realises the presence of these demanding drives, he unconsciously makes grotesque beings emerge onto the surface in order for them to attack him furiously. A temptation, in fact, manifests itself as a fiery spiritual conflict between the evil forces that we carry inside ourselves and our good will and saintly inclinations. Thus, the saint's body becomes the fiery theatre, the battlefield where those fearful meetings take place. The struggle appears as a painful passion, as a cup of sorrow and bitterness that must be exhausted and consumed. The only way of winning the combat is by imitating the behaviour of Christ and the Holy Fathers: their fasts and vigils, their prayers and holy thoughts, their secret means of regaining their strength. In Bosch's central panel, in an open building shaped like a tower or chapel, Christ points at a crucifix on an altarpiece, situated next to a lit candle. Christ looks at Saint Anthony, who, kneeling, invites viewers of the canvas to participate in the redeeming gesture. Anthony, amid a disorder of heresiarchs, monsters, devils and naked sinners, overcomes the temptation and prays to the crucifix.² The excess of evil fantasies depicted in the painting produces an atmosphere of chaos and confusion that expresses the work of the demon in opposition to the well-arranged divine order.

2 Saint Anthony, as early versions of his life make clear, will be tempted by the devil disguised in all the tremendous variety of shapes and appearances that a woman can assume. On the right panel of Bosch's Lisbon triptych, for example, a naked woman is bathing as an evil spider's web covers her sex. From such a sight, however, the saint will turn his pious eyes away. Then, the same woman shows herself as a religious widow who leads the saint to her luxurious town to be rejected. The left panel depicts some grotesque religious figures walking towards a surrealist brothel which is formed by a gigantic man's body over a grotto-house. Beyond that, in a wide bay, souls are allegorically represented as ships being shipwrecked due to their sins. Above them all, Saint Anthony appears flying and praying among a group of devils that are torturing and attacking him.

The space in Joyce's "Circe" is likewise infused with the promiscuity of beings and scenes, the rebellion of objects asserting their autonomy, a carnivalesque inversion of roles, and, above all, absolute disorder. Seductresses also feature prominently. Molly Bloom, for example, appears idealised as an oriental and luxurious lady between a palm tree and a camel. Bloom's anxiety about being in the brothel district triggers her exotic apparition: "He breathes in deep agitation, swallowing gulps of air, questions, hopes, crubeens for her supper, things to tell her, excuses, desire, spellbound. A coin gleams on her forehead" (*U* 15.439). Molly appears as a subtle temptress – after bidding her lover farewell, she must start regaining, or reconquering, her husband. After insinuating herself into Bloom's affections, she asks if he has cold feet (*U* 15.439) or if his heart is trembling: "*Ti trema un poco il cuore?*" (*U* 15.441), but her husband mainly ignores her. After this rejection Molly departs in an arrogant fashion, like the Queen of Sheba in Flaubert's *Temptation*: "*In disdain she saunters away [...]*" (*U* 15.441). Even his old flame Mrs. Breen, after scolding Bloom for being in such a morally unsafe area, tries to seduce him:

MRS BREEN

(Her pulpy tongue between her lips, offers a pigeon kiss) [...] Have you a little present for me there? (*U* 15.446)

There is, however, something grotesque about her "smiling in all her *herbivorous buckteeth*" (*U* 15.442; emphasis added); a disquieting detail that communicates that something beastly is hidden beneath her apparently appealing, familiar figure. As Gilbert Lascault makes clear of Bosch's seductions:

Muchas de las mujeres seductoras y cortesanas son, en ocasiones, casi monstruosas. Disimulan una pata de macho cabrío, de oca, o bien las garras de un ave rapaz, y hay algunas, provocativas, que esconden la cola de un animal por debajo de las colas o los lazos de su vestido. En los relatos hagiográficos y en los cuentos, a veces se nos habla de los trajes de la hermosa deslumbrante y de su piel desnuda. Pero, por debajo de los vestidos y de la piel, están los huesos y la carne podrida, putrefacta. (239)

[Many of the courtesans and seducers are sometimes almost monstrous. They hide a he-goat's or a goose's leg, and even the claws of a bird of prey. Some of them are provocative, and they hide an animal's tail under the trains or ribbons of their dresses. In stories and narratives of saints' lives, we are often told of the dresses of the dazzling beauty or about her naked skin. But under the dresses and the skin, bones and rotten, putrefying flesh, appear.] (My translation)

Several prostitutes also try to seduce Bloom as he walks along the streets. Some of the calls are real, while others are simply psychic projections of Bloom's anxious mind. Nevertheless, he manages to overcome the temptation.

When a harlot named Bridie assaults him, the seductive woman is attached to something dark and disquieting, as in the pictorial "Temptation." Like one of Bosch's devils, she suddenly appears, pursues and harasses sinners, and just as suddenly disappears, as "With a squeak she flaps her bat shawl and runs" (U 15.441). The bat is symbolically related to black magic, to dragons and evil, and the capital enemy of the alchemical process. This is the other side of temptation: the dangers of being figuratively transformed into an animal, or, indirectly implied, of being infected with a venereal disease. Further on, Bloom will suffer a hallucination opposite Bella Cohen's ill-famed house. Zoe approaches Bloom with a greeting that links mourning and death with playful sex: "You [Bloom and Stephen] both in black. Has little mousey any tickles tonight?" (U 15.475). Zoe, then, with Bloom's permission slips her hand into his pocket looking for his genitals, but instead brings out a shrivelled potato that another Higgins (Ellen, Bloom's mother) had dropped earlier on.

As in some of Bosch's figures, the agents of seduction not only conceal a beastly tail or some other animal feature, but even "mouldering bones." When Zoe approaches Bloom, "*She bites his ear gently with little goldstopped teeth sending on him a cloying breath of stale garlic. The roses draw apart, disclose a sepulchre of the gold of kings and their mouldering bones*" (U 15.477). From underneath seduction's garnish and embellishments, rotten flesh and bones emerge. Finally, before Bloom and Zoe enter Bella's so called music room, the centre of the labyrinth of Nighttown, the prostitute once again attempts to seduce the married man. Zoe's seductive, sexual display that momentarily appeals to Bloom hides, like the naked women who appealed to Saint Anthony, something anomalous. Under the folds of Zoe's slip, the bestial reek of those rough males that have mounted her throughout the years appear personified as "the male brutes" who exude sulphur and dung stink, odours traditionally associated with devils. The reader only has to evoke the stinks of Hell as depicted with such tremendous rhetorical energy in one of father Arnall's sermons in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Chapter 3) to get a clear picture of this miasma. All the smells of the men figuratively transformed into animals by a Circean Zoe seem to pulse under the harlot's garments as a warning to this Bloom/Odysseus who can also be transformed into a drugged brute. The uncanny appears half-concealed beneath the seductive, dubious appeal of beauty. Shadowy appearances, in this case in the subtle form of smell, emerge from the dark side of desire.

The torturous strengths of such desire finally reach a climax in Bloom's encounter with Bella/Bello. Like Saint Anthony after his first combat with the ferocious and vicious devils, Bloom will emerge bruised, exhausted, half-dead, and

crying in desperation.³ This recalls "Hell," the right panel of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, in which a collection of bodily assaults, rapes, and personal violations, appear. A man is crucified on a lute mast, another in the strings of a giant harp. Men are devoured by monsters while others are tortured by devils. The devilish disorder is everywhere. Capsules and spheres consume or expel sinners indifferently; the internal and the external do not correspond. The minute infernal choreography implies a sudden liberation of repressed drives, as the hunters and the persecuted run on earth, water, or air. It seems that pleasure, both on Bosch's canvas about the earthly delights and in "Circe," cannot emerge without a crown of thorns to overwhelm it, frustrating its realisation, and adding a final, all too painful resolution, this time in Hell. The massive whore-mistress Bella Cohen prolongs, as her fan announces, the "petticoat government" that Bloom underwent earlier that morning in "Calypso," dramatising that aspect of the chapter's narrative to the point of transforming it into a surrealist theatre of cruelty and inhumanity. Bloom becomes a submissive female, standing on four legs promising never to disobey. Bello twists "her" arm, making Bloom scream; Bello sits on Bloom's face and quenches "his" cigar on "her" ear. Like one of Bosch's comically cruel devils that torture Saint Anthony in the air, or ride sinners on the ground, Bello tortures this feminised Bloom in order to make him confess his sexual-scatological sins. Bloom is accused of having a clandestine marriage, of sending dirty messages to prudish ladies, of coprophilia, of perverted voyeurism, and of being a complaisant, cuckolded husband. Bello imperiously harasses and publicly humiliates Bloom, calling "her" impotent, and inserting his hand inside Bloom's vulva as Bloom calls him "Master! Mistress! Mantamer!" (*U* 15.538).

As with the stink of Zoe's male brutes and Mrs. Breen's smile of "herbivorous buck teeth," under Bello's sadomasochistic "seductions" a beastly member appears. Like one of Bosch's seductive ladies, it appears from under the skirt, as "*Bella raises her gown slightly and, steadying her pose, lifts to the edge of a chair a plump buskined hoof [...] Bloom, stifflegged, ageing, bends over her*

3 In their search for originality Bosch and Joyce come – it must be a happy coincidence – extremely close. In *A la pintura [To Painting]* (1948), Rafael Alberti devotes a poem to Bosch that starts: "El diablo hoccicudo / ojipelambrudo / cornicapricudo / perniculimbrudo/ y rabudo.../ peditrompetea por un embudo" (62). These lines are comparable to the Spanish translation of a Circean passage in which Ben Dollard suddenly appears on stage: "narizpeludo, barbicorrido, coliorejudo, pechipeludo, desmelenado, gordipezonudo, se adelanta, los lomos y los genitales apretados" (*U* 15.597). Not only do the semantic depictions of the hyperactive and playful devils come extremely close in both passages, but so do the linguistic forms in which they are expressed; a series of compound words constructed from names and adjectives that ends in a conventional phrase whose uneven, unexpected rhythm deflates the previous vigorous cadenza.

hoof and with gentle fingers draws out and in her laces" (U 15.529). The apparition of a devilish, bestial member makes Bloom's sexuality shrink; momentarily sucking his youth like a thirsty vampire. Even worse, the hoof becomes an authoritarian projection of the whore-mistress, and, like some objects in Bosch's hell, reaches a fiendish autonomy:

THE HOOF

Smell my hot goathide. Feel my royal weight. (U 15.529)

According to Krafft-Ebing, one of the most common cases of fetishism is the worshipping of female shoes, which implies a masochistic desire to be humiliated (Gifford and Seidman 501). Bello's hoof, linked to a later accusation by Bello of Bloom as "Dungdevourer" (U 15.530), suggests, through the connection of dung and goat's smell, a devilish adoration. Therefore, the seductions, with their devilish touches, their vicious and brutal aspects, become a preview of the tortures of Hell, as in Bosch's *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*.

In conclusion, in "Circe" Joyce invents a pattern of sexual encounters, bodily contacts, and seductive words, that conforms to a sexuality that continuously appears and disappears under many strange disguises. Sex seems to emerge from an experimental laboratory where coition, with the exception of the veterinary's visit and Bloom's hallucination about Molly and Boylan, never appears. Sexuality in "Circe," as in Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, constitutes an 'as if' situation. Men and women dance, they become close, they bend and touch arms or legs, and exchange libidinous looks and absurd words of seduction. Availability, expectation, and promises of promiscuity float everywhere, but are never fulfilled, as seduction is frustrated by unresolved internal traumas. Therefore, wooing and courting appear as a complicated pantomime, a coded riddle, by turns a scenery of gestures and a theatre of sado-masochistic practices, in an often-bject Kristevian scenario.

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