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Wilde about *Ulysses*: Deleuzian Assemblages and the Importance of Being Oscar

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While Oscar Wilde's influence on James Joyce has been explored by many scholars, the flamboyant playwright, novelist, journalist, and critic's importance to *Ulysses* remains elusive. We suggest that Wildean avatars—Deleuzian 'assemblages' (Deleuze, 1980: 340)—both open the novel in the form of Buck Mulligan in 'Telemachus' and close its public narrative in the shape of D. B. Murphy in 'Eumaeus', before triggering the private resolutions of the main cast members in 'Ithaca' and 'Penelope'. These assemblages bookend the novel's opening and closing, and highlight overlooked queer themes in *Ulysses*, particularly the socially constructed nature of identity. Mulligan and Murphy, highly costumed and performative, not only establish Wilde's foundational importance to *Ulysses* but epitomize the queering influence that permeates it, a note that has only recently begun to be heard.

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Introduction

Throughout his formative years and during his literary career, James Joyce was absorbed by scandals, both his own and those of others. Margot Gayle Backus opens *Scandal Work: James Joyce, the New Journalism, and the Home Rule Newspaper Wars* with this declaration: 'In his youth, James Joyce became fixated on newspapers and newspaper scandals, which in turn inspired his own notoriously scandalous writings' (2013: 2). Homosexual scandals, such as the Dublin Castle case of 1884 and the Cleveland Street incident of 1889, piqued Joyce's interest, but it was the 1895 trials and subsequent fate of Oscar Wilde that proved to be particularly consequential for Joyce's life and work. The scandals attached to the Wilde trials certainly framed and influenced Joyce's composition of *Ulysses*, but we want to advance current thinking on Joyce and Wilde by developing Joyce's perception of Oscar Wilde. By using the Deleuzian framework of 'Wilde-as-an-assemblage', we will demonstrate that Joyce was particularly receptive to the diversity of legal, medical, sexological, and popular perceptions of Wilde. Our approach to Joyce's perception of Wilde as a protean figure with no fixed or essential identity embodies the nature of the Deleuzian concept of the assemblage, which Thomas Nail describes as: 'the rejection of unity in favour of multiplicity, and the rejection of essence in favour of events' (2017: 22). Wilde's identity was so varied that the scandalous side of Wilde after the trials was just one part of a whole array of Wilde's various and changing identities. Wilde's influence on *Ulysses* has been explicated by many critics, however, the theoretical framework of 'assemblages' allows us to show Wilde himself, albeit in costume or disguise, not only appears in *Ulysses* and informs the complex and polyvalent ontology of Buck Mulligan and D.B. Murphy, but also triggers the resolutions that end the novel after they exit the public narrative. These two complex characters reveal how invested Joyce was in the queer nature of Wilde's various identities while writing *Ulysses* and in turn show how radically progressive Wilde's influence on *Ulysses* was—bold by the standards of queer politics in the 1920s, anticipatory of the far more complex understanding of queer identit(ies) now.

Wilde-as-Assemblage

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze asks, 'What is an assemblage?', to which he posits:

> [...] it is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes, and reigns—different natures. Thus, the assemblage's only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'. It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 69).

In other words, the thing—be it person, place, concept, or ideology—has its meaning held in check by everything that it is connected to. For Deleuze, these connections and networks are the thing itself; the thing itself cannot stand alone and is only ever able to signify as a connection—what Deleuze paradoxically calls the nature of the thing itself as a 'fragmentary whole' (1980: 4). In 'What is an Assemblage?', Thomas Nail reminds us that

> Deleuze and Guattari do not ask, 'What *is*...?' but rather, how? where? when? from what viewpoint? and so on. These are not questions of essence, but questions of events. An assemblage does not have an essence because it has no eternally necessary defining features, only contingent and singular features [...] if we want to know what something is [or someone, in the case of Wilde], we cannot presume that what we see is the final product nor that this product is somehow independent of the network of social and historical processes to which it is connected (2017: 12).

For Joyce, Wilde was just such an assemblage: scandal created multiple 'versions' of Wilde, variously perceived 'fragmentary wholes'—the newspapers' version of Wilde, the sexological subject, Wilde the poet, Wilde-as-criminal, etc.—but what Joyce stresses is that this was dependent on the eye of the beholder.

Wilde was a product of the discourses that wrote him into various legible beings; Mulligan and Murphy are likewise composite characters that appear differently depending on which way one looks or just how much one knows. Deleuze and Guattari assert that '[t]here are no individual statements, only statement-producing machinic assemblages' (1980: 45). In other words, a statement, or an individual's identity, can only communicate a set of circumstances, circumstances which exist as an intersecting mesh of cultural, political and/or ideological aspects. No 'individual statements' means that an individual cannot claim to be a unitary singular entity unaffected by the either the passage of time or the interlocking networks of time and space that press upon the individual after any 'individual' 'I' statement can be uttered. As Wilde was many different things at many different times, so too Mulligan and Murphy are perceived in many different ways by many different characters at various points in *Ulysses*.

The original French word that Deleuze uses is *agencement*, which translates as 'a collection of things which have been gathered together or assembled' (Nail, 2017: 26). Joyce, we contend, perceived Wilde's identity as an 'assemblage', that is, Joyce, more than has been acknowledged, took a Deleuzian approach to Wilde's complex queer identity. What the perceiver sees is what Deleuze calls a 'fragmentary whole' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 4). For those who saw Wilde through a sexological lens, he was an 'invert'; for those whose understanding of deviance was informed by representations

in the popular press, Wilde's criminality relegated him into the socially transgressive type. Joyce was receptive to both *how* Wilde was perceived, and *why* Wilde was perceived in those ways. Joyce saw Wilde as a kaleidoscopic assemblage of various fragmentary wholes: as a product of the Anglo-Saxon institution, as someone whose name was indicative of his fate, as a cultural 'scapegoat' in the eyes of the law, among other assemblages (*OCPW*: 150). In his essay 'Oscar Wilde: The Poet of *Salomé*' (1909), Joyce goes through each aspect of Wilde's identity as perceived through various lenses, or in Deleuzian terms, various ways of seeing a 'fragmentary whole'. In turn, this queer perception of Wilde is what informed Joyce's construction of Buck Mulligan and D.B. Murphy in *Ulysses*.

Patrick Mullen claims that when Wilde's private sexual acts were put into discourse by a prying, pressing, and perturbed public, it essentially catalysed what he describes as a 'queer epistemological crisis of modernity' (2012: 3). Through such public, legal, social, and medical intersecting discourses, various 'fragmentary wholes' emerged where Wilde became different identities at different times. Such an assemblage relied on signifying the absent 'Other', that is, the lens of Wilde-as-dandy signified his resistance to masculinity, Wilde-as-invert/degenerate signified a homosexual identity that deviated medically from the normative sexuality, and so on.

Writing in the Wake of the Wilde Trials

For decades, critics have observed Joyce's keen awareness of Wilde. Richard Ellmann notes that 'Joyce had been interested in Wilde for a long while' (1977: 23), and Richard Corballis contends that 'the life and work of Wilde are given serious and sympathetic attention' in Joyce's work (2002: 165). Frances Devlin-Glass states: 'To be writing in the wake of the Wilde trial, as [Joyce] was, left discernible traces on a writer who on so many other fronts courageously rejoiced in transgression [...] Joyce implicitly dialogued with Wilde throughout his writing life' (2005: 4). Zack Bowen suggests that Joyce used the 'publicized details of Wilde's personal scandals as well as his aesthetic to shape certain aspects of *Ulysses*' and has counted '[a]t least two dozen references to Wilde and/or his work' (1996: 105) in *Ulysses* (1996: 106–107). Joyce was more than just interested in or influenced by his predecessor. He was preoccupied with Wilde, both from his jottings in a notebook where he sketched 'Oscar = bugger' (see Slote, 1995: 5) and then throughout the composition of *Ulysses*, and beyond. As Backus reminds us:

> Both [Wilde and Joyce] were Irish, and both were repeatedly accused of falling afoul of the British middle class, gentlemanly norms that their public deviations both challenged and defined. Both were stigmatized as outsiders partly by reason of their class and national origins, and partly by reason of their scandalous artistic output (2008: 106).

In their essay ‘Becoming Animal in the Epiphanies: Joyce Between Fiction and Non-Fiction’ (2018), Katherine Ebury was one of the first to demonstrate how Deleuzian frameworks are useful lenses through which to interpret Joycean aesthetics. Extending this suggestion into Deleuzian assemblages in *Ulysses*, we believe that Joyce disassembled and reassembled Wilde as Mulligan and Murphy, and that Wilde’s costumed and disguised appearances install him as another primary lens—like Hamlet or Odysseus—through which Joyce brings *Ulysses* into focus. According to Ellmann, Wilde was ‘Joyce’s compatriot’ (1977: 39) and was present at critical moments in Joyce’s life and work. For example, when Joyce first met Nora Barnacle on Friday, June 10, 1904, he arranged to meet her at 1 Merrion Square North, Wilde’s childhood home. Joyce appeared; Nora did not (Bowker, 2011: 121–122). Now the stuff of literary legend, their meeting was rescheduled for Thursday, June 16. But for Barnacle’s tardiness, Bloomsday and *Ulysses* would have had an even firmer and clearer Wildean foundation. Moreover, in Rome, Joyce read Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and wrote to his brother Stanislaus on August 19, 1906:

> It is not very difficult to read between the lines. Wilde seems to have had some good intention in writing it—some wish to put himself before the world—but the book is rather crowded with lies and epigrams. If he had had the courage to develop the allusions in the book it might have been better (*SL*: 96).

Here, Joyce criticizes Wilde for not directly addressing homosexuality, yet, in an ironic self-indictment, neither does he—not even in a private message to his brother, much less in a published novel. Nevertheless, Joyce was sufficiently impressed with Wilde’s work, as Mahaffey points out (1998: 44), to give *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* a title that alludes to Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The title recalls the line in the novel’s first chapter, in which the painter Basil Hallward says that ‘every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist’ (Wilde, 2012: 61). Finally, in 1918, as manager of the English Players in Zurich, Joyce chose as the company’s debut production Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a coded drama of double lives, inverted worlds and words, one in which Buck Mulligan could have easily inhabited, sharing quips and cucumber sandwiches with Algernon and Jack (Devlin-Glass, 2005: 30). During the curtain call on opening night, Joyce reportedly shouted: ‘Hurrah for Ireland! Poor Wilde was Irish, and so am I!’ (Ellmann, 1982: 426).

To mark the premiere of Richard Strauss’ opera based on Wilde’s play *Salomé* in Trieste, Joyce produced what presumably was to have been an introduction to the opera for a general audience in *Il Piccolo della Sera*. However, his erudite essay, ‘Oscar Wilde: The Poet of *Salomé*’, offers much more. Devlin-Glass writes that the essay ‘reveals both

how attractive Wilde's transgressive aesthetic was to Joyce and how conflicted he was about Wilde', containing 'the seeds of a more liberal understanding of what Wilde's trial meant to Joyce and to *Ulysses*' (2005: 27). Joyce opens the essay as follows:

> Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde. These were the high-sounding titles that with juvenile vanity he wanted to have printed on the title-page of his first collection of poetry. By this vain gesture which he believed would lend him dignity, he sculpted, perhaps symbolically, the marks of his empty pretences and of the fate that awaited him (*OCPW*: 148).

Joyce breaks Wilde down into selves and pieces. His interest in the ideological resonances that affect Wilde's development as an artist, scapegoat, and disgraced exile is evident. Joyce contents that, 'far from being a monster of perversion that inexplicably arose in the midst of the modern civilization of England', Wilde was assembled as 'the logical and inevitable product of the Anglo-Saxon college and university system, a system of seclusion and secrecy' (*OCPW*: 150). The system that, in Joyce's opinion, encouraged homosexuality. Backus echoes this polymorphous and ideologically contingent version of Wilde, reflecting on Joyce's acute receptivity to Wilde-the-phenomenon as opposed to Wilde-the-individual. They describe how 'Joyce's depiction of Wilde in "The Poet of *Salomé*" similarly focuses on ways which Wilde was, through the logic of the British legal system, reduced to an inchoate, humiliated, and distressed object of Otherness' (2008: 115). Joyce, therefore, sees Wilde as an assemblage—not as a collection of parts that are assembled to construct a pre-determined whole, but rather as a writer whose ontological reality is determined by *how* such parts are put together. For Joyce, Wilde is a process of 'becoming' rather than an entity 'put together', that is, not an achieved, static product, but a procedure of self-making, an act of assemblage. Joyce's systematic mapping out of 'Wilde-as-[x]' asks readers not only to consider all the disparate aspects of Wilde's life and work, but to examine how each Wildean fragment is determined by other fragments, and why such an assemblage of different Wildean parts may have occurred in the first place.

Backus concludes that 'Joyce's essay on Wilde marks the point of origin for an image pattern that recurs throughout *Ulysses,* suturing together elements of Wilde's case' (2008: 113). She is right; Wilde hovers throughout—and even appears in—*Ulysses*. A few pivotal examples must suffice. First, Joyce constructs a miniature version of Wilde's 'gross indecency' debacle in the 'Hades' episode, substituting Simon Dedalus, Buck Mulligan and Stephen Dedalus for the Marquess of Queensberry, Oscar Wilde, and Lord Alfred Douglas, respectively (see Bowker, 2011: 111). Bloom is in the carriage with Simon Dedalus, Martin Cunningham, and Jack Power, and they are on their way to the cemetery

for Paddy Dignam's interment when he spies Stephen on his way to Sandymount. 'Your son and heir?' (*U* 6.43), Bloom says to Dedalus, who in turn asks: 'Was that Mulligan cad with him? His *fidus Achates?*' (*U* 6.49), the latter phrase translating to 'devoted follower'. No: Stephen is alone, yet his father erupts, channelling Queensberry's rage at Wilde:

> —He's in with a lowdown crowd, Mr Dedalus snarled. That Mulligan is a contaminated bloody doubledyed ruffian by all accounts. His name stinks all over Dublin. But with the help of God and His blessed mother I'll make it my business to write a letter one of those days to his mother or his aunt or whatever she is that will open her eye as wide as a gate. I'll tickle his catastrophe, believe you me (*U* 6.63–68).

Queensberry, of course, devastatingly 'tickle[d]' Wilde's catastrophe.

Sam Slote's contribution to the present collection focuses on Wilde's presence in 'Scylla and Charybdis' (2024: passim). In the episode, Stephen offers his theory of *Hamlet,* teased in 'Telemachus', that makes complex connections between artists' lives and their work. Wilde emerges alongside Shakespeare to dominate the episode and the explication. As the discussion moves away from *Hamlet* to the Shakespearean sonnets, an undertone of same-sex attraction emerges, especially after Mulligan, who seems to have been eavesdropping, enters (*U* 9.485). The assistant librarian, Mr Best, brings Wilde to the surface: 'The most brilliant of all is that story of Wilde's, Mr Best said, lifting his brilliant notebook. That *Portrait of Mr. W. H.* where he proves that the sonnets were written [for] a Willie Hughes, a man of all hues' (*U* 9.522–24). In light of the work of Kershner (1978), Danson (1991), Bristow (1997, 2022), Corballis (2002), and Slote (2024), among others, Wilde's *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* may have been the reservoir from which Joyce's drew much of the complexly depicted sexuality of Bloom, Stephen, Mulligan, and even Molly. More importantly, perhaps, *Mr. W. H.* not only suggests the transmigration of souls but the translation of one culture into another, an inspiration that prefigures the dominant conceit of *Ulysses* itself, one buried in Joyce's title. In other words, *Mr. W. H.* may be more than the portal into queer *Ulysses*; The intertextual lens that is *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* may be as important to the novel as *The Odyssey* or *Hamlet*.

Then there is 'Circe', in which, according to Corballis, '*The Importance of Being Earnest* [...] assumes particular prominence' (2002: 160). The episode, rendered in a form associated with Wilde—the drama—involves gender and occupational inversions, medical evaluations, fetishism, sexual innuendo and, of course, alleged crimes, all rendered in a circus-like nightmarish atmosphere. People, places and things are topsy-turvy. Wilde, for one, has been transmigrated into Bloom, who, just like Wilde,

endures multiple trials that make use of faeces-smeared material as discovery—Bloom's *Matcham's Masterstroke* toilet paper and Wilde's stained sheets from the Savoy. Backus writes: '[T]he entire courtroom fantasy in "Circe" pointily recalls the defeat of Wilde's libel change against Queensberry by a sensational public display of shit-marked "sheets"' (2008: 107). For Bowen, '[t]he Bloom/Wilde conjunction [in "Circe"] was more than a wise choice among self-styled martyrs; the result was the creation of a Bloomian comic masterpiece based on Wildean tragedy' (1996: 113–115; Casey Lawrence's contribution to the present collection interprets 'Circe' as a direct parody of the Wilde trials). Like Dante, Joyce is building a comedy—an instructional text that begins in betrayal and exile but ends in promise and homecoming. Joyce's fictive family, his trinity—Bloom, Stephen, and Molly—achieves a redemption that was denied Wilde in life and *Ulysses*, but one he'll finally receive in the *Wake*.

Assembling Murphy and Mulligan

Joyce recognizes that Wilde is, as Deleuze might have said, a 'complex multiform creature' whose reality was determined by cultural, political, and serological perspectives (Bristow, 1977: 195). Joyce perceived Wilde as being in a constant state of meaning-making, asking for explication, or indeed demanding various, even contradictory, interpretations. As an assemblage, Wilde was ceaselessly changing because he was rooted in both Victorian literature and Victorian scandal. He was the international genius, the dazzling wit, the literary dandy—but scandal-seeking journalists came to focus on the serological categorization that marked him as an invert, a criminal, an exile, an ex-con. Who (or what) Wilde was depended on the angle of the perceiver. Thus, a cubist portrait of Wilde emerged, simultaneously showing various and contradictory aspects, angles, and elements.

This portrait serves Joyce in *Ulysses* as both model and source for Buck Mulligan and D.B. Murphy, who along with their inspiration—Wilde—are all Deleuzian assemblages, engines of continuous interpretable phenomena. The episodes that feature Mulligan and Murphy offer costumed performances that differ in kind from the appearances and actions of the rest of Joyce's cast of characters. Stephen, Bloom, and Molly, the mourners at the funeral, the patrons at the bar, and the faithful at the church, all are reasonably garbed for their parts and perform those parts with expectant precision. Even the brothel madam Bella Cohen and the flamboyant dance teacher Dennis J. Maginni don appropriate clothes and predictably play their parts. Mulligan and Murphy, however, wear costumes and act with excessive performativity. They are visually linked as the only members of the *Ulysses* cast who possess green goggles, suggesting that they see the world in a similar light; Mulligan's goggles appear in 'Circe' (*U* 15.1774)

and Murphy's in 'Eumaeus' (*U* 16.1678). Mulligan begins the novel shaving, staring out at 'the scrotumtightening sea' (*U* 1:4), and Murphy ends it at the river's edge. Hannah Freed-Thall points to the water's edge as 'a transitional space, a terraqueous ribbon suspended between the militarized roadways of the sea, the verticality and velocity of the metropolis, and the heteronormative architecture of the home' (2023: 35). Water and its edges often are queering places in twentieth-century literature.

The ideology of the interactors (or of the readers) frame perceptions of Mulligan and Murphy, as each is made up of an incongruous constellation of selves embodying Deleuzian assemblages. Thus, any aspect of Mulligan and Murphy cannot be imagined as a 'piece of a jigsaw' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 232), but must be seen as sections as an organ connected to a whole, as a heart to a body. Mulligan's vestments at the opening, his chalice and bowl, his razor and mirror, as well as Murphy's tattoos, his lice, and his postcard, are all pieces of Wildean assemblages. Mulligan and Murphy reveal Joyce's recognition that Wilde's identity was neither fixed nor anchored but rather contingent on ideological viewpoints, whether of the popular press that constructed a scandalously criminal figure, the sexologists who taxonomized Wilde as an effeminate invert, the legal team who represented Queensberry, or the readers and audiences who read Wilde's books and attended his plays.

'Plump' Oscar, 'Stately' Wilde

Though considerable scholarship has been devoted to Oliver St. John Gogarty as the real-life role model for Buck Mulligan (Corballis, 2002: 160–61; Turner and Mamigonian, 2004: 633–652), Gogarty is not the only soul transmigrated into the edgy organism that is Mulligan. Indeed, Gogarty is not, we contend, even the primary source for the character who first appears in *Ulysses*. The faux-priest who begins a pagan Mass is Wilde himself, *en costume*, for, as Mulligan explains, the Martello Tower was to be the site where a Wildean figure—or Wilde himself, implicitly—would enact the rites of aestheticism as high priest. Mulligan, as stately as Wilde and just as plump, appears in a yellow dressing gown, the colour of blasphemy.[1] Valente grasps this (1994: 12)—Mulligan is not a transmigrated Gogarty. Kiberd sees it too; Mulligan 'presents himself as the very incarnation of Oscar' (2009: 44). Bowen writes that Mulligan 'might just as easily be a description of Oscar Wilde in corpulence and taste in color' (2011: 109). Devlin-Glass, meanwhile, states: 'Joyce's characterisation [of Mulligan] owes as much to Oscar as to Oliver' (2005: 29). But Mulligan's costumed performance atop the tower

[1] 'In the Middle Ages', Ferguson points out, heretics were obliged to wear yellow' (1961: 553). Mulligan insists that Ireland be Hellenized, and presumably not in the Matthew Arnold sense.

is not an allusion or a reincarnation. Mulligan *is* Wilde—Wilde as he was in the mid-1890s, the brilliant wit and the toast of London who had two hit plays running in the West End.

Mulligan walks out onto the Martello Tower on June 16, 1904, just three-and-a-half years after Wilde's death in Paris. Wilde's history would still have been very much in the air and on Joyce's mind, and is clearly on his characters' minds, as Wilde permeates the opening episode of *Ulysses*. The trials were, after all, the most sensational and widely publicized scandal of the age. So, with Wilde on everyone's mind, Joyce opens his novel as a Wildean drama: 'Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed' (*U* 1.1–2). On a homosocial set, in a tower without milk, two men have set up house. Mulligan, the high priest, chants a rite, albeit with shaving equipment, intimating how the everyday can be exalted into something divine and eternal, whether through the Eucharist or the transubstantiation of art. He is joined by his tower-mate Stephen Dedalus, whereupon the two bicker like grumpy lovers—Stephen playing the Douglas role to Mulligan's Wilde. They squabble about a long-simmering offense—Mulligan's comment about Stephen's mother—but also about the annoyance *du jour*, the intrusion of the Englishman, Haines. Mulligan takes his broken, stolen mirror, holds it up to Stephen's face and quotes directly from Wilde's preface to *Dorian Gray*: 'The rage of Caliban at not seeing his face in a mirror [...] If Wilde were only alive to see you!' (*U* 1: 143–44). However, Stephen *does* see his face, and he doesn't like what he sees.

The opening of *Ulysses* uses a free indirect discourse that enables Mulligan's self-conscious performative ceremony to disorient and rupture the objectivity of Joyce's 'initial style' (K Lawrence, 1982: 12). The layout of the page for the opening scene resembles a Wildean drama; it is self-consciously hyper-performative. Adverbs steer our perceptual apprehension: 'smartly', 'gravely', 'gaily', 'warily' (*U* 1.18, 30, 34, 56); stage directions scaffold the pseudo-theatrical script, such as 'slow music please' and 'Silence all' (*U* 1.22, 23); and excessive adjectival phrases fussily describe characters who radically depart from the 'scrupulous meanness' of *Dubliners* (*SL*: 83). Descriptions of Mulligan are flamboyant and highly aestheticized: including a face that is 'equine in length' (*U* 1.156) with 'light untonsured hair, grained and hued like pale oak' (*U* 1.15–16). Mulligan invites a multitude of perspectives, from the hyper-masculine and earthy to the overtly feminized and theatrical. The oscillation between various 'states' could be lifted from this opening section and serve as 'fragmentary wholes' which, when read on their own, tell a different story and offer different identities for Mulligan: paradoxically 'plump' yet 'stately' (*U* 1.1), decadent yet priestly, a hyper-masculinized soldier from a war ('Back to Barracks, he said sternly' [*U* 1.19]), both a performer and a

director (‘Shut your eyes, gents. One moment’ [*U* 1.22]). It is after Mulligan verbalizes the performative stage directions that the homosexual subtext emerges, as if Mulligan is self-reflexively leaning into a homosexual interaction with Stephen.

Throughout the ‘Telemachus’ episode, such homosexual allusions accumulate. Mulligan prompts Stephen:

> —Yes, my love?
> —How long is Haines going to stay in this tower?
> Buck Mulligan showed a shaven cheek over his right shoulder.
> —God, isn’t he dreadful? he said frankly. A ponderous Saxon. He thinks you’re not a gentleman. God, these bloody English! Bursting with money and indigestion. Because he comes from Oxford. You know, Dedalus, you have the real Oxford manner. He can’t make you out (*U* 1.49–54).

The homoerotic undercurrent gains momentum as the dialogue develops amid suggestively phallic and penetrative imagery; ‘Mulligan thrust a hand into Stephen’s upper pocket’ (*U* 1.67–68). The sharing of clothes suggests an intimacy that is never spoken but casually recognized; ‘How are the secondhand breeks?’ (*U* 1.113), Mulligan asks, then offers Stephen a ‘lovely pair with a hair stripe, grey. You’ll look spiffing in them. I’m not joking, Kinch. You look damn well when you’re dressed’ (*U* 1.117–19), insinuating that he is familiar with Stephen when he is undressed—or would like to be. Stephen is not concerned with Wildean tensions between romance and reality. He dismisses Mulligan’s crack and matches him, Wilde-to-Wilde, with an allusion to Wilde’s ‘The Decay of Lying’; the mirror, he says, is in fact ‘a symbol of Irish art. The cracked lookingglass of a servant’ (*U* 1.146). Then he shifts the discussion from the aesthetic to the political. Wilde’s presence has been firmly established.

The Wildean evocations lead to Mulligan’s unsolicited imposition on Stephen as he ‘suddenly link[s] his arm on Stephen’s and walk[s] with him round the tower, his razor and mirror clacking in the pocket where he thrust them’ (*U* 1.147–49). Arm in arm, they then stroll about for thirty-five lines of narrative (*U* 1.147–182). Mulligan’s touch jolts Stephen, who subsequently flashes back to Cranly’s earlier homoerotic contact in *A Portrait* (*P* 247) as Stephen’s interior monologue recalls ‘his arm. Cranly’s arm’ (*U* 1.159). Mulligan reassures Stephen, as if Stephen were a jealous lover, that if Haines disturbs him again, he’ll be throttled the way Clive Kempthorpe, a student at Oxford, was hazed. This causes Stephen to imagine the hazing event that he did not witness, but Stephen mistakenly—and Joyce significantly—places Mulligan in Wilde’s college within Oxford—Magdalen—not Gogarty’s—Worcester (Corballis, 2002: 161), a repositioning that tips Mulligan even closer to Wilde.

Stephen tells Mulligan how offended he was by Mulligan's description of his mother's death ('*beastly dead*' [*U* 1.198–99]). Mulligan dismisses Stephen's complaint, even before he hears it in true Wildean fashion; 'I remember only ideas and sensations' (*U* 1.192–93). After the breakfast, Mulligan's lavender impulses continue; 'Contradiction. Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself,' he says (*U* 1.516–17), quoting Whitman's homoerotic 'Song of Myself'. Soon thereafter, in trying to explain Stephen's take on *Hamlet*, Mulligan says in an ironic self-indictment, 'We have grown out of Wilde and paradoxes. It's quite simple. [Stephen] proves by algebra that Hamlet's grandson is Shakespeare's grandfather and that he himself is the ghost of his own father' (*U* 1.554–56). He thereby hints at the connections between biography and artistic production that Stephen will explore later in the library. Haines is intrigued—the Englishman, to quote Joyce's Wilde essay, is the 'logical and inevitable product of the Anglo-Saxon college and university system' (*OCPW* 150). To reiterate, Haines is a product of what Joyce, per his essay on *Salomé*, saw as a breeding ground for homosexuals. As such, Haines functions as a bit of high-end trade, an intruder into the love-life of Mulligan and Stephen.

After breakfast, the three go down to the water so that Mulligan can bathe. Haines produces his 'smooth silver [cigarette] case' (*U* 1.615), itself a metonymy for the Wilde trials, since Wilde frequently gifted silver cigarette cases to his favourites (Kennedy, 2017: n.p.)—both a pricy piece of evidence that loomed large throughout Wilde's prosecution, and an item that Wilde uses as an early homosexual code in Act One of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, a text replete with homosexual references. The Wildean allusions and quotations in 'Telemachus' gather and accumulate. Mulligan, by the end of the episode, naked and 'erect' (*U* 1.726), plunges into the water, symbolically enacting a fall from the top of the tower down nearly forty feet into the water, as precipitous a decline as Wilde's from the toast of London high society to a solitary figure in a Reading Gaol cell.

Other Mulligan appearances throughout the novel evoke Wilde—including in 'Wandering Rocks' and 'Oxen of the Sun'—but none as explicitly as his emergence in 'Circe', wherein Mulligan '*in particoloured jester's dress of puce and yellow and clown cap with curling bell, stands gaping at* [Stephen's dead mother], *a smoking buttered split scone in his hand*' (*U* 15.4167–4169). Mulligan's appearance in 'Circe' is evocative of Joyce's *Salomé* essay written years earlier; 'Wilde entered that literary tradition of Irish comic playwrights that stretches from the days of Sheridan and Goldsmith to Bernard Shaw, and became, like them, court jester to the English' (*OCPW*: 149). Joyce's joker has been definitively identified; Oscar Wilde has taken the stage.

'Sherlockholmsing' D. B. Murphy

After the tumult of 'Circe', the climax of *Ulysses*, Bloom and Stephen wander about and end up at the shelter under Butt Bridge overlooking the Liffey. The 'Eumaeus' episode is another beginning, the opening of *Ulysses*' third and final section, and another morning, very early, with another breakfast, but this time with 'a decidedly miscellaneous collection of waifs and strays and other nondescript specimens of the genus *homo*' (*U* 16.327–28). Once again, the focus is on three men, but the homosocial tower of 'Telemachus' is here a homosexual set. The seemingly rambling episode begins; 'Preparatory to anything else, Mr Bloom brushed off the greater bulk of the shavings and handed Stephen the hat and ashplant and bucked him up generally in orthodox Samaritan fashion which he very badly needed' (*U* 16.1–3). The noun 'shavings' and the verb 'buck' bring back Mulligan and the opening of the Mass in 'Telemachus'. The 'Eumaeus' episode is 'Telemachus' inverted. Once Stephen and Bloom enter the shelter, they are served 'a choice concoction labelled coffee' and 'a rather antediluvian specimen of a bun' (*U* 16.355–56)—an unconsecrated Eucharist—for another morning Mass. They are about to resume the Mass that was begun seventeen hours earlier, and, as in an actual Mass, a transubstantiation will eventually occur. This change, though, is triggered by a red-bearded character, who, like Odysseus, is referred to as being 'wily' (*U* 16.625): the kaleidoscopic D. B. Murphy.

In the *Odyssey*, the hero returns to Ithaca disguised; likewise, in 'Eumaeus', a character returns in costume, using performance to slice through the exhaustion of the participants in the episode, effect change, and deliver a message, just as Odysseus (and Wilde) would have, through irony and inverted comedy. As soon as new arrivals appear at the shelter fresh from Nighttown, Murphy '[has] his weathered eye on the newcomers [and] board[s] Stephen' (*U* 16.367–68). The nautical verb 'board' here takes on a powerful sexuality to which fatherly Bloom is alerted.

Murphy initiates the conversation by asking Stephen, '—And what would your name be?' (*U* 16.370), thus opening a conversation about names and naming, one more complicated than that in *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.* This Other(ed) Odysseus returning home in disguise to another seemingly long-suffering wife, Murphy is also the generic Irishman, an Everyman with what is, Stephen points out, the country's most common name: '— Sounds are impostures, [...] like names. Cicero, Podmore, Napoleon, Mr Goodbody, Jesus, Mr Doyle. Shakespeares were as common as Murphies. What's in a name?' (*U* 16.362–4). But the text suggests that Murphy is a seemingly innumerable collection of parts and personalities, assembled from Sinbad, Morpheus, the Ancient Mariner, Proust, Yeats, even Joyce himself—but also Wilde. Murphy's many avatars

recall Wilde's numerous stand-ins, parts and names—Algernon in *Earnest*, the narrator in *Mr. W. H.*, among others; Wilde's five-part moniker, which Joyce foregrounds in the *Salomé* essay; and finally, Wilde's aliases, including Sebastian Melmoth, which he used after his release from prison, and his pseudonym, C. 3.3., which was his cell number in Reading Gaol and *nom de plume* for *De Profundis*. Like Wilde, Murphy has been assembled from many parts. He is a 'complex multiform creature' (Bristow, 1977: 195).

No minor, belated add-on, Murphy has been in *Ulysses* from the beginning, and, as Jennifer Levine writes, 'Murphy sets up a kaleidoscopic set of echo effects that multiply and disperse him back across the text' (1994: 279). Thus, at the end of the public narrative, Murphy emerges together with Mulligan as the architecture of the novel, each a buttress with Wilde at the spire of the construction. Mulligan's first spoken line in 'Telemachus', 'Introibo ad altare Dei' (*U* 1.5), has been given much attention, yet his last lines of the episode may be as important as his initial utterance. Near the end of 'Telemachus,' Mulligan cries out to his aquaphobic tower mate on the bank: '—The Ship! [...] Half twelve' (*U* 1.733), reminding Stephen to meet him at that public house on Lower Abbey Street at lunchtime with money for drinks. (Stephen will stand him up.) Both Wilde stand-ins are together in the water. In addition, at the end of 'Proteus,' Stephen 'turn[s] his face over a shoulder, rere regardant. Moving through the air high spars of a threemaster, her sails brailed up on the crosstrees, homing, upstream, silently moving, a silent ship' (*U* 3.503–06), bringing Murphy in for his breakfast early the next day with Bloom and Stephen. Mulligan and Murphy's appearances, then, contain the public action of the novel from its opening with the former, through its climax in 'Circe', to 'Eumaeus', a scene of *nostos*, return—the return of Ulysses/Bloom, to be sure, but also the return of Mulligan-redux, Wilde-again: D. B. Murphy.

During conversation with Stephen in the shelter, while Bloom mostly listens and attempts to catch the '*soi-disant*' (*U* 16.620) in a lie, Murphy seems to pick up on the fact that Bloom has been 'Sherlockholmesing him ever since he clapped eyes on him' (*U* 16.831). He satiates their curiosity;

> Seeing they were all looking at his chest he accommodatingly dragged his shirt more open so that on top of the time-honoured symbol of the mariner's hope and rest they had full view of the figure 16 and a young man's sideface looking frowningly rather.
> —Tattoo, the exhibitor explained [...] Fellow, the name of Antonio, done that. There he is himself, a Greek (*U* 16.673–79).

The portrait of the tattoo artist as a young Greek, Antonio, may refer to the closeted Antonio in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (Levine, 1994: 291), but it may also

have a classical correspondence with Marcus Aurelius's *Anton*inus (ca. 121–180 CE), famous for his *Meditations* and infamous for his interest in boys. Murphy continues his show-and-tell;

> —See here, he said, showing Antonio. There he is cursing the mate. And there he is now, he added, the same fellow, pulling the skin with his fingers, some special knack evidently, and he laughing at a yarn (*U* 16.683–85).

Fingering Antonio's face, Murphy palpates his skin into the masks of comedy and tragedy, a flashing sign advertising theatre, and, crucially, invoking Wilde. Although Bloom claims the tattoo shows no resemblance 'to the dramatic personage of identical name who sprang from the pen of our national poet' (*U* 16.839–40), Antonio is, of course, also the name of the gay sea captain and companion to Sebastian in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Antonio loves Sebastian, and the latter is, to reiterate, the name Wilde used after his release from prison.

But it is the 'figure 16' that has generated considerable interest in previous scholarship, since the number 16 has long been known in Europe as slang for homosexuality (Gifford and Seidman, 1988: 544; Levine, 1994: 286; Ramey and Ramey, 2007: 104–105). Ramey and Ramey, in fact, point out that 'sixteen is a kind of talismanic number in the novel-world of *Ulysses*' (2007: 104). Murphy, of course, appears in the sixteenth chapter with a number 16 inked onto his chest. The entire novel takes place primarily on June 16. Bloom and Molly have been married for 16 years. Bloom is 16 years older than Stephen, the same age gap between Wilde and Douglas. To gild the lily, Wilde lived at 16 Tite Street in Chelsea, London and died in room 16 of L'Hotel in Paris. Even Milly Bloom is about to turn 16 years old. Among the sixteens, Murphy's number is permanent—and Bloom's got it.

Bloom is as wary of Murphy now as he was of Mulligan in the National Library earlier in 'Scylla and Charbybdis'. He rightly imagines that Murphy/Wilde has been recently released from prison (*U* 16.834). If as Mulligan is as Wilde was on the opening night of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Murphy is Wilde just out from Reading Gaol. Just as 'Telemachus' and 'Eumaeus' are mirror images, Mulligan and Murphy are inverted forms of one another, the bookends of Oscar Wilde's professional life.

Conclusion

Like Mulligan, Murphy assembles various manners, tones of voice, names, signs and symbols, and cannot be considered reliable or even coherent. Both Mulligan and Murphy contain multitudes and seem more than happy to contradict themselves;

they would therefore not be perturbed by the hermeneutical anxiety that they instil in those who encounter them in Joyce's fictive world or by the mixed signals they send to readers. Murphy imparts a great deal of information about his background, but like Bloom, we are prone to doubt the authenticity of these disclosures, which are redolent of assembled stories—stories configured to provoke a reaction rather than inform. For example, Murphy tells Stephen and Bloom that he knows Simon Dedalus (*U* 16.378), but this turns out to be another person with Stephen's father's name who is purportedly a circus marksman. We are also told that Murphy originates from Carrigaloe in Queenstown, yet he claims not to have seen his wife once in the last seven years, thus precluding any spousal witness who might verify what he says. Murphy also sensationally narrates an anecdote about a killing in Trieste while dramatically holding his dagger. However, when Murphy is asked questions that are off-script, so to speak, he stumbles because he doesn't have the benefit of prior assemblage; when Bloom asks for more information about Gibraltar, for example, he struggles to form a timely response. As a result, the conversation with Murphy directly invokes Wilde for Bloom: 'he brought to mind instances of cultured fellows that promised so brilliantly nipped in the bud of premature decay and nobody to blame but themselves' (*U* 16.1184–86). Bloom recalls those administrators who were arrested for homosexual acts in the Dublin Castle scandal and commits to protecting Stephen from Murphy as well as from Mulligan, thus saving him from the fates of the defendant of the Dublin case—and the tragedy of Wilde.

But most importantly, perhaps, both Mulligan and Murphy are messengers. Mulligan's first name, Malachi, is Hebrew for 'my [God's] messenger'; the Old Testament prophet Malachi foretells the return of 'Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord' in Malachi 4 (Slote et al., 2022: 7). As for Murphy, Richard Ellmann reports that Joyce gave Carlo Linati 'an intricate scheme for *Ulysses* which showed its Odyssean parallels and its special techniques' (1982: 519). In it, Joyce refers to Murphy as *Odysseus Pseudoangelos*, a lost ancient Greek play of unknown authorship, known only through a mention in Aristotle's *Poetics*, translated to *Odysseus, the False Messenger* (Ramey and Ramey, 2007: 98–99). While that correspondence in 'Eumaeus' is recondite even by Joycean standards, it nonetheless labels Murphy, like Mulligan, as another (or the same) messenger. Each of their messages is as powerful as any *deux ex machina* in the ancient Greek canon. Both messengers miraculously generate homecomings for Joyce's protagonists, and each is equally responsible for bringing *Ulysses* to a close. In 'Telemachus', Mulligan's message to Stephen to turn over the key to the tower pushes Stephen to walk away; 'I will not sleep here tonight. Home also I cannot go' (*U* 1.739–40). Mulligan's words set Stephen on a different path and into a

new day. Murphy, on the other hand, as a living message-board, causes Bloom to draw closer to Stephen and invite him home, rekindling an emotion that will stir even after Stephen, refusing to spend the night, walks into the dawn and goes on ‘to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race’ (*P* 252–253).

Wilde, then, through his avatars, not only appears in *Ulysses*, costumed as Mulligan and Murphy, but also triggers salvation for both Bloom and Stephen, resulting in Molly’s romantic reception and Stephen’s promising new workday. The Mass, begun in ‘Telemachus’, and continued in parts throughout the day, reaches its climax in ‘Ithaca’, when Stephen imbibes in the drink Bloom makes for him, before Stephen goes off in peace.

Preparatory to anything else, Wilde frames *Ulysses.* Wilde not only appears in *Ulysses* disguised like Homer’s wily hero, but he provides the text’s architecture, manifesting himself in the kaleidoscopic assemblages—Mulligan and Murphy—who, as Deleuzian assemblages, animate and define the opening and closing of the novel. Wilde is therefore the engine of *Ulysses*: Without Mulligan and Murphy, there’s no reunion for Bloom and Molly, no masterpiece on the horizon for Stephen. In short, without Oscar Wilde, there is no *Ulysses.*

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Competing Interests

The author is also an editor of this Special Collection and has been kept entirely separate to the peer review process of their article.

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