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Moulded, Re-moulded, and Pieced Together The Origins of Joyce's *Ulysses*

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Abstract

Joyce's subject notebook (MS 36,639/3) at the National Library of Ireland (NLI), the earliest available document specifically devoted to *Ulysses*, contains pre-compositional annotations arranged under twenty subject headings. The notebook offers not only a unique glimpse into ideas for plot and characters that were later abandoned or reconceived, but also precious information about the conceptual frameworks guiding the author's hand while shaping his novel. In this sense, analysis of the topics "Leopold", "Stephen", "Weininger", and "Jews" is especially useful to reveal some interconnecting threads of Joyce's imagination.

Keywords: Antisemitism, Intertextuality, Jews, Manuscript Studies, Otto Weininger

1. The Locarno Notebook¹

In 1917 James Joyce is in Locarno, hoping the mild climate will benefit his health which is compromised by a new, severe bout of glaucoma. Here, in October, he buys a "Quaderno Ufficiale" of arithmetic "per tutte le Classi delle Scuole primarie e maggiori" and uses it to perhaps begin giving order to that very "bewildering mass of papers for *Ulysses*" that he told Ezra Pound he had been, by then, carrying around for years.² The Locarno notebook, better known as the "subject notebook" held at the National Library of Ireland (MS 36,639/3, sixteen

¹ A different version of this essay was first published in 2022 as "Un *Ulysses* che non abbiamo mai letto" (*Costellazioni* vol. 17: 95-110).

² This is from an unpublished letter by Joyce to Pound, dated September 14, 1916, in Ezra Pound Papers, YCAL MSS 43, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

sheets measuring 21.8x17 cm), today is recognized as chronologically the earliest available record of notes drafted by Joyce specifically for *Ulysses*.³

Since its discovery in 2002, this documentation has opened the way to invaluable glimpses into the novel's pre-compositional planning, revealing Joyce to be an even more methodical writer than was previously assumed: even in the course of his elaboration of *Ulysses*, he adopted a thematic organization of the material, as he did for *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in the so-called "Alphabetical notebook" (Cornell 25) and *Finnegans Wake* in "Scribbledehobble" (Buffalo VI.A). This subject notebook, in fact, collects notes in twenty separate sections according to subject, identified by as many titles that recall themes and characters from the work: "Simon", "Leopold", "Books", "Recipes", "???" (*sic*), "Gulls", "Stephen", "Theosophy", "Choses vues", "Irish", "Jews", "Blind", "Art", "Names & Places", "Jesus", "Homer", "Rhetoric", "Oxen", "Weininger", and "Words". The thematic articulation of the annotations is quite unusual in the genetic documentation of *Ulysses* as elsewhere the compositional process hinges on the Homeric titles of the episodes. Thus, the Locarno notebook reveals that Joyce worked on his novel following multiple conceptual foundations and multiple different logics and offers a new image of some of the underlying tensions in his creative journey.

Given its exceptional nature, the notebook soon attracted considerable scholarly attention. For instance, Wim Van Mierlo (2007) and Luca Crispi (2015) have identified various sources from which Joyce drew material – not only books, but also newspaper and magazine articles, as well as reference and popular works. Subsequent instances of reemployment of the notes have also been mostly tracked down, suggesting that few aspects of the subject notebook remain unexplored. Actually, the questions raised by this documentation are no less numerous than the answers it is capable of offering, and this contribution intends to examine some of them, focusing mainly on the notes collected in "Leopold", "Stephen", "Weininger", and "Jews".

2. *An Unknown Leopold*

Part of the notes in the Locarno notebook, which Joyce collects under the title "Leopold", explodes within the published text, scattering pieces in several places in the episodes "Hades", "Sirens", "Cyclops", "Circe", and "Eumaeus". This is the full entry:

wishes to write on barmaid's blank face (she has fever near her mouth) praises SD to his face, whose had him decked & knew the wife: angry with those who do not hunt Mollie: thinks there are too many in the world: thinks (Sykes) all those bits put in by monks. stays in bed 1 day per mensem, Lyons says: son to be dentist: bought Neave's Food for his son before birth: he thinks now where the devil is she? knobby knuckles, curious shape whose says: whose tells his fortune. Father provided for dog in will (NLI 3 [3])⁴

³ Wim Van Mierlo (2007) specifies that the compilation of the notebook can be dated with a certain precision because Joyce "purchased the copybook from D. Pellanda in Locarno" in 1917 and one of the annotations is taken from the *Frankfurter Zeitung* of October 16, 1917.

⁴ For the re-elaboration of the notes in *Ulysses*, in the order of the episodes: in "Hades", Bloom remembers for the first time his father's will (*U* 6.125-6) and thinks that funerals are "Too many in the world" (6.516); in "Sirens" he imagines writing on the inexpressive face of the barmaid (11.1086-87), who has a "fever" near her mouth (11.940). "Cyclops" contains mention of a dentist with the same surname as Bloom (12.1638) and "Neave's Food" for children (12.1652); Bloom's monthly indisposition is also joked about here (12.1659-60), although the insult doesn't come from Lyons. A prostitute who knows Molly appears on several occasions (e.g., *U* 12.1252-60; 16.710-5), and another predicts Bloom's future in "Circe" (15.3694-3702). In "Eumaeus", finally, Bloom praises Simon Dedalus in front of his son (*U* 16.260-1) and discusses "bits" of text probably inserted into ancient manuscripts by

There is nothing new about the compositional practice adopted by Joyce, who already in the process of writing *A Portrait* reemployed some character descriptions from *Stephen Hero* by redistributing them in fragments in various parts of the new novel. It is not the technique of reworking that is surprising, but rather the content: the notes included in “Leopold” do not seem to focus on any central aspect of the character of Bloom that we know today. To be specific, almost no part of this entry sounds foreign to the readers of *Ulysses* – elsewhere, the notebook also shows that Bloom was already imagined to be an “Irish [...] jew” (NLI 3 [17]). It is the specific combination of details proposed here that produces a quite estranging effect. In the published text, the above-mentioned thoughts and events merely “flesh out” rather than define the character’s image, surfacing primarily in three scenes that feature him inside public places (the Ormond Hotel Bar, Barney Kiernan’s pub, and the cabman’s shelter). Accordingly, Van Mierlo speculates, “it is likely that Joyce was early on planning a scene in a barroom or similar setting” (2007). Hence, it cannot be ruled out that three separate occasions in *Ulysses* when Bloom stops for refreshments were initially conceived as a single event, which later “shattered” into multiple sections of the novel.

Such conjecture, however, raises doubts about the nature of the annotations collected in the Locarno notebook: are they a general framework for *Ulysses*, notes for specific episodes, or a combination of both? Other entries in the notebook seem to contain a very preliminary study of topics to be covered. It is sufficient to consider the one annotation in “Homer” which is as generic as it is crucial to the novel: “Calypso = Penelope” (NLI 3 [26]). On closer inspection, even “Leopold” is framed by way of sketchy information about his household – the mention of his now-deceased father, his wife, and a son – as if it were a still rough conception of a character. Reasoning with the published text in mind, scholars sometimes identify “the wife” with “Mollie” (*sic*), although in the notes this connection is by no means automatic; perhaps Joyce was thinking of a different Bloom family composition since it seems unlikely the “son to be dentist” is the same Rudy of *Ulysses*, who passed away only days after his birth.

Indeed, to find an interpretive key to the notebook, we should move away from the diachronic perspective and forget for a moment what we know about *Ulysses*. Joyce’s 1917 conception of “Leopold” may have shifted radically over the course of his compositional process, to the point that it ended up in the interstices of the novel, scattered among the parts dealing with the public image of “our” Bloom. In other words, the notebook may describe a different Leopold than the one we know, a character we have never read about. Judging from what emerges from the notes, this Leopold is bold and defiant (he fantasizes about writing on an expressionless barmaid’s forehead), is ready to say things to people’s faces, shows impatience with an unspecified “she” (possibly his wife) and, confidently, rages at those who do not appreciate “Mollie’s” charm (her would-be admirers may be, at the same time, “too many in the world”).⁵

The Leopold of the Locarno notebook is fully immersed in relations with the female world, nearly surrounded by prostitutes, and, in few words, highly sexualized – suffice it to consider, for instance, the double meaning of “bits put in by monks”, apparently mentioned by Sykes.⁶

monks (16.781-82). All quotations from *Ulysses* are taken from the Gabler edition, 1986; references give episode and line number, following the conventions of Joyce scholarship.

⁵ As already pointed out, in *Ulysses* the expression refers to funerals; here, it could be understood almost in a metatextual sense, since Thomas Browne, one of the authors mentioned by Joyce in the section “Books” of the notebook (NLI 3 [5]), writes in *Religio Medici* (1642) that books are “too many in the World” (1902, 44).

⁶ In *Ulysses*, the double-meaning is lost: the text is transformed into “those bits were genuine forgeries all of them put in by monks”, referring to the interference of scribe monks who copied sacred texts (*U* 16.781-82). Claude Sykes was an actor, a friend of Joyce’s in Zurich.

At the same time, his paternal role is highlighted: he has a son with career prospects, a future as a dentist. In addition, he is seen from the beginning in connection with “SD’s” family, just as the character of “Stephen” comes into immediate relationship with “Mollie”:

objects to begin Mollie’s teaching on Friday. Thursday’s child has far to go. artist, makes little plays out of incidents, dreams of seeing himself, trying to recall some face instinctively imitates gestures of person. recognises voices (voice with voice of Jacob). Morning, go easy with the Lsd. evening spendthrift (12 n). Sees faces of those known in youth on strip of tapestry. (10 a) Argues with Synge of words. (10. a): meets consumptive: mimics Haines’ walk: (NLI 3 [11])

Even “Stephen” seems to have undergone significant changes. A striking instance is the mention of the “voice of Jacob”, which in the published text becomes “my voice, the voice of Esau” (*U*9.981): in *Ulysses*, Stephen is associated with the absent and silent Esau, while here it is suggested that, like Isaac, he would not allow himself to be misguided by a deceitful Jacob (see *Genesis* 27). In the notebook, Stephen seems the usurper rather than the usurped, a Proteus of fluid identity, defined by his ability to imitate or falsify – a “lovely mummer”, one might say (*U* 5.97).⁷ After all, even in the published text the character has imitative tendencies: in the library episode alone in “Scylla and Charybdis”, John Gordon noted no fewer than nineteen instances in which Stephen seizes what others have already written or said and exploits it to prove his own theories (2007, 504). According to Joyce’s notes, however, Stephen appropriates not only the words of others, but also their mannerisms and gestures; his instinctive reaction is to imitate, he seems particularly sensitive to nonverbal cues, and is endowed with great visual imagination. It is evident that “Thursday’s child has far to go”:⁸ the Stephen of the notebook seems to still be immature as an artist and as a person because he is involved in basic processes of learning about the world and decoding others, like those mechanisms that characterize a child’s development.

It is noteworthy that the subject notebook outlines a dynamic of opposition and compensation between the figures of “Leopold” and “Stephen”. Of the former we have a paternal image, defined by family and social interactions, sketched through events and actions, while the latter is child-like, characterized by descriptions of his inner life and mental processes. Already in the first notebook for *Ulysses*, Joyce was therefore thinking about a *discordia concors* or *coincidentia oppositorum* between the protagonists and reflected on the theme of the father-son relationship, which, as we will see shortly, he was probably developing through other routes as well.

3. Weininger’s “Jew” and Ulysses

Up to this point, I have focused on those elements, among the notes on “Leopold”, that contribute to outlining a masculine and fatherly figure. However, some annotations that go in the opposite direction cannot be overlooked: the most obvious is “stays in bed 1 day per mensem, Lyons says” (NLI 3 [3]), a derisive allusion to the fact that the character possesses a female corporeality. The contrast between Leopold’s male and female natures is obvious and almost paradoxical, but not unprecedented if seen in conjunction with other subjects of the notebook, namely, “Jews” and “Weininger”.

⁷ The sentence “makes little plays out of incidents” could be a reference to *Epiphanies*, mentioned also in “Proteus” (*U* 3.141). The notes on “Stephen” seem to focus on the faculty of assuming the appearance of others, a characteristic of the mythological Proteus after whom the third episode of *Ulysses* is named.

⁸ Part of a nursery rhyme that is repeated various times in *Ulysses*, as if to suggest Stephen’s future predicament as an exile (e.g., *U* 15.3687).

Wim Van Mierlo (2007) aptly shows that various annotations collected under the title “Weininger” derive from a lesser-known treatise by this Austrian philosopher, *Über die letzten Dinge* (1904; *On Last Things*, 2001). Although the Locarno notebook contains no clear evidence in this sense, it is plausible that Joyce also consulted and drew material from another, more famous work that the same author published in 1903, *Geschlecht und Charakter* (translated into English as *Sex and Character*, 1906). Here, Otto Weininger, himself from a Jewish family, claims to discuss Judaism as “eine Geistesrichtung [...] eine psychische Konstitution” (1920, 402),⁹ whereas he merely echoes strains of Wagnerism and registers an incoherent series of anti-Semitic (and misogynistic) clichés.

Much of what Weininger writes in chapter XIII is helpful to contextualize the seeming contradictions in “Leopold”. On the one hand, Weininger says that “Der Jude ist stets lüsterner, geiler, wenn auch [...] sexuell weniger potent, und sicherlich aller großen Lust weniger fähig als der arische Mann” (1920, 413).¹⁰ On the other, he states that “Es bereitet jedem, der über beide, über das Weib und über den Juden, nachgedacht hat, eine eigentümliche Überraschung, wenn er wahrnimmt, in welchem Maße gerade das Judentum durchtränkt scheint von [...] Weiblichkeit” (1920, 405-06).¹¹

It is easy, Weininger continues, to consider the Jew as more saturated with femininity than the Aryan. The premise of his entire argument is that Jews can be closely associated with women because “das tiefste Wesen der Weiblichkeit zum Ausdruck zu kommen schien, beim Juden sich in einer merkwürdigen Weise ebenfalls [...] finden” (1920, 406).¹² Clearly, both categories are perceived as spiritually and morally inferior to the Christian man and “as the embodiments of carnality and sexual peril” (Steinberg 1999, 68) – consequently, they are a source of deception, corruption, and perversion.

Like the Austrian philosopher’s “Jew”, Bloom is not only womanly, but also has “kein Bedürfnis nach dem Eigentume, am wenigsten in seiner festesten Form, dem Grundbesitze” (1920, 406),¹³ for he pays an annual rent for his residence at 7 Eccles Street. Furthermore, he expresses an unconventional conception of the State (Weininger 1920, 407-08; see *U* 12.1422-23), seeks a close father-son relationship (Weininger 1920, 412), is interested in empiricism and modern materialistic science (417) and has “[ein] große[s] Talent [...] für den Journalismus” (425).¹⁴

The question as to the role Weininger’s work plays in the composition of *Ulysses* is a long-standing one, which has been revived recently by the Locarno notebook itself. Among the first scholars to point out connections between Joyce and Weininger are Frank Budgen (1934, 53) and Richard Ellmann (1982, 463), whose ideas are later elaborated on and expanded by Erwin Steinberg (1999). More recent works suggest that the materiality of the manuscript has made tangible relationships that were – at least in part – already identified: Steinberg’s views regarding Weininger’s impact on *Ulysses* remain largely agreeable, although they were expressed before the subject notebook was found. Similarly, the annotations on “Theosophy” show that

⁹ Translated by Löb 2005, 274: “a cast of mind, a psychic constitution”.

¹⁰ Translated by Löb 2005, 281: “The Jew is always more lecherous, more lustful, than the Aryan man, although [...] he is less sexually potent and certainly less capable of any great lust than the latter”.

¹¹ Translated by Löb 2005, 276: “If one thinks about Woman and the Jew one will always be surprised to realize the extent to which Judaism in particular seems to be steeped in femininity”.

¹² Translated by Löb 2005, 276: “some of the most important points in which the deepest nature of femininity seemed to manifest itself are, strangely enough, also found in the Jew”.

¹³ Translated by Löb 2005, 277: “no real desire for property, least of all in its most solid form, landed property”.

¹⁴ Translated by Löb 2005, 289: a “great talent for journalism”.

Enrico Terrinoni is spot on when he suggests the existence of “un arcipelago di *dark erudition* da cui Joyce riesce a ricavare interessanti immagini, tecniche e strategie narrative” (2007, 17);¹⁵ however, it is not from the notebook that such reflections arose.

According to his brother Stanislaus, James Joyce was largely uninformed about Judaism, and only in 1908 did he begin to acquire basic notions about it and its rituals (see McCourt 2000, 219);¹⁶ it is plausible, therefore, that he was equally uninformed about literature with an anti-Semitic slant and that he found a useful compendium of ideas in the Austrian’s production. “The appeal of Weininger’s work”, in fact, “was not innovation but summation” (Gilman 1991, 133); the assumption regarding the femininity of the Jewish male, for example, has a long history and is linked to circumcision, as well as to fanciful beliefs widespread in the late nineteenth century that Jews fed on the blood of Christians to cure themselves of various ailments, “especially those associated with bleeding, such as male menstruation, and by extension phthisis” (Gilman 1995, 112-13).¹⁷ In “Jews”, Joyce writes precisely “refractory to phthisis” (NLI 3 [17]), showing that he did indeed draw on the initial “reservoir” of Weininger’s work, but that he also made it a starting point for new research and as a basis for further exploration.

In fact, the notes in “Leopold” and “Jews” are full of additional insights that Joyce derived from various sources, including direct experience of the *vox populi* of the of the first years of the twentieth century. It seems no coincidence that Leopold’s son had a future as a dentist: in the Jewish community of Dublin, many were “druggists, dentists and opticians” (O’Brien 1981, 109) and interest in this profession was growing steadily: “By the early 1930s”, Cormac Ó Gráda explains, as many as “four Jewish dentists had rooms on Dublin’s Harcourt Street” (2006, 84). Equally significant is the emphasis on Leopold’s involvement with prostitutes since at the time it was believed that mercenary love was handled almost exclusively by Jews (see Geller 2011, 108).

The section “Jews” includes various kinds of information, ranging from more general contents about the historical diaspora of the Jewish population to very specific facts. For example, from a newspaper article Joyce gathers data on a certain Isaac Marshall (NLI 3 [17]) who died by suicide, and then draws inspiration from it, as Luca Crispi explains, to define the story of Bloom’s father (2015, 73-74). Sometimes, Joyce employs unexpected sources, so unconventional as to raise suspicion that he deliberately (and sneeringly) privileges the most preposterous theories on Jews. This is the case with a rather odd question that might well have fit into “Ithaca”, “Have they centripetal gestures?” (NLI 3 [17]), which probably derives from an equally bizarre source: I believe it can be traced to the article “Physiologie: Les mouvements centripètes et centrifuges” by Gaëtan Delaunay, published in 1880. According to *The Popular Science Monthly*, this is a “curious study” in which the author postulates that arm movements “are rather centripetal than centrifugal with primitive or inferior races”, including Jews, and “rather centrifugal than centripetal with superior races; and the change from one to the other takes place as the race advances” (Anon. 1883, 136).

The “Jews” section also records plot ideas and allows glimpses of outlines of a *Ulysses* that we have never read. It shows, for example, that Joyce planned to introduce a story and character which were not developed later:

¹⁵ Trans.: an archipelago of dark erudition from which Joyce manages to derive interesting images, techniques and narrative strategies.

¹⁶ Incidentally, the Locarno notebook shows that Joyce was not well prepared even with regard to the history of Ireland, of which he summarizes some essential moments as “Irish” (NLI 3 [16]).

¹⁷ Again, contradictions in anti-Semitic imagery are evidenced: Jews were considered immune to various infective diseases, but, at the same time, were characterized as having a fragile constitution that separated them from the muscular and nationalistic Christians of the end of the nineteenth century.

dispute between Leopold Bloom and Lionel Harris, Irish & English jew (NLI 3 [17])

The attention Joyce placed on differentiating the Irish and English origins of the two Jewish characters proves Andrew Gibson's point that Bloom's character should be viewed in its more specific socio-historical declinations, overcoming the resistance of scholars "to think Jews and Irish together", since "[Joyce's] Jew is a historically specific Irishman. The anti-Semitism with which he deals is a historically and culturally specific anti-Semitism" (2002, 43). With Gibson, it is safe to assume that Joyce conceived *Ulysses* keeping in mind the traditional association, if not identification, between Irishmen and Jews, born of a shared past of persecution, demonization, and diaspora. At the level of text arrangement, in fact, the pages of the notebook themselves seem to re-propose a figurative alliance between "Irish" and "Jews", since these are the only two sections annotated on side-by-side sheets, the first on the verso of NLI 3 [16], and the second on the recto of the later [17], so that they run almost parallel.

4. *The Shape of Ulysses*

Apparently, Weininger's shadow looms over several aspects of the composition of Joyce's novel. The philosopher's explanation of Jewish "peculiarities" inspired some features of "Leopold" and maybe even some of "Stephen", since *Geschlecht und Charakter* too discusses "wie Jakob, der Patriarch, seinen sterbenden Vater Isaak belogen, seinen Bruder Esau hinter Licht geführt und seinen Schwieger Laban übervorteilt hat" (1920, 409-10).¹⁸ Weininger's influence on "Stephen" seems rather plausible, considering that *Über die letzten Dinge* provides the source of the German terms "*Nebeneinander*" and "*Nacheinander*" on which the young artist muses in the episode "Proteus" (U 3.13-15; NLI 3 [29]). Finally, the Austrian's discussion of social belonging among Jews in terms of "Scheinanpassung" (1920, 409), a sort of adaptive moulding, and "Plasmodium" (1920, 411; 2005, 280), a multinucleate amoeboid mass, bear close relationships with other imagery that Joyce re-employs in his notes and that is closely connected to his understanding of the writing process at large.

The "Jews" section registers an idea that Joyce seems to abandon definitively after transcribing it once among his notes for "Cyclops" in BL manuscript Add. 49975 (ca. 1919):

Golem, every 33 yrs, lets loose accumulated electric ideas of race (NLI 3 [17])

A figure of long memory and a symbol of the cultural image of Judaism, the Golem is not mentioned explicitly in any text of Joyce's production,¹⁹ but its presence would seem to remain palpable in *Ulysses*. I find it plausible that Joyce derived the aforementioned information from Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem* (1914), in which the well-known clay man is described as a spiritual disturbance: it gives body to the moral and mental instability of the entire Jewish colony, which is overextended every thirty-three years. The character Zwakh thus explains its origin:

Wie in schwülen Tagen die elektrische Spannung sich bis zur Unerträglichkeit steigert und endlich den Blitz gebiert, könnte es da nicht sein, daß auch auf die stetige Anhäufung jener niemals wechselnden

¹⁸ Translated by Löb 2005, 279: "how Jacob, the patriarch, lied to his dying father Isaac, deceived his brother Esau, and cheated his father-in-law Laban".

¹⁹ One of the meanings of the name "Shem" in *Finnegans Wake* is linked with the Golem; in this regard, see Gordon 1991, 93.

Gedanken, die hier im Getto die Luft vergiften, eine plötzliche, ruckweise Entladung folgen muß? – eine seelische Explosion, die unser Traumbewußtsein ans Tageslicht peitscht, um – dort den Blitz der Natur – hier ein Gespenst zu schaffen, das in Mienen, Gang und Gehaben, in allem und jedem das Symbol der Massenseele unfehlbar offenbaren müßte [...]. (1987, 51-52)²⁰

A product of collective consciousness (and depravity), Meyrink's Golem is associated with murder waves and other crimes. The very appearance of the creature is closely linked to anti-Semitic stereotypes, as it presents himself as

[...] ein vollkommen fremder Mensch, bartlos, von gelber Gesichtsfarbe und mongolischem Typus, [...] in altmodische, verschossene Kleider gehüllt, gleichmäßigen und eigentümlich stolpernden Ganges, so, als wolle er jeden Augenblick vornüber fallen, durch die Judenstadt schreitet und plötzlich – unsichtbar wird. (49-50)²¹

As the essence of Judaism, the creature seems to channel within itself not only the negative energies of the ghetto, but also the outward traits that were traditionally said to connote Jewish descent: he wears old fashioned clothes, walks strangely and, reflecting the widespread belief that Jews belonged to the family of Asian peoples, has Mongolian features and yellow complexion.

Especially these last two somatic features of the Golem prompt a foray into a different “subject” of the Locarno notebook, the section devoted to “Books”, where Joyce collects titles of works from which perhaps he intended to draw inspiration. Remarkably, these include “Shelley (Mrs): Frankenstein” (NLI 3 [5]). The monstrous protagonist of Mary Shelley's novel, Mellor notes, is “A yellow-skinned man crossing the steppes of Russia and Tartary”, whom “most of Mary Shelley's nineteenth-century readers would immediately have recognized [...] as a member of the Mongolian race” (2003, 174).

As is well known, the similarities between the Golem of Jewish mysticism and the creature imagined by Shelley are not limited to the colour of its complexion: both lack a name, have gigantic proportions, come to life through arcane knowledge, and present a danger to those around them. It is true that Shelley's creature, unlike the Golem of tradition, is of flesh and blood, but Victor repeatedly claims to have “moulded” him (e.g., 2018, 53) and clay is mentioned in the novel's Miltonian epigraph (“Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mould me man?”). Otherness is a further uniting trait between the Golem and the monster of *Frankenstein*, haunted and forced into a tormented journey, for the conception of which Shelley seems to have been influenced by her husband Percy's poem “The Wandering Jew” (1810). Many more examples and more details could be added regarding this web of connections, but I limit myself here to a few brief observations.

From Meyrink and Shelley to *Ulysses* the step is a short one: considering how Joyce sketched “Leopold” and “Stephen” in the Locarno notebook, probably the Golem and *Frankenstein* are instruments of a reflection devoted to a theme that will become central to the novel, the rela-

²⁰ “Just as, in thundery weather, the electric tension in the atmosphere will increase to a point past endurance, and eventually give birth to the lightning, may it not be that the whole mass of stagnant thought infecting the air of the Ghetto needs clearing from time to time by some kind of mysterious explosion, something potent in its workings. Something forces the dreams of the subconscious up into the light of day – like a lightning stroke – giving rise to an object that, could we but read its riddle, symbolises, both in ways and appearance, the mass-soul [...]” (Meyrink 1976, 28-9).

²¹ “[...] an utterly strange man, clean shaven, of yellow complexion, Mongolian type, in antiquated clothes of a bygone day; it [...] stalks through the Ghetto with a queer groping, stumbling kind of gait, as if afraid of falling over, and quite suddenly – is gone” (1976, 27).

relationship between fathers and sons. Of this relationship, Joyce already highlights the uncertain and problematic nature with the reference to the biblical episode of Isaac, Jacob, and Esau in *Genesis* 27 mentioned above (NLI 3 [11]). By extension, then, the problem of the relationship between father and son opens a dialogue with that which arises, at a different level, between author and work. As shown in the Golem, which comes to life when the letters “emet” (truth) are engraved on its forehead and ceases to live with the erasure of the aleph and transformation into “met” (death), the word enables creation, contains within it the possibility of life and death – the act of writing itself gives form to the formless. If we consider that the published *Ulysses* opens with a mock Eucharist, this idea is further reinforced and enriched as a model for the whole novel, “a text made of words, and the Word, that is in constant tension with the idea of a single body and text” (Erickson 2022, 126).

According to the Linati and Gorman-Gilbert's schemes, *Ulysses* associates a part of the human body with each of its episodes; to write or read the whole work also means to assemble an artificial creature, a body of words. Not surprisingly, Joyce speaks to Carlo Linati of his “damned monster-novel”, in which “is so to speak one person although it is composed of persons” (1975, 271). It is safe to assume that, in taking notes on Golem and *Frankenstein*, Joyce was considering as much the textual micro-levels as he was considering the overall structure, the “composition” of the novel (understood in the rigorously plastic sense of the term) that he was about to write, setting a direction for the subsequent work. This concept of a corporeal “monster-novel” first emerges from the Locarno notebook, as if Joyce perceived the creation of *Ulysses* as a mystical operation, a combinatorial ritual, or rather, a moulding practice which shifts onto the plane of literary creation what *Frankenstein* and the Golem legend describe regarding material physicality.

At the level of character, Joyce's constant disruption of subject boundaries does recall Weininger's image of Jews as a “Plasmodium” of similar individuals cast in the same mould (1920, 411). To the Austrian, lack of defence against alterity is one of the paramount issues with the nature of both Jews and women: they are, in his opinion, amorphous aggregates individualized through incorporation, who can only envisage a collective dimension because they are deprived of an intelligible self. Ever since his early work on *Ulysses* in the Locarno notebook, Joyce seems to pay hostile attention to what Weininger and his followers lamented or condemned as endemic plagues of their time and, perhaps by reaction, embraces the ideas of commingled identities and openness to the other, thus conceiving his novel as a celebration of the fact that “Jüdisch ist der Geist der Modernität” (Weininger 1920, 440).²²

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²² Translated by Löb 2005, 299: “the spirit of modernity is Jewish”.

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