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Ferenc Takács

Joyce and Hungary

The topic of this paper will be not so much Joyce's influence on Hungary as Hungary's and the Hungarians' influence on Joyce and their role in his works. This is, of course, a somewhat irreverent approach and all the more so as I am going to make rather large claims in an area which has been something of a lacuna in Joyce studies. On the other hand, irreverence can be a welcome corrective in discussing Joyce: a kind of awesome seriousness has characterized a large section of Joyce studies both East and West, where Joyce, the high priest of modernism, either commands the literary acolyte's blind obedience or, still in the same capacity, is seen as a paradigmatic case of modernist negativism and decadence. One way of avoiding at least part of the stentility of this deadly seriousness is to stress, irreverently, the 'joco'-element in Joyce's unique 'joco-seriousness': to see Joyce as a comic writer, a deviser of literary blasphemies, the master of linguistic buffoonery, in short, Joyce as the joker. (1

This stress on irreverence is further motivated by the exigencies of my topic: as will become, I hope, abundantly clear in the course of this paper, Hungary's influence on Joyce, or, to use a more neutral formula, the Hungarian theme in Joyce's work takes, in at least one of its important aspects, the form of jokes. They are, more particularly, 'in-jokes': that is, jokes intended for a limited audience sharing the necessary background with the writer to the exclusion of a larger audience, who are by consequence made to look foolish by not being among the group of the understanding elect. What I mean by Joyce's 'in-jokes' here is best made clear by way of illustration. In the passage of the "Cyclops" episode of *Ulysses* that describes, in a parody of pompous journalese, Dublin's farewell to Bloom or, as his name is given here in Hungarian, complete with the old and polite honorific, to "Nagyaságos uram Lipoti Virág", we are given the name of Bloom's destination: it is "the distant clime of Százharminczborjú-gulyás-Dugulás" ("Meadow of Murmuring

Waters"). On the surface this looks innocent enough; a Hungarian place-name and its English translation, given in brackets. For those, however, who are privy to Joyce's in-joke here, this turns out to be something rather less innocent: readers with sufficient command of Hungarian quickly realize that the Hungarian place-name is far from meaning anything like "Meadow of Murmuring Waters". What it means is, in fact, "Constipation caused by one hundred and thirty portions of veal goulash". The typography suggests translation; part of the in-joke is, of course, that it is pseudo-translation, while another, greater part of the joke is that it can be read as a sort of translinguistic pun: some subtle connection between "constipation" and "murmuring waters" is insinuated, with uproariously unsubtle results.

2) There is, of course, another in-joke here: "Meadow of Murmuring Waters" is the kind of place-name we get when old Irish place-names are rendered in literal English, with pseudo-poetic, often comic results. Flann O'Brien's title, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, a literal translation from the Gaelic *Snámh Dá Ean*, is a joke in this vein from 1939. So Joyce's hypothetical reader, fully equipped to appreciate the joke is somebody who is reading the book in English and able to pick up both the Irish and the Hungarian dimensions of the pun. A very select group indeed, though it might be worth considering the possibility that the book, in fact, contains a character who is so equipped. Leopold Bloom is an English speaker with some familiarity with Gaelic matters and with at least memories of Hungarian, his father's native tongue.

So this translinguistic pun establishes, in its cryptic way, a transcultural connection: Irish and Hungarian are telescoped here to hint at further connections and parallels between the cultures, histories and politics of the two countries. These have been numerous and in some cases highly symbolic. For example, Sir Roger Casement, martyr of the 1916 Rising, was the son of an officer of the British Army in India who in 1848 gave up his commission and fled to the assistance of Louis Kossuth and the Hungarian Revolution of 1848-49; he took Kossuth's appeal of help to Lord Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary. Or, to take an example more immediately relevant to Joyce, Arthur Griffith's book *The Resurrection of Hungary* used Hungary as a political metaphor for what was to be done about Ireland, just as a Hungarian book, written sixty years earlier, used Ireland as a political metaphor for those urgent polit-

ical and social reforms whose necessity Hungary was facing in the 1830s and the 1840s. This book was József Eötvös's travelogue from 1844, entitled *Szegénység Irlandban* (Poverty in Ireland). Joyce read Griffith's book and, as appears from a series of letters he wrote to his brother Stanislaus in 1906, was very sympathetic to its author's political position. Whether he was aware of Eötvös's book is difficult to say, though he certainly acknowledged the Hungarian connection in a sly joke of quite monumental ramifications. He made Leopold Bloom and his Hungarian background into something of an influence on Griffith's *Sinn Féin* and - *a fortiori* - on modern Irish nationhood: as John Wyse remarks in the "Cyclops" episode of *Ulysses*, "it was Bloom gave the idea for Sinn Fein to Griffith" and, later in the same episode, Martin Cunningham confirms that "it was he (=Bloom) drew up all the plans according to the Hungarian system." (Incidentally, and significantly, *The Resurrection of Hungary* was published in 1904, the year in which *Ulysses* is set in.)

Joyce's interest in Hungarian matters appears quite early in his career as a writer. Its first recorded manifestation is his 1899 essay on Mihály Munkácsy's painting, *Ecce Homo*. It is of course incidental, though in retrospect not without some 'epiphanic' significance, that Joyce's first piece of systematic thinking on the relationship of religion and art, a topic which was to occupy him throughout his life, was occasioned by the work of a Hungarian painter.

The next and this time more properly literary evidence of this interest and, also, the first instance of its symbolic transmutation in Joyce's work, is found in the short story "After the Race", first published in 1904 and later incorporated in *Dubliners*. Here, the cosmopolitan company of the racing-car drivers in the story contains, among Frenchmen and an American, a Hungarian participant in the race. He is called Villona; whether this is a name invented by Joyce as somehow Hungarian sounding or a distorted version of an actual Hungarian name Joyce picked up somewhere - something like Villányi could be an accurate form - is uncertain. What is probably more important is that the Hungarian driver plays a highly significant role in the short story. He is set apart from the group of the other drivers as much as their Irish companion for the day, Jimmy Doyle, whose ambiguous attitude of fascination and frustrated disillusionment with the *mondaine* world of international sophistication are the theme of the story. On a more symbolic level, this is an

encounter between Ireland and the world; Ireland, frustrated, backward, aspiring to all the things associated with luckier nations, is bitterly rebuffed during this encounter: the day peters out in a game of cards where, we may surmise, the French-American company is playing false, cheating Jimmy out of his money.

4) Villona, however, is a different case. He seems to have found himself in the French group of racers quite by accident; he does not take part in the card game and, later, leaves the cabin and spends the rest of the night alone on deck. He is an alien and an outsider in this company, just like Jimmy himself. At the same time, two distinct motivic threads attach to his character, which set him apart from the other characters in the story. One of these strains is concerned with bodily matters, primarily with eating: we learn that "he was in good humour because he had a very satisfactory luncheon"; later, he is "beginning to have a sharp desire for his dinner" (43). He is a kind of symbolic average sensual man, "an optimist by nature" (41) who finds the prospect of conviviality, of "supper, music and cards" really "delightful" (45). On the other hand, Villona's character is suffused by motifs of music in the story: on the way back from the race he keeps up "a deep bass hum of melody for miles of the road" (41); he possesses a "resonant voice" (44); he praises "the beauties of the English madrigal" (44), talks expertly on "the spurious lutes of the romantic painters" (44) and later, while the others are at their game of cards, he plays the piano. Uninhibitedly sensual and giftedly artistic, Villona is a symbolic counterpart of Jimmy Doyle, of Irish guilt and frustration; a visible embodiment of the young Irishman's secret and half-formed aspirations.

Also, we might note that the character of this Hungarian suggests an anticipation of those two archetypes with which Joyce is concerned in *Ulysses* and elsewhere. Here, in one character, we get a sketchy Bloom and a sketchy Stephen; the average man, defined by the body and its functions on the one hand, and the artist, governed by music, the purest and most spiritual form of art, so centrally important to Joyce.

In *Ulysses*, the Hungarian dimension is restricted to Bloom, the archetypal man of the body; Bloom, who we first see eating and, a little later, emptying his bowels. The body, its metabolism, its natural processes seem to appear in Joyce's imagination in a fairly regular conjunction with matters Hungarian; its frequency is significant and seems

to hint at a constant association in Joyce's mind. The joke I discussed earlier connected Bloom with "veal goulash" and "constipation"; later, in *Finnegans Wake*, the portmanteau "Hungulash" will elevate this connection to an even higher level of generality.

In *Ulysses*, the Hungarian in-joke becomes more substantial. It is partly linguistic: there is something like a dozen Hungarian words and phrases embedded in the text of the novel. This is, of course, part of Joyce's systematic universalism, that is, by the use of an unusually large amount of linguistic material foreign to the native medium of the work, violating the kind of linguistic propriety one associates with national literatures. The Hungarian matter in *Ulysses*, however, goes beyond the strictly linguistic aspect; apart from further puns, like the name of a certain "Countess Marha Virága Kisászony Putrâpesthí" in the parodistic roll-call of the "Cyclops" episode, we have Bloom himself and, with him, a more general Hungarian dimension in the work.

Bloom was born in Ireland while his father, Rudolf Virág, later Bloom, came from Szombathely, Hungary; also, his mother's father, Julius Higgins, was born "Karoly", and was thus a Hungarian who adopted an Irish name. In creating Bloom's character, Joyce had had some first-hand experience of Hungarians in Pola and Trieste, that Babel-like corner of early twentieth-century Europe, with its palimpsest of Italian, German, Slovene and Hungarian cultures and languages. He was particularly interested in Teodoro Mayer, son of a Hungarian-Jewish postcard-vendor, publisher of the newspaper *Il Piccolo della Sera*, Istrian irretist who later became a member of the post-war Italian senate. He was the epitome of all those paradoxes of the national principle Joyce found so deeply fascinating; his was the kind of mixture of national and supranational identities and loyalties Joyce portrayed in Bloom as something naturally given for him, and, similarly, what he identified in Stephen as a conscious choice, uprootedness and homelessness as a project and an aspiration. Bloom's 'natural' homelessness is, then, a metaphor for Stephen's self-imposed and 'artificial' homelessness; also, by way of Bloom's model, Teodoro Mayer, it is a characteristically Eastern European option. And it is a personal metaphor as well; if Joyce is Stephen, he is as much Bloom, in his supranationalism and homelessness.

We might care to visualize this dimension of the novel as a geographical metaphor. If we do, we will see the two extreme fringes, or

margins, of turn-of-century Europe: the actual setting of the book is Dublin, Ireland where "the next parish is Boston"; while the memory-setting of the novel, through Bloom and his ancestors, is Austria-Hungary. Bloom's mind is very much conditioned by his family's journey from this eastern fringe to the western one; writing *Ulysses*, Joyce had the memory of a very similar route he had traced in the opposite direction. All this yields a kind of paradoxical geography of life and art, author and work in Joyce and in *Ulysses*: Joyce exiled himself to the eastern fringe to write a novel about the western fringe; a novel about Bloom whose family left the eastern fringe for the western one. And if we add the biographical element and see Stephen as a younger Joyce, we can see that *Ulysses* is, to an extent, about Stephen's preparation for exactly the same kind of journey.

6) This is, incidentally, emblematic of an important general feature of the high, or classic, modernism of which *Ulysses* is in many ways a paradigmatic work. What I have in mind is the often-noted significance certain geographically and politically marginal areas of Europe acquire in this early twentieth-century period of 'making it new'. Ireland, Austria, Russia, etc. suddenly seem the countries from which much of the modernist impulse is springing; the fringe becomes important in ways on which the centre had an earlier monopoly. Now might we not say that Joyce's careful paralleling or fusion of two of these fringe areas, itself symbolic of Joyce's universalism, is a way of making a point, in a kind of emblematic foregrounding, about this newly acquired significance of the European fringe?

Hungary, as a fringe-area, is present also in *Finnegans Wake*, in the memory-setting of Earwicker's dream. Here, Joyce's universalism takes a different course; if in *Ulysses* it is symbolized, on the linguistic level, by a reaching-out into a multiplicity of existing languages, here the same impulse takes the form of the creation of a universal language, absorbing and telescoping a variety of national usages, with Hungarian among them.

Here some caution is due: words in *Finnegans Wake*, with their deliberately ambiguous orthography, offer an invitation to the reader to use his puzzle-solving ingenuity and imagination with an arbitrariness which, in turn, is certainly licensed by Joyce's implied purpose in creating his text. This means that there is no theoretical limit to our recogniz-

ing Hungarian words in the text, even where Joyce could not have possibly intended them; the text of *Finnegans Wake* is, in this sense, 'open' to any reading in any language, and we have Joyce's authorization to read whatever we want to read into the work. This is of course a welcome possibility as far as the ingenious and imaginative reader is concerned, though it may make a sober and reasonable cataloguing of Hungarian linguistic material in *Finnegans Wake* a despairing task. By the very nature of the text, no pedestrian criterion obtains for deciding whether a linguistic item is really 'present' in the text or not. Luckily, there are a few obvious cases, like "Hungulash", which I mentioned earlier; and "Bruda Pszths" can be easily recognized by a Hungarian as a pun on the name of his country's capital. On the other hand, to recognize, as was proposed, Hungarian words like *vénasszony* ("old woman"), *vigaszom* ("my consolation") or *vériszony* ("dread of blood") in Joyce's "venisson" is certainly a fascinating game; but it somehow seems intuitively wrong, unless we want to conclude that *Finnegans Wake* contains either an infinite or an optionally large number of Hungarian lexical items. The only attempt at a catalogue of this sort, made by Attila Fáj, professor at the University of Genoa, is certainly more modest; in Fáj's view, some three hundred lexical items would be a reasonable estimate.

Incidentally, it was Professor Fáj who, in an 1973 paper, proposed a Hungarian source for the overall structural idea of *Finnegans Wake*. In his view, the cyclic vision of history appearing in Earwicker's dream, or rather in the Biblical Adam's, shows, apart from the general Viconian implications, some significant similarity to *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*), the visionary morality play by the nineteenth-century Hungarian dramatist Imre Madách. The play, written in 1860, is Adam's dream of all future history, unfolding according to a cyclic pattern of renewed faith followed by disillusionment and collapse. Joyce may well have been familiar with Madách's work; Fáj points out that an Italian translation of the play appeared in Fiume in 1908, of which Stanislaus Joyce had a copy in his library, and Teodoro Mayer published an enthusiastic editorial on the play in *Il Piccolo dello Sera*.

If this is true, then the Hungarian dimension of Joyce's work acquires near-cosmic proportions: reading *Finnegans Wake* as a variation on a Hungarian national classic will of course warm quite a few Hungarian

hearts. Whether it *is* true is unfortunately highly doubtful. Joyce may have read Madách and may have used *The Tragedy of Man* as a kind of tangential support for his central idea in *Finnegans Wake*, though for a dream of Adam about all future history it would be advisable to look for a more obvious source, Cantos 11 and 12 of *Paradise Lost*. Madách certainly used this as a source and the fall of Adam and Eve in "Milton's Park" is of course the basic myth of *Finnegans Wake*. So I would argue for a common source and an interesting and in some ways significant similarity rather than for any direct influence of Madách's work on Joyce here.

But this is already an excursion into high seriousness. So let me end on a more "joco-serious" note; if my first illustration of a Hungarian pun in Joyce was concerned with eating and constipation, let me discuss a Hungarian in-joke in *Finnegans Wake* which is about drinking and micturition:

8)

(...)it came straight from the noble white fat, jo, openwide sat, jo, jo, her why hide that, jo jo jo the winevat, of the most serene magyansty az archdiochesse, if she is a duck, she's a douches, and when she has a feherbour snot her fault(...)

This is from "Shem the Penman", that is, from the chapter about Joyce himself; more particularly, about that Swiss white wine Joyce and his friends nicknamed the "orina di un'arciduchessa" or simply "arciduchessa" as it was pale, yellowish and noble. The text makes a visual image of this joke; the winevat appears as the "white fat" of the archduchess, the wine as her urine. Now, the Hungarian in-joke here is that the archduchess is, for some reason, a Hungarian one. While micturating, she repeatedly produces a sigh of contentment in Hungarian - *jo jo jo* meaning "it's good, good, good" -; she is a Hungarian person of royalty as *magyansty* is a portmanteau of "majesty" and "magyar", followed by Hungarian definite article *az*; and, finally, the urine/wine identification is made through Hungarian as *a feherbour* means, in a slightly different spelling ("a fehérbor") quite simply "the white wine".

Now, why this archduchess should be Hungarian I do not know. My tentative answer - and the conclusion of my paper - is that this Hungarian in-joke is again part of a more secret and more personal

aspect of the Hungarian motif in Joyce's work, where Hungary and Hungarians, apart from forming symbolic counterparts of issues in history, politics and nationhood, seem to constitute a system of objective correlatives in matters connected with the human body and more immediate sensuous processes. This is, if not the most important, at least the most vital, Hungarian contribution to Joyce, the man and his work.