A Palimpsestuous Reading of Bloom’s Appetite in Ulysses

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While recognizing that badly or crudely nourished men have achieved great things in the past, we affirm this truth; men think dream and act according to what they eat and drink. F.T. Marinetti

It is the purpose of this paper to reconsider Bloom’s appetite by focusing on how meat, specifically the inner organs of animals, is extremely tempting to Bloom. The word “palimpsest” in the title of this paper refers to a tradition in the Middle Ages that encouraged the reusing of parchments for economical (and sometimes political) purposes by washing or effacing the earlier pieces of writings on it. In the book Palimpsestes (1982, English translation 1997), Gerard Genette incorporated the concept of such practice in his critical and categorical discussions on intertextuality. Among the five types of textual transcendence he mentions, the focus of his argument is on what he called hypertextuality, or “any relationship uniting a text B to an earlier text A... upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not of commentary” (5). Genette schematically opposes Ulysses and Odyssey with Aeneid and Odyssey, claiming that Joyce tells the story of Ulysses in the manner other than Homer’s, while Virgil tells the story of Aeneas in the manner of Homer. Moreover, other critics have discussed how reality can be the palimpsestic text of fiction, or how reality is to some degree effaced or deformed or transformed into fiction. Most notably the critic Lilian Furst argues that in the process of fictionalization the referential is “fused with the textual and comes to acquire some quasi-autonomous” presence. As an example she mentions Dublin on Bloomsday and how “actual sights undergo fictionalization through appropriation into Ulysses, and then materialize with the status of a new reality” (115).

While keeping such discussions of intertextuality in mind, I apply the term “palimpsestuous” rather than palimpsestic in an attempt to reaffirm the highly inter-relational nature of the text. Some of the questions discussed in this paper are: in what way is Bloom ‘tracing’ the appetite of Antiphates? What is Bloom doing at the crucial hour of four p.m., and how does that instigate Bloom’s palimpsestuous ‘other union’?

CORRESPONDENCES AND COLONS IN THE PLAN

It would not make much sense to say that Bloom acts, as Marinetti would say, “according to” grilled kidney. On the other hand, descriptions concerning Bloom’s meals would foreground certain characteristics attributed to Bloom: how modest or extravagant a budget he has for meals, who he dines with (and by that what his social standing and connections are), how crude or
refined his palate is, whether he is a practicing Jew or simply Jewish by heritage, and more. Surely, what Bloom eats does govern his actions.

The “Lestrygonians” is the succulent food episode with the esophagus as the designated organ, according to the much discussed “Plan of Ulysses” published in 1930 with Joyce’s authorization by Stuart Gilbert. In this Plan, “Antiphates: Hunger,” “The Decoy: Food,” and “Lestrygonians: Teeth” are the attributes given to this episode in a column entitled Correspondences. In Odyssey Antiphates is the hungry king of the Lestrygonians; he eats Odysseus’s crewmates and demolishes all but the one ship Odysseus was sailing in. Like Antiphates Bloom is also eclectic about what he eats but is perhaps not as conspicuously cannibalistic; and yet, the chart seems to encourage us to be sentient of traces of Antiphates, rather than Odysseus or Aeolos or any of the other kings. In the Homeric version of Lestrygonians, Antiphates’s men “snatch” and “tear up” their dinner, but their teeth are not directly referred to, at least not in several of the English translations. In Joyce’s “Lestrygonians” there are some references to teeth, as when Bloom enters Burton’s and sees “[a] man spitting back on his plate: halfmasticated gristle: no teeth to chewchewchew it” (215). More references to teeth in the episode will be discussed later, but two things should be noted here. Firstly, Bloom’s appetite, if considerably modest in comparison with Antiphates, is uniquely visceral and contextualizes his interest in teeth. Secondly, although “Sirens” is a different episode with different symbols and correspondences allotted, there is perhaps because of the dinner scene a metonymical extension of teeth which figures as a non-cannibalistic Bloom who chews.

Leopold cut liverslices. As said before he ate with relish the inner organs, nutty gizzards, fried cods’ roes while Richie Goulding, Collis, Ward ate steak and kidney, steak then kidney, bite by bite of pie he ate Bloom ate they ate. (347)

Here Bloom and Goulding are, to say the least, biting (even if the verb “chew” is avoided). The connection between chewing and Bloom (though in a lesser way with Goulding) takes on a particular significance because as the narrative voice fluctuates between Bloom’s consciousness and an unclaimed observing voice (but not Goulding’s), it does not distinguish the shift from physical mastication to internal cogitation. Both acts deducible in meaning from the same word “to chew” are merged in the narrative. Examples of this merging appear in paragraphs in which the first sentence begins with reference to the physical aspect of Bloom eating, and then is continued with a succession of Bloom’s internal monologue.

In liver gravy Bloom mashed mashed potatoes. Love and war someone is. Ben Dollard’s famous. Night he ran round to us to borrow a dress... (348) Bloom ate liv as said before. Clean here at least. That chap in the Burton, grummy with gristle. No-one here... (349)

The reader is able to keep track of the fact that Bloom is eating at all by such interspersed references that are interwoven into an episode narrated mostly in some form of Bloom’s consciousness. What Bloom plays over in his mind as he grinds the bacon and kidney with his teeth is nothing other than the subject that is eating him throughout the day: Boylan’s whereabouts at 4 p.m. The “Lestrygonians” is set at lunchtime, or 1 p.m., but the chewing is a
motif that continuously appears at dinner as well. “Lestrygonians: teeth” is a motif carried well into “Sirens,” thus offering one interpretation of this still elusive clue paired off in a colon: beware of chewing scenes for they will reappear. But of course, innumerable motifs recur without having sandwiched a colon and without being mentioned in the Plan.

The meaningful uncertainty of the colons injected in the keywords in the Plan for this episode raises more questions on various levels of narrative. If the colon is to be translated as ‘is’ and food ‘is’ the decoy, for whom is it a decoy? The naive reader? Will the “sophisticated” reader, or what some critics have named the naïve reader reading a second time, be better equipped to detect or not fall for the decoys scattered across the text? Does food, or the description of food which assumes a considerable portion of the text of the “Lestrygonians,” function as a place or space into which unsuspecting beings are lured for capture? Or is food “the decoy” regardless of the literary competence of the reader, regardless of some ulterior motive of the unreliable, constantly shifting narrating voice? Even if we restrict the discussion to some diegetic level in which Bloom arguably exists, or that realm which Thomas Pavel refers to as the “possible world”, the question of for whom and how food is “the decoy,” remains.

THE THREE MEALS

It is necessary at this point to go over the basic information regarding Bloom’s three meals: what he eats, when, where, and with whom. In the Calypso episode set around eight am, he cooks himself (and for Molly) breakfast at home. The kidney he has just procured at Dulgacz’s is dropped in sizzling butter sauce and sprinkled with pepper, and eaten with gravy, buttered bread, and tea. He eats by himself, or rather, with his m[?]k[?]gnowing cat as he reads a letter from his daughter Milly.

Lunch in contrast is eaten with company, around one p.m. in the “Lestrygonians.” Having set his foot inside The Burton on Duke Street, Bloom chooses to eat elsewhere. The Burton reeks of pungent meat juice, sawdust, cigarette smoke, men’s beery piss, the stale of ferment; the disgusting eating habits of men, men, men annoy him considerably. In need of a pretext to leave without ordering, Bloom pretends to look for someone (possibly Boylan) who is obviously not there. He then walks to a more “moral pub” (217) or to Davy Byrne’s where he orders a glass of Burgundy and Gorgonzola cheese sandwich. The food turns out to be satisfactory, for his “midriff... yearned more longingly, longingly” (220). Note, however, that his lunch is not completely free from the pungent stimulus altogether: “[f]resh clean bread, with relish of disgust, pungent mustard, the feety savour of green cheese” (220). For Bloom, pungency is both the cause of aversion and appeal. He rebukes The Burton for its pungent smell of meat, and yet will relish a dish of grilled mutton kidney “which g[i]ve to his palate a fine tang of faintly scented urine” (65). As is referred to more than once in the text, Bloom has an almost fetish inclination for the inner organs of beasts and fowls; nutty gizzards and liver slices fried with crust crumbs are some of his choice dishes.

The third meal of the day reinforces the image of his preference for organs, as Bloom has cider, mashed potatoes, bacon and liver slices. His companion, Richard Goulding, has whiskey, steak, and kidney pie. The dinner scene is set around four p.m., a time slot allotted to the “Sirens” according to Joyce’s chart. Four p.m. is the expected time of Molly’s afternoon affair,
and as the hour approaches Bloom is more preoccupied with the whereabouts of Blazes Boylan. See me he might, Bloom says to himself as he enters Ormond Hotel with Richard Goulding. The two of them have coincidentally met, and have just exchanged greetings outside the hotel.


It is due to this nonchalant and chance meeting with Goulding, this impulsive dialogue (with Bloom’s silent monologue interjected) that decides for Bloom where he will be eating that evening. There is no time now, as he did in the morning, to dwell on which butcher to go to for fresh meat because it is a Thursday. Nor is there time to complain about a restaurant’s sanitary condition. The hour is approaching. He cannot be or eat at home. The pretext which saved him before (i.e. that of looking for a particular someone who is not there) is useless now, with Boylan there, inside Ormond.

FOUR PM: BLOOM CHEWS

Dinner, however, is not the only meal in which we find Bloom particularly anxious about time. At breakfast, Molly tells him not when but simply that Boylan is “bringing the programme” (76). She then asks him when Dignam’s funeral is, to which Bloom can only answer “Eleven, I think... I didn’t see the paper.” The exact time for both events is left hanging in his mind, unresolved. The breakfast episode meaningfully ends with six consecutive Heighho’s, finally indicating, along with a sense of exhaustion, the time which is a quarter to nine. During lunch at Davy Byrne’s, Bloom “raise[s] his eyes and me[ets] the stare of a bilious clock. Two. Pub clock five minutes fast. Time going on. Hand moving. Not yet” (219). Note that it is a “bilious” clock that, having been personified, stares back at him. The adjective evokes a clock that is “characterized by, or experiencing gastric distress caused by sluggishness of the liver or gall bladder.” This clock is very likely “choleric, wrathful, peevish, ill-tempered.” In short, the clock is anxious, and Bloom duly so.

The question that must be reconsidered here is: what is Bloom doing at the climactic hour of four p.m.? That he is having dinner with Goulding at Ormond is obviously one explanation; but surely this does not yet signify that Bloom is already “chewing” on something. At the time the “Clock whirred... Clock clacked” at the Ormond, both Bloom and Goulding have not yet ordered; they are still walking and are about to take a table near the door. If we read closely the narration just before and after the four o’clock clacking, Bloom figures as someone with a keen interest in the dialogues taking place in the bar. By sound or by sight, Bloom learns that Boylan has pitched a coin but that Lenehan wants him to stay, and that Miss Douce then drops the coin noisily into the cash register. The whirring of the clock coincides with the clanging of the coin. Boylan is heard asking “What time is that? ... Four?” (342) to which Bloom finishes the sentence with a silent “O’clock.” Just how much of this Bloom is able to see for himself is left to the reader’s interpretation, and whether the narrating voice belongs to Bloom or to something between an intra- and extradiegetic narrator is difficult to assess. In spite of this stylistic
uncertainty, Bloom does not stop “talking”; the movements of Miss Douze and others including Goudling’s bag, are given to the reader as information that Bloom has registered. Bloom is paying attention not only to what comes out of Boylan’s mouth, but to what is expressed with the mouth and other parts of the face. That Boylan winks and drinks, that Lenehan drinks and grins, or that Miss Douze’s lips are not shut are all registered in Bloom’s mind.

What Bloom is doing at four o’clock is supposedly suggested by Bloom himself earlier on, on his way towards Davy Byrne’s for lunch. “Never know whose thoughts you are chewing,” Bloom says to himself. This line appears as his thoughts on a future communal kitchen come to a close. “Might be feeding on tabloids that time. Teeth getting worse and worse” (217). Don Gifford notes that these tabloids refer to pills “after the commonplace science-fiction vision of the synthetic diet of the future” (178). Bloom’s logic is that with time teeth will no longer be chewing anything remotely visceral or sinewy. This is doubly ironic. The grammatical construction of Bloom’s thoughts imply that Bloom registers this deteriorating process as happening already in his time (and hence applicable to him). Even his preference for internal organs of beasts and fowls does not give him a set of teeth comparable with that of Antiphates, a prototype of the kind of appetite Bloom has which over the years was neutralized, lessened in degree. The fact that as his thoughts drift towards a future kitchen, the image evoked is the culinary need of the ancient Antiphates. In comparison, when Bloom chews, he chews on things much softer. The idea of food being some sort of decoy reappears in the text of the “Sirens,” in the manner of Bloom’s interior monolog: “Decoy. Soft word” (329). If we take the liberty of interpreting this literally, Bloom is in short chewing on a word rather than visceral organs. Indeed, at four p.m., Bloom is eschewing the words of Boylan and the others exchanged in the bar without their noticing it.

Bloom faithfully writes over Antiphates’s tactic, and employs a decoy that disguises the real motive for being within (if not spearing range then within) hearing range of his game. But Bloom is no “apostolic successor” of the Lestrygonians king; by all means Bloom is not out “to catch” Boylan to eat him. Antiphates’s decoy, his daughter, helps to draw the credulous crewman closer to him. Bloom’s decoy on the other hand helps to position himself closer to Boylan. The modern, passive, and omnivorous Bloom has almost opposite qualities of his palimpsestuous, intertextual other; paradoxically, the attributes of Antiphates are foregrounded rather than effaced.

FOUR PM: THE HOUR OF BLOOM’S UNION IN SILENCE

In the above section I have looked at the scene where Bloom is attentive to Boylan’s movements and articulations at four p.m. just. Soon after this incident Bloom and Goulding order their dinner, and Pat duly serves them. The time is supposedly still four-something. They begin to eat. Bloom is no longer chewing in the mind only, for he has bacon and liver slices to bite down on. If the dinner scene is examined with the “food: the decoy” schema of the “Lestrygonians” episode in mind, four p.m. can be read as the hour embedded with a different decoy from the one already mentioned. In literary discussions elsewhere, Bloom has often been paired or ‘doubled’ with Odysseus, Stephen, Joyce himself; but Bloom and Richard Goulding is the pair to be discussed here.
I have already raised the question of what Bloom is doing at four p.m.; however, I would now like to suggest, in considering the same question, that four o'clock is the hour in which Bloom finds another other. This is the hour in which he has just witnessed Boylan go off to presumably “visit” Molly. Under such circumstances, what does Bloom do? He stays for a princely dinner which complements “a marriage in silence.”

Pat served uncovered dishes. Leopold cut liverslices. As said before he ate with relish the inner organs, nutty gizzards, fried cods’ roes while Richie Goulding, Collis, Ward, ate steak and kidney, steak then kidney, bite by bite of pie he ate Bloom ate they ate.

Bloom with Goulding, married in silence, ate. (347)

Much of this passage has been referred to in this paper already, but the focus here is on the phrase “married in silence.” This union takes place in silence for practical reasons. Not only are the two men’s mouths full, this is a union that Blooms feels does not need to be confirmed by any religious authority nor for that matter, by any third party. Their feelings must either be mutual, or one of them (Goulding) knows nothing about it. Consequently, the very fact that it is conducted “in silence” gives the marriage a doubly figurative status. It has only taken place on a unvoiced, monologic level of language and is therefore not confirmed by the other party involved; the marriage is simply a figure of speech expressing the bliss aroused by eating a “dinner fit for princes.” At the same time, that the words “married in silence” were ‘articulated’ opens the way for a figurative, metaphorical interplay of words. This pseudo-marriage evokes other marriages of the past and even of another pseudo-union possibly taking place concurrently under the Bloom’s roof.

Coincidentally, this ‘union’ between Molly and Boylan is entwined around another act of eating as well, as can be deduced from the crumbs of potted meat on the bed later found by Bloom. The crumbs, or leftover food are in themselves visible traces of the affair which took place, the bed linen being the functional palimpsest which awaits a cleansing of the traces left behind. Food is no longer the decoy but the palimpsestuous sheet is, for decoy in its figurative sense proposes to be “a place in which persons are enticed to the profit of the keeper.” The linen, and metonymically the bed, belongs to none other than Molly.

As opposed to the Molly-Boylan relationship, the one between Bloom and Goulding remain on a strictly linguistic level. Perhaps for that reason it seems somewhat too schematic to discern some hidden homosexual propensity in Bloom based over this dinner scene. Bloom’s union with Goulding requires no rewriting of marital documents, and yet it arguably carries a palimpsestic quality. As was briefly mentioned at the very beginning of this paper, Gerard Genette in Palimpsestes claims that a palimpsest is about “uniting a text B... to an earlier text A.... upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not of commentary. The use of the metaphoric “grafted” and of the negative determination underscores the provisional status of this definition”(5). Bloom is able to conceive of another union without much time or preparation perhaps because he is hungry, and hungry for a palimpsestuous union. Bloom’s second and silent union is most certainly a provisional one, as it is destined to last only as long as the convivial aroma and taste of their dishes. This makeshift union is indeed affixed or grafted “in silence,” without any intervening voices at whatever level of diegesis.
CONCLUSION

In this paper I have employed the term "palimpsestuous" to re-examine the information given in the Plan of Ulysses, especially that given under the "Correspondences" column for the episode dubbed the Lestrygonians. There seem to be traces of Antiphates (rather than Odysseus) in Bloom's visceral appetite, which contextualizes Bloom's if modest obsession with teeth and chewing in the mealtime episodes. Certain palimpsestuous, intertextual qualities are visible in Bloom, and in effect the attributes of Antiphates are at times foregrounded rather than wiped away. The extra-textual information in the Plan with its frequent use of colons is at times confusing and misleading, itself functioning as a decoy for the reader. The more one pays attention to them, the more intertextual and layered in meaning they seem to become.

Other than the three meals discussed in this paper, Bloom does not eat much. In the "Circe" episode he is walking around with a parcel of crubeen and trotter which he is after a while no longer happy to have. "And this food? Eat it and get all pigsticky. Waste of money. One and eightpence too much" (580). He gives them away to a mastiff and hence is rid of them for good. Bloom is then seen offering some chocolates to the prostitutes at Bella Cohen's, and one of them called Zoe 'offers' some back to him. This he does put into his mouth, and mutters (silently) about how color can influence the taste. For Bloom, physical chewing is always concurrent with the chewing in the mind; he eats, therefore he thinks. A rather heavy breakfast shows his inclination for the inner organs of beasts, and lunch gives away his preference for both sanitation and pungence. Dinner, which he eats at the climactic hour of Boylan's expected visit to Molly, is not only the time to send kidney down his esophagus but to eschew soft decoys, the image of pseudo-union(s). That the crumbs of the potted meat are left on the linen on Molly's bed is symbolic not only of the affair but of Bloom's palimpsestuous need to cleanse the traces left behind. But before that, Bloom himself ventures a somewhat grante and in that respect a palimpsestuous union highly provisional in nature, a union which is affixed "in silence."

Notes


2 Cf. Hugh Kenner, Dublin's Joyce (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) 226-227. We also ought to keep in mind that there are two extant schemata by Joyce, the one he sent to Carlo Linati in 1920 and another to Jacques Benoist-Mechin in 1921 which Stuart Gilbert then published. For a discussion on how the two timetables differ, see Don Gifford's "Introduction" to Ulysses Annotated (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 2-3.


4 Oxford English Dictionary (Second Edition) on Compact Disc. 1.a. To crush, bruise, and grind to
pulp, by the continued action of the molar teeth, with the help of the tongue, cheeks, saliva. 3.c. To consider or examine deliberately.


7 In Homer’s Odyssey, the Lestrygonians attack Odysseus’s crew with spears among other things: “They speared the crew like fish and whisked them home to make their grisly meal.” From The Odyssey translated into English by Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1997) 234. Perhaps just another one of those Joycean ‘coincidences,’ but Homer’s Lestrygonians also throws rocks, and the first words of Joyce’s Lestrygonians episode are “Pineapple rock.” As Matthew Hodgart points out, “Bloom is thinking about food and rock, as in ‘Brighton rock’, means hard candy; but it also means the foundation of the Temple, proleptically the foundation of the Christian Church.” Hodgart draws a connection with the famous pun: ‘thou art Peter (i.e. rocky) and on this rock’ the Church would be found. See “Ulysses,” James Joyce (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) 94. We should also keep in mind that the “art” of this episode is architecture.

8 Cf. Peter Brooks, Reading for the Plot (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998) 63. Brooks is referring to Stephen’s theological musing on fatherhood. Brook’s argument focuses on the issue of paternity, the process in which young orphaned characters in nineteenth-century novels discover his choices in relation to the wisdom of older figures. The term “apostolic succession” in itself refers to the doctrine that authority in the Christian Church is derived from the Apostles through an unbroken succession of bishops.

OED, decoy(n) 2.

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