

## Joyce, Beckett & the Homelette in the *Poêle*

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'Mon foie, you wish to ave some homelette, yes, lady! Good, mein leber! Your hegg he must break himself. See, I crack, so, he sit in the poele, umbedimbt!'  
James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits...A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life* (James 1890, 239).

When William James coined 'stream of consciousness' in *The Principles of Psychology* above, he did so with respect to a psychological attitude towards cognition which he terms '*a thoroughgoing dualism*. It supposes two elements, mind knowing and thing known, and treats them as irreducible. Neither gets out of itself or into the other, neither in any way *is* the other, neither *makes* the other' (James 1980, 218). James Joyce's adaptation of the stream of consciousness as a literary device in *Ulysses* likewise serves to divorce the inner realm of his protagonists from the world of known objects. Most notably, Stephen Dedalus' interior monologue calls upon the idealism of Bishop Berkeley in reducing the world to mere 'thought through my eyes' (Joyce 1992a, 45). The stark division Joyce draws between the inner and outer worlds has proven ideal fodder for twentieth century examinations of alterity. More recently, Jean-Michel Rabaté's *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism* considers Joyce's entire corpus in terms of a fundamental dichotomy between 'egoism' and

'hospitality,' the latter characterized as 'openness to strangers' (Rabaté 2001, 154). A more philosophical conception of the divide is evidenced in Rabaté's contention that one goal of *Ulysses* 'is to bridge the gap between self and world, inner and outer values that Galileo and Descartes had opened under our feet' (2001, 60). This paper extends this notion with an analysis of Descartes' direct influence upon Joyce's *Ulysses*, whilst further tracing this influence into both *Finnegans Wake* and the early works of Samuel Beckett.

It takes for its starting point the famous youthful dreams or prophecies of Descartes, which seemingly permeate the interior monologues of both Stephen Dedalus and Molly Bloom. The paper is structured, quite simply, about an exposition of two words contained in its introductory quote, (i) the *poêle* and (ii) the *homelette*. Its minor task is to identify the likely Cartesian source underpinning Joyce's use of both. More importantly, it highlights Cartesian dualism as one of Joyce's fundamental philosophical principles, and one consistent with the knowing/known divide that has characterized the stream of consciousness since its psychologically oriented inception.

### **The *poêle***

To the best of my searching, the only article yet to pinpoint the possible presence of Descartes in *Ulysses* is Philip Sicker's 1984 JJQ publication, 'Shades of Descartes: An Approach to Stephen's Dream in *Ulysses*.' Sicker's point of departure is the following: 'Heretofore, no one has commented upon the striking similarities between Stephen's thrice recollected dream and the prophetic tripartite dream of another youthful intellectual, René Descartes' (Sicker 1984, 7). The detailed delineation of the dreams in question, occurring on the night of November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1619, can be found

in Adrien Baillet's *Vie de Descartes (Life of Descartes)*, published in 1691. Baillet's abbreviated 1692 version, which, unlike its predecessor, was translated into English, does not include such details as the presence of a melon which Joyce clearly drew upon. For an extended English translation of the dreams, see A. Browne's 'Descartes's Dreams.' What is provided below is but a brief summary of their content.

As recounted in *The life of Monsieur Des Cartes*, the 1693 translation of Baillet, Descartes 'having found that day the Foundations of the wonderful Science' fell by his stove into a dream reverie (Baillet 1693, 35). The dream account continues that 'he supposed he discerned through their shadows the tracks of the Path which God had chalked out for him' (Baillet 1693, 35). From this point on, the pursuit of truth would be Descartes' sole occupation. In the first dream, Descartes walks amidst a street of ghosts, before being caught up in a whirlwind and blown violently by an evil demon against the walls of a Church. He is greeted by a man in a courtyard, who 'told him that if he wanted to go and see Monsieur N., he had something to give him. M. Descartes imagined that it was a melon which had been brought from some foreign country' (Browne 1977, 259). On awaking from this first dream, Descartes prays to God for forgiveness for his sins, 'which he realised could be heinous enough to draw down the thunderbolts of heaven on his head' (Ibid, 260). As tradition has it, the proposed compensatory trip to our Ladies shrine at Loreto on the West coast of the Aegean was carried out in 1623. The second short dream amounts simply to Descartes hearing an explosive sound, 'which he took for a clap of thunder,' and thence awaking to see 'sparks of fire scattered about the room' (Ibid, 261). In the third and final dream, Descartes leafs through two books, the first a Dictionary, and the second a poetry collection entitled the *Corpus Poetarum*. 'He had the fancy to read something in it; opening the book, he fell upon the verse *Quod vitae sectabor*

*iter?* (What path in life shall I follow?)' (Ibid, 262). The symbolism of the second poem mentioned, the Seventh Idyll of Ausonius beginning with *Est & Non* (Yes and No), is difficult to decipher but the relevance of *Quod vitae sectabor iter?* to the night that Descartes devoted his life to philosophy needs no elaboration. The dream episode ends with Descartes 'wondering whether what he had seen was a dream or a vision (*songe ou vision*),' and engaged in a notably Freudian interpretation of his own unconscious (Ibid, 262).

As Sicker notes, the best evidence for Joyce's use of the above is the unlikely coincidence of Stephen's dream of a watermelon, of which we are first made aware in Episode III.

After he woke me last night same dream or was it? Wait. Open hallway. Street of harlots. Remember. Haroun al Raschid. I am almosting it. That man led me, spoke. I was not afraid. The melon he had he held against my face. Smiled: creamfruit smell. That was the rule, said. In Come. Red carpet spread. You will see who (Joyce 1992a, 58-9).

Stephen returns to thoughts of his watermelon dream in Episode IX, and its third appearance in the phantasmagoria of Bella Cohen's brothel (Episode XV) ensures that Stephen's initial recollection of a 'Street of harlots' likewise takes on the status of a *vision*, rather than a mere *songe*. Sicker notes that the melon 'has no particular mythic designation' and thus it is the recurrent watermelon in *Ulysses* more than any other detail that 'points to Descartes' influence' (Sicker 1984, 17). He proceeds tentatively to trace possible allusions to Descartes' dream right up to Episode XVII, the penultimate appearance of Stephen and Bloom. Bloom himself becomes, for Stephen, the man from 'some foreign country' and the melon he offers is transformed into Molly, or more specifically into 'the plump mellow yellow smellow melons of her rump, on each plump melonous hemisphere, in their mellow yellow furrow, with

obscure prolonged provocative melonsmellonous osculation' (Joyce 1992a, 867). Joyce's seemingly facetious sexualizing of Descartes' melon works on a more serious note to divert us to what one might rightly conclude to be the moment that modern philosophy began. Descartes, at twenty three years of age, makes a fitting foil for both Stephen Dedalus and Joyce who, at twenty two, were making similarly life altering decisions in the summer of 1904. From our point of view, however, it is not the biographical overlap but the similar philosophical considerations that are of note. These were partly minimized in Sicker's account, as he failed to note some further references to Descartes' dreams in *Ulysses* which allow us to conclude more confidently that it is ultimately theoretical questions of subjectivity that are of concern to Joyce.

Sicker's account, we have said, take us up until Episode XVII, in which Stephen and Bloom return to No.7 Eccles Street before their separation. The Cartesian dreams, however, continue into the next and final Episode. Within Molly's unpunctuated monologue, the following thoughts appear in quick succession.

I felt lovely and tired myself and fell asleep as sound as a top the moment I popped straight into bed till that thunder woke me up as if the world was coming to an end God be merciful to us I thought the heavens were coming down about us to punish when I blessed myself and said a Hail Mary....the candle I lit that evening in Whitefriars street chapel for the month of May....he says your soul you have no soul inside only grey matter because he doesnt know what it is to have one yes (Joyce 1992a, 876).

Given that Joyce was utilizing Descartes' dreams as a template throughout *Ulysses*, Molly's likewise awaking from a thunderclap to pray to the Virgin Mary for protection seems more than coincidental. She does not pinpoint Loreto as a place of potential pilgrimage, but it is notable that, in Episode XIII, Gerty MacDowell derives

the scene from St. Mary's Star of the Sea Church by Sandymount Strand, whilst listening to the benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament conducted by reverend John Hughes S. J.

in that simple fane beside the waves, after the storms of this weary world, kneeling before the feet of the immaculate, reciting the litany of Our Lady of Loreto, beseeching her to intercede for them, the old familiar words, holy Mary, holy virgin of virgins (Ibid, 460).

Note again that the pilgrimage site follows subsequent to 'the storms of this weary world.' Rather than Sicker's attempt to isolate the dreams in Stephen, we are instead presented with Descartes' dreams as a structuring device that informs the bulk of the many dream references throughout the text, notwithstanding the character involved. More interesting, however, than Descartes' thunderclap being utilized to the same extent as the melon, is Molly's reference to the lighting of the candle. For it is the close proximity of the melting candle which allows us to transcend Descartes' youthful dreams, and find our footing more firmly in the famous wax experiment of his later philosophy.

When Descartes established mind/body dualism with the 1637 publication of his *Discourse on the Method*, he did so in the form of a first person narrative, the setting of which was the *poêle* or stove-heated room of his 1619 vision. Discourse Two begins:

At that time I was in Germany...the onset of winter detained me in quarters where, finding no conversation to divert me and fortunately having no cares or passions to trouble me, I stayed all day shut up alone in a stove-heated room, where I was completely free to converse with myself about my own thoughts (Descartes 1985, 116).

Baillet identifies the night in question as November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1619. In the later 1641 treatise, *The Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes is found ‘sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing gown’ (Descartes 1984, 13), and he states overtly in the ‘Preface’ that we are being offered a continuation of the earlier *Discourse* (Ibid, 8). As such, these two foundational works of modern philosophy are set on the same night as the youthful dream revelation, a fact which more than justifies Joyce’s extensive use of the dreams. Descartes’ metaphysics, in essence, did not evolve beyond ‘the stove-heated room where I had had all these thoughts’ (Descartes 1985, 125), and in holding the melon so firmly to our faces, Joyce is ultimately pointing us to the Cartesian theoretical vantage point which he built into his text. Leopold Bloom’s contention above that ‘you have no soul inside only grey matter’ could just as well comment upon Christian theology as Cartesian dualism, but its proximity to the Cartesian dream which precedes it makes the reference more probably to the Second of Descartes’ *Meditations*. Having doubted the existence of his body, external objects and God, Descartes finally comes to the axiomatic truth that ‘I am, I exist, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind’ (Descartes 1984, 17). The argument which follows, aimed at establishing his essence as a thinking soul divorced from the corporeal body, uses the example of a ‘piece of wax’ (Ibid, 20), Just as the wax, when melted beyond recognition, ‘is perceived by the mind alone’ (Ibid, 21), so the subject is an enduring soul, and not essentially a set of changing corporeal characteristics. When Molly moves from the thunderclap of Descartes’ dream, via the lighting candle, to her faith in an enduring soul, one justifiably concludes that Joyce is yet tracing the thoughts that first occurred in that stove-heated room on November 10, 1619. The point is an important one because establishing a firm link between the dreams and the philosophy may help to

illuminate the theoretical framework of a myriad of passages in *Ulysses* where Descartes' dreams occur.

Sicker makes great strides in unearthing possible Cartesian references in Episode III, adding that 'although these veiled references to Descartes remain speculative, there is an unmistakably Cartesian flavor to Stephen's ruminations in 'Proteus'' (Sicker 1984, 11). If we could conclude with some degree of certainty that Joyce is as interested in the melting wax as the revelatory thunder, then many such references would appear less speculative. 'Proteus' considered in its entirety, as derivative of the God of changing forms, could cast Stephen's musings on matter and substance as a direct commentary upon Descartes' wax experiment. Joyce himself might be deemed to hint at the import of the melting wax as early as the opening Episode. 'I'm melting, he said, as the candle remarked when...But, hush! Not a word more on that subject' (Joyce 1992a, 13). Just as Molly appears self-reflexive about the danger of our penetrating the Cartesian orientation of her thunder/candle/soul musings cited above. Just two pages subsequent to them we read, 'I let out too much the night before talking of dreams so I didn't want to let him know more than was good for him' (Ibid, 879). It may indeed be that Joyce has let out too much talking of dreams; that they will serve us as a gate into a deeper Cartesian intent. While that deeper intent is largely beyond the remit of this paper, the Cartesian dreams will here serve another important purpose. For tracing their appearance in the writings of Samuel Beckett will allow us to fashion a thematic philosophical link between Joyce and Beckett which has hitherto gone unnoticed but which informs much of Beckett's early works.



In 1930, Beckett presented a paper in French, entitled '*Le Concentrisme*,' to the Modern Language Society of Trinity College.<sup>1</sup> It provided a commentary upon the life and works of the non-existent French poet, Jean du Chas. As Du Chas had reportedly committed suicide, Beckett entertained himself by making him the author of a book entitled *Discours de la sortie* (Discourse on Exits). An 'invitation to anyone to whistle up the ghost of Descartes,' this imaginary book is founded of course upon the similarly titled *Discours de la méthode* (*Discourse on the Method*) (Pilling 1997, 54). While many critics have noted the similarity of these titles, there is little evidence that they have grappled with the full extent to which Du Chas, as well as being based on Beckett himself, is more fundamentally a recapitulation of the life of Descartes. Youthful trips to Germany, the pilgrimage to Ancona in Italy (the city a little north of Loreto) and the final months in Sweden are all referenced, ostensibly as pertaining to the life of the non-existent Du Chas.<sup>2</sup> From our perspective, however, it is Beckett's invocation of Descartes' *poêle* that is of utmost import: 'the author of the *Discourse of the Exit*, conceived and composed among the hot vapors of the concierge's chamber, of all the concierges, stoves of Neuberg novecenteschi'

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<sup>1</sup> *Le Concentrisme* can be found, in French original, in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, 35-42. To the best of my knowledge, there has been one English translation published, by John Pilling on MenCard 118, for the Menard Press. This translation is difficult to find and unfortunately out of print. As such, I have here utilised a later translation by Michael Zeleny, which was posted in celebration of the centenary of Beckett's birth on URL <http://larvatus.livejournal.com/68681.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Jean du Chas returns as a character in Beckett's *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. In this text the character is partly modelled on Beckett's real life friend, Alfred Péron, whose name was published in connection with Beckett's works under the misspelling of 'Perron'. This latter spelling, incidentally, is the correct spelling for Descartes' early designation, Seigneur du Perron, with which we know Beckett was familiar (see 'Whoroscope'). Given that du Chas begins as a further encryption of Descartes, one might conclude that the 'error' was not lost on Beckett, who persisted with the misspelling even subsequent to its causing complications with the publication of 'Anna Livia Plurabella' (Ackereley and Gontarski 2006, 432).

(Beckett 2006, internet). Historically, Neuberg was the locale for Descartes' dreams amidst the 'hot vapors' of the stove, though Baillet mistakenly located them in Ulm in his unabbreviated 1691 account. Beckett's source here may have been Baillet's abbreviated 1692 version, which correctly located the dreams in Neuberg, or more probably Mahaffy's 1902 *Descartes*, which was also a source for the Cartesian poem, 'Whoroscope,' published earlier in 1930. We can also detract from '*Le Concentrisme*' that Beckett was explicitly tying the later philosophy to the earlier dreams, as we here propose Joyce was doing in *Ulysses*.

Beckett's Du Chas reappears in his first (though not first-published) novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. Ackerley and Gontarski (2006, 133) have drawn attention to a likely Cartesian reference therein via Belacqua's 'objection to going out to be frozen to death when there was nothing to prevent him from hatching a great thought over the stove' (Beckett 1992, 76). Belacqua's earlier referring to Descartes explicitly as 'Idiot, idiot,' in the context of his dispute with Galileo about falling bodies, makes another invocation of the 'stoves of Neuberg' here very likely (Ibid, 47). Even more obvious is the appearance of Descartes' dream in *Murphy*, with Beckett's unmistakable 'dream of Descartes linoleum,' though if the linoleum itself has some symbolic import it has yet eclipsed all critics (Beckett 1973, 81). *Murphy* is also the text which most explicitly exposes the dreams' functionality to be the highlighting of an underlying Cartesian dualism. 'Thus Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common' (Ibid, 64). Beckett himself is consistently found to be hatching his thoughts above Descartes' stove, a wellspring for ideas to which he returned repeatedly, much as is the case with the image of Dante and Virgil outside the Gates of Hell. The work most suggestive of Joyce's direct influence on Beckett, however, is 'Whoroscope,' to which I will now turn.

This author has commented elsewhere upon the fact that ‘Whoroscope,’ a portmanteau word combining ‘whore’ and ‘horoscope,’ seems deliberately designed to recall the scene of Bella Cohen’s brothel in *Ulysses*, wherein Stephen (Mind) and Bloom (Body) have their horoscopes cast by a whore. Noted also was the curious coincidence of Beckett’s first published poem allegedly being written for a poetry competition on competition deadline day of June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1930. That Beckett was reportedly three hours late with his delivery thus secures the date of composition as Bloomsday. In this context, such phrases as ‘Leider! Leider! she *bloomed* and withered’ (my italics) appear as self-conscious references to the poems Bloomsday birth (Beckett 1986, 3). The alternative, that Beckett unwittingly continued the covert treatment of Descartes, inclusive of blooms on Bloomsday, without conceiving of the work to which he was totally devoted at this time, strikes this author as unlikely. ‘Whoroscope’ itself makes extensive use of Descartes’ dreams. They can be found in the ‘hot-cupboard’ from which Descartes is found ‘throwing Jesuits out of the skylight’ (Ibid, 2). The wind of Descartes’ evil demon, which awoke him to promises of Loreto, also finds expression.

A wind of evil flung my despair of ease  
 against the sharp spires of the one  
 lady:  
 ...what am I saying! The gentle canvas –  
 and away to Ancona on the bright Adriatic (Ibid, 3).

‘Whoroscope’ has been described as a ‘stream-of-consciousness’ from Descartes’ first-person perspective (Connors 1978, 27). Like *Ulysses*, it never once mentions Descartes by name. But that it should likewise utilize the Cartesian dreams which so shape Stephen’s stream of consciousness stroll upon Sandymount strand, as well as the final monologue of Molly, is simply too suggestive to be regarded as a mere

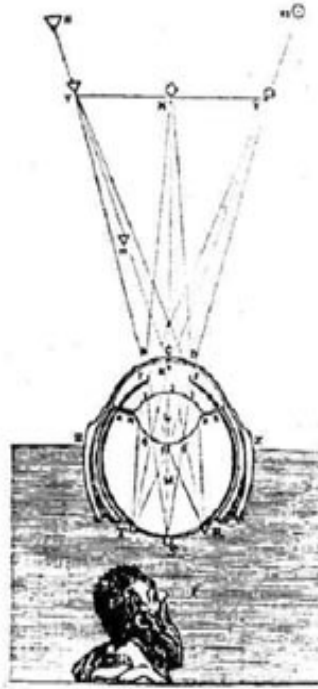
accidental association. Accepting this fact may reduce the Bloomsday competition itself to a fabrication, an extension of the covert Cartesian in-joke that permeates the works of Joyce and Beckett. There are likely further references to the *poêle* that await exposition in both, but we wish now to turn to the possibility of a Cartesian source for the homelette which Joyce houses therein.

### **The *Homelette***

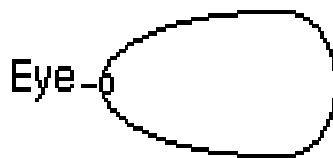
The Sixth Discourse of Descartes's *Optics*, entitled 'Of Vision,' begins with the following comment about our internal picture of the external world.

Now although this picture, in being so transmitted into our head, always retains some resemblance to the objects from which it proceeds, nevertheless, as I have already shown, we must not hold that it is by means of this resemblance that the picture causes us to perceive the objects, as if there were yet other eyes in our brain with which we could apprehend it (Descartes 2001, 101).

The danger which Descartes' world-view holds for us is that of fashioning a false picture of a little man, or homunculus, hidden behind the organ of the eye – who 'sees' again the picture that the mechanism of the physical eye creates. The accompanying illustration from Discourse Five, a little man who peers out through a grossly magnified eye, perhaps contributed to what Daniel Dennett terms 'the persuasive imagery of the Cartesian Theatre [that] keeps coming back to haunt us' in spite of Descartes' best protestations (1991, 107).



This association between the physical ‘eye’ and the ‘I’ or philosophical subject found later expression in Schopenhauer’s description of the ‘I or ego’ as ‘the dark point in consciousness, just as....the eye sees everything except itself’ (Schopenhauer 1966, 491). Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* further exemplifies the point.



‘For the Form of the Visual Field is surely not like this’ (1971, 69).

That is to say, the eye is not a part of its visual field, and the 'I' or subject is similarly unknown, not a Cartesian object amongst objects. When Joyce, in the *Wake*, morphs his 'mind's eye' into 'My mine's I' (Joyce 1992b, 425), he is perpetrating a much maligned philosophical confusion. Joyce, of course, may simply be offering a play upon the identical English sounds. Our contention here, however, is that Joyce's use of the homunculus, which becomes the 'homelette,' is deliberately tied to its Cartesian source. We begin with an exegesis of the homunculus in Beckett.

The extensive role which the homunculus plays throughout Beckett's corpus has been thoroughly traced in Dirk Van Hulle's *Manuscript Genetics, Joyce's Know-How, Beckett's Nohow*. For Van Hulle, 'Beckett shows a remarkable interest in the creation of homunculi,' which appear in *Malone Dies*, *Waiting for Godot*, and *The Unnamable* (Van Hulle 2008, 172). One might add to this list 'the brisk homunculus' of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. Of Beckett's likely sources, Van Hulle includes Herbert Silberer's 1914 article, '*Der Homunculus*,' which outlines the popular belief that mandrakes grow beneath hanging gallows, in those places where the sperm of erect and ejaculating criminals falls. The myth, which grew from the mandrake's phallic roots, comes to play a defining role in the conversations of Didi and Gogo.

ESTRAGON:                   What about hanging ourselves?

VLADIMIR:                   Hmm. It'd give us an erection.

ESTRAGON:                   *(highly excited)*. An erection!

VLADIMIR:                   With all that follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow.  
That's why they shriek when you pull them up. Did  
you not know that?

ESTRAGON:                   Let's hang ourselves immediately (Beckett 1965, 17).

All this has been previously noted by Van Hulle, including the clear connection Beckett here fashions between the homunculus and the phallus, but we wish to extend this consideration retrospectively into the works of Joyce. While neither *Ulysses* nor *Finnegans Wake* contain direct references to the homunculus, Joyce's two uses of the mandrake in the latter are highly suggestive both of the myth contained in Silberer's '*Der Homunculus*' and the optical origin of the homunculus itself.

'if a mandrake shrieked to convultures at last surviving his birth the weibduck will wail bitterly over the rotter's resurrection' (Joyce 1992b, 138)

'No v, fix on the little fellow in my eye, Minucius Mandrake, and follow my little psychosinology, poor armor in slingslang.' (Ibid, 486)

The 'little fellow' alongside the Mandrake taken in conjunction with the prior 'convultures' make Joyce's invocation of Beckett's ejaculatory mandrake myth unmistakable. Van Hulle is one of a small number of scholars who seamlessly transgress the boundaries between Joyce and Beckett studies, and utilize the former to illuminate the latter. Typically and perhaps understandably, the tack of Beckett scholarship at large has been to divorce the one from the other. That Beckett himself was so adamant about the division, however, might point instead to the fact that Joyce's influence was overarching for much of Beckett's career. The above provides one example of how their very differing results can nevertheless stem from precisely similar starting points. The effect is such that Beckett can be used to illuminate Joyce every bit as much as the reverse and the painstaking conclusions of Beckett scholarship can simply be transposed, with equal justification, into our reading of *Finnegans Wake*.

Beyond 'Minucius Mandrake,' the most likely reference to the homunculus in the *Wake* is the convoluted passage with which this paper opened: 'Mon foie, you

wish to ave some homelette, yes, lady! Good, mein leber! Your hegg he must break himself. See, I crack, so, he sit in the poele, umbedimbt!’ (Joyce 1992b, 59). An additional ‘h’ in front of ‘omelette,’ perhaps stolen from the ‘[h]ave’ which precedes it, preserves the egg yolk of the word, while simultaneously suggesting ‘hommelette’. This latter spelling, with the double ‘m’, translates directly from the French as ‘little man’. A ‘homelette’ is thus a little-man-omelette. The implied homunculus, or ‘little human,’ is readily apparent.

Certainly, the allusion was not lost on Jacques Lacan, who borrowed Joyce’s ‘homelette’ in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Book XI of *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*.

I am going to talk to you about the lamella.

If you want to stress its joky side, you can call it l’hommelette. This hommelette, as you will see, is easier to animate than primal man, in whose head one always had to place a homunculous to get it working.

Whenever the membranes of the egg in which the foetus emerges on its way to becoming a new-born are broken, imagine for a moment that something flies off, and that one can do it with an egg as easily as with a man, namely the hommelette, or the lamella (Lacan 1973, 197).

For Lacan, who was present at Joyce’s first public reading of *Ulysses* in the *Shakespeare & Co.* bookshop in 1921, the ‘hommelette’ is representative of the formless pre-Oedipal subject. When picturing Lacan’s ‘hommelette’, the ‘mirror stage’ of his child’s development, we are to imagine breaking up a man the way one might break the membrane of an egg. This, Lacan claims, is what the child’s self knowledge resembles in its primal phase. There is no *Cogito* or sense of self unity with the ‘little man’, only a shattered identity, a gooey eggy mess of meanings. It is with recognition of the ‘other’, often the recognition of self as object in a mirror reflection, that subjective consciousness is given. In *How to Read Lacan*, Slavoj



Žižek elaborates upon the more dense and precise formulation of the lamella found in ‘Position of the Unconscious’, the *écrit* corresponding to Seminar XI. It is ‘*L’objet petit a*, where *a* stands for ‘the other’, thus the ‘object small other’... is Lacan’s neologism with multiple meanings. Principally it designates the object-cause of desire’ (Žižek 2007, 197). In sum, for Lacan and Žižek, the ‘hommelette’ or ‘lamella’ is an amorphous mass, which grasps self-consciousness via its relationship to the other. This Lacanian ‘hommelette’ stands diametrically opposed to the unquestionable self-knowledge of the Cartesian *Cogito*, which is divorced from those external objects under the rubric of which any formulation of the ‘other’ must be contained. If we can reasonably trace Joyce’s ‘homelette’ to a Cartesian source, the portmanteau in this instance serves rather to extricate self from world and not to bring the two together. Our stated attempt to trace Joyce’s ‘homelette’ to Descartes returns us finally to where we began – the watermelon dreams of Stephen Dedalus.

While there is no ‘homelette’ in *Ulysses*, the word ‘omelette’ occurs three times in quick succession during the latter half of the crux Episode XV, set in Bella Cohen’s. The relevant passage begins as follows:

STEPHEN: .....Enter gentlemen to see in mirrors every positions trapezes all that machine there besides also if desire act awfully bestial butcher’s boy pollutes in warm veal liver or omelette on the belly *pièce de Shakespeare*.  
 BELLA: (*Clapping her belly, sinks back on the sofa with a shout of laughter*)  
 An omelette on the...Ho! ho! ho! ho!...Omelette on the... (Joyce 1992a, 673)

Now given that Joyce invented the ‘homelette,’ the reference to ‘Ho...Omelette’ above makes it highly likely that said invention occurred not during the composition of the *Wake* as tradition would have it, but rather prior to the publication of *Ulysses*. The context suggests that the ‘omelette on the belly’ is a sex act that imagination might unravel, but the ‘ho! ho! ho!’ of Bella’s laughter acts simultaneously as

commentary upon the ‘*ho-omelette*’ of which it is paradoxically the creator. We might conclude that it is the sex act that pleases Bella here, but the portmanteau which amuses Joyce, for whom Bella becomes an unwitting vehicle. And aurally the joke is doubly sweet, given the silent ‘h’ of the French, which effectively reduces the ‘omelette’ and ‘homelette’ to a bilingual homonym.

That the ‘homelette’ and ‘poele’ of *Finnegans Wake* provide a retrospective glance to the ‘*ho-omelette*’ of Bella Cohen’s is further vouchsafed by the conclusion to Stephen and Bella’s omelette digression. To continue where we broke above:

STEPHEN: (Mincingly) I love you, Sir darling. Speak you englishman tongue for *double entente cordiale*. O yes, *mon loup*. How much cost? Waterloo. Watercloset. (*He ceases suddenly and holds up a forefinger*)

BELLA: (*Laughing*) Omelette...

THE WHORES: (*Laughing*) Encore! Encore!

STEPHEN: Mark me. I dreamt of a watermelon (Ibid, 673-4).

The ‘*entente cordiale*’ is a peace agreement signed between Britain and France in the year of Ulysses’ setting, 1904. Joyce’s transfiguration of this timely reference into a ‘*double entente cordiale*’ clearly calls up the ‘*double entendre*,’ a figure of speech with two meanings. The immediately proceeding double entendre we are proposing – omelette/homelette – even fluctuates between ‘you englishman tongue’ and that of the Frenchman, as did the *entente cordiale* Joyce invokes. We might even conclude ‘*mon loup*,’ my wolf, to be an invocation of the popular French song ‘*mon petit loup*,’ ‘my little wolf,’ with the ‘little’ further suggestive of the homelette or homunculus. In this connection, it may be worth exploring the eight usages of ‘little man’ in *Ulysses*, with Molly’s sexually charged ones most in context with the ‘omelette on the belly’ which precedes them. Regardless of this latter ‘little’ leap of faith, that this entire convoluted passage acquires such a degree of coherency when considered as Joyce’s

original 'homelette' is itself a reasonable guarantor of our having grasped authorial intention in this instance. That Stephen should break the discussion with his final recollection of Descartes' watermelon adds further grist to the mill. The 'ho-omelette' and 'watermelon' of *Ulysses*, and the 'homelette' and 'poele' of *Finnegans Wake* are one and the same thing. Joyce too, both before and after Beckett, is hatching his thoughts above Descartes' stove.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude I will propose one final allusion to Joyce's specific brand of Cartesianism found in the early works of Beckett. It is more speculative than much that has gone before, though its rejection ought not to detract from the general thrust of our argument. Its acceptance, on the contrary, may compel one to conclude that Joyce and Beckett were working out their Cartesianism in tandem. It is the existence of a possible link between Descartes and the *homelette* contained in Beckett's own Cartesian Bloomsday composition, 'Whoroscope.' Once again, the *homelette* is not mentioned, though the accompanying footnotes to Beckett's poem begin with the following incidental though historically accurate detail. 'René Descartes, Seigneur du Perron, liked his omelette made of eggs hatched from eight to ten days; shorter or longer under the hen and the result, he says, is disgusting' (Beckett 1986, 5). The poem, a summation of Descartes' entire life, is in a sense structured about this omelette, with Descartes persistently breaking the narrative with requests as to how ripe his hen's eggs are. Nothing definitive can be concluded from this curious poetic device, but that Joyce should have so definitively tied the omelette to Descartes in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* raises the possibility that Beckett is again following suit here. And if so, it is such an unlikely detail to utilize that he surely borrowed it with

Joyce's assistance. Beckett, after all, was transcribing *Finnegans Wake* during the two years prior to Whoroscope's publication, and it may not be coincidental that his intensive study of Descartes began in 1928, the year he befriended Joyce. That Beckett was totally devoted to Joyce at this time, and was similarly infatuated with such ludicrous details as Descartes' stove, not to mention his relationship to an omelette, strongly suggest that Joyce and Beckett were working together on this one. And that such detail was most overtly stated in Beckett's Bloomsday composition, which 'bloomed and withered,' makes direct reference the most plausible possibility.

But the continued return to biographical details such as stoves, watermelons and evil winds ought not to cast a shadow over the serious philosophical import contained in these seemingly lighthearted ruminations. Just as the 'dream of Descartes linoleum' points to a duality inherent in Beckett's Murphy, so the isolation of Stephen's Sandymount stroll may be better understood in the light (and heat) of Descartes' 'hot vapors.' For though it is the idealism of Bishop Berkeley, 'the good bishop of Cloyne' (Joyce 1992a, 60), which Stephen overtly muses upon, the covert recollection of Descartes' watermelon sources this subjectivity in the *Discourse and Meditations* which first separated the indubitable enduring soul from the dubitable existence of the external world. The 'other' of Lacan's 'hommelette,' which grasps self-consciousness via the external object, is in truth a perversion of this stark division, which takes the *Cogito* as its axiomatic starting point. And while much work remains in highlighting how a Cartesian dualist framework might shed light on Joyce's *Ulysses*, his persistently returning to the birthplace and time of said dualism, a stove-heated room on November 10<sup>th</sup> 1619, undoubtedly justifies the future attempt to do so. Such a process will likely send one further into the porous terrain of *Finnegans Wake*, as well as into the notoriously cryptic writings of the early Beckett.

It will unlikely be as neat an affair as one would wish for but then 'You can't make an [h]omelette without breaking eggs'.

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