

THE
IRISH COMIC
TRADITION

BY
VIVIAN MERCIER

© Oxford University Press 1962

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
1962

James Joyce and the Irish Tradition of Parody

The nature of Joycean parody

PUCK MULLIGAN footed featly, trilling;

I hardly hear the partieu cry

Or a Tommy talk as I pass one by

Before my thoughts begin to run

On F. M. Curdy Atkinson,

The same that had the wooden leg . . . !

Here we have the Irish tradition of parody represented in full career, travestying the lines of a great poet almost as soon as they are published. The time is supposedly 1904, the place the National Library of Ireland; 'Baile and Aillinn', the poem parodied, formed part of *In the Seven Woods*, which Yeats published in 1903. Buck Mulligan's parody follows the brief prologue to the poem line by line:

I hardly hear the curlew cry,

Nor the grey rush when the wind is high,

Before my thoughts begin to run

On the heir of Uladh, Buan's son,

Baile, who had the honey mouth . . . !

Oliver St. John Gogarty, universally recognized as the original of Buck Mulligan, may not in fact have parodied this particular poem, but friends of Yeats did regularly produce travesties of his work for his and their amusement.¹ There is a reference to this practice in his published correspondence. A letter of 5 November, 1922, written while the Irish Civil War was still raging, describes a dinner given in his honour at the Dublin Arts Club:

¹ *Ulysses* (Hamburg, 1935), p. 223.

² *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats* (New York, 1957), p. 189.

³ Conversations with the late Mrs. Kathleen Cruise O'Brien (*née* Sheehy).

At 10.15 . . . somebody threw a bomb outside in the street and the parodist, who was in the middle of a parody of my 'Innisfree', did not pause nor did his voice hesitate.¹

Joyce depicts Dublin as so saturated in parody that Stephen Dedalus, who rather despises Mulligan's mockery, allows more than one snatch of parody to intrude upon his own reverie. Before going any farther, I should like to sketch a definition of parody and to indicate some of the ways in which Joyce uses this device in *Ulysses*. Joyce's work prior to *Ulysses* appears to me to contain a great deal of pastiche, such as the poem recited in 'Ivy Day in the Committee Room' or the juvenile poems by Stephen in *A Portrait*, but almost no parody.

Buck Mulligan's lines, however, constitute parody in the strictest sense, for they bear a very close metrical, verbal, and syntactical resemblance to their original. Parody is always traced to the Greek rhapsodists, who often interspersed their recitals of Homer with

little poems composed of almost the same lines as those they had recited, whose meaning they twisted in order to express something else calculated to amuse the audience.²

Octave Delepiere, whose excellent book on parody I have just quoted, underlines this expressing of 'something else' as essential to parody:

It is . . . the substitution of a new subject which separates parody from the burlesque or the comic.³

As anybody who reads the Yeats lines and their parody to the end can see, not only have the personages been changed, but a passage exalting platonic love has been twisted so as to refer to onanism.

Most definitions of parody agree that it need not confine itself to the imitation of a specific passage or even of a specific work. Prose parodies frequently limit themselves to the imitation of an author's characteristic style; such are the parodies of English prose style through the centuries in the hospital ('Oxen of the Sun') episode of *Ulysses*; some of these even parody the general style of a period rather than that of a particular author.

¹ *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (New York, 1955), p. 692.

² Octave Delepiere, *La Parodie chez les Grecs, chez les Romains, et chez les modernes* (London, 1870), p. 8 n. My translation.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

We may go farther still and speak of parodying an entire literary or sub-literary genre: Gerty MacDowell's reverie in the 'Nausicaa' episode imitates what used to be called the 'Peg's Paper style' in Ireland, after an English publication once popular among servant girls. The newspaper headlines in the 'Aeolus' episode may also be described as parodies. In the 'Cyclops' or pub episode we find parody of such genres as nineteenth-century translations of the Gaelic sagas; accounts of spiritualist séances; newspaper reports (of an execution, a Gaelic Athletic Association meeting, a parliamentary debate, a wedding); an almost apocalyptic description of a religious procession, with copious illustrations from the Latin liturgy, and a hilarious excerpt from a Gaelic League journal, purporting to deal with the dog Garryowen's ability to recite Gaelic verse. The supposed translation of 'the canine original' runs as follows:

The curse of my curses
Seven days every day
And seven dry Thursdays
On you, Barney Kiernan,
Has no sup of water
To cool my courage,
And my guts red roaring
After Lowry's lights.¹

This parody has so many possible applications that one wavers between the original verse of Synge and the translations of Douglas Hyde, or between Yeats and Lady Gregory in certain phases, before finally deciding that the entire Anglo-Irish Literary Revival is their true victim.

Before leaving *Ulysses* we must take note of the type of parody implicit in the book's title. I say 'parody' advisedly, Bloom were called Odysseus and all the other characters were allotted their Homeric names, I do not think we could describe *Ulysses* as a burlesque. In true burlesque Bloom would have to draw the bow of Odysseus while speaking with the accents of Dublin. He would have to undergo shipwreck and all kinds of other physical hardships, or at least some semblance of them. The 'tedious brief scene' of Pyramus and Thisbe acted by

¹ *Ulysses*, p. 324.

Bottom and his friends is a good example of the genre. An older Irish contemporary of Joyce's begins a characteristic piece of burlesque thus:

'Essex,' said Queen Elizabeth, as the two of them sat at breakfast in the back parlour of Buckingham Palace; 'Essex, me haro, I've got a job that I think would suit you. Do you know where Ireland is?'

'I'm no great fist at jography,' says his Lordship, 'but I know the place you mane. Population, three million; exports, emigrants.'¹

On the other hand, *Ulysses* is not a stylistic parody of Homer, as are the *Batrachomyomachia* and *The Rape of the Lock*. The chief formal elements of the *Odyssey* parodied in *Ulysses* are the over-all rhythms of search for the father, wandering, and return home, emphasized by the division of the book into three unequal parts, indicated by Roman numerals.

No doubt one could say that the personages of the *Odyssey* are parodied, though 'caricatured' would be a more precise term. The plots of individual episodes—plot, of course, constitutes a formal element—are travestied also. It would hardly be stretching the meaning of 'parody' too far to describe *Ulysses* as a thematic and structural parody of the *Odyssey*. This type of parody has at least one precedent in Irish literature: *The Vision of Mac Conglinne*, which I shall discuss later, presents many parallels with the life of Christ, though it makes no recognizable attempt to imitate the language of the Gospels.

It may be objected that *Ulysses* is not a true parody, since it does not expose the work of Homer to even the mildest sort of ridicule, though it belittles modern life by comparison with the heroic past. I disagree. In the light of *Finnegans Wake* we can safely read into *Ulysses* the implication that Homer's heroes were not quite so heroic as he painted them, and that Penelope, like Molly Bloom, was no better than she should be. Hugh Kenner, in his *Dublin's Joyce*, reproduces Joyce's own table of the Homeric correspondences in *Ulysses*.² Twice, Joyce seems to show a knowledge of Bacon's *The Wisdom of the Ancients*: first, when he equates Proteus with Primal Matter; second, when he has Scylla ('The Rock') symbolize Aristotle and

¹ *Poet, Poems and Parodies of Percy French*, ed. Mrs. De Burgh Daly (Dublin, 1953), p. 174.

² Hugh Kenner, *Dublin's Joyce* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1956), pp. 226-7.

Charybdis ('The Whirlpool') symbolize Plato. Bacon writes of 'the Rocks of Distinctions and the Gulfs of Universalities; which two are famous for the Wrack both of Wits and Arts'.¹ If Joyce did know Bacon's work, he cannot have missed this surprising account of the origin of Pan:

... others attribute unto him a far different beginning, affirming him to be the common Offspring of *Penelope's* Suitors, upon a Suspicion that every one of them had to do with her . . .²

Those who are not convinced should at least consider the possibility that the past as well as the present is being held up to ridicule in *Ulysses*.

Examples of Gaelic parody

I shall have more to say later about the ways in which Joyce uses parody to focus the past upon the present and vice versa. First, however, I want to justify the reference in the title of this chapter to an Irish *tradition* of parody. It will be necessary to examine in some detail certain Gaelic works already mentioned in earlier chapters which must be unfamiliar to most readers of Joyce, even though they have been translated into English. I must also discuss briefly several rather more familiar Anglo-Irish parodists, some of whom may have had a direct influence on Joyce.

The Vision of Mac Conglinne seems to be the oldest as well as the best major work of parody in Gaelic. Professor Myles Dillon finds no reason to disagree with the judgement expressed by Kuno Meyer and Wilhelm Wöllner in 1892—namely, that the *Vision* 'was composed in the twelfth century . . . the work of a wandering scholar with a grudge against the church . . .'.³

The *Vision* tells of a clerical student named Antér Mac Conglinne who has abandoned his studies for poetry and become a *scholaris vagans*. Having received the most meagre hospitality at the Abbey of Cork, he recites a satire on the monks. The abbot sentences him to be crucified, but during the night before his execution Mac Conglinne has a vision of a land so abounding with food that everything—boats, houses, clothing—is made of it. When the abbot hears of this vision,

¹ Francis Bacon, *The Essays . . . with the Wisdom of the Ancients*, ed. S. W. Singer (London, 1857), p. 346. For Proteus see pp. 294–3.

² Bacon, p. 262.

³ Myles Dillon, *Early Irish Literature* (Chicago, 1948), p. 143.

he decides that the poet may be able to cure Cathal, king of Munster, of a hunger demon that makes him perpetually ravenous.

After various preliminaries, Mac Conglinne arranges to have the king bound firmly to the wall of the palace. He then prepares a delicious meal and passes tasty morsels before the king's mouth while describing last night's vision of gluttony. Finally the demon leaps out of the king's mouth to get at the food. Mac Conglinne traps him under an overturned cauldron and has the palace evacuated and burned to the ground. The king rewards Mac Conglinne, who triumphs over the monks.

In the words of the late Dr. Robin Flower:

The tale . . . is one long parody of the literary methods used by the clerical scholars. At every turn we recognize a motive or a phrase from the theological, the historical, and the grammatical literature. A full commentary on the *Vision* from this point of view would be little short of a history of the development of literary forms in Ireland. And it is not only the literary tricks of the monks that are held up to mockery. The writer makes sport of the most sacred things, not sparing even the Sacraments and Christ's crucifixion. He jests at relics, at tithes, at ascetic practices, at amulets, at the sermons and private devotions of the monks . . .¹

We must regret that Dr. Flower never found time to provide such a 'full commentary' himself. I can, however, substantiate some of his statements. For instance, the beginning of this riotous tale solemnly adheres to a traditional formula:

The four things to be asked of every composition must be asked of this composition, viz., place, and person, and time, and cause of invention.²

The ending, too, is a conventional one for saints' lives or other edifying narratives:

There are thirty chief virtues attending this tale, and a few of them are enough for an example.

The married couple to whom it is related the first night shall not separate without an heir. . . .

The new house, in which it is the first tale told, no corpse shall be taken out of it. . . .³

¹ Robin Flower, *The Irish Tradition* (Oxford, 1947), p. 76.

² Kuno Meyer, ed. and tr., *Aislinge Meic Conglinne* (London, 1892), p. 2. The translation only is reprinted in *Ancient Irish Tales*, ed. Tom Peete Cross and Clark Harris Slover (New York, 1936), pp. 551–87.

³ *Aislinge*, pp. 110–12.

Many of Mac Conglinne's adventures seem devised intentionally to burlesque the life of Christ. He is unjustly convicted, scourged, condemned to be crucified, tied to a pillar-stone instead of a pillar. (In the later version of the tale found in Trinity College, Dublin, MS. H. 3.18, King Cathal plays the role of Pilate; he 'said he would not crucify a bard, but the clerics might do it themselves, for it was they that knew the wrong he had done'.¹) Aníer himself makes the blasphemous comparison, saying, '... we will go in humility, as our Master, Jesus Christ, went to His Passion'.² He carries his own cross to the place of execution. When he is finally triumphant, he is permitted to sit always at the king's right hand and is granted the right of intercession—all but one-third of it, which is reserved to the men of Ireland.

Within its loose framework the *Vision* includes several very specific parodies of literary and liturgical forms, all harping on the food theme. In one, Aníer traces the genealogy of Abbot Manchín up to Adam, as the genealogy of Christ is traced in the third chapter of St. Luke's Gospel:

'Bless us, O cleric, famous pillar of learning,
Son of honey-bag, son of juice, son of lard ...'

and so on for twenty lines more, up to

'Son of bone-nourishing nut-fruit, son of Abel,
son of Adam.'³

Elsewhere we find what seems to be a parody of a *lorica* or 'breastplate prayer' for protection, several of which survive from the early Celtic Church:

'Off with thee now to the suets and cheeses,' said the phantom.
'I will certainly go,' said MacConglinne, 'and do you put a gospel around me.'

'It shall be given,' said the phantom, 'even a gospel of four-cornered even dry cheese, and I will put my own paternoster around thee, and neither greed nor hunger can visit him around whom it is put.' And he said:

'May smooth juicy bacon protect thee, O MacConglinne! ...
May hard yellow-skinned cream protect thee, O MacConglinne!

¹ *Aislinge*, p. 149.

² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-34.

May the cauldron full of pottage protect thee, O MacConglinne!
'May the pan full of pottage protect thee, O MacConglinne!'

In similar vein, Austin Clarke, a living Irish poet, makes the king say an act of *nutrition* instead of *contrition* in his verse play, *The Son of Learning*, based on the *Vision*.²

This kind of blasphemous parody has of course the utmost relevance to Joyce's work, but it was commonplace during the Middle Ages; blasphemy has little charm except in ages of faith, just as we relish most those parodies which ridicule the authors we most admire. The most sacred portions of the Catholic liturgy were the most frequently parodied, so that the Council of Trèves felt obliged to pass the following decree:

*Item, praecipimus ut omnes sacerdotes non permittant Trulamos et alios vagos scholares, aut Goliardos cantare versus super Sanctus et Agnus Dei, in missis, &c.*³

No doubt it was frequently disobeyed. Delepiere mentions the great number of parodies of the Mass which still survive, and he quotes a typical one in honour of Bacchus from Harleian MS. 913:

INCIPT MISSA DE POTATORIBUS

Introibo ad altare Bacchi. R. Ad eum qui laetificat cor hominis.

It continues in the same spirit down to

... per dominum nostrum reum Bacchum, qui bibit et poculat, per omnia pocula poculorum.⁴

Joyce might well have written the last phrase if he had thought of it. Two of the changes that he rings on *secula seculorum* in *Finnegans Wake*—'*Insomniá, somnia somniorum*' (p. 193) and 'from circular circulatio' (p. 427)—can be allowed to stand for all the thousands of such blasphemous parodies in the book. Protestants may take note, for instance, of two parodies of the Lord's Prayer, on pages 530-1 and 536.⁵

¹ *Aislinge*, pp. 80-82.

² *The Collected Poems of Austin Clarke* (London, 1936), p. 195.

³ Delepiere, p. 54 n.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

⁵ *Finnegans Wake* (New York, 1947). All later quotations are from this edition, but incorporate Joyce's own corrections, as given on pp. 629-43 of the same edition.

Since the *goliardi* were such notorious parodists, they may well have forged more than one saint's life. Professor R. A. S. Macalister says flatly that the 'Life of Findchua of Bri-Gobann' in the *Book of Lismore*, a codex of the late fifteenth century, is a goliardic parody.¹ Father John Ryan, S.J., makes a less sweeping statement. Referring to the hospitality given to visiting monks in early Christian Ireland, he writes:

So common was this feature that it was burlesqued by the imaginative writer of St. Findchua's life. When this abbot was informed that Ronán the Fair, a holy elder of Fir Breg, was on the way to visit him with some companions, he is reported to have exclaimed: 'Let a vessel of ale, enough to intoxicate fifty, and food enough for a hundred be given them, and if they deem that insufficient, add more.'²

Such a piece of exaggeration would not prove anything by itself, since even the account of Findchua's suckling a boy at his right breast is hardly out of keeping with the other saints' lives in the *Book of Lismore*. But the saint is represented as taking part in seven battles and giving way constantly to the sin of anger; on one occasion his head gets so hot that it burns his tutor's cowl; his lay neighbours describe him as a 'slaughterous warrior'. In one battle he behaves more like a Celtic war god than a Christian saint:

Then the cleric's nature rises against them, so that sparks of blazing fire burst forth out of his teeth. And that fire burnt up the shafts of the spears, and the wrists and forearms of the marauders...³

It is comforting to learn that at the end of his days Findchua made a pilgrimage to Rome: '... for he was repentant of the battles which he had fought and the deeds which he had done for friendship and for love of brotherhood'.⁴

If the 'Life of Findchua' is a parody, it missed its mark, for it was obviously taken seriously by the compilers of the *Book of Lismore*. Nobody who has even the most superficial knowledge of the Gaelic saints' lives will wonder why. Typically, the earliest version of a saint's life is written in Latin and is a sober

¹ *The Book of Mac Carthaigh Ríablaich* (Dublin, 1950), p. xvii.

² John Ryan, *Irish Monasticism* (London, 1931), p. 326.

³ *Lives of Saints from the Book of Lismore*, ed. and tr. Whitney Stokes (Oxford, 1890), p. 236.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

enough document. Later come the Gaelic versions, in which the Latin life is either ignored or overlaid with a tissue of pagan folklore.¹

It will cheer many people to learn that the *goliardi* did not have all the laughers on their side. As Robin Flower has shown, lay learning regained its independence in Ireland about the twelfth century, when the hereditary bardic families once more achieved prominence under the patronage of the native, and even of the Anglo-Norman, aristocracy. Naturally the bards incurred the jealousy of their clerical rivals.² It is probably to this rivalry that we owe the uproarious parody and burlesque of earlier druidic pedantry which we find in *Imtheacht na Tromdámh* (or *Tromdámh Guaire*) which was edited and translated from the *Book of Lismore* almost a century ago by Professor Owen Connellan. He translated the title as *The Proceedings of the Great Bardic Institution*, but Dr. Flower gives a more accurate version, *The Proceedings of the Burdensome Bardic Company*. This satire studded with parodies and burlesques seems to consist of four different stories; the hero—or rather, victim—of the first is a *filí* named Dallán Forguill, who belongs to the late sixth or early seventh century.³

The three remaining stories deal with Dallán Forguill's successor as chief of the poets of Ireland, Seanchán Torpéist. The first of these, in which he and his huge company (*dámh*) of poets, students, servants, and womenfolk make extravagant demands upon the hospitality of King Guaire, seems to be the main source of *The King's Threshold*, a tragedy in which Yeats ignores the tale's satiric aspect and takes the side of the poet against the king.

In the next story Seanchán satirizes the mice that steal his food and the cats who should have killed the mice. A giant cat carries him off, and he is saved only by the intervention of St. Ciarán of Clonmacnois. Seanchán does not show the least gratitude to the saint, 'for', says he, 'I would rather that Guaire would be satirized than that I should live and he not satirized'.⁴

¹ See R. A. Stewart Macalister, *The Secret Languages of Ireland* (Cambridge, 1937), pp. 64, 67.

² See Flower, pp. 67-93.

³ See Chapter 5 above, p. 107.

⁴ Transactions of the Ossianic Society V (Dublin, 1860), 87.

The last story recounts a battle of wits between Seanchán and Marbhán the hermit, who has already helped Guaire to meet the harsh demands of the bards. Marbhán, champion of Christian learning—and something of an old wizard into the bargain—completely outwits the bards by forcing them to admit that they do not know *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, the greatest of the Gaelic sagas. In order to learn it they finally have to summon the hero Fergus from the dead.

Dallán Forguill's mission in the first part of the satire is to obtain the magic shield of the King of Oriel for his own patron, Aedh Fionn (Hugh the Fair), King of Brefni. First he tries to win it by compliments; the poem he addresses to the King of Oriel must be either a parody or a burlesque:

'That is a good poem,' says the king, 'whoever could understand it.' 'That is true for you,' says Dallán, 'and whosoever composes a poetic remonstrance, it is he himself who ought to explain it . . .'¹

Inevitably, by the time he has finished we wish he would explain his explanation. Having failed to obtain what he wants by flattery, Dallán tries satire; the king again replies politely:

'We must confess . . . that we do not know whether that is better or worse than the first poem you composed.'²

The bard then proceeds to gloss his own invective. His satire, being unjust, recoils on his own head, in accordance with the laws laid down by the saints of Ireland, and he dies three days later.

The satires of Seanchán against mice and cats, which cause ten mice to fall dead before him, but merely anger the giant cat Irusan, are true parodies, since the scathing verses usually directed against humans—and widely credited with the power to cause disfigurement or even death—are here directed against insignificant victims. The outrageous demands or wishes expressed by Seanchán and his companions are obvious parodies, being long, almost meaningless, and seemingly impossible of fulfilment until Marbhán comes to the rescue.

In the final story Marbhán obtains his choice of whatever music he wishes because he can show his relationship to the arts: . . . the grandmother of my servant's wife was descended from poets.'

¹ Ossianic Soc. V. 15.

² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

'You shall obtain your choice of the arts, though very remote is your connection with them,' said [Seanchán]. . . .'

From such examples as the *Vision of Mac Conglaine* and the *Proceedings of the Burdensome Bardic Company* we can learn what kind of social and cultural situation it is that gives rise to major works of parody, such as *Don Quixote* or the attacks of Aristophanes upon Euripides and Socrates. Mere intellectual rivalry is not enough; an outmoded literary tradition or one that has yet to establish itself must be seen as the symbol of a rival social group, whether it be a class or a political party. The lay intellectuals—*golardi* or bards—lampoon their clerical rivals for social power and prestige; the clerics return the compliment.

We find the same effluence of parody, and an even greater bitterness, in the attacks on the 'Cockney School' of poetry in early nineteenth-century England. Mistrust of and contempt for a new kind of poetry were reinforced by class and political prejudices in the minds of writers for the *Quarterly Review*, *Blackwood's*, and, later, *Fraser's*. The same complex of feelings had produced the parodies of *The Anti-Jacobin* a little earlier.

Joyce's astonishing outburst of parody results from his fighting a war on two fronts at once. On the one hand, he is fighting the old battle of the wandering scholar against the clergy, who must inevitably tend to dominate intellectual life in a Catholic country. On the other hand, he is fighting the battle of philosophy and the humanities as he had learned them from his Jesuit teachers against the science and pseudo-science that capture the allegiance of an untutored man of good will like Leopold Bloom and encourage his native vulgarity. Such an intellectual position as Joyce's may not be entirely self-consistent, but it's a grand place from which to start a fight.

Anglo-Irish parody

I have no wish to attempt anything like a full history of Anglo-Irish parody, which is indistinguishable from English parody whenever its victims are the great English poets. William Maginn's best parody, 'Don Juan Unread', based on Wordsworth's 'Yarrow Unvisited', may stand for all such work. I should like, however, to mention one remarkable squib of Maginn's on which he lavished all his humour and learning,

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

the "Luctus" on the Death of Sir Daniel Donnelly, Late Champion of Ireland' which appeared in *Blackwood's* for May 1820. This symposium of mourning for an Irish prizefighter fills thirty-five pages in Maginn's collected works and includes commemorative poems allegedly by Byron, Wordsworth, and others; a Greek elegy; a Latin one; a Hebrew dirge, supposedly by 'Jackie' Barrett, the eccentric Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, accompanied by a characteristic letter; and fulsome poems and speeches said to be the work of leading citizens in Maginn's native Cork.¹ Here and elsewhere in Maginn's work we find anticipations of Father Francis Mahony's audacious and sometimes libellous pranks in his *Reliques of Father Prout*, a series which appeared in *Frazier's* under Maginn's editorship. I prefer Mahony to Maginn; though perhaps not so versatile, he draws on a far richer personality.

Mention of 'Father Prout' brings us to a vein of parody which is peculiarly Anglo-Irish. Gaelic as a spoken language was dying out in Ireland as the eighteenth century faded into the nineteenth, but the traditional Irish tunes did not die. New English words were fitted to them, which often bore no relation to the Gaelic. Usually these words were supplied by Anglo-Irishmen—including Goldsmith, it is said—but sometimes they were the work of folk poets. One such ballad, 'Castlehyde', by an itinerant heir of the bards from County Cork whose name has not come down to us, inspired a famous parody, 'The Groves of Blarney', which in its turn was imitated and parodied *ad nauseam*.

The poet of 'Castlehyde' admittedly knew more Gaelic than he did English, but those who scoffed at him failed to realize that he was attempting to render the assonantal patterns of Gaelic poetry in English. What seem to be ludicrously bad shots at rhyme are really assonances; in accumulating these, the poet has undoubtedly strained the English language severely. Here is my favourite excerpt:

The grand improvements
They would amuse you,
The trees are drooping
With fruit all kind;

¹ *Miscellaneous Writings of the late Doctor Maginn*, ed. Shelton Mackenzie (New York, 1855), ii. 47-82. For 'Don Juan Unread' see i. 179.

The bees per/suming
The fields with music,
Which yields more beauty
To Castlehyde.¹

'The Groves of Blarney', by Richard Millikin of Cork, while it won its author's bet that he could write something more ridiculous than 'Castlehyde', displays little of the skilled vowel harmony of its original. I shall quote here not Millikin's authentic text, but the one given by 'Father Prout' in 'A Plea for Pilgrimages', his tongue-in-cheek account of the pilgrimage of Sir Walter Scott to the Blarney Stone in 1825. I give an excerpt from what Mahony claimed was the Greek original, an incredibly accurate rendering, as I hope my literal translation will show. He also offered a French version which avoids all the absurdities of the English and a Latin version which is not up to the usual high standard of Mahony's Latinity. There is even an alleged rendering into Gaelic of one stanza. Mahony later produced an Italian version also.

THE GROVES OF BLARNEY

I

The Groves of Blarney,
They look so charming,
Down by the purlings
Of sweet silent brooks,
All decked by poesies
That spontaneous grow there,
Planted in order
In the rocky nooks.

'H 'Υλη Βλαρνεκη

α

Της Βλαρνας αί ἕλαι
Φεριαται, καλλυφυλλαι,
'Οπου σιγη ρεουσι
Πηραι ψιθυρίζουσαι
'Εκοντα γεννηθεντα
'Ομως τε φυτευθεντα
Μεσσοσι εν αγκουεσσω
Εστ' αυθε' πετρωδεσσων.²

[Literal translation of the Greek: 'Of the Blarney the woods, best, with beautiful leaves, where silently flow springs murmuring; spontaneously generated and likewise planted in the middle dells are flowers.' The last word in the Greek means 'rocky' and agrees with the word for 'dells' in the previous line. A prose translation could hardly be more faithful to the original than Mahony's rhymed one is.]

¹ Kathleen Hoagland, ed., *1000 Years of Irish Poetry* (New York, 1947), p. 255. I have divided the lines and used italics to emphasize the assonances.

² *The Works of Father Prout*, ed. Charles Kent (London, 1881), pp. 34-35. Greek accents omitted in original.

Mahony wrote at least two imitations of 'The Groves of Blarney' in English; one is entitled 'The Attractions of a Fashionable Irish Watering-Place' and sings the praises of a little seaside village near Cork, 'The town of Passage'.¹ Much more famous, however, is 'The Shandon Bells'. This *jeu d'esprit* has somehow stumbled into *The Oxford Book of English Verse* and thence to a terrific New Critical drubbing at the hands of Messrs. Brooks and Warren,² thus answering Pope's rhetorical question, 'Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?'

In truth 'The Shandon Bells' is but a pastiche of a parody; the occasion for its first appearance throws a light on the perverse wit of Francis Mahony. In one of the 'Prout Papers' he presented what he alleged to be the French, Latin, and Greek originals of poems by Thomas Moore—who, being a Whig, was a favourite target of Maginn and Mahony. These 'originals' were written by Mahony himself with the help of a former pupil, Frank Stack Murphy, who appears as 'an obscure Greek poet, called *Στρακκος Μορφιδης*'. The article ended with Father Prout's account of how he had sung his own 'The Shandon Bells' to Moore—verses which the latter soon plagiarized in 'Those Evening Bells', one of the songs in his *National Airs*.³

I have dwelt rather long on Mahony because, like Joyce, he received his entire formal education from the Jesuits. Any remote chance Mahony still had of being ordained a Jesuit priest disappeared when he was forced to resign from the post of Master of Rhetoric at Clongowes Wood College, Joyce's first alma mater, partly as the result of a drunken spree with his students; some of the blame for this escapade rests with the father of one of them.⁴

Mahony's long residence and death on the Continent and his skill in polylingual puns also remind us of Joyce. I cannot prove that Joyce knew of Mahony's connexion with Clongowes, but he is mentioned at least once in *Finnegans Wake*: 'The prouts who will invent a writing there ultimately is the poeta, still more learned, who discovered the raiding there originally'

¹ *The Works of Father Prout*, p. 257.

² Cleanth Brooks, Jr., and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Poetry* (New York, 1946), pp. 220-4.

³ *The Works of Father Prout*, pp. 83-103.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. ix-xiv.

(p. 482). One could not be sure that Father Prout, as well as Marcel Proust and the Latin dissyllable *prout*, was among those present, were it not that the same paragraph contains a reference to 'the bells of scandal'.

Both Maginn and Edward Vaughan Kencaly—a linguist, but hardly a wit, who translated 'Castlehyde' into Greek—were graduates of Trinity College, Dublin, where the undergraduate weekly magazine, *T.C.D.*, is still known for its parodies, as *Hermathena*, the college's learned journal, is for its Greek and Latin renderings of English verse. Robert Yelverton Tyrrell, a Fellow of the College and one of the great Latin and Greek scholars of his day, carried on the Maginn tradition admirably. Shortly after being elected to Fellowship in 1868 he founded a magazine named *Kottabos*, which became world-famous for its parodies and Greek and Latin verse as well as for the original English poetry of Oscar Wilde and others. The best of the work in its scarce volumes was reprinted in an anthology, *Echoes from Kottabos*.¹ Tyrrell's own 'Herodotus in Dublin (*The original Greek is added when it is deemed necessary*)' was a favourite parody, as was R. F. Littledale's 'The Oxford Solar Myth'. The latter, which put forward the view that Max Müller, the philologist and dabbler in comparative mythology, was the sun, had the distinction of being translated into German! The link between Tyrrell and Joyce was of course Gogarty, who was at one time a friend of both.

Imitations from the (Percy) French

Finally we come to a Trinity graduate whose work as a parodist and author of popular songs was peculiarly dear to James Joyce, as to many other Irishmen of his generation. William Percy French (1854-1922), better known as Percy French, was distinguished for his banjo playing rather than his classical learning while at college. His greatest achievement there was the writing of 'Abdullah Bulbul Amceer', now better known to American undergraduates than to Irish ones. A London publisher pirated and copyrighted the song, so that French never earned a penny by it nor even had the satisfaction of being acknowledged as its author.

After futile attempts to settle down as a civil engineer, French

¹ Ed. R. Y. Tyrrell and Sir Edward Sullivan, Bart. (London, 1906).

became first a humorous journalist, then a travelling entertainer singing his own comic songs, giving his own recitations, and doing clever lightning cartoons.¹ This Anglo-Irish successor to the medieval gleemen wrote a number of songs to original or traditional Irish tunes, some of which have become so popular that they are often mistaken for anonymous folksongs. 'The Mountains of Mourne', 'Phil the Fluter's Ball', and 'Come Back Paddy Reilly (to Ballyjamesduff)' are probably the best-known. 'Phil the Fluter's Ball' bulks almost as large in *Finnegans Wake* as the ballad which gave the book its title. As a matter of fact, the paragraph on p. 6 of *Finnegans Wake* in which the wake of the hod-carrier Tim Finnegan is first described contains at least two detailed allusions to 'Phil the Fluter's Ball'. First we read, 'And the all gianed in with the shoutmost shoviality', which corresponds to the line in the fourth verse of the song, 'Then all joined in wid the greatest joviality...'. Later comes, 'Tee the tootal of the fluid hang the twoddle of the fuddled, O!' which parodies the opening of the chorus, 'With the toot of the flute, And the twiddle of the fiddle, O...'.² Even in the previous paragraph on p. 6 there is what may be described as an allusion to French's song. Tim when drunk is called 'Phill'—'. . . wan warning Phill fill tipping full'. Wherever one finds a further allusion to 'Phil the Fluter', a reference to the hod-carrier's wake is usually not far away. Not counting those on p. 6, I have found at least sixteen allusions to French's ballad in *Finnegans Wake*.³

I can find no allusion to 'The Mountains of Mourne'—which does not prove that there is none—but on p. 485 we read these words: 'Come back, baddy wryly, to Bullydamestough! Cum him, buddy rowly, with me!' The following other songs by French are alluded to: 'Mick's Hotel (by the Salt Say Water)', p. 50; 'Phishlin Phil McHugh', p. 50; 'Shlathery's Mounted Fut', pp. 137, 181, 405; 'Are Ye Right There, Michael?' pp. 66, 296; 'Abdullah Bulbul Ameer', p. 355; and 'Drumcolliher', pp. 60, 176, 540.

The 'Drumcolliher' references on p. 540 require special

¹ *Chronicles and Poems of Percy French*, ed. Mrs. De Burgh Daly (Dublin, 1922), contains a great deal of biographical detail about French, some in his own words.

² Sheet music. Copyright 1937 by Keith Prowse & Co., Ltd. Published by arrangement with Messrs. Pigott & Co., Ltd., Dublin.

³ Pp. 12, 58, 63, 230, 240, 277-8, 297, 318-19, 335, 341, 351, 363, 444, 491.

explanation. The song tells of a typical one-horse (and one-store) town:

There's only one house in Drumcolliher,
For hardware and bacon and tea¹

None the less, the native of Drumcolliher is proud of it and wouldn't live anywhere else. Hence the travel agent's slogans in four languages on p. 540 of *Finnegans Wake*. The last of these, however, strikes a sinister note: '*Vedi Drumcollagher e poi Moons*. You will say that it is merely a variation on 'See Naples and die.' No doubt—but note the spelling of 'Drumcollogher'. There is a real town of that name in County Limerick; in 1926 forty-eight people were burned to death there in a cinema fire.²

In accordance with Joycean punctilio, Percy French is mentioned twice by name in *Finnegans Wake*, once in the first footnote on p. 296 as 'Parsee ffrench', and again on p. 495 in the phrase 'skirriless ballets in Parsee French . . .'. Percy French indeed wrote many ballads, but none of them was scurrilous; the nearest this kindly man ever came to satire was in verses entitled 'The Queen's After-Dinner Speech', as supposedly reported by a waiter at the Viceregal Lodge during Queen Victoria's state visit to Ireland in 1900. The references to Maud Gonne and W. B. Yeats should be better known than they are:

'That Maud Gonne,' sez she,
'Dhressin' in black,' sez she,
'To welcome me back,' sez she;
'Though I don't care,' sez she,
'What they wear,' sez she,
'An' all that gammon,' sez she,
'About me bringin' famine,' sez she,
'Now Maud 'ill write,' sez she,
'That I brought the blight,' sez she,
'Or altered the saysons,' sez she,
'For some private raysins,' sez she,
'An' I think there's a slate,' sez she,
'Off Willie Yeats,' sez she.
'He should be at home,' sez she,
'French polishin' a pome,' sez she,

¹ Sheet music. Copyright 1940 in the U.S.A. by Pigott & Co.

² *Irish Independent* (Dublin), Golden Jubilee Edition (3 Jan. 1955), p. 39.

'An' not writin' letters,' sez she,
 'About his betters,' sez she,
 'Paradin' me crimes,' sez she,
 'In the 'Irish Times', sez she.¹

This verse form, if I may so dignify it, has a long history in Anglo-Irish humorous writing. French's lines appear to be an imitation of 'Loey Philip and Her Grayshus Majesty', by M. J. Barry of Cork, a squib which presumably dates from 1848.² Barry's verses stem ultimately from the 'Dialogue Between Tom Flinter and His Man', quoted in Sir Jonah Barrington's *Personal Sketches of His Own Times* (otherwise known as his *Recollections*):

Dick! said he.
 What? said he.
 Fetch me my hat, says he;
 For I will go, says he,
 To Timahoe, says he . . .³

This, in turn, may be modelled on a Gaelic humorous poem; I have come across one which repeated the verb of saying in similar fashion, but if I noted the source at the time, I have since lost the reference. I could prove that Joyce knew Barrington's book, but I feel sure that it is French's verses he is parodying on pp. 519-20 of *Finnegans Wake*: 'He is doing a walk, says she, in the feelmick's park, says he, like a tarrable Turk, says she . . .'⁴

In the 'Proteus' episode of *Ulysses* Stephen's meditations include his own parody of some lines by Percy French:

The aunt thinks you killed your mother. That's why she won't.
Then here's a health to Mulligan's aunt
And I'll tell you the reason why.
She always kept things decent in
The Hannigan familye.⁴

The original is entitled 'Mathew Hanigan's Aunt'; the first four lines of the chorus are almost identical with those above, except where 'Mulligan' is substituted for 'Hanigan'.⁵

¹ *Prose, Poems and Parodies of Percy French*, p. 56.

² Daniel Casey, ed., *Cork Lyrics* (Cork, 1857), pp. 148-52.

³ *Recollections of Jonah Barrington*, with an introduction by George Birmingham (Dublin, n.d.), p. 93.

⁴ *Ulysses*, p. 46.
⁵ *Prose, Poems and Parodies of Percy French*, p. 155.

Joyce's motives for parodying a parodist

French himself was no mean parodist; note particularly his renderings of nursery rhymes in the styles of various nineteenth-century English poets. These can be found in *Prose, Poems and Parodies of Percy French*, a volume still regularly reprinted in Ireland.¹ It is curious to see Joyce, the arch-parodist, so frequently parodying a fellow-parodist. What were his motives? A satisfactory answer to that question would tell us a great deal about his choice and treatment of sources for *Finnegans Wake*.

In the first place, we must remember that Joyce was still working in the Flaubert tradition, which places a premium on historical accuracy. Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, the dreamer of *Finnegans Wake*, recapitulates the history of the human race in his Jungian dreams, but he is also a dweller in a particular time and place. He is an Irish middle-class Protestant, aged fifty-odd in or about 1939; so was my late father, who was able to give me many of the words of 'Drumcollither' before I obtained a copy of the sheet music. It would be surprising if H. C. E.'s free association of ideas in dreaming did not contain reminiscences of songs by Percy French, as well as of Moore's *Irish Melodies* and the *Irish Country Songs* collected by Herbert Hughes in this century.²

To reinforce my argument on this point, I must stress the fact that Joyce introduces a number of very precise contemporary touches into the bar-room scene of *Finnegans Wake* (pp. 309-82). When the customers pay for their drinks, they do so in the handsome Irish coinage introduced in 1928:³ 'he scooped the hens, hounds and horses biddy by bunny, with an arc of his covethand . . .' (p. 321). The 'bunny' on the threepenny piece is more correctly termed a 'hare' on p. 313. On p. 324 the radio announcer prefaces an S.O.S. ('lessonless') message with the words 'Rowdioso wodhalooing'. The allusions to the noise in the bar and the Battle of Waterloo are clear enough, but only those who have heard an Irish announcer say '*Radio Átha Luain*' ('Radio Athlone') will

¹ Pp. 84-98. See also pp. 65-83 and 121-5.

² *James Joyce: sa vie, son œuvre, son rayonnement*, ed. Bernard Gheerbrant (Paris, 1949). An exhibition catalogue; see Nos. 120, 122.

³ See *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, p. 749.

recognize the primary reference; this is an authentic period touch, as announcers now say 'Radio Éireann' ('Radio Ireland'). On p. 325 we have radio commercials, not all of them authentic. I am not sure that Arthur Guinness, Sons and Company ('Art thou gainous sense uncompetitive?') or Anne Lynch's Teas ('Anna Lynchya Pourable!') advertised on the Irish radio before 1939, the year in which *Finnegans Wake* was published, but I do remember that the Irish Hospitals Sweepstakes advertised regularly ('Don't forget. I wish ausplicable thieves-dayte for the stork dyrby.'). As for references to De Valera, such as 'Devine's Providence' on the same page, Andrew Cass has collected a number of them and presented his case for the identification of 'Shaun' with De Valera in two brilliant articles.¹

In the second place, French's songs would naturally form part of the equipment of the ideal reader of *Finnegans Wake*—one who, like Joyce himself, knew both the microcosm and the macrocosm, both twentieth-century Ireland and the wider human world in time and space to which that Ireland, often reluctantly, belongs. The more familiar the underlying jingle, the more extravagantly can Joyce counterpoint his puns against it without the experienced reader's losing the melodic line altogether. Look at the distortions suffered by the three-word phrase 'Phil the Fluter' without its becoming totally unrecognizable; I have arranged them in the order of their difficulty, not that of their occurrence in the text:

Phil fluther (p. 444)
 filthefluthered (p. 63)
 foil the fluter (p. 230)
 foil the flouter (p. 363)
 fill the flatter (p. 335)
 feel the Flucher (p. 58)
 Flinn the Flinter (p. 240)
 Publ the Punkah (p. 297)
 Tham the Thatcher (p. 318)
 Pied de Poudre (p. 12)

The longer the recognizable quotation parodied, the greater the opportunity it offers for verbal arabesques. Here are some

¹ 'Sprakin Sea Djoytsch', *Irish Times*, 26 Apr. 1947, p. 6; 'Childe Horrid's Pilgrimace', *Envy*, v (1951), 19-30.

variations on the passage from the chorus of 'Phil the Fluter' which I quoted above:

for the total of your flouts is not fit to fan
 his fettle, O! (p. 58)
 to the tickle of his tube and the twobble of
 his fable, O . . . (p. 319)
 with the sickle of a scythe but the humour of
 a hummer, O . . . (p. 341)
 To the tumble of the toss tot the trouble
 of the swaddled, O. (p. 444)

To go back for a moment to 'Pied de Poudre'—why am I confident that this is a reference to 'Phil the Fluter'? Let me quote part of the context:

. . . hopping round his middle like kippers on a griddle, O, as he lays dormant from the macroborg of Holdhard to the microborg of Pied de Poudre.

The citizens of Dublin are hopping round the middle of the sleeping giant—who is Finn MacCool, H. C. E., Finnegan, and the city of Dublin, among other things. The giant's head is Howth Head ('Holdhard'), while his feet lie at the Powder Magazine in Phoenix Park ('Pied de Poudre'). Now, 'hopping round his middle like kippers on a griddle, O' is almost a direct quotation from the chorus of 'Phil the Fluter's Ball', where the words are 'Hopping in the middle like a herrin' on a griddle, O!'

Furthermore, if one reads 'Pied de Poudre' with a Dublin pronunciation instead of a Parisian one, it sounds much closer to 'Phil the Fluter'. It cannot be too often stressed that, as Joyce's own recording shows, the basic language of *Finnegans Wake* is English with a Dublin accent. The quickest way to understand almost any passage is to read it *aloud* as if it were English. If a passage in roman type seems to be entirely in a foreign language, then the reader must be particularly on guard against a hoax. The reference to 'that once grand old elrington bawl' on pp. 55-56, coupled with the parody of Swift's epistolary style which occupies most of p. 413, suggests that Joyce was familiar with F. Elrington Ball's edition of Swift's *Correspondence*. If so, he must have known the language which Swift and the Rev. Thomas Sheridan called *Latino-Anglicus*. It looks

like Latin, but turns out to be English. Sheridan began his first letter in the new language with the words 'De armis ter de an', which mean nothing more than 'Dear Mr. Dean.'¹ So when we find, on p. 91 of *Finnegans Wake*, what seems at first sight a passage of Modern Irish, '... mhuith peisth mhaise as fearra bheura muire hriosmas,' we must beware. The rule, 'Read aloud as English', does not apply here, but when given a Gaelic pronunciation the words sound very like 'with best wishes for a very merry Christmas'.

In the third place, the songs of Percy French, besides forming part of the culture of H. C. E. and the ideal reader of *Finnegans Wake*, also helped to make up the culture of Joyce himself. He could not have parodied them if he had not known them. I deliberately use the word 'culture' in its anthropological sense. In recapitulating the history of mankind through the ages Joyce was fully aware that he must represent 'culture' in the most inclusive sense of that word. Man's religion, politics, art, science, and technology are all parts of his culture—but so are his dirty jokes, his children's games, and the songs pounded into his head by gleemen or crooners. Everything was grist that came to Joyce's mill; much of it did not come spontaneously, but had to be sought for by Joyce and his band of unpaid researchers; other material, including most of the popular culture he used, was already stored in his memory. We can be sure of this last point, because Joyce's parodies of the Percy French songs often reflect a version which varies considerably from the printed text.

Like every other reader of *Finnegans Wake*, I am deeply indebted to Messrs. Campbell and Robinson's *Skeleton Key*.² They will, I hope, pardon me for regretting that, in their analysis of Joyce's references, they show so much knowledge of Sanskrit and so little of 'stage Irish', so much of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and so little of the Irish book of the living.

A philosophy of parody

Having explained, at least tentatively, why Joyce parodied so much trivial verse, I must go on to ask a more fundamental

¹ *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, D.D.*, ed. F. Elrington Ball, v (London, 1913), 73. And see above, Chapter 4, pp. 97-98.

² Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson, *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* (New York, 1944).

question: *why parody at all?* I have suggested above that much of the parody in *Ulysses* had a satiric intention, but I cannot detect the same animus in most of *Finnegans Wake*. A majority of the critics I have read agree that the latter is by far the mellowest book, yet parody is far more integral to its structure than to that of *Ulysses*. If Joyce wished to fuse past and present into a single work of literature, why did he not quote the great and trivial phrases of the past without parody, as Ezra Pound has done in his *Cantos*? One answer, of course, is that Joyce was not Pound. Another might be that the Irish mind is innately destructive; though appallingly loosely phrased and impossible to prove, this answer has the merit of being difficult to refute. Even the philosophic systems of Berkeley and Erigena contain an undeniable element of nihilism. However, I do not think we need discuss this second answer, as the view of history which Joyce was putting forward almost inevitably finds expression in parody.

If I were to attempt a philosophy of parody, I might produce merely a parody of philosophy; instead, let me look for help from the philosophers. A reading of Susanne K. Langer's chapter on 'The Comic Rhythm' in *Feeling and Form* suggests that the sense of human continuity which Joyce sought to express is basically comic; the moment history is represented as imitating itself, parody is only a step away. The following quotation forms the kernel of Mrs. Langer's argument:

What justifies the term 'Comedy' is not that the ancient ritual procession, the Comus, honouring the god of that name, was the source of this great art form—for comedy has arisen in many parts of the world, where the Greek god with his particular worship was unknown—but that the Comus was a fertility rite, and the god it celebrated a fertility god, a symbol of perpetual rebirth, eternal life.¹

'Eternal life' here of course means eternal life on earth.

Support for the view that there is something inherently comic in the repeat performances of history comes to us from an unexpected quarter:

Hegel remarks somewhere that all great, world-historical facts

¹ Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York, 1953), p. 331. Compare Francis Macdonald Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (Cambridge, 1934), and Albert Cook, *The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean* (Cambridge, Mass., 1949).