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Met Whom What?

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This note takes off from a remark that has been made in criticism several times—that Bloom in his explication of “metempsychosis” somehow mistakenly swerves into a related notion, metamorphosis, when he illustrates the term in his second didactic attempt: “They used to believe you could be changed into an animal or a tree, for instance” (U4.375-76).¹ As usual, Bloom is not really wrong (if the term has any meaning), but quite on target.

Bloom’s serial explication of “metempsychosis,” after only a brief moment of getting his thoughts together, is surprisingly accurate: “That means the transmigration of souls” (U4.341). This could have been taken straight out of a reference book that Gerty MacDowell once consulted about “halcyon days,” “Walker’s pronouncing dictionary” (U13.342-43), which reads: “The transmigration of the soul into the bodies of other animals, as taught by Pythagoras, and still believed in some parts of the East.”² So the idea of transformation into animals or plants traditionally can be evoked by the term. The theosophists had later on tended to emphasize the idea as derived from Hinduism, in the more exclusive sense of purely human avatars. But it is on record that human souls can pass into the lower spheres.

Rebuffed by Molly, in his resilient exemplifications Bloom indeed drifts away from the narrower concept towards a more general notion of transformation in the example already quoted, that “you could be changed into an animal or a tree, for instance. What they called nymphs, for example” (U4.376-77). As said before, such examples had been given in profusion by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, in which the first extended story relates to Daphne’s change into the laurel. Ovid, however, also had anticipated Bloom in reverse direction—towards metempsychosis. From multiple mythological changes (gods into humans, humans into animals or plants,³ also into heavenly bodies), the poem includes the doctrines of Pythagoras, whose description of the transmigration of souls takes up a great part of the last book, which also serves as a philosophical basis for the whole anthology of mythological changes. Pythagoras

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is not named (he is “a man from Samos”⁴), nor is the term “metempsychosis” used; most reference works mention Pythagoras as the inventor of the term. But his views are paraphrased at length. They describe all kinds of changes, many of them within nature. The metempsychotic message reads like this:

*morte carent animae semperque priore relictæ
sede novis domibus vivunt habitantque receptæ* (Met. 15.158-59)

(our souls are deathless, and ever, when they have left their former seat, do they live in new abodes and dwell in the bodies that have received them—Met. 377)

Translations preceding *Ulysses* run like this: “For souls are free of death. Howbeit, they leaving evermore / Their former dwellings are received and live again in new” (Arthur Golding, 1567); “Nor dies the Spirit, but new Life repeats / In other Forms, and only changes Seats” (John Dryden, 1693); “Souls are not subject to death; and having left their former abode, they ever inhabit new dwellings, and, there received, live on” (Henry T. Riley, 1889).⁵ Poetic forms too undergo changes in different minds; thoughts find new habitations, and a justification underlying all translation is that the semantic soul is somehow preserved in ever new verbal embodiments.

Bloom is not quoting Ovid’s poem, nor is Joyce, but some phrasings almost might be taken over: “that we go on living” (U4.362; “vivunt”); “or some other planet” (U4.364; “novis domibus”). Dryden’s “and only changes seats” could even be aligned to a recollection Bloom has of the times at Dolphin’s Barn when he and Molly first played charades, and, we learn much later, also “Musical chairs. We two the last . . . Round and round slow” (U11.726-27). Such pairings are not intentionally allusive, but simply inevitable, given the nature of the subject.

The soul in its wanderings does not remember its previous innings, as Bloom well knows, and so he expands: “They say we have forgotten it. Some say they remember their past lives” (U4.364-65). Remembering, memory—and conversely oblivion (the next episode, “Lotus Eaters,” will ring changes on that theme)—are basic principles. *Ulysses* celebrates memory and recalls and elaborates on manifold distortions. Its readers depend on *their* memories. Without knowing it, Bloom evokes a ghost. The first person on record with a memory of a past life is again Pythagoras himself. He had been, as he claimed, a Trojan hero defending the city against the Greeks:

*ipse ego (nam memini) Troiani tempore belli
Panthoides Euphorbus eram (Met.15:160-61)*

(I myself [for I remember it], in the days of the Trojan war was Euphorbus, the son of Panthoüs—Riley522)

On one occasion he even recognized his own shield. So Joyce makes Bloom, a literary reincarnation of Odysseus, hero before Troy, unwittingly call up Pythagoras, who in his former existence had been a minor Trojan warrior, Euphorbus, on the opposite side of the camp. Euphorbus was killed by Menelaos (*Il.*17.59,.81). Classical sources like Diogenes Laertius gave an even more detailed account of the transmigrations of that particular soul:

He had once been Aethalides and was accounted to be Hermes' son, and Hermes told him he might choose any gift he liked except immortality; so he asked to retain through life and through death a memory of his experiences. Hence in life he could recall everything, and when he died he still kept the same memories. Afterwards in the course of time his soul entered Euphorbus and he was wounded by Menelaus . . . then he told of the wanderings of his soul,⁶ how it migrated hither and thither, into how many plants and animals it had come, and all that it underwent in Hades. . . . When Euphorbus died, his soul passed into Hermotimus . . . he identified the shield. . . . When Hermotimus died, he became Pyrrhus, a fisherman of Delos. . . . But when Pyrrhus died, he became Pythagoras, and still remembered all the facts mentioned.⁷

Pythagoras was a most versatile, all-round person, versed in mysteries, music, geometry, and numbers above all. Bloom's speculation on "Numbers it is. All music when you come to think" is ultimately Pythagorean lore (*U*11.830). Ovid tells us that he was a voluntary exile ("*exul sponte erat*"—*Met.*15.61-62), like Joyce, and gives him the attributes of carefulness and curiosity: "*animo et vigili perspexerat omnia cura*" ("he examined all things with his mind, and with watchful study"—*Met.*15.65). "*Vigilis cura*" is certainly a characteristic of Bloom and of Odysseus. Pythagoras was interested and knowledgeable in such things as the origin of the universe and the causes of things (where does the snow come from or lightning; what makes the earth quake; what laws direct the course of the stars); all of this, and in particular the interest in causes, are Bloomian concerns as well. The difference is that Pythagoras used to pass on his knowledge, to make it public to a silently wondering crowd: "He set them openly / Abroad for other folk to learn" (Golding379). Bloom aspires to such instruction as well, but is rarely given the chance; even Molly is no longer listening to his clarification. Some projec-

tions in "Circe" see him as public adviser, but when he tries to hold forth in "Cyclops," he is easily mocked: "Mister Knowall. Teach your grandmother how to milk ducks" (U12.838).

Bloom is remembered as speaking up for "Humane methods. Because the poor animals suffer" (U12.843). Pythagoras appears in *Metamorphoses* above all as a preaching vegetarian; he enjoins repeatedly that one is not to kill and eat animals, because they contain souls. Bloom is pointedly no vegetarian, though he appreciates a few advantages of abstaining from meat. One of his thoughts approximates Pythagorean injunctions: "If you do [eat beefsteak] the eyes of that cow will pursue you through all eternity" (U8.535-36).

At any rate, both Bloom in *Ulysses* and Pythagoras are elucidators of metempsychosis. Later on, Molly will make fun of his proclivity to teach and instruct when she remembers the scene: "hed say its from the Greek leave us as wise as we were before" (U18.241-42). Bloom is right, however, when he patiently explains a term that is connected originally with wise Pythagoras: "It's Greek: from the Greek" (U4.341).

Perhaps a final note on Molly's need for an explanation of "Met him. . ." in the first place ("final" in the sense of terminating this note, that is, not the debate). She thwarts with contempt Bloom's first try, and as he keeps groping for better instruction, she seems to lose interest altogether and attends entirely to her tea cup until she notices the smell from the kitchen. The contention here is that she does not even primarily want to know. Some moments before, the conversation—an intricate connubial game (where both know what the other may have in mind and yet agree to stay clear of a touchy subject)—comes close to the impending visit this afternoon. Casually diverting him, Molly asks about the time of the funeral, then points towards the book and offers the word. It is a bait to divert Bloom's attention and is entirely successful. Molly knows how her husband loves to explain, to hold forth, to instruct, so she throws him a bone, and he gnaws at it, along with us readers (who of course at this early stage do not know either of the characters). It is a stratagem worthy of wise Penelope herself. And it stands Joyce in good stead by introducing a term with multiple ramifications.

NOTES

¹ The most recent view is from Patrick McCarthy's "Reading in *Ulysses*," in *Joycean Occasions: Essays from the Milwaukee James Joyce Conference*, ed. Janet E. Dunleavy, et al. (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1991), p. 23.

² John Walker, *Walker's Pronouncing Dictionary* (London: Longman and Company, 1860).

³ Compare the Protean variant: "God becomes man becomes fish becomes barnacle goose becomes featherbed mountain" (U3.477-79).

⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976). Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as *Met*.

⁵ Ovid, *Selected Works*, trans. Arthur Golding (London: J.M. Dent, 1939), p. 380; John Dryden, *The Poems of John Dryden*, ed. John Sargeant (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1935), p. 498; Ovid, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. Henry T. Riley (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889), p. 522.

⁶ "της ψυχης περιπολησιν," which seems to be the origin of "transmigration of the soul."

⁷ Diogenes Laertius, "Pythagoras" VIII.4-6, in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Book Four. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1925), pp. 323-25.

Djuna Barnes Remembers James Joyce

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Djuna Barnes's famous interview with James Joyce came out in *Vanity Fair* a few months after the publication of *Ulysses* in 1922; then she continued her impressions of him in "Vagaries Malicieux," an unmalicious, if definitely rambling article describing her first trip to Paris.¹ Richard Ellmann used some of her details in his biography *James Joyce*.

When they met, Barnes was mostly known as the brilliant New York journalist sent by *McCall's Magazine* in the fall of 1921 to observe the Left Bank scene. There were any number of mutual friends and connections: Barnes had met Helen Fleischman, Peggy Guggenheim's cousin and Giorgio Joyce's wife-to-be, in 1917. Joyce and Barnes were friends of Robert McAlmon and, of course, Sylvia Beach, who perhaps arranged for them to meet at her bookstore. Their meetings took place at the Café aux Deux Magots, across from the church of St. Germain des Près, a stone's throw from Barnes's flat. Barnes said that, during her four months in Paris, she had talked with him often.

With the keen eye of a portrait painter, Barnes saw Joyce emerge from the fog sporting goatee, blue gray coat, and heirloom waistcoat.² In the interview, she says that she had read *Dubliners* during World War I, had recommended *Exiles* to theatrical committees, and had perused *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* shortly after its publication, but she only spotted the singer in Joyce when she read