

THE FLOOD

FW 287.18-292.32

tentative general reading tracks
by
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The passage starting at 287.18 and ending at 292.38 seems to mark a qualitative change in the textual course of the Night Lesson. Whereas the rest of the chapter is graphically divided in a tripartite layout, with the main text in the middle and Shem's and Shaun's marginal notes on its sides (first left and right, then right and left); in this passage the marginal notes disappear, as if flooded and engulfed by the main narrative. Being, thus, in itself, a whole unit, I think it would be wise to have a general overview of its parts before plunging into a more detailed sequential analysis.

Basically this is a description of the children of the Earwicker family (Shem, Shaun and Issy); especially of the Shem/Shاون polarity seen from a general perspective (the narrator's) and from an inner one, that of Issy's; the sexual aspect being the nucleus of the imaginative constellation. But what is particularly interesting is the fact that whereas Dolph is mentioned (at the beginning), there is no track of Kev (although he appears in his Shaunian aspect). Now, since Dolph is the one who introduces the "geomatry" lesson it is possible to look at the whole passage as an emotional whirl inside his psychic structure, described in its various phases by the all engulfing mother. No matter how "free" his "thinking" is, Dolph feels the Shaunian aspect as his inner resistance to the ritualistic mystery of sex he is about to perform.

First of all we must note that the text is divided in its constituent parts by "semi-colons (;)" - and by one single "colon (:)". I'll explain the reason why as soon as we meet it. Leaving aside the Latin passage (amply discussed in previous mails) we have:

- 1) 287.18-288.13 (Shem)
- 2) 288.13-289.10 (Shaun) [;]
- 2a) 289.10-289.17 (Shaun) [:]
- 3) 289.17-289.24 (Shaun/Shem)
- 4) 289.24-291.21 (Issy)
- 5) 291.21-292-12 (Issy/Shاون/Shem)
- 6) 292.12-292-21 (Shem)
- 7) 292.21-292.32 (Shem/Shاون)

(1) 287.18-288.13

Shem is the transgressive guy who throws doubts among his fellow students, upsetting their passively accepted mental habits; and considering, as his central topic of discussion, the "female", seen as:

- i) an evil essence (first, Faust)
- ii) a persistent thought (segunds thoughts)
- iii) a charming attraction (girlalove)
- iv) an armoured sex appealing maid (fourthermore)
- v) a whorish sexual object (filthily)

The "damning letter" is in fact the devilish contract signed by Faust. Metaphorically: the unavoidable bond which links the male to the female. In this we may see the modification of Shem's attitude towards sex: the sinful concept taught by the Church's moral on second thought becomes platonic love; that then becomes romantic love; that then becomes carnal love, sex at its basic (or basest level). The last three forms of love are reflected by the three syllabic forms: oxytone (Oxatown), paroxytone (baroccidents) and proparoxytone (proper accidence), which may

be looked at from opposite perspectives:

(A) descending

high - platonic love - spirit (antepenultimate)

middle - romantic love - soul (penultimate)

low - carnal love - body (ultimate)

(B) ascending : sex penetration

up to the deeper source (no matter how oxymoronic!)

(2) 288.13-289.10

Here we have a discreet shift from the Shemian to the Shaunesque figure. "In point of feet" is the literal translation of Italian "*in punta di piedi*" (on tiptoe) - the Roman teaching that makes its subtle entrance. Shaun (as St Patrick) is the one who accepts the new religion and preaches against luxury and tries to rescue whores from their sinful state (peccaminous corpulums).

"*Barcelonas*" are linked to Italian "porcellona" (big sow, horny harlot), with their "Borsalino hats" (probably snatched from Joyce's head, who used to wear Borsalinos) and probably transmitting venereal diseases (Barcellona → Spain, → Spanish disease → syphilis). The moral and the religion taught by Shaun/Patrick is adopted by the native Irish, so that they suffer not Lucifer's (Benjermine Funkling's) fate.

(2a) 289.10-289.17

The Fire Sermon (probably a reference to the Hell-fire sermon of the Portrait) convinces the natives to leave their old faith. And here we find the above mentioned colon (:), which has a double meaning: as "pillar" (Italian "colonna" - column), it is a solid stand against sin; as "coal" it is a reminder of the infernal pains. (I wouldn't exclude, though, a rascal allusion to "intestine, colon, rectum" - thus an "up your ass" teaching.)

(3) 289.17-289.24

But all these teachings - especially those addressed to maids, ordering them to chase away the snake of tentation (to scotch the

schlang - "scotch" Italian "*scacciare*", chase away) - namely sex restraint, do not seem to work on Shem, the vagabond (Shaughraun) artist. Here we must point out some interesting allusions. "*blameall*" is linked to Benjermine Funkling. There is in fact one famous saying of his (Benjamin Franklin): "*blame-all and praise-all are two blockheads*". So here we see Shem in his damnable Lucifer aspect. For what concerns the four cursive words (amongst the many other nuances) we find : *disparito*, Italian "sparito" (disappeared) and "dispari" (odd, uneven) and "disparato" (disparate); *duspurudo* : Spanish "desperado" (desperate) (outlaw); *desterrado* : Portuguese "exiled" and Italian "dissotterrare/ sterrare" (to unearth), thus "unearthed"; *despertieu* : Spanish "despierto" (awaken), with a "tieu/dieu (French "god") nuance. So we may see a lot of connections with Shem/Joyce in these four "no German" words (with-out another ostrovgods word - 289.16).

(4) 289.24-291.21

But now the image shifts back to Shaun, seen, this time, from the perspective of Issy's, who re-enacts the Tristan/Isolde affair. She remembers the romantic Tristan of their first encounter, to whom she showed herself in all her nakedness, charmed by his sweet words; and who now has become a cold, detached, chaste ambassador ; an obedient servant of his King, the old and unattractive Mark of Cornwall; whenas she could have the best young males of all Ireland. But what she cannot accept is the fact that Tristan/Shawn has found another Issy, the spiritual one (the best was still there if the torso was gone) - a Shawn influenced by the moralistic sexuophobic teachings of the Church.

(5) 291.21-292-12

And while she is trying (vainly) to make a man of Shaun - Shem, the vagabond, in his aspect of the Flying Dutchman (Somehow-at-Sea) and of a writer who has not yet reached success (on the high seas, having yet a long way to go), publishes his work about

free love (lamoor ... toward out yondest) on a magazine of doubtful renown, heedless of consequences that may fall on his head -- in fact his "ass" (heaven help his hindmost). A cultural attitude that will have devastating results on common moral, since, when sex is shown in its reality, when "it" (the it with an itch in it - p. 298) appears as "it" is, when girls have no restraints (la donna è mobile), no priestly sermons will be able to check the instinctual goads of the young males.

(6) 292.12-292-21

But this triggers Shaun's reaction, who considers Shem's theories as a bunch of corrupted and degenerate thoughts; the repetition, under apparent new words, of a stale and decadent philosophy.

(7) 292.21-292.32

The conclusion of what has been shown is that - no matter how someone states that no limits should be set to the march of human history - common sense (the beast of boredom) replies that proper barriers must be erected to indicate what is the right track to follow; and that, though a subject appears to us as a single unity, one must know how to parse its components and how to draw a definite line between what is lawful and what is not. Which brings the flow of the text back to its riverine bed.