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# Paranoid Modernism in Joyce and Kafka

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*This essay considers the work of Joyce and Kafka in terms of paranoia as interpretive delirium, the imagined but internally coherent interpretation of the world whose relation to the real remains undecidable. Classic elements of paranoia are manifest in both writers insofar as their work stages scenes in which the figure of the artist or a subjective equivalent perceives himself as the object of hostility and persecution. Nonetheless, such scenes and the modes in which they are rendered can also be understood as the means by which literary modernism resisted forces hostile to art but inherent in the social and economic conditions of modernity. From this perspective, the work of both Joyce and Kafka intersects with that of surrealists like Dali for whom the positive sense of paranoia as artistic practice answered the need for a systematic objectification of the oneiric underside of reason, “the world of delirium unknown to rational experience.”*

**Keywords:** James Joyce / Franz Kafka / paranoia / modernism

In recent years, paranoia has become nothing less than a paradigm for the reevaluation of modernism and modernity. David Trotter gave currency to the term “paranoid modernism” in his 2001 study of the English novelists Ford Madox Ford, Wyndham Lewis and D.H. Lawrence. His thesis is that in the economy of the early twentieth century, artists and writers struggled with the need to establish the symbolic capital of their talent in the absence of any real legitimating authority or institution. Inevitably they felt that their talent was not properly recognized, and this lack of recognition was often experienced as persecution. In this context, modernist experimentation can be understood as a paranoid response to this imagined persecution insofar as it insists on the writer’s expertise as a form of symbolic capital. At the same time, paranoia acquired an aesthetic value for members of the Surrealist movement like André Breton and Salvador Dali. By focusing on this historical phenomenon in the 1930s, Jean-Michel Rabaté has shown how the Surrealist movement’s interest shifted from an interest in hysteria to one in paranoia as a model for the artistic transformation of reality. In one of his manifestos, Dali himself called for a new art based on the example of paranoia that would answer the need for a concrete and systematic objectification of the oneiric underside of reason, “the world of delirium unknown to rational experience” (261).<sup>1</sup>

Most recently, John Farrell's *Paranoia and Modernity* (2006) traces the paranoid character in Western literature from Don Quixote to Rousseau, arguing that symptoms of paranoia are standard psychological components of the modern literary hero. In general, the value of the concept of paranoia for literary studies is that it constitutes an imagined but internally coherent interpretation of the world whose relation to the real remains undecidable. It thus serves as a kind of formal analogy for aesthetic modes that open themselves to notions of radical alterity while seeking to encode such notions within the formal constraints of the art work. At the same time, paranoia as a subjective relation to the object world has become a symptomatic condition of the figure of the artist in the face of a modern world perceived as uncomprehending, hostile or simply indifferent. We thus have two closely related paradigms of paranoia: one aesthetic and the other subjective. The otherwise very different worlds of Joyce and Kafka overlap within the respective spheres of these two paradigms. Simply put, each writer's work is the function of a relation between himself and the world perceived as essentially antagonistic. However, the two writers work out this problem in radically different ways.

The psychological disorder known as paranoia, particularly as elaborated by Freud and Lacan, consists of an interpretive delirium in which the self is given an exaggerated relation to the world, for example as an object of persecution or as a figure of grandeur. What distinguishes paranoia from other forms of delirium is the perfect coherence of this interpretation, at least internally, and the subject's absolute certainty of its truth. The attraction of paranoia as a figure for artistic activity is precisely its character as something imagined, ordered and projected in a visionary mode. In this sense T.S. Eliot, no stranger to paranoia himself, performs an exercise in paranoid criticism when he says, in his famous 1923 judgment of *Ulysses*, that Joyce's method constitutes a way of "controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary history" (177). What is paranoid in this formulation is the rage for control combined with the fear of the world at large. In any case, modernism creates its own form of meaning. As Trotter points out, just as the paranoid personality in its delirium rejects the real in order to impose its own meaning on the world, paranoid modernism seeks to create meaning and value in place of the world (5). What follows here may be understood as a complement to the work on English modernism already accomplished in Trotter's study. In arguing that modernist experimentation affirms the uniqueness of artistic production in the face of the writer's unstable social position, Trotter's emphasis is on the motives for creating symbolic capital out of certain literary forms. My own approach starts from the premise that paranoia is a fundamental dysfunction of the relation between the subject and the object world, and that certain writers suffer from this dysfunction for reasons that lie more deeply than their professional needs would dictate; such writers seek to gain mastery of this dysfunction by objectifying it in their writing. Unlike Trotter, I see no reason to consider paranoid modernism as especially English.<sup>2</sup> One the purposes of my study has been to find a measure of common ground between two writers, neither of them English, who are rarely put

in relation to one another despite their supreme importance to any definition of literary modernism. I do not attempt to psychoanalyze either Joyce or Kafka, but I do attempt to analyze the figure of the artist, and of the subject as artist, which each writer produces as the reflection of an inherently troubled psychic condition that remains nonetheless enigmatic. For this purpose, fictional representations are of equal value to personal testimonies in the form of letters and diaries. The question at stake here is that of the subjective position of the writer before, faced with, the act of writing: why write?

In the 1976 seminar entitled "Was Joyce Mad?" Lacan suggests that Joyce saw himself in the role of "redeemer" and therefore wished to put himself in the place of the true one as represented by his religious education (*Le sinthome* 79). There is no shortage of material to support such a view, especially in Joyce's early writings. In *Stephen Hero*, the title character fears that he will have wasted his talents "in order to save people who have neither inclination nor aptitude for freedom" (205). In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen wonders how he could "cast his shadow" over the imaginations of the daughters of Ireland, "that they might breed a race less ignoble than their own" (259). Stephen's final resolution to forge in the smithy of his soul "the uncreated conscience" of his race (276) again seems to cast him in the role of redeemer.

The visions of grandeur in Joyce's writings are continually heightened by visions of persecution. An early poem such as "The Holy Office" (1904), for example, establishes the writer's own myth of himself as a solitary figure despised by his inferiors in talent. This satirical broadside is directed against the figures active in the literary revival and includes a series of hilarious caricatures with specific reference to W.B. Yeats, John Synge, Oliver St. John Gogarty, Padraic Colum, W.K. Magee, George Roberts, James Starkey, John Eglinton and George Russell. As for his own place in contemporary Irish letters, Joyce defines his function as that of "Katharsis-Purgative." The writers of the revival, he says,

Make me the sewer of their clique.  
That they may dream their dreamy dreams  
I carry off their filthy streams (*CW* 151)

In other words, the complacent pieties of the revival are made possible by the presence of a reprobate figure onto whom all their sins can be projected. Not very convincingly, the speaker of the poem professes indifference to this treatment, while picturing himself as solitary, fearless and aloof. The poem concludes with an expression remarkable in its bitterness:

And though they spurn me from their door  
My soul shall spurn them evermore. (152)

The poem illustrates the principal of symmetry in classical studies of paranoia, whereby the degree of imagined self-grandeur is equal to the degree of imagined persecution.

"The Holy Office" was written in Dublin in late summer 1904, and is based on a personal experience that is fictionalized in *Ulysses*. The fictional moment takes place on June 16 of the same year, when, as told in the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode of *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus learns that he is not to be included in the collection of younger poets' verses being put together by George Russell as editor, with Roberts "doing the commercial part" (9.301).<sup>3</sup> Overhearing the idle praise of these poets in the librarian's office, Stephen silently compares himself to Shakespeare's Cordelia. In Stephen's mind, he is to the revival as Cordelia is to her hypocritical sisters: a virtuous but lonely figure of sorrow, denied recognition precisely because of his inherent superiority. The book in question, *New Songs*, including poems by Colum, Starkey and Roberts, was in fact published by Roberts in April 1904 without any contribution by Joyce. The circumstances under which the selection of poets was made for this book are no longer known, but in Joyce's personal history of the wrongs done to him by many persons, George Roberts figures prominently. Among other things, Roberts was the publisher who, in 1912, destroyed the proofs of *Dubliners* after failing to persuade Joyce to alter certain potentially actionable passages. The incident is remembered in the broadside "Gas from a Burner" (1912), where Joyce figures among the writers and artists sentenced to "banishment" from Ireland. And Joyce knew how to bear a grudge. As late as 1935, Joyce in a letter to his son Giorgio remembers that moment 23 years earlier in Dublin when Roberts, the man who claimed to be his best friend, presided over the "holocaust" (*olocausto*) of Joyce's first book.<sup>4</sup> In 1935 the word "holocaust" did not have precisely the meaning it has today, but according to the OED it already meant "a complete destruction, especially of a large number of persons; a great slaughter or massacre." I choose this example not just because it is new (being from the unpublished letters of the Jahnke Bequest at Zurich), but also because it demonstrates Joyce's capacity to give mythic proportions to his own sense of persecution. It is no accident that Stephen's name is that of the first Christian martyr, or that he suffers a mock martyrdom in *Portrait* when he is beaten by his school fellows for his heretical defense of Lord Byron.

In *Ulysses*, the one truly mad character is a marginal figure called Denis Breen, who exhibits symptoms of the disorder known as querulous paranoia. Persons suffering from this disorder are, in one psychiatrist's words, "unusually persistent complainants" (Lester). The symptoms consist of an obsessive and unreasonable demand, often made of a court of law or of other institutional authority, to satisfy a grievance that cannot be satisfied, such as the punishment of an imagined or relatively minor injustice. The energy spent in pursuing such a grievance is out of all proportion with the magnitude of the offense that occasions it, and the authorities who fail to give satisfaction are perceived as united in a conspiracy with the original offender. An example from the classical psychoanalytic literature is the patient whom Lacan calls Aimée,<sup>5</sup> who had literary aspirations. When her manuscript was rejected by a publishing house, she physically assaulted the employee who communicated this judgment to her. She then wrote letters to

the police commissariat of her district in an attempt to file charges against the publisher who had stood in the way of her literary success (Lacan, *De la psychose* 156).

Denis Breen's complaint is of a different nature, but his actions are no less litigious. An anonymous person has sent him a postcard with the cryptic message "U.P.: up" (U8.257), which Breen interprets as libelous. He intends to sue whoever is responsible for £10,000. Accompanied by his long-suffering wife, he surfaces several times in *Ulysses* while making the rounds of solicitors' offices and police authorities. Doggedly pursuing his grievance from place to place, he carries two heavy volumes of the law in the manner of a deluded latter-day Moses. Turned away by each of the persons whose aid he seeks, and intentionally misdirected by others, he is last seen looking to hire a private detective, having become the butt of jokes among the clients of Barney Kiernan's pub. The actual content of the message on the postcard, long a crux for Joyce scholars,<sup>6</sup> is less important than the construction Breen gives to it and to the way in which, imagining an insult to himself, he becomes consumed with the impossible task of seeking redress. If we ask what function this minor figure performs in the symbolic economy of *Ulysses*, a possible answer derives from the nature of Joyce's work as a survey of modern urban subjectivities. Breen's manifest madness puts into proper perspective the neuroses of other persons in the book: Leopold Bloom's voyeurism, Stephen Dedalus's narcissism, Buck Mulligan's sadism, the Citizen's hysterical xenophobia, etc. However, it is also possible that Breen figures as the phantasmic projection of something in Joyce himself, both as an object of derision and ridicule and as the subject of a querulous paranoia.

An example of the latter tendency in Joyce's life as a writer emerges from his response to the publication in 1931 of a short story entitled "Vielleicht ein Traum" under the name of James Joyce in the prestigious *Frankfurter Zeitung*.<sup>7</sup> In a curious coincidence of names, the publication was in fact the translation by one Irene Kafka "from the English manuscript" of a story entitled "Perchance to Dream" by a writer named Michael Joyce. From what can be gathered of the facts of this affair, it appears that Kafka, subject to her own lapse, mistakenly wrote "James" for "Michael" and the editors of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* thought they were publishing the translation of a minor work by the famous Irish writer. In any case, alerted to this publication by his German publisher, Joyce's reaction was nothing less than hysterical. He embarked on a campaign to identify Irene Kafka and Michael Joyce, to denounce the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and to seek (unsuccessfully) damages of \$5,000 (equivalent to the purchasing power of at least \$70,400 in 2010 [Officer, n.p.]). With the help of Sylvia Beach, Joyce's Paris publisher, this essentially banal affair took on the proportions of an international literary scandal—this despite apologies from the newspaper, the author of the original story and the translator. Ursula Zeller has shown a list of letters written during the three-month period from July to September 1931, in which more than 20 figures in the literary world took an active role. These include such names as T.S. Eliot, Sean O'Casey, Harold Nicolson, Harriet Shaw Weaver, Adrienne Monnier,

Philippe Soupault, Padraic Colum and Ernst Robert Curtius. During this period, Joyce was entirely distracted from his work on the manuscript of *Work in Progress* (later *Finnegans Wake*). The *Frankfurter Zeitung* affair nonetheless made its way into the *Wake*, with a reference to the “*Francofurto Siding*” (70.04)<sup>8</sup> a play on the Italian *franco furto*, meaning “outright theft.” What we can make of this bizarre coincidence of another Joyce with another Kafka is that James Joyce exhibits a kind of paranoia of the signature—a fear of the other’s appropriation of his proper name—that far surpasses any material or moral harm that could have come to him had he let the matter drop in the beginning. He was indeed compelled to do so in the end, but only after drawing the attention of most of the European literary world to the imagined damage to his reputation, and to the existence of an otherwise totally obscure writer named Joyce. To paraphrase what Stephen says of Shakespeare (*U*9.999), the notes of persecution, banishment and betrayal sound continually in the language of Joyce. Similarly, the idea of the artist as assigned to the sewer of an otherwise clean-smelling world of letters ranges throughout Joyce’s work, from the early satirical verses all the way through *Finnegans Wake*, where, for example, Shem the Penman, a Joycean alter ego on trial for indecent exposure, is addressed in court as “you and your gift of your gift of your garbage” (93.19–20). In a later episode Shem’s house is described in indignant tones as the house of O’Shame, “known as the haunted inkbottle” (182.30–31), a dwelling that exceeds everything “even in our western playboyish world for pure mousefarm filth” (183.04).

It is curious to compare Joyce’s ironic formulation of the artist’s “filth” to the much more serious use of such language in Kafka’s letter to his father in 1919. Here Kafka recalls a conversation some 20 years earlier in which the father had advised the son to hire a prostitute in order to learn the facts of life. What still offends the writer at age 36 is that his father could have given such advice while remaining outside it: “a married man, a pure man, having risen above such things” (*Brief an den Vater* 45). In Kafka’s words, the father “became still purer, rose still higher” as the son was pushed down into the filth. “And so, if the world consisted only of me and you . . . , then the purity of the world ended with you and, by virtue of your advice, the filth began with me” (*mit mir begann kraft Deines Rates der Schmutz* 45). In the logic of this discourse, Kafka’s relation to the father is analogous to the relation Joyce ironically claims to the fathers of the Irish Revival: he purifies the father by taking the father’s sins unto himself. But for Kafka, the function of Katharsis-Purgative refers not just to the relation between father and son. It also refers to the role of a writer like him in his relation to the larger world that his father represents. In a 1922 letter to Max Brod, Kafka reflects on the reason why he has refused to journey to Görgental in Thüringen to visit his friend Oskar Baum. His fear of travel, he says, is in fact a fear of leaving his writing table, to which he must cling for all he is worth in order to avoid madness. “The definition of a writer, of such a writer, and the explanation of his function, if he has one, [is that] he is the scapegoat of mankind, he allows men to innocently enjoy a sin, or almost innocently” (*Briefe* 386). The image of the artist as scapegoat belongs to



the recurring motif of martyrdom in Kafka. In his diary for 1912 there is a single line set off from the surrounding text: "I ought to pose nude as Saint Sebastian for the painter Ascher" (*Tagebücher* 214). Georges Ascher was a Polish artist of Jewish origins working in Paris at that time. His paintings evoke an atmosphere of solitary contemplation in contemporary settings. Although they seem infused with the melancholy fate of Jewish exiles from Eastern Europe, they otherwise have nothing to do with historical or biblical subjects. For Kafka to imagine himself as Saint Sebastian in one of Ascher's pictures is therefore to appropriate the figure of the martyr for his own historical moment and his own identity as an artist: his body pierced with arrows as those around him pursue their daily business. Business like the prosperous one run by his father Hermann Kafka, a robust, self-made man who was at best oblivious, at times contemptuous of his son's artistic efforts.

In contrast to Goethe, whom Kafka saw as an artist of joyful creation, Kafka experienced his own activity of writing as a mournful necessity to which he was bound in the same manner as a madman is bound to his delirium (*sein Wahn*): "were he to lose it, he would become 'mad,'" as he says in a letter to Robert Klopstock. It has nothing to do with the quality of his writing, but the value that it has for him personally. "And that is why," he continues, "in fear and trembling I preserve writing from everything that might trouble it, and not just writing, but also the solitude that belongs to it" (*Briefe* 431). The metaphor of the madman who cannot let go of his delusions for fear of becoming mad resonates with certain key passages in the analyses of paranoia by Freud and Lacan. In his essay on the case of Daniel Paul Schreber, Freud takes inspiration from a scene in Goethe's *Faust* that comes after Faust has spoken the curses that free him from the world. The chorus laments that he has destroyed the world, which now lies in ruins, and beseeches him to "Build it again / In thine own bosom build it anew!" (Part I, scene 4). Freud sees an analogy between Faust's destruction of his relation to the world and Schreber's vision of the end of the world, a vision which Freud understands as the projection of the patient's internal catastrophe: "his subjective world has come to an end since his withdrawal of his love from it" (70). But the patient has to live in the world nonetheless, and so, like Faust, he must build it again after his own fashion. This for Freud is the origin of paranoid delusion. "The delusional construction, which we take to be the pathological product, is in reality an attempt at recovery, a process of reconstruction" (71). A similar analysis is made by Lacan in the case of Aimée. Lacan finds in his patient's delusions of persecution and grandeur "the preservation of order in thoughts, actions, and will" (*De la psychose* 201).<sup>9</sup> For both Freud and Lacan, the delirium of the paranoid psychotic, with its internal coherence, constitutes an inner world of meaning to which he must cling in order to avoid being cast adrift in the chaos of schizophrenia. Kafka's obsessive need to preserve (*halten*) the act of writing from anything that might trouble it is analogous to the paranoiac's preservation of order in the form of delusion. One cannot therefore conclude that Kafka's writing is a form of delirium; an analogy is not a relation of identity. There is nonetheless something paranoid in the "fear



and trembling" (*zitternder Angst*) with which Kafka protects the sphere of writing and in his fear of madness lest it not be protected.

Kafka seems to have known, if only in anecdotal form, what real madness was when it came to the writer's relationship to his work. In his diary for February 1912, Kafka writes of meeting a young man called Reichmann who is convinced that he is the victim of a shameless act of plagiarism. Reichmann has written an essay entitled "Lebensfreude" (Zest for Life) that he left with a Frau Durège-Wodnanski, a figure in the women's movement whom he supposes to have literary connections. Two days after his meeting with Frau Durège he is surprised to find his essay printed in the Prague *Tagblatt*. His initial joy at being a published author quickly gives way to suspicion: how did the newspaper come into possession of the essay without his authorization; how was it printed without the author's name, and without payment? "In truth," he tells Kafka, "it's an abuse of confidence, a fraud (*ein Betrug*)" (*Tagebücher* 386). Kafka has Reichmann show him the manuscript in order to compare it to the printed essay, entitled "Das Kind als Schöpfer" (The Child as Creator), but he can find absolutely no similarity between the two. Confronted with this judgment, Reichmann only maintains his position more strongly: "Of course everything is copied, but disguised (*vertuscht*), arranged in another order, abbreviated and with foreign ingredients added" (387). In other words, the very difference of the printed text from the manuscript is proof of their identity: "in essence everything is copied, everything (*Im Innern ist alles alles abgeschrieben*)" (387). Reichmann takes a number of steps toward obtaining redress: he confronts Frau Durège, then by turns the publisher and the editor of the *Tagblatt*. Obtaining no satisfaction there, he telephones the competing newspaper, the *Bohemia*, but the connection is bad. Reichmann attributes this technical difficulty to interference from the *Tagblatt*: "In fact I hear constant indistinct whispering [*Flüsterstimmen*] in the line, obviously from the editors of the *Tagblatt*" (390). He goes in person to the *Bohemia*, but again without success. As for Kafka, he proves adept at calming Reichmann down: he counsels a more subtle form of vengeance by suggesting that Reichmann submit his essay to another publication. Then, once it is printed, he should send it to Frau Durège with an elegant dedication. Reichmann is pleased with the suggestion, and Kafka goes home struck with the feeling of how refreshing (*erfrischend*) it is to converse with an absolute madman (393). Some days later he learns that Reichmann has been committed to an insane asylum (400).

Having referred to Joyce's role in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* affair as a case of paranoia of the signature, I see a similar dynamic at work in the Reichmann case as Kafka describes it. Joyce takes the mistaken attribution of a story for its forgery; Reichmann mistakes an essay entirely distinct from his own as plagiarized. In other words, Joyce objects to the use of his name on a piece he did not write, whereas Reichmann objects to the absence of his name on a piece he believes he wrote. Both see themselves as victims of a conspiracy where a reasonable judgment would find none and where there is in fact none. The principle of paranoid symmetry is again at work here, where the imagined degree of persecution is

commensurate with the subject's sense of his own importance. The key difference between the two cases, of course, is that between neurosis and psychosis: Joyce overreacts wildly in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* affair, but he has not lost his mind; the same cannot be said for the unfortunate Reichmann.

The case is rather different for Kafka, who did not have the sense of his own greatness that Joyce had. His own testimony is that he suffered from a profound anxiety related to his writing in two rather different ways. On one hand, as we have seen, this anxiety arose from his concern to protect at all costs the sphere of solitude that the act of writing constituted for him. On the other hand, he wished to relieve precisely this anxiety (*diese Angst*) through the act of writing. A notebook entry in 1911 reads, "I have a longing to uproot my anxious condition by writing it out of me (*meinen bangen Zustand aus mir herauszuschreiben*), and, as it comes from the depths of my being, I need to bring it forth from those depths onto paper, or to write it out in such a way that I can understand, within my limits, what it is that I have written. This is not an artistic need" (*Tagebücher* 286).

If Kafka was not mad, he was also not sane in the normal way and did not necessarily want to be so. In a diary entry of 1913 he speaks of his fear of madness, but then asks what it means not to be mad: *Was ist dann die Nicht-Narrheit?* He answers, "Non-madness consists in standing like a beggar before the threshold, beside the doorway, to collapse and rot away" (*Tagebücher* 305). This anticipates the *mise en scène* of the story "Before the Law" (1915), and suggests a certain parallel between the figure of non-madness and that of the patient countryman who waits a lifetime in vain for admittance to the Law. In both cases, access to a kind of revelation is denied, perhaps in favor of a revelation of another kind. Kafka himself seems to have dwelt at the threshold between sanity and a kind of illuminated non-sanity and to have drawn his artistic material from this marginal position.

It is nonetheless a position that condemns him to solitude and to a willed estrangement from the world around him; Kafka's solitude is at the source of his suffering, but it is also his greatest temptation and the condition of his existence as a writer. The necessity of this condition appears both in the metaphors Kafka creates for the nature of his suffering and in his account of daily life. A 1922 letter to Brod speaks of his solitude as "the monstrous fear that has hold of me" and of "the fear of this fear." This *Angst* does not make him wish to prove himself as a great writer writing on noble subjects, rather he prefers to "prove myself in my mousehole" (*in meinem Mauseloch*) (*Briefe* 415). Kafka wants to prove himself as a writer on his own terms, even if his writing is of no importance to the world.

At this point, however, we must ourselves dive into the figure of the mouse hole in order to dig a tunnel that will connect Kafka to a series of other burrowers, including Joyce. Kafka as mouse hole-dweller recalls another great figure of paranoid modernism, Dostoevsky's underground man, who regards himself as a "wretched mouse," a creature morally inferior but spiritually superior to the innately stupid "homme de la nature et de la vérité" (11).<sup>10</sup> The mouse-man at least possesses a heightened consciousness, even if "in its loathsome, stinking underground, our offended, beaten-down, and derided mouse at once immerses itself

in cold, venomous, and, above all, everlasting spite" (11). If we ask what could be wrong with "the man of nature and truth," Lacan has an answer for us in one of his seminars on Joyce, at least concerning the distinction between the true and the real: the true is what is pleasing; the real, necessarily, is not: "le réel, ça ne fait pas plaisir, forcément" (*Le sinthome* 78). Dostoevsky's underground man chooses the painful real over the truth that gives pleasure, as does Joyce. In encountering the mouse holes of Dostoevsky and Kafka, readers of Lacan will also be reminded of Lacan's figure of the hole (*le trou*) that gapes between the symbolic order and the real. Lacan's question concerning Joyce is how art can render substantial the symptom of this gap as it is lived by the writer (*le sinthome*) who incarnates it, even in his hole (*dans son trou*, 38), i.e. precisely as he inhabits this gap between the symbolic and the real. Lacan implies that this is possible only through a language that breaks the frame of the symbolic order that it constitutes, and which somehow accedes to the real in its materiality.

Kafka, whose last story was devoted to the "mousefolk," is one of the inheritors of this murine tradition. Even in the most everyday setting he can evoke the metaphor of the abject, crawling creature, for example when reacting to the various noises produced throughout the family apartment as he is trying to write. As he testifies in his diary, Kafka in this situation is hypersensitive to every kind of noise—the opening and closing of doors, footsteps in the hall, the scraping of ashes in the fireplace next door, the sound of the oven door in the kitchen, the voices of pet canaries. He exclaims in exasperation: "I wonder if I might half-open the door, crawl like a serpent into the room next door, and once there, implore my sisters and their maidservant to be quiet" (122).

The point here is that for Kafka writing represents the temptation of a way of life completely sealed off from the rest of the world. This same insular quality applies to his fiction, which is typically abstracted from historical or even human contexts. It is in this sense that I wish to consider the unfinished story, written near the end of Kafka's life, known in English as "The Burrow" (1923–24). I take this story to be a kind of fable for the act of writing, with its temptations and dangers. The speaker of "The Burrow" is an architect of paranoia. His habitation is constructed in a highly systematic manner, but is labyrinthine in its diversification; it is maintained with maniacal watchfulness, allowing as little as possible for deterioration or any other chance occurrence. Its overriding purpose is not shelter but defense—that is to say, the exclusion of the other. In the anxious mind of the narrator, the other is always a potential enemy. At every moment, he is tormented by the thought that his enemies are assembling even now at the entrance to his burrow and preparing to break in. In the burrower's fevered imagination, these enemies include someone not unlike himself, a connoisseur of building, some brother of the forest who wants a place to dwell without building his own shelter. The mere thought of such importunity fills the narrator with rage: "If he were actually to arrive now . . . , in his obscene lust . . . I might in my blind rage leap up on him, maul him, tear the flesh from his bones, destroy him, drink his blood, and fling his corpse among the rest of my spoil" (337). It has crossed the mind

of the narrator that one day he might put his trust in another creature, but how? Would such a confidant not want to see the burrow, and once inside, would he not have to be kept under constant surveillance? Equally disturbing to him are *die Kleinen* or *das kleine Volk* (with a nod to the brothers Grimm),<sup>11</sup> the little creatures who, according to the narrator, work indefatigably to undermine the burrow, one particle of earth at a time. Unlike the more physically imposing, if imagined, rival from the forest, these creatures cannot be confronted because they are invisible. However, they do make a kind of faint whistling sound that will not go away, so that even in the furthest depths of his hideaway, the narrator cannot be at peace, just as the writer Kafka cannot be at peace amid the noises of the family flat.

The narrator of the burrow is essentially the author of his own live burial: he has constructed his own grave to live in, out of fear of living in the world outside. In this respect, his condition echoes a complaint Kafka made concerning his calling as a writer. In the famous letter to Brod mentioned earlier, Kafka speaks of writing as a descent into the forces of darkness, as the unleashing of spirits normally kept under control, and of the obscure things that take place in such depths. But he also speaks of the writer as someone who does not really live, who looks longingly at a life from which he is excluded. "All my life I have been dead" (*Mein Leben lang bin ich gestorben*) (*Briefe* 385). It is in this sense that he has made for himself a living burial. Writing is Kafka's burrow, and the force of this writing derives from the author's conscious objectification of this very condition.

In a notebook entry for 1922, written when Kafka was also writing *The Trial*, he speaks of the increasing distance between his interior world and the outer world, and of his growing solitude. At the time of writing, this solitude is about to reach its most extreme point, in a movement he calls "an assault on the last earthly limit" (*Tagebücher* 878). Kafka here reminds us of the extent to which his work is an assault on limits: the limits of solitude in the "The Burrow," the impassable boundaries of *The Castle*, the limits of the law in *The Trial*.<sup>12</sup> Both Kafka and Joyce write against the law, the Name of the Father, the master signifier, but there is a fundamental difference in how they do this. Kafka's universe, in both his fiction and his letters, is so utterly dominated by the figure of the father that he seeks only a little "mousehole" in which to exist as a writer, although this space fails to give him the comfort that he seeks, and everything he writes is marked by the necessity of suffering.

The case of Joyce is, if possible, even more complicated. The psychoanalytic tradition of reading Joyce acknowledges that he, too, refuses the master signifier, but that his symptom is that of being rooted in the father even while denying it: he continues to seek the love of the father, but refuses the symbolic castration that is the normal condition for that love (Nusinovici 2). The solution to this impossible situation Joyce finds in writing. Lacan asks: Joyce's desire to be an artist who would occupy the entire world, as much of the world as possible, is this not precisely to compensate for the fact that his father was never a father to him? (*Le sinthome* 88). This analysis is well-known, but let me add a nuance to it. If the limit is Kafka's master trope, Joyce finds another way of registering his refusal of

the law: the way of the line of flight, of infinite displacement. Both Lacan and Derrida emphasize Joyce's totalizing impulse,<sup>13</sup> which is yet another symptom of paranoia. But here I think we need to modify the initial analysis of Joyce as suffering from delusions of grandeur. Cannot the productions of this totalizing impulse equally be understood as the way out that finds in the protean forms of language the possibility of an infinite escape from the master signifier? If in Kafka we are continually confronted with the situation of no exit, of an insurmountable barrier between inside and outside, Joyce confronts this problem by creating a language of perpetual escape, to the point where the distinction between inside and outside collapses in the radical materiality of language. Already the world of *Ulysses* is one without interiors, where everything takes place in a space that is neither wholly inside nor outside, neither wholly private nor public in terms of the constructed environment. The same is true of what is taken for psychic interiority, which in *Ulysses* is little more than the trace, the register left in the mind by a world neither wholly internal nor external to consciousness. *Finnegans Wake* is of course the culmination of this impulse to flight, Joyce's final exilic movement, in which there is no outside, no inside. To see this book as a rendering of the unconscious is merely to impose on it another master signifier. Lacan, for whom the unconscious is structured like a language, does not find that language to be that of *Finnegans Wake*. Instead, he finds the *Wake* to be "unsubscribed from the unconscious" *désabonné à l'inconscient*, in that it plays strictly on language itself, rather than on language as representation (166). *Finnegans Wake* is in this sense the *fuite en avant*, the breathless headlong rush through the dim halls of language in a form of writing as catharsis. Lacan is even willing to see in this course a way of bypassing psychoanalysis and of compensating for absence of the transfer. In *Encore* he finds the language of *Finnegans Wake* to be "in the register of psychoanalytical discourse" (37). Already in the "Leçon sur *littérature*" Lacan had said that Joyce would have had nothing to gain from psychoanalysis, since "il allait tout droit avec ce *a letter, a litter*, tout droit au mieux de ce que l'on peut attendre de la pschanalyse à sa fin": with his *a letter, a litter*,<sup>14</sup> he went straight to what at best one can expect of psychoanalysis in the end (101).

As Joyce writes of Shem the Penman, "he winged his way on a wildgoup's chase across the kathartic ocean and made synthetic ink and sensitive paper for his own end out of his wit's waste" (*FW* 185.5–8). When Joyce was writing the early drafts of *Finnegans Wake* he wrote to Harriet Shaw Weaver in 1924, "I think that at last I have solved one—the first—of the problems presented by my book. In other words one of the partitions between two of the tunneling parties seems to have given way" (*Selected Letters* 304). The narrator of "The Burrow" also constructs a vast system of interconnected tunnels, a potentially infinite number of intersecting passages, in his attempt to evade a possible predator. Despite the differences between the two works, there is a certain structural similarity between this expanding network of tunnels and the linguistic network of Joyce's final work: on one hand, the constant displacement of earth, on the other hand the continual displacement of the signifier, and the rhizomatic culture of the word in its viral

mutations and excrescences. *Finnegans Wake* is Joyce's burrow, his mouse farm for Kafka's mouse hole.

## Notes

1. Translations from French and German are my own, with the exception of the Muir translation of "Der Bau" ("The Burrow").
2. "Paranoid Modernism was markedly—though by no means without exception—English, male, and novelistic" (Trotter 12).
3. In accordance with standard practice in Joyce scholarship, citations from *Ulysses* are identified by chapter and line number in the Gabler edition.
4. Hans Jahnke Bequest, Zurich James Joyce Foundation.
5. Aimée's real name was Marguérite Anzieu, mother of Didier Anzieu, who later was also analyzed by Lacan as part of his own training as a psychoanalyst.
6. See Gibbons for the latest and most persuasive identification of a source for this formula.
7. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 19 July 1931: 14–15.
8. Citations from *Finnegans Wake* are identified by page and line number.
9. Lacan is citing the formulation of Emil Kraepelin.
10. In French in the original and in the Pevear-Volokhonsky translation.
11. See, for example, Grimm. Prof. Markus Winkler informs me that "das kleine Volk" is an expression used not just by the Grimm brothers but also by Heine and other Romantics to designate the demoniacal, elemental spirits living in the earth, such as dwarfs and gnomes.
12. Cf. Agamben 39–65.
13. For example, the well-known passage in Derrida's *Ulysses gramophone* where Joyce's work is characterized as "that hypermnesiac machine able to store, in an immense epic . . . western memory and virtually all the languages of the world, *even traces of the future*" (98).
14. "The letter! The litter! And the soother the bitter!" (*FW* 93.24).

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