

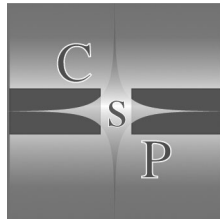
# Occult Joyce



Occult Joyce  
The Hidden in Ulysses

By

Enrico Terrinoni



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This work is dedicated to Chiara

As man, as beast, as an ephemeral fly begets, Godhead begets Godhead,  
For things below are copies, the Great Smaragdine Tablet said.  
—W.B. Yeats, “Supernatural Songs.”

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## FOREWORD

This book is mainly intended for general readers interested in Joyce, but I hope that it will also be useful to specialists. All references to James Joyce's *Ulysses* in the end-notes are to the Random House/Bodley Head text, reprinted in the current Penguin Student Edition. They are followed only by page numbers. The standard episode-and-line-number reference system is here avoided in order to encourage the reader's approach to the great book as a process of discovery. *Ulysses* is in many ways a "human" book, and its most profound meanings are encrypted beneath the surface of its "body." To unveil its secrets implies an effort of anthropological archaeology. Accordingly, common readers as well as experts appraising *Ulysses* are always in a way interpreters of the occult, that is, the *hidden* in the text. Hence, only by following the traces and signs left on the textual surface will they eventually dig out what lies dormant beneath.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I acknowledge financial support from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- U* *Ulysses*, edited by Declan Kiberd. London: Penguin, 1992.
- P* *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, edited by Seamus Deane. London: Penguin, 1992.
- D* *Dubliners*, edited by Terence Brown. London: Penguin, 1992.
- FW* *Finnegans Wake*, edited by Seamus Deane. London: Penguin, 1992.
- GJ* *Giacomo Joyce*, edited by Richard Ellmann. New York: Viking Press, 1968.
- CW* *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, edited by Richard Ellmann and Ellsworth Mason. New York: Viking Press, 1959.
- L, I, II, or III* *Letters of James Joyce*. Vol. I, edited by Stuart Gilbert. London: Faber and Faber, 1957. Vol II and III, edited by Richard Ellman. London: Faber and Faber, 1966.
- JJQ* *James Joyce Quarterly*, University of Tulsa, 1963-.

All translations from Italian into English are mine, unless stated otherwise.



## INTRODUCTION

# HERMETICISM, ROSICRUCIANISM, OCCULT SCIENCE AND DREAMY VISIONS

On a normal day at the end of spring 1885, W.B. Yeats and some of his associates secretly met to found the Dublin Hermetic Society. It was June 16, exactly nineteen years before the day in which Joyce's *Ulysses* is set. The members of the society were later said to be interested in "European magic and mysticism and Eastern religion."<sup>1</sup> The whole affair lasted only one year. In 1886, the DHS became the *Dublin Theosophical Society*. As Roy Foster suggests, the shift towards theosophical matters "disappointed Yeats, though he was impressed by the envoy sent by the Theosophical leader Madame Blavatsky."<sup>2</sup>

Such an anecdote, evoking more or less randomly the memory of Yeats in an analysis of the occult in Joyce, may probably sound suspicious, if not out-of-context. The antagonism between Yeats and Joyce is indeed a common place in modern criticism. Neil Corcoran, for example, suggests that "Yeats steps forward into modernity out of the mists of the Celtic Twilight and the Irish Literary Revival," whereas Joyce has often been read "as urban realist, European modernist, stylistic revolutionary."<sup>3</sup> However, a new generation of scholars is beginning to regard the relationship between the two writers in alternative ways, especially as regards the Irish national question. Emer Nolan argues that the Joyce/Yeats connection cannot be solved in terms of a simplistic dualism, "although it is certainly tempting to regard him [Joyce] as the antithesis of Yeats in every conceivable way."<sup>4</sup> As P.J. Mathews points out:

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<sup>1</sup> R. Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Mask*, 42.

<sup>2</sup> Foster, *W.B. Yeats: a Life, I: The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914*, 47.

<sup>3</sup> Corcoran, *After Yeats and Joyce. Reading Modern Irish Literature*, viii.

<sup>4</sup> Nolan, "Modernism and the Irish Revival," 164.

Notwithstanding Joyce's scepticism about certain elements of the Revival, the idea that he may have been in sympathy with aspects of revivalist thought, is rarely countenanced.<sup>5</sup>

In this regard, the ambiguity of Joyce's political position reflected in his works complicates the matter further. As David Lloyd has pointed out, Leopold Bloom is a "destabilizing figure," for he "makes Joyce's *Ulysses* a great counter-nationalist text without it, for that reason, becoming a pro-imperialist one."<sup>6</sup>

Despite the apparent aesthetic and political distance that separates the two Irish writers, the relationship between them shows also a certain affinity, an affinity one can indeed assess by exploring their mutual visionary poetics. However, neither Yeats nor Joyce can be seen as spokesmen of a univocal message. It might be argued that one of their main common features is the presence of a creative friction between antinomies that helps them produce utterly dialectical texts. Such a struggle between contrary forces is certainly a cornerstone of Yeats's poetics. A similar conflict is also present in Joyce's writings. Terry Eagleton describes the author of *Ulysses* as "a rare creature, an avant-garde artist who is also a genuine democrat." He points out that "hardly any other modernist writer is at once so esoteric and down to earth."<sup>7</sup> A perspective like this can be a useful groundwork for the present discussion of Joyce and the occult, despite the fact that the actual subject of the book is a little more esoteric than down to earth.

But now, let us return briefly to the mentioned anecdote. One may well explain the odd coincidence by stating that the real events of June 16, 1885, and the fictional ones of June 16, 1904, have no connection at all. On the contrary, more credulous people may perhaps be inclined to resort to what Carl Gustav Jung would have candidly called a synchronicity. Other readers will regard casual events and synchronicities as the very same thing. What is exactly a synchronicity? Jung explained that the term means "a *meaningful coincidence* of two or more events, where something other than the probability of chance is involved."<sup>8</sup> In order to elucidate this definition, he mentions the distinction between "duplications" of events and "chance groupings." The latter are significant in that they are more improbable than mere duplications. Here follows a colourful example of chance groupings:

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<sup>5</sup> Mathews, *Revival. The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, The Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement*, 111.

<sup>6</sup> Lloyd, *Ireland After History*, 114.

<sup>7</sup> Eagleton, *The English Novel. An Introduction*, 284.

<sup>8</sup> Jung, *The Collected Works*, 520.

On April 1, 1949, I made a note in the morning of an inscription containing a figure that was half man and half fish. There was fish for lunch. Somebody mentioned the custom of making an “April fish” of someone. In the afternoon, a former patient of mine, whom I had not seen for months, showed me some impressive pictures of fish. In the evening, I was shown a piece of embroidery with sea monsters and fishes in it. The next morning, I saw a former patient, who was visiting me for the first time in ten years. She had dreamed of a large fish the night before. A few months later, when I was using this series for a larger work and had just finished writing it down, I walked over to a spot by the lake in front of the house where I had been several times in the morning. This time a fish a foot long lay on the sea-wall. Since no one else was present, I have no idea how the fish could have got there.

When coincidences pile up in this way one cannot help being impressed by them—for the greater the number of terms in such a series, or the more unusual its character, the more improbable it becomes.

[...] It seems to me that in judging such a series a factor of uncertainty enters in at this point and requires attention. I have observed something similar in other cases, without, however, being able to draw any reliable conclusions.<sup>9</sup>

As is clear, Jung does not suggest bluntly that coincidences hide secret meanings. They just look suspicious and possibly conceal some strange knowledge connected with a hidden collective unconscious or memory. In our case, the Joyce/Yeats coincidence may well be just a mere “duplication,” although more superstitious readers, perhaps those equipped with a certain knowledge of other events related to Joyce’s life, may even go further and connect it with, say, the death-date of Joyce’s brother, Stanislaus, on June 16, 1955. Such an argument would not be rewarding in critical terms. Besides, Jungian approaches to Joyce taking into account the theory of synchronicity are not the most favourite ones in recent times.<sup>10</sup> However, given Joyce’s particular obsession with dates and the importance he attached to simultaneity and coincidental occurrences in fiction, there is no doubt that the foundation of Yeats’s Dublin Hermetic Society on June 16, 1885—provided that he had access to such an information—would have proved significant to him.

In an article written in Italian a few months after his death<sup>11</sup> and published in the periodical *Letteratura* in 1941,<sup>12</sup> Stanislaus Joyce states that “of the modern

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 521.

<sup>10</sup> See Thurston: “*Odyssey of the Psyche: Jungian Patterns in Joyce’s Ulysses*,” in *James Joyce Broadsheet*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> The article is really an early draft of *My Brother’s Keeper*. Its content is expanded, and rewritten more extensively, in Stanislaus’s later book. To quote from it here is relevant due to certain significant differences, especially regarding Joyce’s own position towards the occult.

Irish poets he esteemed only Yeats.”<sup>13</sup> He would have returned to the same idea in *My Brother's Keeper*, where he wrote that his brother considered Yeats “the greatest poet Ireland had produced.”<sup>14</sup> Joyce's attitude towards Yeats was in fact two-fold. Although he did not agree, especially during his youth, with some of Yeats's aesthetic choices,<sup>15</sup> he must have held him undoubtedly in high regard. This is shown by the fact that he knew by heart two of Yeats's esoteric short stories, namely “The Tables of the Law” and “The Adoration of the Magi,” which deeply influenced his own early prose style. This points also to Joyce's recognition of the intrinsic value of Yeats's unmistakably occult short stories.

The respect Joyce had for the older master is beyond doubt. In a letter to his son, Giorgio, written in June 1935, Joyce tells him about one night when he was asked by some friends to recite something beautiful, and for the next two hours he recited only poems by Yeats.<sup>16</sup>

The idea that Joyce was a great admirer of the art of Yeats despite the latter's clear occultist inclinations, seemingly so distant from Joyce's own temper, is shared by Ellmann. In *Ulysses on the Liffey* the critic stresses the importance, in “Telemachus” (Ulysses 1), of the difference between Stephen's and Mulligan's respective attitudes towards the great poet, stating that “Stephen never attacks him, only Mulligan does. It is a demonstration of affect that Joyce yielded to no other Dublin contemporary.”<sup>17</sup> With regards to “Circe” (Ulysses 15) he records Joyce's concern “with the idea of a precursor,” a role that he first assigned to Ibsen, then to Ibsen and Hauptmann, although “his final decision was for Yeats.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, Yeats is not a precursor, but rather a mentor, who himself must have had the greatest admiration for the younger artist, as is evident in many letters. This is also confirmed in a famous speech pronounced by Yeats on the occasion of the awarding of the Tailteann prizes in Dublin, in August 1924:

It is our duty to say that Mr. Joyce's book, though as obscene as Rabelais, and therefore forbidden by law in England and the United States, is more indubitably a work of genius than any prose written by an Irishman since the death of Synge.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> A translation of the same essay into English appeared eight years later in the *Hudson Review*. See next note.

<sup>13</sup> S. Joyce, “Recollections of James Joyce,” 27.

<sup>14</sup> S. Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper*, 183.

<sup>15</sup> See for example: Ellmann, R. *James Joyce*, 101-3, 239, 325.

<sup>16</sup> See *L*, I, 371-2.

<sup>17</sup> Ellmann, R. *Ulysses on the Liffey*, 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in: Ellmann, R. *James Joyce*, 578.

Despite the actual documented appreciation by Yeats of at least the Martello tower episode of *Ulysses*, in 1923 the poet confessed “that he had not been able to finish the book.”<sup>20</sup> This shows that one can indeed enjoy a glass of good wine without having to finish the whole bottle, although people like Joyce would not agree with such a piece of wisdom.

Statements of mutual respect between Yeats and Joyce are helpful in approaching the core argument of the present study. An analysis of the common ground, especially in occult terms, on which the two artists occasionally drew, might be a useful perspective for a new reading of *Ulysses*. It is not a concern of this book to demonstrate that Joyce was an adept of some remote occultist sect, or anything like that. He was no adept, nor can we see his use of occult themes and authors as an ultimate commitment to such an obscure territory of knowledge. On the contrary, the aim of the present analysis is to assess the actual relevance of occult authors, themes, and methodologies of investigation in the hidden structure of *Ulysses*, as well as to propose an interpretation of Joyce’s response to the subject.

It is a fact that Joyce had several works dealing with various aspects of the occult in his personal libraries. It is also beyond doubt that, from his earlier works until his most mature books, he constantly referred to occult authors and themes on many occasions. However, it is necessary first to define Joyce’s idea of the occult. His approach is partly a way of revisiting, and perhaps resolving, his troubled relationship with religion. This would put him in a closer position to Yeats than one may imagine. For Yeats the occult, though an inestimable source for artistic imagination and vision, as well as a surrogate for religious belief, is mainly something pertaining to the supernatural. He believed intensely in the imaginative power of the paranormal, as his affiliation to many secret and esoteric societies, and his full commitment to practical magic, clearly show. Kathleen Raine explains that Yeats’s interest in various aspects of the occult, like Theosophy, magic, Swedenborgianism, Neoplatonism, and Indian philosophy concerns “the exploration of a mental universe.”<sup>21</sup> She adds that Yeats, like Blake, did not share “any part of the beliefs of materialism.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, the occult becomes a *place of the mind* where all souls and memories, past and present, occasionally meet. Belief in supernatural powers helps the poet create an inner world of images useful in the construction of his own aesthetic creations.

Surprisingly, Joyce’s attitude is not too distant from this perspective. The supernatural, the paranormal, and visions are massively present in *Ulysses*, though in distorted ways. However, to assess the nature of Joyce’s position

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 531.

<sup>21</sup> Raine, *From Blake to a Vision*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

towards the subject implies the need to reinvent the whole notion of the occult, and to completely redesign the universe of occultism in terms of belief. It is in fact an assumption of the present work that Joyce was not the man who would gladly subscribe to any kind of spiritual system, let alone spiritualism. Despite his firm rationalistic rejection of all forms of spirituality, certain psychological considerations inform his approach to the occult in his texts.

Judging by Joyce's character, his broad and multifaceted interests, and his literary achievements, one can state bluntly that he is more empirical, scientific, and curious than Yeats about the more material aspects of existence. However, this cannot but settle the argument partly. Joyce's aesthetic choices, which were always very close in their effects to an empirical and terrestrial representation of man and his unconscious, should undergo a redefinition in the light of his own relationship to the body of occult knowledge in which he was deeply read.

Some evidence will here be useful. Among the volumes on occult subjects he had in his personal library in Trieste, we find many texts concerning occult matters, like Jacob Boehme's *The Signature of all Things*, Emanuel Swedenborg's *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, two books on theosophy and discipleship by Annie Besant, a tract on the occult meaning of blood by Rudolph Steiner, a study in French on *Spiritism*, a volume by Merlin called *The Book of Charms and Ceremonies Whereby All May Have the Opportunity of Obtaining Any Object They Desire*, a translation of Plutarch's theosophical essays, a study on Yogi philosophy and oriental occultism, a work by Giordano Bruno and a study on him, and finally several works by Blake and Yeats.<sup>23</sup> Joyce remained interested in the occult also in his more mature years. In the Paris library we find a copy of *The Occult Review* (July 1923) which features essays and articles on the "Practical Qabala," the "Akasic Records," and "the alleged communication with Madame Blavatsky." The Paris library hosts also other books on similar subjects, though not as many as the Trieste library.<sup>24</sup>

Such a variety of texts would suggest that Joyce's position towards the occult was very eclectic, as if the subject were a kind of amalgam of different traditions, all marked by the signature of secrecy. Theosophy, mysticism, magic, spiritism, and the so-called occult science in fact blend together to form a cluster of obscure erudition where Joyce eventually finds useful ideas, helpful in building up what looks literally like a cryptic system. This is consistent with the ways in which scholars use the word occult as an umbrella term. Antoine Faivre defines "Esotericism" as a field that includes various traditions of thought which have many common denominators:

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<sup>23</sup> See Ellmann, R. *The Consciousness of Joyce*, 1977.

<sup>24</sup> See Connolly, *The Personal Library of James Joyce: a Descriptive bibliography*.

The more “classical” are, on the one hand, alchemy (understood as Philosophy of Nature and as a mode of spiritual transformation), astrology (in its speculative and not only divinatory form), magic (or *magia*, a manner of conceiving Nature as alive, interwoven with correspondences, and to which are related various forms of arithmology and musicosophy). Others were born at the beginning of modern times, such as Christian Kabbalah, Neo-Alexandrian hermetism, Paracelsism, theosophy, and Rosicrucianism.<sup>25</sup>

Faivre rightly contends that the esotericists established relationships between such diverse currents of thought eclectically, drawing on “different authorities of the past, but almost always with a vision of universal correspondences inseparable from the idea that the cosmos is alive.”<sup>26</sup> As regards this very last statement, all readers of Joyce will know that, were it not for the esoteric notion that “the cosmos is alive,” they would never encounter a soap crying “We’re a capital Bloom and I; / He brightens the earth, I polish the sky”<sup>27</sup> in “Circe,” like many other instances of pseudo-magical prosopopoeia.

However, the issue should not be reduced to single farcical occurrences in *Ulysses*. In fact, the cluster of secret knowledge which seems to be Joyce’s interpretation of the occult, is also consistent with the historical developments of that amalgam of hidden traditions named by kabbalist Cornelius Agrippa—an author whom Joyce readers encounter as early as the fifth chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*<sup>28</sup> —“*occulta philosophia*.” The eclectic nature of the esoteric is also implied in what Aldous Huxley calls “Perennial Philosophy.”

Alongside occult authors and artists, also many professors of literary occultism describe it as an utterly heterodox doctrine. Leon Surette sums it up as follows:

Perennial Philosophy is Aldous Huxley’s label for a set of beliefs that I call “occultism.” Both Perennial Philosophy and the occult claim for themselves whatever enlightenment is thought to be contained in Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, or any other mystical, pneumatic, or visionary tradition whatsoever—including those of Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as Swedenborgianism, spiritualism, and theosophy. They are, in short, synoptic belief systems.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition. Studies in Western Esotericism*, xiii.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>27</sup> *U*, 571.

<sup>28</sup> See *P*, 244.

<sup>29</sup> Surette, *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, and the Occult*, xvii.

Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos argues that the “doctrines, myths and motifs of the occult tradition are highly eclectic and far too various for any claim of homogeneity to be meaningful.”<sup>30</sup> He adds:

The occult is a heterodox tradition constantly rediscovered by its adherents who simply borrow, steal, or reinvent religious ideas and practices that other eccentrics like themselves have kept current in all sorts of societies and publications.<sup>31</sup>

Tryphonopoulos’s definition of the occult seems to fit quite well Joyce’s own interpretation of the subject. William York Tindall, in commenting on various authors well known to Joyce such as Agrippa, the kabbalists, the Pythagoreans, Paracelsus, Boehme, and Swedenborg, argues that they are representative of some occult and philosophical branches of the Hermetic tradition “so thoroughly confused with one another that there is no point in trying to distinguish them.”<sup>32</sup>

Some of the occult books Joyce had seem to point to such confusion. They show a kind of continuity not only with the occult tradition itself, but also with writers who were interested in occultism like Blake and Yeats. In particular, thinkers like Boehme, the author of *The Signature of All Things*, and Swedenborg, the author of *Heaven and Hell*, were primary sources of inspiration for both poets. They were also very important to Joyce, and continued to be so since the early years until the later phases of his career. An early mention of them is to be found in the autobiographical essay “A Portrait of the Artist,” written in 1904: “He descended among the Hells of Swedenborg [...] His heaven was suddenly illuminated by a horde of stars, the signature of all nature.”<sup>33</sup> Here we find a direct mention of Swedenborg, while the allusion to Boehme is obliquely occulted. It is interesting to note that the copy of *The Signature of All Things* Joyce had is dated by Ellmann 1912, but the quotation above shows clearly that he must have known the book as early as 1904, while he was still in Dublin.

Later in this study we will focus on the ways in which Joyce derived directly from Swedenborg the idea of writing *Ulysses* according to a body/book correspondence. The Swedish mystic, whose influence is recognisable in the works of writers, poets, and thinkers as diverse as Sheridan Le Fanu, Blake, Yeats, and Emerson is really a crucial author for Joyce. His interpretation of the Bible according to a general correspondence between the body of man and the body of Heaven deeply influenced *Ulysses*. Just as happens in Joyce’s great book, the

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<sup>30</sup> Tryphonopoulos, “The History of the Occult Movement,” 23.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Tindall, “James Joyce and the Hermetic Tradition,” 24.

<sup>33</sup> C, 44.

Swede had invented a particular correspondence between the various organs of the human body and the organs of Heaven, otherwise called “the divine man.”

In relation to Boehme, his *Signatura Rerum* is really a “signature” in Joyce’s great work, from its use in the opening passage of “Proteus” (Ulysses 3),<sup>34</sup> down to the actual shaping of a visionary aesthetics strictly connected with the empirical perception of external reality. Boehme’s unorthodox mysticism is based on the theory of the elements. He believes that the elements of nature are powerful forces that influence the life of man. The signature is the external body of things as they appear to the eye. It is an exterior form hinting at the presence of a symbolic nature. This connects with the poetic power of imagination, which enables one to work out a set of interconnected correspondences. In fact, in Faivre’s words, correspondences imply an imagination “capable of deciphering the hieroglyphs of the world, that is, ‘the signatures of things.’”<sup>35</sup> The scholar points out that such signatures “always present themselves more or less as mediators between the perceptible datum and the invisible or hidden thing to which it refers.”<sup>36</sup> In the context of the above quotation from “A Portrait of the Artist,” the symbolic potential of Joyce’s interpretation of Boehme’s signatures as key elements of his use of the occult in his works, puts him in a much closer position to Yeats than one may suspect.

As has been said before, Joyce admired immensely two esoteric short stories written by Yeats. This is confirmed by Stanislaus in *My Brother’s Keeper*.<sup>37</sup> The first story, “The Tables of the Law,” appeared in *The Savoy* in 1896, while the second, “The Adoration of the Magi,” was published privately in a separate volume, alongside the first story, one year later. Originally, they were intended to follow another esoteric short story called “Rosa Alchemica” in the volume known as *The Secret Rose*, a collection published in 1897. Together they represent the follow-up to “Rosa Alchemica.” Joyce’s copy of the volume in the Trieste library dates 1904, but he must have read the book well before that date. The “prefatory note” to the 1904 edition suggests as much, as Yeats makes a veiled allusion to a meeting between him and the young James Joyce:

These two stories were privately printed some years ago. I do not think I should have reprinted them had I not met a young man in Ireland, the other day, who liked them very much and nothing else that I have written.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See *U*, 45.

<sup>35</sup> Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, xxii.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, xxii.

<sup>37</sup> See S. Joyce, *My Brother’s Keeper*, 183.

<sup>38</sup> Yeats, *The Tables of the Law* and *The Adoration of the Magi*, 1904.

Yeats's first encounter with Joyce occurred in early October 1902. A few days after their meeting, on October 22 and 23, 1902, Joyce went to Marsh's library, which still holds many occult texts. On that occasion, he read a copy of the prophecies attributed to Joachim of Flora. The library stocks other books by the Italian mystic. Joyce refers poetically to the circumstance in the third episode of *Ulysses* where he talks about "the stagnant bay of Marsh's library."<sup>39</sup> A few lines below, he actually quotes from the text, trickily distorting a sentence written by Joachim. He also suggests a connection between the Italian mystic and the Dean of Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Jonathan Swift.<sup>40</sup> Yeats's occult influence on Joyce, although subliminal, must have been relevant in this case, for both "The Tables of the Law" and "The Adoration of the Magi" are strictly connected with Joachim's ideas on religion and the history of the world, as exposed in his imaginary secret book called *Liber Inducens in Evangelium Aeternum*. Furthermore, in "The Tables of the Law" we encounter also a link between the Italian mystic and Jonathan Swift. In fact, after having explained Joachim's theories on the "Kingdom of the Spirit," one of the characters, Owen Aherne, in response to the narrator's scepticism about Joachim's revolutionary theology, paraphrases and distorts one of Swift's expressions in *A Tale of a Tub*: "Jonathan Swift made a soul for the gentlemen of this city by hating his neighbour as himself."<sup>41</sup> This is an interesting instance of Yeats's influence on Joyce's texts.

Other references in the short story are relevant in the present discussion, for they are parallel to some occurrences in the third episode of *Ulysses*. One of them is Yeats's allusion to "the kabalistic heresies of Pico della Mirandola."<sup>42</sup> In Joyce's "Proteus," besides all the references to various heretics, there occurs also an allusion to Pico della Mirandola,<sup>43</sup> as well as to the kabbalistic primordial man, Adam Kadmon.<sup>44</sup>

The idea of using some of Yeats's intuitions concerning occult knowledge in the unfolding of his works, is precisely suggesting the existence of an occultist method by which Joyce manages to conceal obscure significances behind half secret hints. Biographically speaking, we do not know, for it is not recorded anywhere, whether or not Yeats suggested that Joyce should go to Marsh's library to find books by Joachim. However, this could very well be the case, for they met just a few days before his visit to the library, and on that occasion, as Stanislaus records,<sup>45</sup> they talked of the two esoteric short stories Yeats would

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<sup>39</sup> *U*, 49.

<sup>40</sup> See *ibid.*, 49.

<sup>41</sup> Yeats, *Short Fiction*, 207.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>43</sup> See *U*, 50.

<sup>44</sup> See *U*, 46.

<sup>45</sup> See n. 37 above.

have reprinted some time later. Besides, in “The Tables of the Law” there happens to be also a reference to the 1527 edition of Joachim’s book *Expositio in Apocalypsin*. Actually, a rare copy of the same volume, published in Venice in 1527, is the property of Marsh’s library, alongside three other works and a biography of the mystic. Therefore, not only may we assume that Joyce must have followed the advice of the older artist, but also that he took his suggestions so seriously that he ended up using them later on, in one of the most cryptic passages of his masterpiece.

In the case just mentioned, Joyce’s use of one of Yeats’s intuitions is clearly recognisable. This allows us to spot a certain similarity between their ways of concealing occult allusions in their works. Joyce and Yeats use the occult as a landscape of the mind. A mental landscape represents, for the author of *Ulysses*, the work of a lucid and precise intellect capable of elaborating complex aesthetic theories. It also reflects the products of a sort of hallucinated consciousness devoted to the invention of an oneiric textual universe. On the other hand, in Yeats’s art the predominance of visions as a poetic device could not have a psychological explanation concerning the nature of hallucinations, for Yeats believed in visions as ways to revelation. His writings are somehow magical writings, in that they try to establish a living connection with a supernatural spiritual world. On the contrary, Joyce is certainly more interested in the occult as a mirror reflecting a distorted human consciousness. Accordingly, in his texts he attempts to approach the secret faculties of the hidden side of the mind, by resorting to a parallel occult cognitive system.

Apart from the autobiographical essay (1904), other places where occult authors are referred to are, for instance, the paper “Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages” (1907), the Trieste conference paper on Blake (1912), *Giacomo Joyce* (1914?), *A Portrait* (1914), certain critical writings, *Ulysses* (1922), and *Finnegans Wake* (1939). Swedenborg is ever present, but we also find Boehme, Paracelsus, Cornelius Agrippa, Hermes Trismegistus, the mystic known as Dionisius the Pseudo-Areopagite, Pico della Mirandola, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Kooti Hoomi, and many others. Besides, among the ideas more frequently used in Joyce’s fiction are Giordano Bruno’s and Nicholas of Cusa’s theory of the coincidence of the contraries, the kabbalistic idea of the androgynous man, the theosophic theory of the Akasic Records, the idea of metempsychosis, numerology, and the alchemical correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm as expressed in Hermes Trismegistus’s *Tabula Smaragdina*. Such themes blend with many others of a more folkloric nature in *Ulysses*, such as magic transformations, living objects, apparitions of ghosts, haunting vampires, and daemonic beings, all contributing to gradually change the book into a curious example of fantastic literature.

The authors Joyce occasionally mentions, with their occult theories and beliefs, are instrumental in the shaping of a secret internal texture in his works. This is clear especially in *Ulysses*, a book partly based on the empirical—almost scientific in that it involves a psychological methodology—exploration of the human mind. Occasionally, themes taken from the occult philosophy cohabit with a kind of more superstitious interest in the occult. This is the case of Joyce's use of apparitions of ghosts and dead people, often in the form of vampires.

Despite Joyce's manifest interest in occult themes, his biography would lead us to think that he may have been only mocking the occult as a category of pseudo-knowledge. For instance, in relation to the Dublin theosophists, it can be argued that Joyce's judgement was not very positive. In a letter from Rome, in which he relates to Stanislaus his reaction to the riots at the Abbey Theatre during the staging of Synge's *Playboy*, he calls them derogatorily hermetists.<sup>46</sup> An explanation of such an attitude towards them is the widespread idea, among his Dublin acquaintances, that Joyce was just pretending to be interested in the occult, while in fact he was only mocking it. In this regard, Stanislaus Joyce's recollections are certainly illuminating:

In the period following his mother's death Joyce still maintained an interest in theosophy, reading everything on the subject he could lay his hands on. He read Swedenborg, Blake, Madame Blavatsky, Colonel Olcott, Leadbeater, and Annie Besant. It was on this common theosophic terrain that he made the acquaintance of the poet-painter-economist, George Russell, who published his poems under the initials A.E. At their first encounter they discussed theosophy, at Russell's home, until almost daybreak. Knowing Joyce's satiric humour, the other young writers of the group laughed over this encounter later, believing that Joyce had been pulling Russell's leg.<sup>47</sup>

Stanislaus Joyce, who in *My Brother's Keeper* calls Blake "a lunatic,"<sup>48</sup> is very sceptical about the occult in general. However, he often refers quite clearly to his brother's genuine, though naïve, interest in the subject. His own recollection of Joyce's encounters with Russell continues as follows:

And Joyce let them talk because, as he confessed to me, he preferred they should believe a hoax had been perpetrated rather than have them discover his naïveté in the matter.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See *L*, II, 208.

<sup>47</sup> S. Joyce, "Recollections of James Joyce," 493.

<sup>48</sup> S. Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper*, 243.

<sup>49</sup> S. Joyce, "Recollections of James Joyce," 493.

In *My Brother's Keeper*, Stanislaus again refers to Joyce's commitment to the occult as something earnest though temporary:

Knowing my brother's satirical humour, his friends, foremost amongst them Gogarty, were sure that it was a glorious leg-pull, and my brother preferred them to think so. In fact, however, he had been even then as much in earnest as Russell himself.<sup>50</sup>

Stanislaus felt that the influence of Yeats and Russell on Joyce in the field of mysticism and Hermeticism was by no means a respectable matter. He refused to acknowledge Joyce's problematic two-fold attitude towards the subject. Despite this, one can agree with Bonnie Kime Scott that although "Joyce's renunciation of the Dublin theosophists was a formality that gave him a needed sense of artistic integrity," he nonetheless "left their 'neighbourhood,' [...] with considerable theosophical baggage, and added to it as he continued to read their work."<sup>51</sup> As regards his alleged mocking scepticism of their practices, the scholar believes that "Joyce's satirical use of the Theosophists was often restrictive and conveniently masked indebtedness."<sup>52</sup>

It can be argued that Joyce was at the same time drawn to, and repelled by, the occult. This ambivalence is also very Yeatsian. In fact, the visionary in Yeats always loved to experience visions, while the sceptic loved to question them. Declan Kiberd wittily remarks that Yeats "spent much of the decade [the 1890s] seeing visions as a member of the *Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn*: and the rest of it being expelled for questioning them."<sup>53</sup> One should really be reminded that, in 1890, Yeats was requested indirectly by Mme Blavatsky to leave the so-called Esoteric Section of the *Theosophical Society* due to his scepticism about some aspects of the society's proceedings. This concerned primarily matters of belief, like when a resolution was passed which included a belief in Mme Blavatsky's teachers.<sup>54</sup> George Mills Harper records that:

Yeats, as always, was sceptical, refusing to decide between alternatives because there were 'too few facts to go on' [...] Hesitant to commit himself and uneasy about the vagueness of the resolutions, Yeats determined 'to keep a diary of all signings I go through and such like, for my future use; and always to state my reasons for each of them most carefully and when in doubt as to the legitimacy of

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<sup>50</sup> S. Joyce, *My Brother's Keeper*, 180.

<sup>51</sup> Scott, "Joyce and the Dublin Theosophists: 'Vegetable Verse' and Story," 69.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>53</sup> Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, 396.

<sup>54</sup> See Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn*, 5.

my reasons to submit them to some prominent members in whom I have confidence.<sup>55</sup>

Such an oscillating attitude, always in balance between scepticism and belief, is parallel to Yeats's own refusal to submit to the aggressive authority of McGregor Mathers in the occult society he later joined, the *Golden Dawn*. His behaviour generally tells us a great deal about his own opposition to the often obscurantist attitudes of many occultists, an aspect of their character which left Yeats disillusioned many a time.<sup>56</sup> In fact, his belief in the occult is often counterbalanced by doubts of various sorts. Such ambivalence perhaps led him to prefer the "magic" power of poetry and imagination to proper occultism, as the ultimate fulfilment of his visionary temper. On the other hand, one cannot avoid registering the fact that he had been a member of the *Golden Dawn* and its follow-ups for more than thirty years. This seems a good enough reason to consider his commitment true and definitive. At the same time, his oscillations persuade us that he must have been also partly sceptical about his own allegiance to the occult. A truth is always made of two opposite sides, as Wilde would remind us. In this context, to see the occult in Joyce in relation to the occult in Yeats may be helpful in assessing the similar nature of Joyce's own ambivalent response to the question.

As Stanislaus Joyce points out,<sup>57</sup> a blend of mysticism and occultism can be spotted in Joyce's interpretation of the occult. Actually, he seems to combine the two categories, as if they were the two aspects of the very same system. In a sense, we can describe mysticism and occultism as the two sides of the same coin. As Faivre explains:

Simplifying a little, one could consider that the mystic—in the very classical sense—aspires to a more or less complete suppression of images and intermediaries, of mediations, because they quickly become obstacles for him to union with God. This, in contrast to the esotericist, who seems more interested in the intermediaries revealed to his inner vision by virtue of his creative imagination than in tending above to a union with his God.<sup>58</sup>

Following such a simplifying explanation, one would be tempted to see in Joyce stronger affinities with the esotericist nature rather than the mystic, even though he pretended to put mystics and theosophists all into one category. However, it is such an assembly of remote influences that I here name occult. As a matter of

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>56</sup> See *ibid.*, 14-68.

<sup>57</sup> See note 47 above.

<sup>58</sup> Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, xxiii.

fact, in “A Portrait of the Artist” (1904), alongside unorthodox mystics and visionaries like Swedenborg and Boehme, Joyce mentions also the Christian mystics John of the Cross and Joachim Abbas. In *Giacomo Joyce* he talks of Miguel de Molinos and Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite. Again he mentions Dionysius in “Ireland: Island of Saints and Sages,” as well as in the Italian conference paper on Blake. The case of this last mystic is exemplary in showing that Joyce’s personal combination of mysticism and occultism had somehow an historical foundation.

Dionysius is probably better known as Pseudo-Dionysius. The writings attributed to him were very important in the religious developments of the early Church, although later they became fundamental mainly in the Christian orthodox tradition. Joyce considered him as the *sine qua non* for the understanding of Blake’s prophetic writings and visions. In a pioneering study, Frances Yates analyses what she believed to be a kind of hermetic golden age in history—a period whose dominant philosophy was precisely the occult philosophy—focusing on certain authors, many of whom were dear to both Yeats and Joyce (Lull, Pico, Agrippa etc...).<sup>59</sup> Her exploration explains the relevance of the Kabbalah as a factor of continuity in the developments of the occult philosophy in the Renaissance.

Jewish Kabbalah, after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, and through the contacts with Christian Europe, took place alongside the newly-born Christian Kabbalah, when kabbalistic secrets and mystical techniques came gradually to be applied also to the interpretation of Christian mysteries. Dionysius’s theories on the angelic hierarchies are believed by Frances Yates to be behind the doctrines of many kabbalists, among whom we find Raimond Lull and Francesco Giorgi.<sup>60</sup> While Raymond Lull was a Christian kabbalist *ante litteram*, the Franciscan friar of Venice, Francesco Giorgi, author of *De Harmonia Mundi*, was a proper Christian kabbalist. His philosophy is summed up in the following description by Yates:

The amalgam of Platonism, Hermeticism, Cabalism, astral cosmology and ethics is given a strongly Christian direction in the last book of *De Harmonia Mundi* which presents an elaborate Christological doctrine, infused with Franciscan Christian mysticism.<sup>61</sup>

Such an explanation may provide us with the missing link that possibly misled Stanislaus, in his own perception of the role of the occult in his brother’s views. Joyce’s idea of the occult, and particularly his own knowledge of the

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<sup>59</sup> See Yates, *The Occult Philosophy of the Elizabethan Age*, 75.

<sup>60</sup> See *ibid.*, 12, 33, 36.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 34.

field, seems to be parallel to the *occulta philosophia* of the Renaissance. This was in fact a blend of traditions as diverse as early Hermeticism, medieval Jewish Kabbalah, mysticism, Neoplatonism, Christian Kabbalah, and so on. Such a cluster of different categories of knowledge might have appealed very strongly to Joyce's "medieval" mind. Yates's idea that the theology of Dionysius was behind the systems of some Renaissance Christian kabbalists, is peculiarly relevant in the present study, for it suggests precisely a cluster-like quality of the occult. Besides, as Frances Yates again points out, the "Giorgi type of Christian Cabala," which was associated in Elizabethan England with the "Agrippa type, more deeply magical, alchemical as well as Kabbalist," is the very root of Rosicrucianism.<sup>62</sup> Such an intuition confirms the suspicion that Christian Kabbalah and Rosicrucianism are actually synonymous.<sup>63</sup>

Joyce makes one significant, although seemingly casual, allusion to Rosicrucianism in the early short story "Sisters," first published in George Russell's journal, *The Irish Homestead*. As is well-known, the story is set in 1895, the year in which Yeats, already a member of the *Golden Dawn*, an explicitly Rosicrucian association,<sup>64</sup> wrote "The Body of the Father Christian Rosencruc." It is a short essay about the coming of "an age of imagination, of emotion, of moods, of revelation,"<sup>65</sup> after an "age of criticism."<sup>66</sup> The name Rosencruc stands for Rosencreutz, the imaginary founder of the secret order of the Rosicrucians. In Joyce's short story, a young man is addressed by his uncles as a "Rosicrucian."<sup>67</sup> Leaving aside the question of the historical developments of Rosicrucianism, what is relevant in Joyce's allusion is the evocative power of the adjective "Rosicrucian." Jeri Johnson dismisses the whole question of any particular meaning to be attached to it, by pointing out that it "is simply used to suggest that the boy has become too interested in matters too esoteric for his own good."<sup>68</sup> However, if we see the reference in connection with Yeats's short paper on father Christian Rosencruc, and with the idea of an amalgam of different esoteric undercurrents to which the term Rosicrucian alludes, it may suggest some deeper meanings yet to be calculated.

Beeler thinks that we can discuss a Rosicrucian text as a text which seems "to blur in the eyes of its readers and cross over the border of fiction into the realm of reality."<sup>69</sup> He argues about the way in which "Rosicrucian texts were

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 170.

<sup>63</sup> See *ibid.* 89.

<sup>64</sup> See Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn*, 8.

<sup>65</sup> Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 197.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>67</sup> *D*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Johnson, "Notes," in Joyce, *Dubliners*, 198, n. 4-14.

<sup>69</sup> Beeler, *The Invisible College: a Study of the Three Original Rosicrucian Texts*, 26.

written with multiple interpretations in mind,<sup>70</sup> and believes that they are open texts.<sup>71</sup> One can suspect that a connection between the original Rosicrucian manifestos and Joyce's works does indeed exist. Some odd coincidences point to this very conclusion. It is the case of Joyce's secret (quasi-kabbalistic) use of letters, a device consistent with the notion of "open text." In *Ulysses*, letters and words become alive through mutability and ambiguity. As Sebastian Knowles rightly explains, "language in Joyce is transformative, [...] meaning is multiple, and [...] letters, for Joyce, are an endless source of play."<sup>72</sup>

As a matter of fact, in reading the original seventeenth-century Rosicrucian manifestos, one may be struck by the reference, in the *Fama Fraternitatis*—first published in Germany in 1614, though an English translation by Thomas Vaughan appeared in 1652—to three books with letters for titles (book M, book H, book I).<sup>73</sup> Stephen Dedalus in "Proteus" refers twice to such an idea.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the anonymous author of the *Fama Fraternitatis* considers "Protheus" the most revealing book in the philosophical *Bibliotheca* of the Rosicrucian Society. In fact, the structural importance of "Proteus" in the organization of Joyce's great work could hardly be denied. Furthermore, the manifestos stress the alchemical idea of a correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm, which is one of the major structural characteristics of *Ulysses*. Finally, as Frances Yates again points out, the Rosicrucian manifestos are an expression of an age between the Renaissance and the XVII-century scientific revolution "historically set forth as an alternative to the Jesuit Order."<sup>75</sup> All this could well have appealed also to the anti-Jesuit in Joyce.

Rosicrucian thought is based on many of the assumptions of esotericism, like the adept-only capability to decipher the secrets of nature. This may generally apply also to the relationship between Joyce's works and their readers. In fact, as is stated in the second Rosicrucian manifesto called *Confessio Fraternitatis*, the great book of nature is "open to anyone's eyes, but can be read or understood by only a few."<sup>76</sup> It can be argued that *Ulysses* is the prototype of the text open to many, but understandable only by few. Such an apparently despicable and obscurantist quality of the book makes one wonder about the *genre* to which it *belongs*. Indeed, if literary theorists had invented a narrative

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>71</sup> See *ibid.*, 33.

<sup>72</sup> Knowles, *The Dublin Helix. The Life of Language in Joyce's Ulysses*, 17.

<sup>73</sup> The two original manifestos are reprinted in Frances Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*.

<sup>74</sup> See *U*, 50 and 61, where he speaks of "alphabet books."

<sup>75</sup> Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, xi-xii.

<sup>76</sup> Cited in: Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 174.

subgenre called “hidden writing,” Joyce would have been probably among its main exponents.<sup>77</sup>

Among the revivalists of modern Rosicrucianism were also W.B. Yeats and Rudolph Steiner. There is absolutely no doubt that Joyce, at some stage, must have come in contact with their works. Yeats’s relationship with Rosicrucianism is evident in his commitment to the *Golden Dawn*. Despite his affiliation to such a secret esoteric society, his attitude towards occultism is filtered through his early commitment to the more-theoretical-than-magical theosophy of Madame Blavatsky. She was, just like Rudolph Steiner, a theorist of what could be named occult science.

Dr. Steiner, who between 1907 and 1909 gave some 24 lectures on Rosicrucianism between Munich and Budapest, was committed to the founding of the so-called “science of the spirit,” otherwise known as “anthroposophy.” One may rely on his *Occult Science* for an outline of its core arguments. In Steiner’s words, occult science is “the science of what—to the ordinary methods of cognition—is present but unmanifest in the phenomena of the world.”<sup>78</sup> However, one must be sceptical about the alleged scientific outlook outlined in the book. Steiner’s occult science moves constantly between an empiricist approach and a non-sensible subject matter, namely the soul. He does not seem to have had major doubts about the validity of his own original perspective. He deeply believes that the occult science is interested in “the non-sensible World-contents in the same mood as does the natural scientist of those accessible to sense-perception.”<sup>79</sup> The assumption is that the secret realm of the occult, the soul, is in contact with the non-sensible.

In relation to Joyce, we really need a more sombre approach. The occult, like many other systems of thought, has to be seen primarily, in its literal sense, as something hidden, which can be brought to the surface by using the proper tools. The “scientific” approach of such a methodology is closer to psychology than occultism. The two fields share in fact some basic ideas. Links between Jung, the occult, Gnosticism, and oriental philosophy, as well as between Freud’s psychology and the tradition of the Jewish Kabbalah, have been the object of many studies in recent years.<sup>80</sup> As regards Joyce’s aesthetics, the

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<sup>77</sup> In relation to this aspect, see the illuminating examples Knowles spots in *The Dublin Helix*, especially the one involving Russell’s initials as the hidden reason why he speaks “occultly” in “Scylla” (11-2).

<sup>78</sup> Steiner, *Occult Science: an Outline*, 26.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>80</sup> See for instance: Nandor Fodor, *Frued, Jung and Occultism*, University Books, New York, 1971; J.J Clarke, *Jung and Eastern Thought: a Dialogue with the Orient*, Rutledge, London, 1994; David Bakan, *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*, New