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In Svengali's fur coat: the legacy of *Trilby* in James Joyce's *Ulysses*

Abstract

George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894) forms part of the Late Victorian dramatic afterlife in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Reading *Ulysses* in light of the legacy of *Trilby* reveals yet another layer of the composite palimpsest that forms Joyce's literary universe. In her well-known soliloquy, Molly Bloom remembers attending a performance of *Trilby* (1895) at the Gaiety with Herbert Beerbohm Tree in the role of evil Svengali. Trilby O'Ferrall, a singer and model, forms part of Molly's repertoire of dramatic references and informs Joyce's impression of womanhood. Moreover, Leopold Bloom appears in "Circe" enveloped in Svengali's fur overcoat. In *Ulysses*, Svengali's fur coat seems to point at a hidden, paternal legacy: the Jewish outcast of *Trilby* might in fact be read as the most theatrical among the forefathers of the Jewish outcast of *Ulysses*. Thus, under the legacy of Svengali, "Circe" appears as Joyce's elaboration of theatre as a site of alternative jurisdiction.

On a busy evening of October 1895, Leopold and Molly Bloom went to The Gaiety Theatre to see the hit of the turn of the century, *Trilby*: "theyre always trying to wiggle up to you," recalls Molly in the closing monologue of *Ulysses* (1922), "that fellow in the pit at the pit at the Gaiety for Beerbohm Tree in Trilby the last time Ill ever go there to be squashed like that for any Trilby or her barebum" (Joyce 1922, 717). Today almost forgotten, *Trilby* (1894) was a bestselling novel written by the Franco-British author and cartoonist for *Punch*, George Du Maurier. The story, a period piece about a group of young artists set in the Parisian Latin Quarter, enjoyed a vast, if short-lived, success and generated a craze of unprecedented proportions. In 1895, *Trilby* was adapted for the stage by the American playwright Paul Potter and, over the 1890s, became a powerful and pervasive collective fantasy.

As a late Victorian work, *Trilby* belongs in all probability to the literary references of Joyce's youth. It is therefore hardly surprising to find *Trilby* in Joyce's early work *Stephen Hero* (1903-1905):

> Passing down Jones's Road they saw a gaudy advertisement in strong colours for a melodramatic play. Wells asked Stephen had he read 'Trilby'.
> - Haven't you? Famous book, you know; style would suit you, I think. Of course it's a bit . . . blue.
> - How is that?
> - O, well, you know . . . Paris, you know . . . artists.
> - O, is that the kind of book it is?
> - Nothing very wrong in it that I could see. Still some people think it's a bit immoral (Joyce 1944, 71).

In *Stephen Hero, Trilby* forms part of the entertainment life of 1890s Dublin, where young Stephen takes his first steps as an aspiring writer. His friend Wells muses over Stephen's future career and pictures him "as the author of a second 'Trilby' or something of that sort . . ." (Ibid.: 72). The juxtaposition of future Stephen Dedalus and George Du Maurier is quite revealing if, as Theodore Spencer and Joseph Prescott (1954, 221) seem to agree, "*Stephen Hero* not only elucidates passages in Joyce's other works [but] also prefigures Joyce's later activity – in particular, his development as a craftsman".

And indeed, the conversation between Wells and Stephen over *Trilby* prefigures Joyce's own reflection on morality and the work of art and, to some extent, the publication of *Ulysses*, notoriously the subject of severe criticism for immorality and protagonist of a widespread, if more long-lasting, success. Moreover, the presence of *Trilby* in *Stephen Hero* casts Du Maurier's story as part of the Victorian dramatic afterlife of Joyce's later works. Traces of *Trilby* may be found, fragmented and rewritten, within the fabric of *Ulysses*. For once, the first pages of the two novels bear a striking similarity. In *Trilby*, three young men in their Parisian apartment are startled by a sudden knock at the door and Trilby's loud cry, "Milk below!". In *Ulysses*, Stephen, Buck and Haines welcome in Martello tower the old Irish milkwoman bringing their daily bottle of milk. Moreover, references to Trilby's signature song *Ben Bolt* and Joyce's considerations on absolute music fully explored by Michelle

Witen (2018) owe much to Du Maurier's (1894, 218) notion of "song without words", a concept reiterated word for word in "Sirens" and recycled in Joyce's description of *Finnegans Wake* (1939) as "pure music" (Ellmann 1966, 715).

This essay explores the legacy of *Trilby* as a late Victorian novel and play about theatre and performance. The title character, Trilby O'Ferrall, is a shapeshifting singer and model: in *Ulysses*, she becomes part of Molly Bloom's repertoire of dramatic references and a model for Joyce's impression of womanhood. Moreover, re-reading "Circe" and Bloom's trial in light of Svengali's legacy illuminates Joyce's exploration of theatre as a site for alternative jurisdiction, thus revealing yet another layer of the palimpsest of *Ulysses*.

1. *Trilby*: from the printed page to the stage

George Du Maurier's *Trilby* first appeared in serial form on the *Harper's Monthly* magazine between January and August 1894 with 122 illustrations. The novel was met with unprecedented enthusiasm, and, by its second instalment, the magazine's circulation had already increased by one hundred thousand. *Trilby* is set in the Quartier Latin, Paris's bohemian arts district, where three young artists - Taffy, The Laird and Little Billee – meet the young model Trilby O'Ferrall. Bewitched by her androgynous beauty, Little Billee soon asks her in marriage. However, his family's reservations about their wedding lead Trilby to turn away, leaving a distraught and heartbroken Little Billee. After the premature death of her little brother, Trilby falls victim to evil Svengali, a Jewish pianist and musical impresario. Through his hypnotic powers, Svengali pours his musical talent into Trilby's body and turns her into the best-known singer of her time, La Svengali. The novel ends at the Drury Lane, in London, with Trilby's final performance: Svengali dies in the middle box on the grand tier, leaving a disoriented Trilby on stage, crashed by the loud hissing of the audience.

Following its initial success, *Trilby* was issued as an illustrated book both in America and in the UK. The new system of advertising and mass circulation contributed to the success of the book, which sold over 200.000 copies in the first year alone, breaking all previous records for best-sellers (Showalter 1995; Jenkins 1998). In the 1890s, *Trilby* became a prominent component of the cultural mythology of the time, giving rise to a fashion trend then known as Trilbyana or Trilby-mania. As *Trilby* scenes, gestures, and clothing styles became part of the vernacular, artists recycled scenes and characters from *Trilby* for their cartoons, burlesques, movies, parodies, and sketches. Many among the upper classes staged tableaux vivant performances from the book or performed *Trilby* songs to raise money for charity, while art galleries profited from exhibitions of Du Maurier's manuscripts and illustrations. Not to mention, the widespread and unquenchable thirst for *Trilby*-related items: cigars, ice creams, corsets, shoes, puzzles, games, dolls, toothpastes, soaps, sweets, hats, etc. "Never in our time has a book been so suddenly exalted into a bible," writes the American commentator Justin Huntley M'Carthy on the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1896), "The taste for Trilby became a passion […] the passion grew into a mania and the mania deepened into a madness".

On 20 January 1895, after having read Du Maurier's book in only one sitting, the American playwright Paul Potter started writing an adaptation of *Trilby* for the stage. In March 1895, the play opened in Boston and was then taken on a short tour in the USA. The British actor Herbert Beerbohm Tree saw the play in Buffalo on the last day of his American trip. At the end of the second act, Tree left his wife Maud in their box, went backstage, and bought the British rights for the play (Bingham, 1978). The following day, Tree returned to the UK with the manuscript and revised it with Du Maurier. Tree's *Trilby* opened in London at the Haymarket on 30 October 1895 after a UK and Ireland tour which took off at the Theatre Royal, in Manchester, on 7 September 1895. The play starred Dorothea Baird as Trilby and Beerbohm Tree as Svengali. The show, just like the novel, enjoyed tremendous success, and it soon became Tree's biggest hit with over 257 performances in the initial London run alone. In fact, a few years later, Tree could finally

fulfill his dream of rebuilding His Majesty's Theatre on the profits from *Trilby* alone.

The play's huge success owes much to its two main characters, Svengali and Trilby. In the play, the story of the three artists in the Quartier Latin and the tormented romance between Trilby and Little Billee leave room for Svengali's evil plans and the rise to success of La Svengali. In an interview for the *Metropolitan Magazine* (May 1895), Paul Potter explained that "Svengali […] dominates this play throughout, and perhaps its name should have been 'Svengali' instead of 'Trilby,' but we could not part with the name that caused the very existence of the play". Svengali's success was fed further by Beerbohm Tree's mesmeric performance: according to a reviewer, "the audience, like Trilby, is under the spell of this weird, uncanny, dirty-fingered, unkept, [*sic*] death-faced scoundrel".[1] The predominance of Svengali and Trilby's storyline finds justification in Potter's declared fascination with hypnotism:

> Don't you know that hypnotism is the very essence of the play? There is where my play differs from Du Maurier's book. When I read the book, I saw very clearly that the parting of two lovers by hypnotism was the backbone of its drama. You see, hypnotism had never before been used on the stage seriously – not to my knowledge, that is – and here was the chance (*Metropolitan Magazine*, May 1895).

For his take on Du Maurier's Svengali and Trilby, Potter exploited the trope of the frozen mesmeric subject made popular by mesmerists since the 1850s. On stage, Svengali demonstrates his craft on the innocent Trilby, made unconscious, unable to move or act for herself. Thus, in the play, the Gothic tinge of the novel gains momentum, spread by the dark and pervasive presence of evil Svengali.

Moreover, in the passage from novel to play, Du Maurier's characters lose much of their psychological depth. According to Emily Jenkins (1998), given the familiarity of the audience with Du Maurier's illustrated book, at the heart of the play's success was merely the recreation on stage of the pictures drawn by Du Maurier and included in the illustrated edition of the novel. The play's characters are indeed caricatural and static, however on

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[1] "'Trilby' at the Hyamarket Theatre," Production Archives. Quoted in Jenkins 1998, 245.

stage they work as symbols: while originally Taffy, Sandy and Little Billee may be read as decadent, androgynous aesthetes, in the play they become conservative symbols of Victorian respectability when compared to the two main characters, evil Svengali and the lascivious Trilby, who, contrarily to the novel, does not abandon Little Billee out of sheer altruism, but merely succumbs to Svengali's hypnotic influence. On second analysis, on stage, Svengali, Trilby and the three artists become bare embodiments of anxieties specific to the fin de siècle, symptomatic of changing definitions of gender roles, sexual propriety and deviance, but also national decline, immigration, invasion, and race. Thus, Trilby is at once a *garçonne,* a respectable lady and an enchantress; she embodies fears around the revival of feminism and the dangerous fascination with sexual revolution. Jewish Svengali is the racial Other; his stereotypical characterization can be read as a response to the arrival from the 1870s onwards of a large number of Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe, which eventually led to the Aliens Act of 1905 and the birth of political antisemitism in the UK. Finally, the three Englishmen act as grantors of morality and Victorian respectability in an age of moral degeneration and decline.

2. Those lovely seaside girls

On the 10 and 11 October 1895, Beerbohm Tree staged a production of *Trilby* at The Gaiety Theatre, in Dublin. The Blooms were, with all probability, in the audience. Austin Briggs (2002) speculates that Molly – like Trilby, a concert singer and daughter of an Irish army officer - might in fact have identified vicariously with Trilby. On second thought, it would not be hard to imagine Trilby as one of the models or dramatic references for Molly and for the women of *Ulysses*. Nina Auerbach (1981) described Trilby as one of the key literary products of the composite ethos of the 1890s, defined by the controversy over the rise of the New Woman and the insistence on sexual equality. As opposed to the virginal, maternal and conservative Victorian woman devoted to her home and family, the New Woman was often satirized as a manly woman: educated, assertive, seductive, physically and financially

independent. In turn, Trilby incarnates the changing myths of womanhood that haunted the public imagination at the turn of the century, when the Victorian myth of the angel of the house was joined by old symbols of vice and unregulated sexuality such as the siren, Medusa, Calypso and Circe.

Trilby's story is the tale of redemption of a young *garçonne* turned angel of the house. In the play, Dorothea Baird enters the stage wearing Trilby's signature attire: a military overcoat, striped petticoat, and bare feet. Trilby is androgynous, beautiful, independent, seductive, she smokes cigarettes and speaks in a strong French slang. She is a model and poses *for the altogether* for several artists. Trilby's (and Baird's) bare feet became a sensation inside and outside of the story: "It is said," writes a reviewer, "that those who go to see Miss Baird in 'Trilby' are quite as much interested in her feet as in her acting. If her acting is as good as her feet, there can be no marvelling at her success".[2] However, changed by her love for Little Billee, Trilby is the protagonist of a true psychological and physical metamorphosis: her traits turn delicate, soft and she becomes innocent, virginal, the embodiment of the Victorian angel of the house - "His love," she says in the play, "had made me a new woman!" (Potter 1895, 606). Trilby's new-found innocence, however, makes her more vulnerable to Svengali's influence: under his hypnotic gaze, she becomes the most famous singer of her time, able to entice the entire world with the sound of her voice. Yet again, Trilby morphs from angel to Siren - "a wanton and perilous siren, an unchaste and unprincipled and most dangerous daughter of Heth, and the special enemy of her house" (Du Maurier 1894, 271-2). By the end of the story, free from Svengali's control, Trilby returns to her more innocent, virginal self. However, her friends cannot help but recognize her undying allure: "tuneless and insane, she was more of a siren than ever" (Ibid.: 261); and "Oh, Circe, poor Circe, dear Circe, divine enchantress that you were!" (Ibid.: 262).

In a manner akin to Du Maurier's *Trilby*, the chapters of *Ulysses* dedicated to women explore and dramatize the tension between the myth of the Victorian angel of the house and the myths associated to the New Woman. Their

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[2] The clipping can be found in the Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library. Quoted in Jenkins 1998, 239.

titles evoke the figures that shaped the late Victorian impression of womanhood: “Calypso”, “Sirens”, “Nausicaa”, “Circe” and “Penelope”. In turn, the fluid texture of Joyce’s female characters reflects the ambiguity at the heart of womanhood: they are shapeshifting, metamorphic, androgynous, sensual, maternal. Young Gerty embodies the archetypal Virgin: “a sterling good daughter was Gerty just like a second mother in the house, a ministering angel too with a little heart worth its weight in gold” (Joyce 1922, 339). However, lying in the maritime landscape of “Nausicaa”, Gerty invites Bloom’s voyeuristic gaze and indulges his masturbatory game: she lets down her hair and raises her skirts, making Bloom the spectator of her impudent performance of femininity. In “Circe”, the fallen women of Mabbot Street open the way for Bella Cohen, an androgynous madame with moustache and glittering eyes. At once intimidated and enthralled by Bella, Bloom indulges in a long sadomasochistic fantasy in which Bella turns into a man-tamer, Bloom becomes female and submits to Bello’s castigation. However, Bella’s pose of “domination and castigation” recalls, according to M. Keith Booker (1992, 362), the virginal figure of Beatrice and her attitude towards Dante. In both cases, the castigation of Dante and Bloom are intended to lead them towards salvation.

In “Sirens”, the scenes of the two coquettish barmaids of the Ormond Hotel are juxtaposed with pictures of virgins in the frame-maker’s shop: “by Bassi’s blessed virgins Bloom’s dark eyes went by. Bluerobed, white under, come to me” (Joyce 1922, 249). Meanwhile, “all flushed (O!), panting, sweating (O!), all breathless” (Ibid.: 249), Joyce’s sirens are doubly deceiving as they divert the reader’s attention from the cardinal siren of the novel, Molly Bloom. In fact, like Trilby who “surpassed all other models as Calypso surpassed her nymphs” (Du Maurier 1894, 66), Molly casts a shadow over all other female characters in *Ulysses*. Molly is the modern reincarnation of Penelope, she is associated to images of motherhood, fertility, and nourishment: her body is soft and abundant and, in her final monologue, she recalls her pregnancy, her engorged breasts, and tender nipples; she “had to get [Bloom] to suck them they were so hard he said it was sweeter and thicker than cows” (Joyce 1922, 705). She is associated to Gaea, the Greek goddess of Earth, and to Tellus Mater, the Roman Earth Mother. On the other hand,

Molly is also juxtaposed to the nymph Calypso: she is an androgynous, metamorphic, seductive, highly sexual creature. Moreover, Molly, whose maiden name is Tweedy, is often associated to the activity of weaving, which recalls both Penelope's canvas, symbol of marital loyalty, and Calypso's golden shuttle, witness to her seduction of Ulysses.

As singers[3] and models, Trilby and Molly fully embody the myth of the nymph or siren. In "Eumaeus", Bloom shows Stephen a photo of his wife: "Mrs Bloom, my wife the *prima donna*, Madame Marion Tweedy […] She could without difficulty, he said, have posed for the ensemble" (Ibid.: 606-7). Bloom's last words evoke one of *Trilby*'s most memorable and enticing scenes, when a half-naked Trilby states: "I'm posing for Durien the sculptor, on the next floor. I pose to him for the altogether.' 'The altogether?' asked Little Billee. 'Yes – *l'ensemble*, you know'" (Du Maurier 1894, 15).[4] Both women are depicted as they pose in various stages of nakedness or as they perform onstage. Such peculiar, if recurrent, stance exemplifies the composite and thus complex position of late Victorian women.

Magazines of the time such as *Munsey's, McClure's* and *Cosmopolitan* featured sexy images of singers and actresses, a testimony to a growing consumer interest in celebrities (Jenkins 1998). In turn, Trilby and Molly have learnt to exhibit themselves to male viewers. They gain self-esteem from the admiration of men and thus present their bodies for inspection in a passive performance of femininity. This is, according to Garry Leonard (1991, 27), a "similar dynamic to that experienced by the consumer in the modern marketplace who is invited to gaze wantonly upon objects deliberately arranged so as to titillate all who pass by". Molly's and Trilby's unique bodies are thus

[3] In his study on Molly's singing voice, James Van Dyck Card (1990, 596) observes that "there is no mention anywhere in the novel of Molly's musical training. She plays the piano, but she never remembers taking piano lessons, as most of us would. Similarly, although she must have studied voice, she has no memory of singing lessons or of vocal exercises, nor is there any mention of any person with whom she might have studies. In fact, Molly seems to have sprung full grown from Gibraltar to the Dublin concert stage like Minerva from the head of Zeus"; or, dare we say, like Trilby.

[4] Maintained and popularized by the play, the expression entered current use as an idiom – in the altogether - after the success of *Trilby*.

reduced to merchandize ready to be consumed with the eye. Through photography, their images can be reproduced and purchased as commodity or a product for mass consumption:

> La Svengali has arrived in London. Her name is in every mouth. Her photograph is in the shop windows […] A crowd of people […] is assembled in front of the windows of the Stereoscopic Company in Regent Street, gazing at presentments of Madame Svengali in all sizes and costumes […] they all go in and purchase largely" (Du Maurier 1894, 243-4).

Moreover, the consumer culture that informs the consumption, so to speak, of Trilby and Molly also informs the consumption of Gerty and the barmaids, as they display their bodies on the rocky landscape of Sandymount Strand or on the counter of the Ormond Hotel.

Under the male gaze, female bodies are segmented into sites of spectacle and desire. Trilby's feet, in particular, became an object of desire inside and outside of the novel, a sexual fetish "packaged," according to Jenkins (1998, 250), "so as to be appropriate for the public consumption". Ice creams shaped as Trilby's feet and other foot-shaped edibles could be purchased, sucked, and consumed by any schoolchild. Moreover, Baird's feet were blatantly displayed onstage, indulging the voyeuristic pleasure of the public: "With 'Little Billee' we compete / And 'Taffy' and 'the Laird,' / In laying homage at her feet / Of Dorothea – bared".[5] *Ulysses* magnifies the focus on Trilby's feet, which becomes a persistent preoccupation with women's feet, charged with unapologetic eroticism. Bloom reveals: "To be a shoefitter in Mansfield's was my love's young dream, the darling joys of sweet buttonhooking, to lace up crisscrossed to kneelength the dressy kid footwear satinlined, so incredibly small, of Clyde Road ladies" (Joyce 1922, 497). Bloom worships Bella's foot, which suddenly turns into a speaking hoof. Molly appears with "jewelled toerings" (Ibid.: 418) or posing for Bloom in an expensive pair of stockings: "I dont like my foot so much still I made him spend once with my foot […] he asked to take off my stockings lying on the heartrug in Lombard street" (Ibid.: 697).

[5] The clipping may be found at the Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library. Quoted in Jenkins 1996, 72.

On the other hand, from their position of models and enchantresses, Trilby and Molly actively invite the male voyeuristic gaze.[6] Trilby enters the novel with bare feet and presents them to Little Billee to be sketched. Molly guides Boylan's gaze on her foot: "I was waggling my foot […] I saw his eyes on my feet going out through the turning door he was looking when I looked back […] how did that excite him because I was crossing them" (Ibid.: 696-7); in "Lotus Eaters", Bloom's voyeuristic gaze is caught by the feet of a woman hopping on a carriage: "High brown boots with laces dangling. Well-turned foot. What is he fostering over that change for? Sees me looking. […] Watch! Watch! Silk flash rich stockings white. Watch!" (Ibid.: 71). The intimation to watch, not dissimilar to Svengali's hypnotic hold, suggests an active role on the part of women. Nina Auerbach (1981, 284) describes Trilby as "a virtual giantess" and writes: "her size is so great, in fact, that she can be parceled into fragments with a self-contained and totemistic value of their own, such as her majestic (but not Cinderella-like) foot". The same is true of Molly, who towers over Bloom and Boylan, and, in part, of Gerty, who clumsily mesmerizes Bloom. Auerbach continues on late Victorian heroines:

> what strikes us is the kinds of powers that are granted to the women: the victim of paralysis possesses seemingly infinite capacities of regenerative being that turn on her triumphant mesmerizer and paralyze him in turn. Dispossessed and seemingly empty, the women reveal a sort of infinitely unfolding magic that is quite different from the formulaic spells of the men (1981, 284).

3. A trial-show in Gothic guise

Trilby was interesting to Joyce as a story about theatre and, in particular, about theatre as a space for alternative jurisdiction. The connection between the

[6] In psychoanalytical terms, foot fetishism is the expression of a phallic object. Jenkins (1998) describes Trilby as phallic woman, whose foot stands as a symbol of a phallus, worshipped inside and outside of the story. In a similar way, Joyce's women are also phallic women: in particular, Bella/o with her endless metamorphoses and arsenal of phallic objects – nose, fan, cigar, heels, arm, hoof – eventually penetrates Bloom; and, in "Lestrigonians", Molly is also depicted in the position of sexual giver, when she pushes seedcake from her mouth to Bloom's as they make love at Howth's Head.

courtroom and the stage is a very old one. Many have written about the courtroom as a "performing space" and the trial as a "show-trial" (Saada 2012, 136-7), in other words a didactic performance "staged by its principal actors (judge, jury, lawyers, and defendant) and a putative audience (the courtroom gallery and the actors themselves as an audience of their own performance)" (Corrigan 2018, 45). In turn, from Shakespeare's tragedies to the French theatre of Racine, Corneille and Molière, theatre has often been used as a courtroom: Kenji Yoshino (2012) argues that theatre, and Shakespearian tragedies in particular, function as a way to include the audience in judgement; Karel Vanhaesebrouck (2015) describes the stage as the preferred site for both the actors and the audience to experiment together through the acts of acting and watching with legal, political, and social issues, such as direct democracy in Greek tragedies, marriage law in the comedies, and so on. According to Julie Saada (2012), the show-trial shares with theatre a very important social function: not only does it restore the social bond between citizens and the institutions of the State by evoking a shared feeling of indignation, but it also leads to a form of catharsis in the social body, a moment of reconciliation, purification, and restoration.

The turn of the century was renamed by George Robb and Nancy Erber (1999, 4) the "Age of the Trial". Public scandals became a recurrent aspect of modern life and the trial a "defining moment in modern culture" which, fed by its inherent element of spectacle, could bewitch and polarize the public opinion for considerable time. With the Victorian Age at the sunset and the decline of the Empire, the widespread attendance to trials as dramatic events was symptomatic of an unspoken will of the cultural centre (i.e., the British establishment) to depict and resolve conflicts with figures perceived as threats to an already fragile social and political order – the colonized (e.g. the O'Shea-Parnell case); the homosexual (e.g. the trials of Oscar Wilde); the Jew (e.g. the Affaire Dreyfus); the New Woman (e.g. the trial of Lady Colin Campbell); divorcees (e.g. the Ampthill baby case) etc. However, not all social conflicts could be articulated or resolved in court or by the organs of the State.

It is the case of the Jew: at the turn of the century, the rising antisemitic feelings widespread among the English population clashed with the tradition

of tolerance that had been integral to the British identity since Tudor times. Moreover, under the reign of Queen Victoria, Jewishness had come to be regarded as a symbol of change, modernity, and tolerance translated in the 1858 emancipation of the Jews, in Queen Victoria bestowing he knighthood to Moses Haim Montefiore, and Benjamin Disraeli's appointment as Prime Minister. However, from the 1870s, with the Jewish migration from the East followed by the Jewish Question and the Boer War, the liberal attitude towards the Jew started to be questioned, informally at first, as a manifestation of "the dangers of excessive liberal tolerance" (Cheyette 1989, 14). And yet, between 1894 and 1901 the French Affaire Dreyfus, tinged as it was with antisemitism, caused much indignation among the British, who stood unanimously in defence of the Jewish officer. British institutions, it seemed, were not yet ready to abandon the vestige of Victorian philosemitism and liberal tolerance. However, Steff Nellis (2021, 6) suggests that theatre compensated for the shortcomings of the State and argues that "what cannot be articulated on a legal stage needs an altogether different, literary theater of justice".

In *Trilby,* Du Maurier staged, reversing Saada's words, a trial-show against the Jew in Gothic guise. In fact, by the end of the century, the Gothic mode had become the preferred style for depicting Jewish men (Bar-Yosef, Valman 2009): the Wandering Jew reappeared in the 1890s in an increasingly metamorphic, demonic, and vampiric form and became one of the most frequent antagonists of shilling shockers and mass circulation Gothic novels. It is the case of Svengali, but also of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). To be fair, Du Maurier's Svengali is a complex character which concentrates the ambiguities at the heart of the nineteenth-century vision of the Jew: the banned poet with the fiery eye of the Romantics; the heroic alienness of genius; Fagin; Daniel Deronda; the *juif errant* of many penny dreadfuls. Richard Davison (2001, 93) argues that in Svengali "are the quintessential, popularized tropes of the nineteenth-century dirty, scheming, criminal Jew: Svengali is poor, vindictive, unwashed, and turns obsequious or abusive as suits his manipulative desires". He is a brilliant pianist and impresario, yet deceitful, metamorphic, morally and sexually ambiguous.

In the stage version of the novel, Svengali as a vampiric Jew gains a prominent position in the story. On stage, Beerbohm Tree appeared with greasy

black locks, a long curly beard, mesmeric eyes, dressed in Svengali's signature long fur-lined coat and top hat. He spoke in a thick German accent, which marked – as the audience knew only too well – Svengali's humble origins as an Eastern-European Jew. In the novel, Svengali is animated by the desire to reach fame as a musician and envisions Trilby as an instrument whereby he would be able to create spellbinding music; in the play, instead, profit drives Svengali's evil plan and Trilby's body becomes a mere source of financial gain. Moreover, in Tree's version of *Trilby,* Svengali suffers from heart disease and invokes the God of Israel, reciting a confused Hebrew prayer. Finally, the element of hypnotism tightly links Svengali to the uncanny, giving, according to Davison (2001, 75), "a pacifying, palatable affirmation to a popular set of much more sinister assumptions about 'the Jew' than merely the dirty, unwelcome, alien-pariah". The hypnotic hold that Svengali exercises over Trilby is imbued with a sense of sexual possession and depravity. Evoking George Taylor's description of Svengali in British theatre (Foulkes 2009), Jenkins (1998, 246) adds: "Tree's necrophiliac, vampiric Svengali created an atmosphere of sexual tension in the play that tapped the fervid imagination of the decadent 1890s in a way the novel did not". Thus, Svengali became the main Jewish antagonist of the fin de siècle as well as Tree's most memorable interpretation.

The evil Jew had its positive double in a British character - the hero or heroine, in Franco Moretti's (1997, 83-4) words, "a representative of the present, a distillation of complacent nineteenth-century mediocrity: nationalistic, stupid, superstitious, philistine, impotent, self-satisfied". Naturally, such characters find fertile ground in Du Maurier's novel: they are of course Little Billee, Taffy and The Laird. In the stage version of the story, Little Billee, Taffy and The Laird lose much of their individuality and distinctive traits in favour of Trilby and Svengali's storyline and converge into one choral character, often referred to as *les trois Anglishes*: all three fall in love with Trilby, but no feeling of jealousy hinders their friendship; they share a sense of uneasiness upon finding out that Trilby poses nude for Durien; they share feelings, opinions, they act as one and talk in the first-person plural. The convergence of the three characters into one theatrical choral character only strengthens their role as grantors of British respectability and morality and

accusers of evil Svengali. In turn, Svengali becomes essential in building a sense of solidarity and national belonging as the dark Gothic doppelgänger of the fair British identity.

The opposition between *les trois Anglishes* and Svengali reaches a cathartic, if tragic, ending during Trilby's final performance as La Svengali at the Drury Lane theatre in London. The composition of the scene as imagined by Du Maurier derives much of its strength from the old bond between theatre and the court. The two defendants, the Siren and the Jew, stand isolated yet visible to everybody at the centre of the theatre: Trilby on stage and Svengali in the middle box on the grand tier. *Les trois Anglishes* and the rest of the audience are in the gallery. During the performance, Svengali dies in his box and Trilby, finally free from the hypnotic hold of her master, fails to sing in tune: "the whole house was in an uproar – shouts from the gallery – shouts of laughter, hoots, hisses, cat-calls, cock-crows" (Du Maurier 1894, 248). Then, the attention of the audience shifts to Svengali, lying dead in his box under the hungry eyes of the London Establishment: "'Svengali! Svengali! Svengali!' The whole house took up the cry, derisively. […] that terrible figure of Svengali still sat, immovable, watching his wife's retreat – still smiling his ghastly smile. All eyes were now turned on him once more" (Ibid.: 251). Thus, in the middle of the Drury Lane, in the very heart of London, the evil Jew finally succumbs, and Trilby's purity is restored.

The play includes a similar, if more eloquent, retelling of the trial-show against Svengali. La Svengali's final performance takes place at the Cirque des Bashibazouks. Although in Paris, the representatives of the British Establishment are in the audience: *les trois Anglishes*, the prince of Wales and the British ambassador. However, the fictional theatre is not present on stage: Trilby's singing occurs offstage while the audience watches the quarrel between Svengali and the three Englishmen backstage and Zouzou reports from inside: "you never heard such row as the gallery is making – hoots, hisses, cat-calls, cock crows" (Ibid.: 635). Svengali does not die in the grand tier, but backstage under the eyes of the *trois Anglishes* and of the spectators of *Trilby*. Therefore, in the passage from novel to play, the courtroom gallery and the spectators move from fiction, that is from inside the story, to reality, that is outside of the story. Guided from the stage by *les trois Anglishes*, the

audience of *Trilby* is called to judge, and so they do: the "spectacle of the dead Svengali lying across a table with his hideous face inverted and his eyes staring at the spectators," writes a reviewer, was met with a cathartic "burst of cheers" (*New York Times*, 16 April 1895).

4. In Svengali's fur coat

Bloom appears amid the rocambolesque spectacle of "Circe" disguised as Svengali. Besides their East European Jewish extraction, Bloom and Svengali have seemingly few traits in common. While the stereotype of the Jew as moneylender or usurer is often associated with Bloom, he is hardly the vampiric Jew of Gothic fiction. However, his Jewishness, like Svengali's, makes Bloom a social pariah and an alien to Irish society, an object of ridicule and a menace. Martin Cunningham, seemingly the most compassionate of Joyce's Dubliners, calls Bloom "a perverted Jew [...] from a place in Hungary" (Joyce 1922, 323). "What makes Bloom an abject figure and casts him out is his half Jewish origin," writes Sobia Mubarak (2017, 46), who adds: "A thematic of Jewishness, anti-Semitism and Bloom as a scapegoat are pervasive as a motif through the entire narrative of *Ulysses*".

Moreover, Jewishness is linked to the motif of disguise and plasticity. The lack of apparent national or cultural belonging has long condemned the Jew to be regarded as an intruder and master shapeshifter. To say it with Richard Wagner, the Jew was imagined as a "plastic demon" - a monstrous being on the inside, the Jew could easily disguise (that is, assimilate) or mimic any national or cultural character. In turn, Svengali is an expert manipulator: he is depicted as a dark spider weaving his web of lies, yet he can turn servile friend or genius musician as suits his will. Under the transformative power of Circe, the motif of disguise and plasticity finds full expression: the episode is populated by shapeshifting characters and speaking objects; in it, Bloom is the protagonist of an array of metamorphoses that illuminate his social frustrations: he is a Britisher, a writer of fiction, a monarch, a pregnant woman, a mother, a Messiah, a cod, etc. he changes costume, mask, shape, gender.

The proliferation of masks, disguises and transformations finds justification in the dramatic structure of "Circe", the most theatrical among the episodes of *Ulysses*. "Circe" appears visually as a script complete with stage directions and "marks a radical departure from the formal prose style of the rest of the novel and indeed from most conventional narratives" (Fargnoli, Gillespie 2006, 201). Much has been written about the dramatic structure of "Circe" and many agree in reading the episode as a performed interior monologue in which issues presented in former chapters return "without the amelioration of Stephen's and Bloom's normal psychological defences" (Ibid.: 201). Its most grotesque or illogical scenes are often interpreted as mere hallucinations induced by absinthe, or "instances of textual free play" (Gordon 1994, 15).

Bloom's trial is with all probability the most theatrical moment in "Circe". A hyperbolic crescendo of accusations against Bloom culminates in Bloom's arrest and trial. The trial begins as the Watch inflects, as if a Latin noun, Bloom's name: "Bloom. Of Bloom. For Bloom. Bloom." (Ibid.: 430). On the accusative case, the Watch stops. The composition of the scene bears a striking similarity to Trilby's final performance as described by Du Maurier. Joyce too plays with the semantic ambiguity of the English word *gallery*, at once a section of the courtroom, the upper section of the theatre and part of the public. The gallery appears from behind a "panel of fog," which "rolls back rapidly" (Ibid.: 444) as if it were a theatre curtain. The gallery reveals a jury made of Dubliners: Bloom often "turns to the gallery" (Ibid.: 433) in order to defend himself and assert his belonging to Dublin's society - "I think I see some old comrades in arm up there among you" (Ibid.: 433-4), he says.

The anti-Semitic voices that resonate throughout *Ulysses* seem to converge here in a chorus of disembodied voices – "A crowd of sluts and ragamuffins" (Ibid.: 441); "the jurors" (Ibid.: 444); "the watch" (Ibid.: 430); "the Irish evicted tenants", "the Artane orphans", "the Prison Gate girls" (Ibid.: 468); "the mob" (Ibid.: 464). This collation of voices speaking as one recalls a Greek chorus, a single character acting, much like *les trois Anglishes*, as a collective prosecutor and executor – "THE SLUTS AND RAGAMUFFINS (*Screaming.*) Stop thief! Hurrah there, Bluebeard! Three cheers for Ikey Mo!" (Ibid.: 441); "THE MOB Lynch him! Roast him!" (Ibid.: 464). Amidst the cries

of condemnation, Bloom appears: "BLOOM (*In Svengali's fur overcoat, with folded arms and Napoleonic forelock, frowns in ventriloquial exorcism with piercing eagle glance towards the door. Then, rigid, with left foot advanced, he makes a swift pass with impelling fingers* […])" (Ibid.: 494).

The image of Bloom as Svengali, tightly enveloped in his fur overcoat, with his ventriloquial exorcism and piercing glance, may be interpreted as an invitation to read Bloom's trial in close connection with Svengali's trial. While "Circe"'s play-like form seems to leave no room for interiority, Bloom's trial has often been read as an elaboration upon Bloom's sense of guilt in the form of hallucinations, as a trial fantasy or psychic trial in which Bloom's mental processes acquire physical materialization. It works, according to Hugh Kenner (1987, 127) "like a psychoanalysis without an analyst". However, Bloom's consciousness is hardly the only one being laid bare in "Circe". In a manner akin to that used by Du Maurier, Joyce constructs in "Circe" a legal theatre in which he dramatizes the workings of the collective consciousness, driven by fears of national, sexual, and racial degeneration, and animated by the urge to identify and eliminate of the Other.

After Svengali's cameo, Bloom is the victim of a veritable public execution or, in Lenn Platt's (2007, 138) words, a "ceremonial performance," in which "the community asserts itself against a perceived outsider". The presence of the chorus intensifies along with a sense of atavistic irrationality: "Artane orphans, joining hands, caper round him. Girls of the Prison Gate Mission, joining hands, caper around in the opposite direction" (Ibid.: 468). Spurred by the hornblower, "all the people cast soft pantomime stones at Bloom. Many bonafide travelers and ownerless dogs come near him and defile him" (Ibid.: 469). Eventually, "(*Lieutenant Myers of the Dublin Fire Brigade by general request sets fire to Bloom. Lamentations.)* THE CITIZEN Thank heaven!" (Ibid.: 469). After Bloom's condemnation and execution, the sigh of relief of the Citizen(s) expresses the sense of catharsis and purification shared by Joyce's Dubliners after Bloom's death.

That said, the show-trial against Svengali is hardly Joyce's only source of inspiration. In fact, swallowed by the recycling forces of *Ulysses*, all the trials, real and fictional, against the social pariahs of history converge in Bloom's trial and execution: Christ, Socrates, Charles Parnell, Don Giovanni, Alfred

Dreyfus, Oscar Wilde, etc. Similarly, the choral, almost atavistic, chant that resonates in "Circe" descends from an older cry: it is the cry of the crowd condemning Christ – "'What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?' Pilate asked. They all answered, 'Crucify him!'" (Matthew 27: 22); it is the cry of the French mod condemning Dreyfus: "A mort!"; it is the cry of the spectators, fictional and real, at the Drury Lane hooting, hissing, catcalling. However, enveloped in Svengali's infamous fur overcoat, Bloom comes in "Circe" as the heir of Svengali, the most popular incarnation of the figure of the social pariah and scapegoat of the late Victorian stage. Under the legacy of Svengali, the courtroom becomes an uncanny circus, the standard script of the legal theatre is translated into a stage scrip, and the trial turns into a Gothic "travesty of justice" (Joyce 1922, 439).

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