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*And the waters broke above us”: Dante,
Ulysses, and the Contemporary Irish Poet’s
Quest*

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And the waters broke above us’’: Dante, Ulysses, and the Contemporary Irish Poet’s Quest

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Remember who you are, what you were made for:
not to live like brutes, but for the quest
of knowledge and the good.” I said no more;

for, encouraged by this brief address,
my comrades were so keen to journey on
I scarce could hold them from the final test;

and with our stern set firmly towards the dawn,
we made wings of our oars for that mad flight,
forever gaining on the port horizon.^[1]

This is the effect of the power of rhetoric used, or misused, towards the goal of the quest, the human urge to explore, discover, conquer, exemplified in the figure of Ulysses guiding his companions towards death. In Dante’s retelling of Homer’s story, Ulysses himself meets his fate in drowning with his men and ship with the Earthly Paradise in sight, yet unattained. The popularity and literary importance of Canto XXVI of the *Inferno*, a part of which is quoted above from Ciaran Carson’s translation, and the myth of Ulysses in general, refers to an actuality of the theme of the quest for meaning or knowledge, of the manipulation through clever use of language, and the recurring myths about the consequences of pride.

In her enlightening essay on Dante’s Ulysses, Teodolinda Barolini considers recent strands of contemporary Dante criticism, divided on the topic of Ulysses, including “Nardi, who argues that Dante’s Ulysses is a new Adam, a new Lucifer, and that his sin is precisely Adam’s, namely *il trapassar del segno*. Ulysses is thus

a transgressor, whose pride incites him to seek a knowledge that is beyond the limits set for man by God".^[2] John A. Scott, despite granting Dante an awareness of his own intellectual hubris, observes a "clear and striking" contrast between Ulysses' voyage, contravening "the natural limits imposed by the deity he knew and should have respected", and Dante's own voyage, enjoying God's blessings.^[3] Barolini, however, strictly separates the notions of Dante the pilgrim and Dante the poet, focusing on the immense authority assumed by the poet who ventures to describe the indescribable, the vision of Paradise, therefore approaching the Godlike as a *scriba Dei*:^[4]

[...]if the pilgrim learns to be not like Ulysses, the poet is conscious of having to be ever more like him. Writing the *Paradiso* meanstrapassar il segno, poetic equivalent of the *varcare* (passing beyond, crossing over) associated with Ulysses and his mad flight: 'il varco / folle d'Ulisse' (Par.27.82-3).^[5]

Thus the poet's progress, from a moral perspective, is inversely proportional to the pilgrim's progress. Concerning narrative techniques, Barolini notes a corresponding movement from linear narration in the *Inferno* to anti-narrative textuality in the *Paradiso*, as well as a deliberate poetical stasis reflected in the death of the *terza rima* as shown in the triple rhyme of *Cristo/Cristo/Cristo* in Par.14.103-8.^[6] She emphasizes the structural and thematic significance of Ulysses for the whole *Commedia*, since he is mentioned in each canticle (*Inf.* 26, *Purg.* 19, *Par.* 27) and "invoked [...] through surrogate figures like Phaeton and Icarus; through semantic tags, like *folle*", and "through Ulyssean flight imagery". A figure textually and poetically privileged by the poet,^[7] Dante's Ulysses serves as a "hermeneutic lodestone of the *Commedia*, associating it with the voyage metaphor that keeps the Ulyssean thematic alive even in the hero's absence".^[8]

T.S. Eliot, in his essay on Dante, similarly notes and praises the "continuous straightforward narrative" and the resulting readability of the Ulysses episode,

contrasting it with Tennyson's Ulysses poem, inferior to Dante's "simplification" in its forced poetics.

Thus the line about the sea which
moans round with many voices,
 a true specimen of Tennyson-Virgilianism, is too *poetical* in comparison
 with Dante, to be the highest poetry.^[9]

Irish drawings on the Ulysses-theme cannot be discussed, of course, without taking into account James Joyce's modern classic *Ulysses* and the writer's Dante-reception. In his introduction to the Penguin edition, Declan Kiberd points out that Joyce intended to write an "'epic of the body', with a minute account of its functions and frustrations", wishing to deconstruct the myth of the ancient military hero. Assuming that the Greek Odysseus also had certain flaws and imperfections, he depicted his book's hero, a modern Odysseus, as a very ordinary man with ordinary quotidian occupations. Thereby, Joyce attacked the cult of the Irish epic hero Cúchulainn, which had been revived by writers such as Yeats and Pearse, because he resented violence in all circumstances and therefore criticized extreme nationalism.^[10]

Mary T. Reynolds, in her seminal book on Joyce and Dante, calls the spiritual journey in *Ulysses* Joyce's "comedy", in reference to Dante, and explains the complex process of reverse transformations made by Dante and Joyce:

Joyce has taken Dante's pattern and epistemology to reproduce in Dublin a spiritual journey, in conscious emulation of Dante's similar use of Virgil, whose *Aeneid* in turn adapted Homer. Dante's syncretism successfully met the challenge of providing a pagan guide for a Christian poet, an achievement closely observed by Joyce. I suggest that his transformation of Dante's journey required a comparable boldness. He demonstrates simultaneously the continuing presence of Dante's world in the Dublin of 1904, and the vast gulf between these worlds – a reading of Dante that is

continuously informed by a sense of otherness arising from Joyce's awareness of the relativity of modern man's view of his universe.^[11]

Seventy-two years after the publication of *Ulysses*, another Dubliner comes across Dante and the universal theme of the quest for knowledge, reflecting the urge to escape and explore foreign countries and therefore himself in self-imposed exile. The Irish Poet Harry Clifton, who has, among other places, lived in Africa, France, and Italy and only in 2004 returned to Dublin, published a poem called 'The Canto of Ulysses' in his collection *Night Train through the Brenner* (1994). It would then serve as the eponymous poem of a collection of French translations of his poems, published in 1996, *Le Canto d'Ulysse*.

Calling the poem 'The Canto of Ulysses' not only alludes to the reading of said canto happening in the poem and to the canto as such, but also implies that the poem might be *about* Ulysses, or from Ulysses' point of view. In consequence, the poem's speaker can be said to identify with the Greek hero and the two men merge into one. 'The Canto of Ulysses' consists of seven stanzas of eight lines each, following a rhyme scheme that slightly changes from stanza to stanza. It is set in the poet's and his wife's home in Italy, where the speaker reflects upon the approaching departure from that temporary home. There is a palpable tension between the impossibility of settling and an anxiety about what is to come:

As the eye reads, from left to right,
Ulysses' canto, what comes next,
The day, already spread like a text
On the ceiling above me, asks to be read.
Anxiety, or increasing light,
Whatever wakes me, fills my head
With the oceanic billows
Of a slept-in marriage bed.

The shutters go up, like thunder,
On the street below. If the soul fed

On coffee, aromatic bread,
Niceties raised to the power of art,
We would long ago have knuckled under
To perfection, in the green heart
Of Italy, settled here,
And gone to sleep in the years.

But what was it Dante said
About ordinary life? My mind wanders
Like Ulysses, through the early sounds,
A motor starting, taps turned on,
Unravelling Penelope's skein,
Unsatisfied, for the millionth time,
With merely keeping my feet on the ground –
As if I could ever go home![\[12\]](#)

The text in front of the poet conflates with his contemporary surroundings: forces of nature are evoked by the sound of the shutters and by the sheets rumped up after a storm of passion, or marital fight – we can only guess. Something in the speaker's soul is stirring, preventing the return home. His wife becomes Penelope, home and hearth, ordinary life. In stanza four, he remembers Dante's passage "women will all be widows to the quest", but he cannot see it clearly. The text in front of him is blocked by a hampering feeling of impotence, of aging. This is where his reality diverges from the text: unlike Ulysses, he takes his wife, his "one satisfaction / At the heart of the known world" with him, wherever the journey takes him, and he admits to a certain "cowardice" in his "need to be gone". As the similarity to the Greek hero becomes blurry, the "sail of Ulysses, west of the Sun" is "dwindling in ptolemaic skies".[\[13\]](#) Obviously, the role of women has undergone some changes, as has the notion of virility.

The last stanza, the ultimate recognition of departure looming, reeks of regret. Ordinary life is associated with peace and enjoyment, parting becomes an

exhausting undertaking. The price of adventure, of constant dissatisfaction, has not changed over the centuries, apparently. The flood (maybe in the form of a nervous breakdown) punishes the lack of humility, and so ‘The Canto of Ulysses’ ends with the words of the canto of Ulysses, Canto XXVI of Dante’s *Inferno*, “infin che ‘l mar fu sovra noi richiuso”,^[14] transformed into the present tense and substituting “until” with “before”, effecting premonitions:^[15]

Any day now, we hand back the key
To habit, peace, stability,
The seasonal round, festivities
Of wine and cherry. Think of the fuss
Of what to take, and leave behind –
Shade for the soul, our miniature trees
Of olive, oak, and southern pine –
Before the seas close over us.^[16]

The “green heart of Italy” might live on in the form of miniature trees, as a keepsake, for memory’s sake. But any “mad flight” has its consequences.

Interestingly, in Carson’s translation of the last lines of Canto XXVI, stern and prow of Ulysses’ ship have female possessive pronouns (not so in Dante’s original, but employed in other translations such as Hollander’s), and he closes with a markedly female pun:

Three times it whirled her with tempestuous force;
and at the fourth time round, her stern rose,
her prow went down, as pleased Another. Thus

the waters broke above our heads, and closed.^[17]

Once again, a shift in male perception, or absorption, of female influence and presence might be in evidence here.

Harry Clifton’s ‘Benjamin Fondane departs for the East’ from his collection *Secular Eden* (2007) proves a useful companion piece to ‘The Canto of Ulysses’.

The motif of departure, migration and the poet's self-questioning, or mid-lifecrisis, as well as the figure of the wife, reappear. Benjamin Fondane, the Romanian poet, critic, translator, film director and playwright, who died in 1944 in Auschwitz before finishing his "Projet Ulysse", in the poem merges into Clifton's poet/speaker, who muses about his afterlife through his poetry, showing the human anxiety of not leaving a mark on the world, on the future.

The poem consists of six stanzas of ten lines each, with an irregular rhyme scheme and the second verse of each stanza shorter than the rest. The "postcards drifting like dead leaves / Back from that other world we are asked to believe in" in the second stanza foreshadow the leaves of the Sibyl of Cumae alluded to again in the last stanza. Fondane, like Clifton an immigrant in Paris, is "uprooted"; both are "transmigrating like souls".^[18] The cliché of the Irish exile is paralleled with that of the Jewish exile, noted by Michael Weingrad in his essay on Fondane:

Fondane will be grist to the mill of those ready to mythologize the relation between Jews and exile, a common occurrence in contemporary discussions of literature. Here we see a lamentable confluence of the hoary Christian myth of the Wandering Jew and the romantic stereotype of the poet as outsider. Many of the most admiring treatments of figures such as Celan and Jabes lapse often and easily into this rhetoric, underwritten by the equation: poet=Jew=exile.^[19]

Clifton writes, "Athens and Jerusalem, Ulysses and the Wandering Jew— / There we all go, the living and the dead, / The one in the other".^[20] Athens and Jerusalem refer to the polemic philosophy of Shestov, whom Fondane admired. Athens is Shestov's allegory for Reason and intellectual hubris, as discernible in Plato or Hegel, for example, whereas Jerusalem stands for the "absurdists", like Shakespeare or Dostoevsky.^[21] The Wandering Jew, sometimes called Ahasuerus, is also mentioned in Joyce's *Ulysses*, when the citizen compares Bloom to Ahasuerus.^[22] Clifton seems to imply that in constant flight, or

transmigration, they all become equals, equally driven to move, to wander, to sail on.

Clifton is one of those Irish writers whom Barbara Freitag might accuse of being anachronistic, “guilty of creating and perpetuating a culture of exile”, most of them like Joyce “voluntary cultural exiles, émigrés or expatriates” but “draw[ing] on the traditional picture of enforced exile”, their “salutary value of distance from the object of literary art” ensuring an “originality of vision”.^[23] The culture of exile becomes a culture of intercultural and intertextual transmigration, and one poet lives on in another. Paths cross in anachronistic journeys, like Dante walking with Virgil through imaginary afterlives.

And now they tell me ‘Hide your poems, wait—
Somewhere in Nineteen Eighty
Readers will find you...’ I see a Paris street,
Old letterbox, a drop-zone for the infinite
In a leaf-littered hallway, where a publisher long ago
Went out of business, and a young man searches
In the sibylline mess and the overflow
For a few lost words—*my own soul-sister, my wife*
Till death us do part, in the Eastern Marches...
And that, my friends, will be the afterlife.^[24]

Seamus Heaney, another voluntary exile, or “inner émigré”, in his 1985 essay “Envy and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet”, admires (political exile) Mandelstam’s perception of (political exile) Dante “as the apotheosis of free, natural, biological process”, “a woodcutter singing at his work in the dark wood of the larynx”,^[25] a further example of perpetuating and romanticizing a culture of exile to kindle the creative process. The flight metaphor, the motif of the sea journey or pilgrimage, and the fascination with political exile all reflect the poets’ need to express an inner restlessness and the continuously re-emerging question of identity in a divided and profoundly changing country.

In her inspiring essay on Irish translations of Rimbaud's *Bateau Ivre*, a poem about "exile and the weary longing to return", Kathleen Shields notes that Samuel Beckett, Derek Mahon and Ciaran Carson, each in his own specific way, are "exiling themselves from aspects of their culture which are narrow or problematic, and at the same time bringing new things to their culture" by translating Rimbaud's poem.^[26] Like the voyage of Ulysses' ship, the floating of the drunken boat signifies man's subjection to nature, or, depending on his belief, to God's will. Mahon's boat is "contemptuous of the blinking lights ashore",^[27] signifying civilization, safety, but also surveillance and confinement. Shields suggests that Mahon "balance[s] the urge to escape into a future or other life against the backward homeward look. He cuts down considerably on the tripartite structure of Rimbaud's poem [...] What remains are the opening and closing sections and the equilibrium between the two movements of departure and homecoming".^[28] Carson, meanwhile, exemplifies "the translator, who can stay in Ireland and yet, by translating from another literature, wander from it".^[29]

In Mahon's beautifully traditional and formal poetry, Homer's *Odyssey*, rather than a later hypertext, is an important inspiration, as in 'Circe's Cup' from *Somewhere the Wave* (2007), or 'Calypso', from *Harbour Lights* (2005). 'Calypso' is a rhymed ten-stanza poem, suggesting that "Homer was wrong"; Odysseus probably never returned from the island, spending "his days there in a perpetual summer",^[30] free from marital and political duty in the arms of the sea nymph, "gaily distracting him from his chief design".^[31]

Homer was right though about the important thing,
the redemptive power of women; for this narrative,
unlike the blinding shields, is womanly stuff.

The witch bewitches, the owl-winged sisters sing,
some kind girl takes charge within the shadow
or a calm glade where the sea finds a meadow;
much-sought Penelope in her new resolute life
has wasted no time acting the stricken widow

and even the face that sank the final skiff
 knows more than beauty; beauty is not enough.^[32]

When writing this, Mahon must have had Michael Longley's witty 'Odyssey' from the 1969 collection *No Continuing City* in mind. This is Longley's first stanza:

Amateur witches and professional virgins,
 Sirens and shepherdesses – all new areas
 Of experience (I have been out of touch) –
 Ladies, you are so many and various
 You will have to put up with me, for your sins,
 A stranger to your islands who knows too much.^[33]

Mahon might have picked up on the ironic generalisation of the "many and various" women as universally sinful "Ladies", his own poem feigning the suggestion that the female characters of the *Odyssey* contribute nothing to the narrative beyond "womanly stuff". Both poets ventriloquise unenlightened points of view in order to promote a more enlightened understanding of sexual plurality.

Like Clifton, Mahon merges the narrative of Odysseus with his own experiences, his own perspectives on home and departure. The following passage can be read having the Irish poet in mind, leaving behind a Northern Ireland in the clutches of an insolvable war:

He prayed for an end to these moronic wars,
 burned wasteful sacrifices to the vague stars
 and dreamed of honey, yoghurt, figs and wine
 on night beaches far from the life he knew;
 silent, unlit; but a faint murmur, a faint glow.

Those were the times he thought about his wife,
 remembering their lives in a former life,
 her handsome profile, her adventurous heart

and proud demeanour. At sea and lost he wept
 for jokes and music, promises unkept,
 sandals on board and tile, shared places, friends,
 shared history, origins, those woods and glens,
 his brisk departure from the family hearth
 a glib mistake; but nature took its course
 leaving him desolation and long remorse.[\[34\]](#)

The situation of the trapped husband longing to escape his wife, for whom Penelope is the eternal paradigm, is also cleverly appropriated into Paul Muldoon's 'Making the Move' from *Why Brownlee Left* (1980). The speaker notices a "gulf / Between myself and my good wife" and dreams of sailing away on the "wine-dark sea", which might, of course, also refer to drowning one's sorrows in alcohol:

When Ulysses braved the wine-dark sea
 He left his bow with Penelope,
 Who would bend for no one but himself. [...]

The bow I bought through a catalogue
 When I was thirteen or fourteen
 That would bend, and break, for anyone,
 Its boyish length of maple upon maple
 Unseasoned and unsupple.

Were I embarking on that wine-dark sea
 I would bring my bow along with me.[\[35\]](#)

The phallic imagery of the bow at the end of the poem stresses the desire for other women, for sexual pleasure far away from the "oceanic billows of a slept-in marriage bed". The husband thinks about making a move on other women, or

moving out of the house, the bow from his adolescence waiting to be relaunched in a rising wave of mid-life crisis.

‘The Jimi Hendrix Experience: *Are You Experienced?*’, the first poem in the sequence ‘Sleeve Notes’ from the collection *Hay* mentions the Cream song ‘Tales of Brave Ulysses’, which is about man’s longing for eternal summer, tempted by sirens and an exotic dream girl, like Mahon’s Calypso. The lyrics are written by artist Martin Sharp, who was inspired by a trip to Ibiza, having to endure a cold English winter upon his return. Cream took the riff of The Lovin’ Spoonful’s ‘Summer in the City’ and the melody of Cohen’s ‘Suzanne’ and Clapton added the wah-wah sound with his guitar. In the poem, Muldoon mentions that Hendrix’s wah-wah on ‘I Don’t Live Today’ “predated by some months the pedal / Clapton used on ‘Tales of Brave Ulysses’ / And I’m taken aback (jolt upon jolt) / to think that Hendrix did it all ‘by hand.’”^[36]

Typically for Muldoon, the poem is a sonnet, yet not a traditional one, its rhyme scheme being abcdefg abcdefg. So “Ulysses” at the end of the fifth line in the twelfth line has an internal (eye-)rhyme in “Laois”, a county in Leinster, and an end rhyme in “Laos”. From his workplace and new home America, he drifts back through “the smoke of battle / on the fields of Laois, yes sir, and Laos.” Ulysses’ departure from Ithaca is linked, therefore, with the island Muldoon left behind.

John A. Scott writes that for Dante, “only a figure from the remote past of classical antiquity could provide such a complex web of allusions and parallels”.^[37] With classical antiquity, Dante, and subsequent texts as a treasure trove of hypotexts, how much more complex, and confused, is the web we can spin now.

[...] Dante’s Ulysses stands as a perpetual reminder of the vitality of ancient myth in our Western culture. Like Dante’s Virgil, his Ulysses is also a constant reminder of the tragedy of ancient, pagan civilization: even as Virgil is obliged to leave the Earthly Paradise as soon as his role as guide is complete, so Ulysses and his companions are doomed to die a

terrible death by drowning as they arrive in sight of that same paradise.[38]

In an age of confusion, characterized by increasing secularization as well as spreading religious extremism, Ulysses' doom appeals ever more. Although science and the quest for knowledge are constantly progressing, nothing is as defined as it was in Dante's age, and we begin to analyse the consequences. The best example of a possible *trapassar del segno* is probably genetic engineering. As certainties of belief and purpose are shattered, as the roles of the sexes are reversed or blurred, as globalization and migration uproot the feeling of belonging, Irish poets, having grown up in a backward yet reassuring religious environment, cannot but reflect these arising doubts and crises in a never-ending poetic journey. They turn to classical texts for inspiration and guidance, in order to create something new on the groundwork of the old. Ulysses, the Greek hero, has to be dealt with ironically, for heroic men, or the classical notion of virility, have become extinct. In their place, male pop idols and top models embody a new androgynous ideal and their idolatry serves to fill the spiritual void. This is the kind of (anti-)culture that clashes with cultural tradition, and the resulting friction is reflected in art.

Endnotes

[1] Carson, Ciaran. 2002. *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*. London: Granta. 184-5.

[2] Barolini, Teodolinda. 1997. "Dante's Ulysses: Narrative and Transgression". In: Iannucci, Amilcare A. 1997. *Dante: contemporary perspectives*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 113-132. 113.

[3] Scott, John A. 2004. *Understanding Dante*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press. 255.

[4] Barolini 116.

[5] Barolini 119.

[6] Barolini 120-22.

[7] Barolini 115.

[8] Barolini 126.

[9] Eliot, T. S. 1949. "Dante (1929)". In: Eliot, T. S. 1949. *Selected Essays*. 2nd ed., rev. and enlarged, reprint. London: Faber and Faber. 237-277. 248.

[10] Joyce, James. 1992. *Ulysses*. Introd. by Declan Kiberd. London: Penguin Books. ix-xi.

[11] Reynolds, Mary T. 1981. *Joyce and Dante: The Shaping Imagination*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 9.

[12] Clifton, Harry. 1994. *Night Train through the Brenner*. Loughcrew: The Gallery Press. 69.

[13] Clifton, Night Train 70.

[14] Dante Alighieri. 2005. *La Divina Commedia. Inferno*. Commentary by Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi. Milan: Oscar classici, Mondadori. 792.

[15] Clifton's use of Dante's line could be read as what Gerard Genette calls transformation, as opposed to imitation, both of which are a form of what Genette defines as hypertext. Applied to Clifton's poem, imitation could have happened had he written the poem in *terza rima*, or as part of an epic, or with the same number of lines as Dante's canto. Clifton's 'The Canto of Ulysses' might be regarded as one of copious hypertexts of the *Divina Commedia*, which itself is a hypertext of the *Aeneid*, which in turn is a hypertext of the *Odyssee* and also the hypotext for Joyce's *Ulysses*. Genette regards *Ulysses* as transformation and the *Aeneid* as imitation, arguing that the latter process is more complex. Cf. Genette, Gerard. 1993. *Palimpseste. Die Literatur auf zweiter Stufe*. Frankfurt a. M. 14-18.

[16] Clifton, Night Train 70.

[17] Carson 185.

[18] Clifton, Harry. 2007. *Secular Eden: Paris Notebooks 1994-2004*. Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University Press. 200.

[19] Weingrad, Michael. 1999. "The Exodus of Benjamin Fondane". *Judaism*.
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0411/is_4_48/ai_59120282 (09 Mar, 2009)

[20] Clifton, Secular Eden 200.

[21] Weingrad.

[22] Joyce 439.

[23] Freitag, Barbara. 1997. "From George Moore to Brian Moore: Irish Writers Making a Fetish of Exile". In: Coulson, Anthony (ed.). *Exiles and Migrants: Crossing the Thresholds in European Culture and Society*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press. 72-82. 72-3.

[24] Clifton, Secular Eden 201.

[25] Heaney, Seamus. 1985. "Envy and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet". *Irish University Review*, vol. 15 (Spring 1985). 5-19. 18.

[26] Shields, Kathleen. 1997. "Stotious Boats: Exile in Irish Translations of Rimbaud's Bateau Ivre". In: Coulson, Anthony (ed.). *Exiles and Migrants: Crossing the Thresholds in European Culture and Society*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press. 175-84. 175.

[27] Mahon, Derek. 2006. *Adaptations*. Loughcrew: The Gallery Press. 65.

[28] Shields 180.

[29] Shields 182.

[30] Mahon, Derek. 2005. *Harbour Lights*. Loughcrew: The Gallery Press. 59.

[31] Mahon, Harbour Lights 57.

[32] Mahon, Harbour Lights 59.

[33] Longley, Michael. 2006. *Collected Poems*. London: Cape Poetry. 14.

[34] Mahon, Harbour Lights 58.

[35] Muldoon, Paul. 2001. *Poems 1968-1998*. London: Faber and Faber. 90-91.

[36] Muldoon 411.

[37] Scott, John A. 2004. *Understanding Dante*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press. 259.

[38] Scott 260.

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First Response

This is a very fine essay on Dante, Ulysses and contemporary Irish poetry, and I would be very pleased to see it published in PG English. It draws on an excellent range of material (it's good to see Harry Clifton there, along with Ciaran Carson, Derek Mahon, Paul Muldoon and others), and it pulls together some compelling instances of Irish poets using the Homeric myth, via Dante, in subtle and innovative ways. It's also a well researched essay; it shows a good deal of originality; and it's written in a very lucid and appealing prose style. So, yes, I feel very positive about it.