

The Performance of Joyce:  
Stage Directions in *Dubliners*, *Exiles*, and “Circe”

BA Thesis English Language and Culture, Utrecht University

Lotte Murrath

6145752

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. David Pascoe

Second Reader: Dr. Onno Kusters

June 2021

## Abstract

James Joyce (1882-1941) was drawn to theatre and performance. He was particularly fascinated by the effect of stage directions, which he remediated from the play to different genres such as short stories and prose. This thesis investigates the way in which Joyce has been influenced by playwrights such as Bernard Shaw and Henrik Ibsen, and how they contributed in shaping Joyce in, and outside of, his writing. The curious use of stage directions written in the past tense will be explored in “The Boarding House” and “The Dead”. Subsequently, the effect of sound and the construction of interior spaces on the experienced reliability of Joyce’s works will be charted. Additionally, the credibility of Joyce’s descriptions in the phantasmagoria of “Circe” will be examined. This will determine his proficiency in establishing the ultimate form of realism through the use of stage directions.

Contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1: Decisive Expressions .....	7
Chapter 2: Distant Music .....	14
Chapter 3: Medley of Voices .....	20
Conclusion .....	25
Works Cited.....	26

## Introduction

Joyce enjoyed performance. He was a tenor and a dancer (Chrisp), and for some time it was his ambition to make a career with singing (Ellmann 165). He occasionally visited the National Theatre Society to sing during the breaks of rehearsals, and Joyce frequently wrote reviews of plays (54, 160). Next to other encounters with performance, Joyce's time at the National Theatre Society presumably influenced the way he looked at theatre, and it familiarised him with aspects such as décor and other practicalities, since any performance needs certain rules and some form of organisation, and perhaps most importantly, stage directions.

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) was a Norwegian playwright. His innovative ideas on realism and modernism in theatre have influenced numerous writers and artists, and Ibsen is considered to be one of the most important playwrights in the European tradition (Macleod 879). Because of Ibsen, "Joyce became convinced of the importance of drama" (Ellmann 54). Joyce started reading his plays around 1896, after which he wrote his first play, which was never published due to severe criticism of Ibsen's translator, William Archer (Steward). Thus, with the commencement of *Exiles* (1918) several years later, Joyce wrote his only play that would ever be published (Ellmann 104).

Joyce was most intrigued by Ibsen and his work during his time as a student. One of his reviews, "Ibsen's New Drama" (1900) on *When We Dead Awaken* (1899) was a significant one. In the essay, Joyce alludes to the writing style of the playwright, and indicates that "there is from first to last hardly a superfluous word or phrase" (49). Ochshorn also refers to this in her article and suggests that Joyce saw significance in the "sparseness" of Ibsen's writing (99). Joyce's essay caught the attention of Ibsen, and with that the first correspondence between the two writers was established, albeit through Ibsen's translator. Joyce expressed his admiration for him when he wrote the letter on April 28, 1900: "the

words of Ibsen I shall keep in my heart all my life” (Ellmann 74). Almost a year later, on the 73<sup>rd</sup> birthday of the playwright, Joyce wrote his first letter to Ibsen himself, where he clarified his fondness of him and his work. The letter, however, seems to allude to the fact that Joyce saw Ibsen as a springboard for his artistic ambitions as an author (Ochshorn 99):

I have claimed for you your rightful place in the history of the drama. I have shown what, as it seemed to me, was your highest excellence – your lofty impersonal power. Your minor claims – your satire, your technique and orchestral harmony – these, too, I advanced. (Ellmann 86)

In his plays Ibsen sought to break taboos which lead to scandal on several instances, for example when he wrote about syphilis in *Ghosts* (1881). Joyce saw similarities between himself and Ibsen, mostly because Ibsen liked to give commentary on current political debates or on the state of his country. With obscene themes such as masturbation and defecation, together with a habit of providing critique on his native country, Joyce seems to have found the courage that he needed in Ibsen to succeed and continue becoming a writer “in unenlightened Ireland” (Parrinder 24). Joyce, however, thought that “Ibsen’s realism did not go far enough” (26). He was critical of Ibsen’s work and formed his own vision on what he thought to be important in writing.

Another playwright of importance to Joyce was Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), who was also greatly influenced by Ibsen. Shaw coined the term “Ibsenism” (Ochshorn 96). Despite his admiration Shaw was also critical of him, which can be deduced from his work *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891). This essay received much criticism, but according to Gerould, Shaw “proclaimed the originality of Ibsen’s technique” (144). Shaw was working on what he thought to be most important in drama, which did not always coincide with

Ibsen's ideas (142). His opinion on Ibsen, therefore, kept changing over time; he did not consider Ibsen to be his master forever (145). However, similar to Joyce's development as a writer, Ibsen was an important aspect to Shaw's forming as a playwright (142). Shaw thought Ibsen's plays were meant for reading instead of watching (Gerould 134). This is significant, mostly because Joyce might have been influenced by this, especially with regard to stage directions. He knew that Shaw was the authentic Ibsenite and read *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, which he applauded (Weintraub 61).

By familiarising himself with Shaw through the means of reviews (61-62), Joyce was introduced to Shaw's intriguing and innovative use of stage directions. According to Bertolini, Shaw's intention was for his plays to be "performed *and* read" (4): his stage directions contain details which could not be observed during performance. In this instance Shaw seems inspired by Ibsen. Shaw used comprehensive directions in the descriptions of his characters and the setting of the scene, along with analyses upon specific character traits (Bertolini 5).

Shaw's influence on Joyce's stage directions is present, but Joyce undoubtedly makes his descriptions unique with his own additions and extraordinary use of detail. Furthermore, as indicated with Ibsen and Shaw, it could be argued that Joyce's plays are more for reading than watching. Joyce's writing is therefore not solely influenced by Shaw, but also by Ibsen, both explicitly and implicitly.

Joyce uses stage directions in different ways: he tends to use either parenthesis, brackets, italics, or no indications. These minor changes can have consequences in how one perceives or reads a work, mostly because Joyce preferred to control the way in which his stage directions were written down. This indicates that Joyce presumably had concrete reasons on why and how he used certain features. This aspect will not be discussed further in

this thesis but it is important to acknowledge that it is significant in the analyses of Joyce's works.

With the use of stage directions, the authority and control Joyce has over his characters becomes apparent, mostly because of elaborations on aspects that are not expected. Joyce makes his ideas and instructions everlasting and credible, which gives rise to the question of this thesis: what role do stage directions play in Joyce's prose, and in what ways might *Exiles* contribute to a better understanding of the theatrical elements within "The Boarding House," "The Dead," and "Circe"? Just as much as *Exiles* is crucial to an understanding of the use of stage directions in Joyce's works, "The Boarding House" and "The Dead" contribute to the journey and development of this theatrical device, which all eventually comes together in "Circe".

## Chapter 1

## Decisive Expressions

Some parts of “The Boarding House” can be interpreted as stage directions, where Joyce is moulding and guiding the characters in their actions. Wales mentions how close stage directions can be to fiction: she compares it with the setting of the scene at the beginning of an act, which is similar to the beginning of a work of prose (245). The opening of “The Boarding House” can be interpreted as a stage direction, but it seems more akin to the introduction of a story rather than the setting of a scene: “Mrs Mooney was a butcher’s daughter. She was a woman who was quite able to keep things to herself: a determined woman ...” (*Dubliners* 56). Other parts of the story, however, can be understood through stage directions, and they might be even more significant and characteristic. These instructions are subtle because one must look for them and are not explicitly marked with italics or parentheses as in a play.

However, an extremely important aspect of stage directions that “The Boarding House” does not contain, is the use of the present tense. Stage directions guide “the visual and aural imagination of the reader, by providing at least a partial substitute for the missing contributions of actor, director, and designers” (Carlson 39). They can allude to locations, structures of the scene or act, attributions, and character descriptions (37, 38). Stage directions indicate some form of realism; it frames the reality of the situation and the character. They are instructions about performance and specify what the character should be doing at that exact moment. It could therefore be argued that the ultimate form of realism is a stage direction. The use of it in “The Boarding House” is thus contradictory to the essence of them because they are written in the past tense. Even though Joyce wrote his directions in the past tense, it could be productive to consider what would happen if the tense were to be recast



from past to present. Is it solely Joyce's use of tense that prohibits these stage directions to embody the realism of the story, or are there other aspects that should be considered?

In the descriptions of his characters, Joyce is rather elaborate on the way they look, walk, talk, or what they are wearing. Mrs Mooney is introduced with that she "was a big imposing woman (*Dubliners* 56), and Polly "was a slim girl of nineteen" and "she had light soft hair and a small full mouth" (57). Joyce goes on by emphasising Polly's eyes, "which were grey with a shade of green through them, [and] had a habit of glancing upwards when she spoke with anyone, which made her look like a perverse madonna" (57). Joyce's descriptions of these women are all in the past. Then, in *Exiles*, Joyce introduces Bertha as follows:

Bertha is a young woman of graceful build. She has dark grey eyes, patient in expression, and soft features. Her manner is cordial and self-possessed. She wears a lavender dress and carries her cream gloves knotted round the handle of her sunshade. (*Exiles* 44)

The stage directions of Bertha are all in the present tense, but the way in which she is described correlates with that of Polly and Mrs Mooney. Furthermore, in the "Circe" episode in *Ulysses* (1922), Bella Cohen is introduced in a similar manner:

*Bella Cohen, a massive whoremistress enters. She is dressed in a threequarter ivory gown, fringed round the hem with tasselled selvedge and cools herself, flirting a black horn fan like Minnie Hauck in Carmen. On her left hand are wedding and keeper rings. Her eyes are deeply carboned. She has a sprouting moustache. Her olive face is*

*heavy, slightly sweated and fullnosed, with orangetainted nostrils. She has large pendant beryl eardrops. (Ulysses 373)*

Similar to Polly and Bertha, Bella's eyes are mentioned, next to references directed at the shape of her body and clothing. Polly and Bella even look like someone else: the latter is compared to an American soprano who was still alive when Joyce wrote "Circe". Bella's stage direction thus contains an allusion to a living person, which brings her character more to life. The descriptions differ in detail, but they all contain the same information and are simple and relatively short subject-verb-object sentences. In regards to "Circe," the simplicity of these sentences adds to the overall phantasmagoria of the story. One difference between the two plays – *Exiles* and "Circe" – and "The Boarding House," is that the stage directions of the latter are in the past tense. Since there are only minor differences in the aforementioned quotes, the descriptions of the characters in "The Boarding House" can be perceived as stage directions. It is, however, important to keep in mind that the tense differs from the other examples. A short story still varies from a play, and the descriptions are written in a contrasting style, but they should not be limited to one tense. The realism conveyed with stage directions, however, will be perceived differently due to Joyce's descriptions in the past in "The Boarding House."

Other than through stage directions, theatricality is also achieved through performances by the characters themselves. On Sundays, the boarding house comes together in the drawing room, where Polly is one of the entertainers and sings (*Dubliners* 57). Here, the drawing room can be interpreted as a theatre. The gatherings are always in the same room and a piano is present: "Sheridan played waltzes and polkas" (57). This indicates that if there were to be a performance, it would happen in the drawing room. Furthermore, guests who can play music will display their talents: "the music-hall *artistes* would oblige" (57). Since the

drawing room is always referred back to as the place where the singing, dancing and musical activities happens, it appears to serve as a stage. The boarding house thus seems to contain a small theatre. Next to that, Polly's performance might be the only one referred to in detail, but it is important to consider what happens off stage. Joyce briefly mentions "musical-hall artistes" and other characters that play music (57), which adds to the theatricality of the drawing room specifically, but also the story itself.

According to Lepaludier, dialogues should not be considered to be the only aspect of theatricality in short stories (par. 3). Joyce barely incorporated them in "The Boarding House," apart from the ending where there is a brief conversation between Polly and her mother: "Polly! Polly! Yes, mamma? Come down, dear. Mr Doran wants to speak to you" (*Dubliners* 64). Even though this is a moment where stage directions and dialogue are used together, this excerpt does not account for the strongest theatrical aspect of "The Boarding House," which Lepaludier also refers to: "the power of the theatrical short story does not simply lie in its capacity to imitate drama ... the theatrical power of the short story lies ... in its versatility and compression" (par. 15, 21).

As mentioned before, stage directions, even though in the past tense, contribute to the building of a sense of theatre in the story. Lepaludier, however, argues that nuances such as bodily movements, intonation, and the mise-en-scene cannot be achieved in short stories, "at least not through the same means" (par. 4). It is true that these aspects are not brought about the same as in a play, but Joyce's elaborate use of detail in the construction of "The Boarding House," makes sure that the theatre is still close to the audience despite the fact that they are reading the story rather than watching it.

Even though stage directions are a crucial contribution to shaping "The Boarding House," not every part of the story can be interpreted as such. Joyce's descriptions of his characters are not as extensive as those in *Exiles* or "Circe". Scattered throughout the story,

Joyce continuously refers to aspects of the characters, but they are not always written in the form of a stage direction. In his plays Joyce also repeatedly adds new facts and details about his characters, but the difference is that they are always a stage direction.

Joyce does not solely describe characters and their behaviour or movements, but also the setting of or introduction to a scene, or the construction of some of the spaces in the boarding house:

It was a bright Sunday morning of early summer, promising heat, but with a fresh breeze blowing. All the windows of the boarding house were open and the lace curtains ballooned gently towards the street beneath the raised sashes. The belfry of George's Church sent out constant peals and worshippers, singly or in groups, traversed the little circus before the church, revealing their purpose by their self-contained demeanour no less than by the little volumes in their gloved hands. Breakfast was over in the boarding house and the table of the breakfast-room was covered with plates on which lay yellow streaks of eggs with morsels of bacon-fat and bacon-rind. Mrs Mooney sat in the straw arm-chair and watched the servant Mary remove the breakfast things. She made Mary collect the crusts and pieces of broken bread to help make Tuesday's bread pudding. (*Dubliners* 58-59)

This excerpt creates the impression that the beginning of a story is introduced and that the scene is set with all the details accounted for, which correlates with Wales' argument on the similarities between fiction and play previously discussed (Wales 245). However, it only occurs a few pages into the story. Some aspects, however, might contribute to the interpretation of the story as a whole: the wind seems to create a calm setting, also because the windows are open and the curtains are peacefully fluttering towards the street. Joyce even

pays attention to what happens outside, which suggests that it needs to be emphasised that it is not only calm and peaceful in the house, but everywhere. The latter part focusses on the setting of the scene itself, which clearly establishes Mrs Mooney's authority. Even though it is indicated that it is a quiet morning in the boarding house, the scene is to a high degree 'constructed': everything needs to be in a certain place, all under the control of Mrs Mooney. It almost represents some form of check list that is run through before the scene starts and other events can happen.

Another kind of stage direction that Joyce accounts for in "The Boarding House," is that of bodily movements and how the characters move through space. In several instances they are so detailed that no dialogue is needed: "he comforted her feebly, telling her not to cry, that it would be all right, never fear" (*Dubliners* 62). Furthermore, Joyce uses similar descriptions for Polly and Mrs Mooney who seem to gather their thoughts when they are alone: "[Mrs Mooney] stood up and surveyed herself in the pier-glass. The decisive expression on her great florid face satisfied her" and "[Polly] dried her eyes and went over to the looking-glass. She dipped the end of the towel in the water-jug and refreshed her eyes with the cool water. She looked at herself in profile and readjusted a hairpin above her ear" (60, 63). Despite the fact that these instances happen a few pages from each other and both characters are alone, these performances are rather alike: both mother and daughter are alone, focussing on themselves, and are making sure they are presentable when going outside and seeing other people. There are, however, small differences such as Mrs Mooney who "surveys" and Polly who "looks at" herself, which might mirror their personality: Mrs Mooney is always surveying her guests and making sure that she knows everything, while Polly seems to far less inquisitive. Overall, the stage directions suggests some form of consistency in how Joyce leads his characters, but also that by way of similar stage directions, he shows the audience their connection as a family.

Even though stage directions in “The Boarding House” are written in the past, they can still be read as such. They are interesting in the way in which they differ albeit somewhat more confusing in some instances, but also interesting in terms of realism. They can still be truthful, and the only difference, as pointed out, is tense: if the tense would change from past to present no distinction could be made with stage directions which are originally written in the present tense.

## Chapter 2

## Distant Music

Out of all the short stories in *Dubliners*, “The Dead” was added last, because Joyce felt that he had been too harsh in writing about Dublin: “I have reproduced ... none of the attraction of the city ... I have not reproduced its ingenuous insularity and its hospitality” (Ellmann 231). “The Dead” indeed shows another part and class of Dublin, which had not been accounted for in his other short stories. However, “The Dead,” but also *Exiles*, share some similarities with regard to Ibsen, but also autobiographical aspects surrounding Joyce himself. This tendency becomes rather clear in “The Dead” and *Exiles* where Nora was a great inspiration for his writing. Joyce was rather obsessed with Nora’s past, specifically with her history of relationships (307). This fascination is reflected in Richard and Bertha in *Exiles* where Richard feels a need to know everything that is going on with Bertha and Robert. Next to that, Gabriel wants to know all about Gretta’s deceased lover in “The Dead”. Nora’s presence in some instances is so clear that things Nora said or wrote seem to have been transcribed into Joyce’s work (Maddox 102). In his notes on *Exiles*, for example, Joyce wrote about Nora, and in a letter he asked her: “do you remember the three adjectives I have used in ‘The Dead’ in speaking of your body. They are these: ‘Musical and strange and perfumed’” (Ellmann 284). These examples only scratch the surface of how invested Joyce was in incorporating Nora into his work.

Ibsen’s influence on Joyce comes through beautifully in these works. Apart from incorporating some of his stylistic devices and methods (Parrinder 26), *Exiles* and “The Dead” have been regarded as being similar to several of Ibsen’s plays, among which are *When We Dead Awaken*, *The Lady from the Sea* (1889), *A Doll’s House* (1879), and *Hedda Gabler* (1890) (MacLeod 887, 894; Doloff 111; Theoharis 791). Apart from links with Ibsen’s plays, Ibsen’s use of dramatic symbolism had a direct influence on the writing of

“The Dead” and *Exiles* (Parrinder 51). Parrinder argues that Joyce’s appreciation for Ibsen was reinvigorated in the symbolist style of “The Dead,” and its use of drama, as Ibsen favoured to write about elite classes where a dark secret or truth would eventually destroy their sense of belonging. Gabriel has a similar experience when he finds out that he is not the only man who Gretta has loved (66). *Exiles* too shows connections with Ibsen’s preferred style. The triangularity in the relationship between Richard, Robert, and Bertha, the whispers about her bastard child Archie, and adultery as a theme throughout the play among other taboo-like subjects, highlights the similarities, and mostly the influence of, between this work and that of Ibsen, which can be seen as “an act of homage” (106). For the cohesion of the argument “The Dead” will be elaborated upon after *Exiles*, which will truly manifest the relation between these two works.

For *Exiles*, Joyce used two different kinds of stage directions. The first is meant for descriptions of bodily movements, the characters’ tone, emotion, gestures, and the way they look; fundamentally everything of importance to Joyce in describing his characters and their whereabouts (*Exiles* 19). The second type of stage direction is aimed at exits, entrances, and other practical “stage business” (19). Furthermore, Joyce insisted that the descriptions should be distinguished by the way they look and are shaped. This indicates that Joyce gave value and importance to setting the scene, and knew that it was significant in the guidance of “both reader and actor to imagine not only what is physically apparent onstage but also what is occurring beneath outward appearance” (19).

Joyce, whose attention to detail never fails to go unnoticed, wrote extensive and thought-provoking descriptions of interior spaces. Ibsen’s influence again makes a reappearance, as he used to write elaborate directions on the correlation between the interiority of characters’ lives and domestic interiors. In *Exiles*, each of the three acts is introduced by a stage direction which describes almost every aspect of the room in which the



scene is set. For the introduction to the first act, for example, Joyce mentions pieces of furniture, accessories, windows, multiple doors, and details on where and how these objects are placed in space (*Exiles* 25).<sup>1</sup> Since the characters tend to move around a great deal, Joyce makes sure to not forget anything in his descriptions on where the character is standing at that exact moment:

*[Bertha] goes out on the left with Richard's hat, which she leaves in the hall, returns at once, she stops for a moment at the davenport, replaces the slip in the drawer, locks it, and replaces the key, and, taking the roses, goes towards the right. Robert precedes her to open the door for her. She bows and goes out. (59)*

Joyce's direction highlights an incredibly precise routine; this is not the first time that she has made these exact movements, since they seem to happen without any thought.

Furthermore, Richard's study is referred to several times with no mention of how it is organised: "*in the wall at the back to the right a small door leading to a study*" and "*she crosses to the study door ... comes in from the study*" (25, 27). The interiors are only mentioned when Bertha looks into the room in the third act: "*one can see a small untidy room with many bookshelves and a large writingtable with papers and an extinguished lamp and before it a padded chair*" (143). Instead of using Bertha, Joyce uses "one," which creates the

---

<sup>1</sup> "*The drawingroom in Richard Rowan's house at Merrion, a suburb of Dublin. On the right, forwards, a fireplace before which stands a low screen. Over the mantelpiece a giltframed glass. Farther back in the right wall, folding doors leading to the parlour and kitchen. In the wall at the back to the right a small door leading to a study. Left of this a sideboard. On the wall above the sideboard a framed crayon drawing of a young man. More to the left double doors with glass panels leading out to the garden. In the wall at the left a window looking out on the road. Forward in the same wall a door leading to the hall and the upper part of the house. Between the window and door a lady's davenport stands against the wall. Near it a wicker chair. In the centre of the room a round table. To the right, forwards, a smaller table with a smoking service on it. Near it an easychair and a lounge. Cocoanut mats lie before the fireplace, beside the lounge and before the doors. The floor is of stained planking. The double doors at the back and the folding doors on the right have lace curtains which are drawn halfway. The lower sash of the window is lifted and the window is hung with heavy green plush curtains. The blind is pulled down to the edge of the lifted lower sash. It is a warm afternoon in June and the room is filled with soft sunlight which is waning*" (*Exiles* 25)

impression that the audience is able to see the inside of the room, even though they would probably only see Bertha standing in the small doorway (143). It can be argued that the study is described differently than in earlier directions: there is no mention of what is on the table except for papers, and the only reference about the walls is that there are bookshelves. This suggests that the room is a private space for Richard and what happens in there mostly goes on inside his head to which the reader (and audience) get no access (Parrinder 107).

In his descriptions of *Exiles*, Joyce mentions multiple doors, which are introduced at the beginning of each act: their location is specified next to other aspects such as whether they are double or single. When a character moves, Joyce indicates to which door they walk, and whether they are open or closed. In some way it seems as if the doors mirror the current state of affairs at the house, whether it be light or somewhat more dark and tense. They would be open with the former and closed when the mood tends to be more restless. Joyce seems to use doors as a path for the characters to get to know themselves, as if walking through one of these doors could account for new beginnings and discoveries.

Another aspect that creates a consciousness of interior spaces in *Exiles* is music. The piano, which Archie and Beatrice play, is “*heard faintly from the upper room*” (*Exiles* 49). A few pages later the instrument is mentioned again: “*the piano can be heard faintly from the upper room*” (53). The stage directions emphasise that a noise is constantly present, which means that the conversations are not the only sound accounted for. They therefore add to the building of and reliability of the interior spaces, which is not solely the room in which the main events and dialogues take place.

In comparison, “The Dead” contains more references to music, which also contributes to the perception of the interior spaces. The way in which Joyce makes use of sound and space in “The Dead” adds to the credibility of the theatricality in the short story (Sakr par. 7). A piano can be heard from different rooms, which creates the idea that the house is big, but

noisy. Gabriel can hear the instrument while he stands in the hallway, and he can hear “the stamping and shuffling of feet on the floor above” (“The Dead” 177). Moreover, multiple references are made of characters running up and down stairs (177, 178, 182). Since the characters can be heard walking, even through the ceiling, and the music can be heard in the whole house, Joyce organised the interior spaces in such a way that even though there are multiple rooms, one is still able to hear almost everything that happens. Among other spaces, there is a kitchen, a dressing-room, a drawing-room, a pantry, and a back room, but it seems as if characters would have a hard time finding a place where they would not be heard by others.

The house has two levels, which on occasion become involved in the same events, something the stage directions clearly account for. Lily, for example, welcomes the guests on the ground floor, while others are upstairs, “peering down over the banisters and calling down to Lily to ask her who had come” (175). Sakr calls this a “synchronisation” of actions (par. 19). The directions add a new level of theatricality, since one can now envision the co-existing of the different rooms and levels of the house where interactions take place at the same time; not unlike an actual theatrical stage. Another theatrical aspect in “The Dead” is the way in which noise, next to the piano, is accounted for (par. 12). A great deal of it comes from laughter and clapping, which adds to the reality of the story. Other sounds such as the clanging of a door bell, toddling from stairs, clothing that sweeps and feet that shuffle, the clattering of cutlery, and patting of the table also contribute to this sense of liveliness (“The Dead” 175, 177, 178, 201).

The most important aspect of the theatricality in “The Dead” according to Sakr, is the development of sound and space and the way in which Joyce communicates them throughout (par. 10). Sakr does not diminish the importance of stage directions, because these noises

only come to life as a result of them. It is the effect of them that seems to play a significant part in the development of “The Dead” as a theatrical short story.

The sound of the piano is present for a considerable amount of time in *Exiles*, but another noise that is frequently turned back to is laughing, whether it be “harsh,” “scornfully,” “heartily,” or “nervously” (83, 87, 45, 26). The effect, however, is somewhat different in *Exiles* than in “The Dead”. The former is a play, and it is less needed to convince one of the liveliness, even when it is not performed: the way in which the play differentiates between stage directions and dialogue is already a big contributor to the credibility of the theatricality. One aspect that does add to this are the numerous stage directions Joyce spends on how loud and in what way the characters speak: “*weakly ... rudely*” (38); “*quietly*” (39); “*in an offended tone*” (51); “*almost crying*” (84); “*almost inaudibly*” (138); “*delighted*” (142). These short but telling directions add to the way in which the reader imagines the play while reading.

With the use of stage directions, which highlight the way in which noise is present in both *Exiles* and “The Dead,” Joyce seems to pay attention to small traits of the characters, some that might go unnoticed: for example the way in which Lily is “literally run off her feet” or when Beatrice “coughs rather nervously” (*Dubliners* 175; *Exiles* 26). This is precisely what Joyce aspired to do in his work: “his aim was to collect ‘little errors and gestures – mere straws in the wind – by which people betrayed the very things they were most careful to conceal’” (Bénéjam par. 7).

## Chapter 3

## Medley of Voices

“Circe,” the fifteenth episode of *Ulysses* differs from its counterparts, since it can be interpreted as being written in the form of a play. It is a phantasmagorical, magical chapter that is rather confusing and complicated because there are smooth changes between different worlds. A distinction is made between the real world and a one full of dreams and fantasy, and different states of mind (Wales 260). Joyce’s stage directions in “Circe” are extensive, and prescriptive: they indicate exactly what happens at every moment (Ferrer 140). They form some sort of guideline for the reader; animals, objects, things, and characters are accounted for. Joyce tends to illustrate the latter elaborately: he refers to their clothing, bodily movements, and the way they look and present themselves to the other subjects *and* objects present in the play.

Flynn argues that “Circe” has an “absence of order and control” (122), but through the descriptions, Joyce gives a sense of authority and regulation, which is somewhat the opposite of the chaos Flynn suggests. Even though the episode is wildly confusing in numerous of instances, the stage directions give a sense of purpose and meaning to which the reader can always refer back.

Since the episode is filled with magic, namely objects that can talk or a dog that changes breed, the stage directions contribute to make the audience believe in the phantasmagorical and grotesqueness of “Circe”. They create reliability and account for explanations on how something or someone is behaving. Joyce treats objects, people, and magical characters similarly. This establishes a truth of existence: Joyce makes the reader believe in everything. It is therefore important to emphasise that this work of Joyce, too, should be read rather than watched. An example of this is when an “*odour of ... sick-sweet weed floats toward [Bloom] in slow round ovalling wreaths*” (*Ulysses* 324). Consciousness of

such nuances would be very difficult to account for on stage, especially considering that the weed floats, how does one translate this onto stage?

For the reader to believe in the truth of existence of the subjects and objects in “Circe,” Joyce makes his stage directions of the living characters elaborate. This results in that a trustworthy view can be brought together. An example of this are Stephen’s bodily movements: “*Stephen thrusts the ashplant on him and slowly holds out his hands, his head going back till both hands are a span from his breast, down turned in planes intersecting, the fingers about to part, the left being higher*” (311).

Furthermore, by addressing all movements and sound present at a particular moment on stage, the world(s) where the action takes place can be perceived as real, since more is accounted for than solely the stage directions of the characters and objects that speak; take, for example, the two long stage directions at the beginning of “Circe” (308-309). These descriptions clearly establish that characters and objects are not the only aspects accounted for. This argument can be expanded to things, such as when Joyce describes fog: “*snakes of river fog creep slowly. From drains, clefts, cesspools, middens arise on all sides stagnant fumes. A glow leaps in the south beyond the seaward reaches of the river*” (311). Joyce lets the fog creep and describes it as *snakes of river fog*. He gives the fog features of an animal, which makes it come alive. Maybe he even gives it agency, as if the fog chooses to move in a particular direction rather than that the wind has moved it in a certain way. Furthermore, Joyce lets “the sins of the past” talk “*in a medley of voices*” (380): he gives them human characteristics, which makes the sins, similar to the fog, more alive, and are thus given truth of existence, even though they are magical and phantasmagorical.

Characters or animals in “Circe” are either described to appear or disappear, walk in or exit, or their whereabouts are not accounted for. With this discrepancy in directing, Joyce highlights the difference between living and phantastic subjects. At one point, Bloom

disappears and reappears a “*moment*” later, whereafter he disappears again and emerges “*a few moments later*” (311). Another character, “*the freckled face of Sweny ... appears in the disc of the soapsun*” (316) and somewhat further on “*the man in the macintosh disappears*” (345). One time “*the face of William Shakespeare ... appears*” (400) and later on “*Edward the Seventh appears in an archway*” (415). At the end of the episode “*a figure appears slowly*” which then turns out to be Rudy, Bloom’s deceased son. ‘Appear’ seems to allude to characters that are either dead or ghosts, and even though the examples given are not exhaustive, it gives the impression that Joyce was consistent in these specific stage directions, which in these instances give truth of performance, even though the characters are not alive.

Moreover, Joyce lets several objects speak, which are at times accompanied by stage directions. Bells, a gong, a bar of soap, a timepiece, quoits, and a gramophone speak, among numerous of other things (312, 316, 335, 360). At one point before a gasjet speaks, Joyce devotes specific descriptions to several objects: “*a skeleton judashand strangles the light. The green light wanes to mauve. The gasjet wails whistling*” (362). By giving objects specific instructions, Joyce seems to give them agency: “*the roses draw apart, disclose a sepulchre of the gold of kinds and their mouldering bones*” and “*Venetian masts, maypoles and festal arches spring up*” (340, 341). Even though these things do not have any lines, they are still present and add to the magical atmosphere of the episode due to the truth of existence and performance created by the stage directions.

When Bella Cohen enters, an almost immediate distinction is made between her and her fan when the latter is given lines and stage directions. This results in yet another object that has been given agency. Descriptions of the fan mostly consist of the movements that should be made by it: “*half opening, then closing ... folding together, rests against her eardrop ... folded akimbo against her waist ... tapping ... points downwards slowly ... points downwards quickly*” (373, 374). Despite the fact that the fan moves on its own, it is still held

by Bella, or at least attached in some way to her body: it is *resting* and *folding* against *her*.

Next to that, Joyce even accounts for some of the actions of the fan, namely that it is “*flirting quickly, then slowly*” (373). Because the movements of the object, with some instructions on the actions of it, are so heavily accounted for, the reader once again is submerged into the world(s) of the “Circe” episode. It is the stage directions, and not only the dialogue which makes the objects come to life.

The ease with which some changes occur is another aspect that adds to the reader’s immersion in the magic, and the overall cluster of different plots and storylines. Throughout the episode there is a dog present which constantly changes breed, but this is not explicitly mentioned in the stage directions. Every time the animal shows up, the stage directions seem to function as a reminder that the dog is present by accounting for its whereabouts, with no mention of changes: “*A liver and white spaniel on the prowl slinks after him, growling*” (310); “*The retriever approaches sniffing, nose to the ground*” (313); “*followed by the sniffing terrier*” (316); “*The wolfdog sprawls on his back, wriggling obscenely with begging paws, his long black tongue lolling out*” (324); “*The mastiff mauls the bundle clumsily and gluts himself in the growling greed, crunching the bones*” (324); “*The bulldog growls, his scruff standing, a gobbet of pig’s knuckle between his molars through which rabid scumspittle dribbles*” (325); “*The beagle lifts his snout, showing the grey scorbutic face of Paddy Dignam*” (337). Joyce’s descriptions do not ignore the fact that the dog changed breed, but rather treat it as if nothing significant has happened. Interestingly, the first time the animal is referred to, the indefinite article ‘a’ is used, whereas the following descriptions always use the definite article ‘the,’ which creates the sense that the reader knows what is talked about. Furthermore, the descriptions all seem to follow the same sentence structure. In the creation of truth and the existence of the dog, stage directions are used to create a sense of reliability.



An additional strange change which might be harder to account for, is when Bloom gives birth to “*eight yellow and white children*” (*Ulysses* 351). Almost everything about the stage directions that describe the birth seems impossible, especially since Bloom is male. The children are never babies and “... *handsome, with valuable metallic faces, wellmade, respectably dressed and wellconducted, speaking five modern languages fluently and [are] interested in various arts and sciences ...*” (351). It just does not seem to make sense in any way. However, this situation does not happen at the beginning of the episode, which means that the reader has already come across a number of bizarre events and elaborate descriptions. All phantasmagorical, and magical occurrences throughout “*Circe*” can be interpreted as building up towards new and grotesque events that seem unimaginable, but become credible through the use of stage directions in their aforementioned creation of scenes, atmosphere, and characteristic detail. Joyce uses them to create an overarching sense of reality, which makes the reader believe in the existence of the characters, objects, and subjects, whether they be phantasmagorical, magical, or real, in whatever world they may be. The phantasmagoria of “*Circe*” is thus only possible through the credible environment fostered by stage directions. The reader is more inclined to believe what is happening due to these descriptions: they are a tool to suppress the disbelief and make us believe in the materialisation of the fantasy.

## Conclusion

Even though *Exiles* was Joyce's only play ever published, and his first attempt in 1900 was unsuccessful, the writing of *Exiles*, including those prior to *Exiles*, has been essential for the creation of Joyce's other works. He might have composed the play after he wrote *Dubliners*, but references to theatre and theatrical elements consistently appear in his works, whether it be a short story or a play in a novel such as *Ulysses*. Explorations of *Exiles* contribute to a deeper understanding of *Dubliners* and "Circe," and not solely in regards to theatricality. Joyce's *Exiles* might be interpreted as a blueprint to which can be referred back to, but *Dubliners* and "Circe" also significantly facilitate an enhanced insight of *Exiles* itself: they give the possibility for comprehensive analyses from different points of view.

Joyce's stage directions create a credible environment and are the ultimate source of reliability, especially in "Circe" due to its phantasmagorical and magical aspects, and the presence of multiple realities and worlds: if it is narrated in a stage direction, it tends to be true. This is true, not only for "Circe," but it is a line that can be traced through all the works discussed. Stage directions create the scene and the setting of, and in some way smuggle characteristics, details, and descriptions into the world of the story. Joyce was a man of the theatre, both in his writing and his passion for the performance arts, shaped significantly by the triangular relation between him, Shaw, and Ibsen. He might have been strongly influenced by other playwrights and writers, but his own utilisation of this material is irreducible to any of them. Joyce's characteristic performances in theatre might have been ephemeral, but they are eternalised in his writing.

## Works Cited

- Bénéjam, Valérie. "Charades and Gossip: The Minimalist Theatre of Joyce's *Dubliners*." *Journal of the Short Story in English*, vol. 51, 2008. [journals.openedition.org/jsse/903](http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/903).
- Bertolini, John A. *The Playwrighting Self of Bernard Shaw*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1991. *Google Books*, [books.google.nl/books?hl=nl&lr=&id=LHXkgmDFSGUC&oi=fnd&pg=PP13&dq=](http://books.google.nl/books?hl=nl&lr=&id=LHXkgmDFSGUC&oi=fnd&pg=PP13&dq=).
- Carlson, Marvin. "The Status of Stage Direction." *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1991, pp. 37-48. *ProQuest*, [www-proquest.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/scholarly-journals/status-stage-directions/docview/1303459370/se-2?accountid=14772](http://www-proquest.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/scholarly-journals/status-stage-directions/docview/1303459370/se-2?accountid=14772).
- Chrisp, Peter. "James Joyce, the Dancing Years." *From Swerve of Shore to Bend of Bay*, 11 Feb. 2021, [peterchrisp.blogspot.com/2021/02/james-joyce-dancing-years.html?m=0](http://peterchrisp.blogspot.com/2021/02/james-joyce-dancing-years.html?m=0). Accessed 21 March 2021.
- Doloff, Steven. "Ibsen's 'A Doll's House' and 'The Dead.'" *James Joyce Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1994, pp 111-114. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.com/stable/25485426](http://www.jstor.com/stable/25485426).
- Ellmann, Richard. *James Joyce*. Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Fargnolli, A. Nicholas, and Michael P. Gillespie, editors. *Exiles: A Critical Edition*. University Press of Florida, 2016.
- Ferrer, Daniel. "Circe, Regret and Regression." *Post-structuralist Joyce: Essays From the French*, edited by Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer, Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 127-144.
- Flynn, Catherine. "'Circe' and Surrealism: Joyce and the Avant-Garde." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2011, pp. 121-138. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/jmodelite.34.2.121](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/jmodelite.34.2.121).

- Gerould, Daniel C. "George Bernard Shaw's Criticism of Ibsen." *Comparative Literature*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1963, pp. 130-145. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/1768900](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1768900).
- Joyce, James. "Circe," *Ulysses*. Ed. Sam Slote. Alma Classics, 2012.
- . "Ibsen's New Drama." *James Joyce: The Critical Writings*, edited by Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann, Cornell UP, 1989, pp. 47-67.
- . "The Boarding House," *Dubliners*. Penguin Books, 1992.
- . "The Dead," *Dubliners*. Penguin Books, 1992.
- Lepaludier, Laurent. "Theatricality in the Short Story: Staging the Word?" *Journal of the Short Story in English*, vol. 51, 2008. [journals.openedition.org/jsse/891](http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/891).
- Maddox, Brenda. *Nora: A Biography of Nora Joyce*. Hamish Hamilton, 1988.
- Macleod, Vivienne K. "The Influence of Ibsen on Joyce." *PMLA*, vol. 60, no. 3, 1945, pp. 879-898. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/459184](http://www.jstor.org/stable/459184).
- Ochshorn, Kathleen G. "Who's Modern Now: Shaw, Joyce, and Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*." *SHAW: The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies*, vol. 25, 2005, pp. 96-104. *Project Muse*, [doi.org/10.1353/shaw.2005.0018](http://doi.org/10.1353/shaw.2005.0018).
- Parrinder, Patrick. *James Joyce*. Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Sakr, Rita. "Staging Social and Political Spaces: Living Theatre in Joyce's 'The Dead.'" *Journal of the Short Story in English*, vol. 51, 2008. [journals.openedition.org/jsse/907](http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/907).
- Shaw, Bernard G. *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. Walter Scott Publishing House, 1891.
- Steward, Bruce. "James Joyce (1882-1941) [1/3]." *Ricorso*, 23 March. 2011, [ricorso.net/rx/az-data/index.htm](http://ricorso.net/rx/az-data/index.htm).
- Theoharis, Theoharis C. "*Hedda Gabler* and 'The Dead.'" *ELH*, vol. 50, no. 4, 1983, pp. 791-809. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/2872927](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2872927).

Wales, Katie. “‘Bloom Passes Through Several Walls’: The Stage Directions in ‘Circe.’”

*European Joyce Studies*, vol 3, 1994, pp. 241-276. *JSTOR*,

[www.jstor.org/stable/44871034](http://www.jstor.org/stable/44871034).


Weintraub, Stanley. “A Respectful Distance: James Joyce and His Dublin Townsman

Bernard Shaw.” *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1986, pp. 61-75.

*JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3831432](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3831432).

**MARKING GRID FOR LITERATURE & CULTURE ESSAYS ON THE  
BA IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE & CULTURE AT UTRECHT UNIVERSITY**

To be completed by *student* and stapled, this side up, to the front of the essay:

Name & student number	Lotte Murrath - 6145752
Essay title	The Performance of Joyce: Stage Directions in <i>Dubliners</i> , <i>Exiles</i> , and “Circe”
Word count	Including abstract and footnote: 7472 Excluding abstract and footnote: 7071
Course	Bachelor Thesis English Language and Culture
Supervisor	Prof. Dr. David Pascoe
Second Reader	Dr. Onno Kusters
Date & Signature*	02/06/2021 

\*signifying you have read & understood the plagiarism declaration overleaf.

To be completed by *examiner* (name):

Category [ Code]	Description	Comments (if appropriate)	Mark
Content (60%)	response to assignment, argumentation, scope & reading, quality & elegance		x6=
Structure (10%)	thesis statement / research question context within academic literature methodology reporting format (& rationale)		
[ MLA ] (10%)	parenthetical references works cited, layout & word count		
[ G ] (10%)	grammatical accuracy & use of complex structures		
[ R S V P ] (10%)	register, repetition & redundancy, spelling, vocabulary & punctuation		
Final Mark			

## INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY STATEMENT

Utrecht University defines “plagiarism” as follows:

“If, in a thesis or some other paper, data or parts of a text produced by someone else are used without the source being identified, this shall be considered plagiarism. Among other things, plagiarism may entail the following:

cutting and pasting text from digital sources such as encyclopaedias or digital journals, without using quotations marks and references;

cutting and pasting any text from the internet without using quotation marks and references;

copying from printed material such as books, journals or encyclopaedias without using quotations marks and references;

using a translation of the above texts in your own work, without using quotations marks and references;

paraphrasing the above texts without using references. A paraphrase should never consist of merely replacing some words by synonyms;

using pictures, sound recordings, or test materials produced by others without references, such that it appears that this is one’s own work;

copying work by other students and passing this off as one’s own work. If this is done with the other student’s consent, the latter shall be an accomplice to the plagiarism;

even in cases where plagiarism is committed by one of the authors collaborating on a paper, the other authors shall be accomplices to plagiarism if they could or ought to have known that the first-mentioned author was committing plagiarism;

submitting papers acquired from a commercial source (such as an internet site offering summaries or complete essays) or written by someone else for payment.”

I have read the above definition of plagiarism and certify with my signature on the preceding page that I have not committed plagiarism in the appended essay or paper.