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Of Contorted Politics: A Note on the VIII.A Notebooks of 1916

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Joyce's political convictions during the First World War that made him want "to further the Allied cause by cultural propaganda" as manager for the English Players were subsequently complicated by his private battle with the British Consul General in Zurich and his critique of British Imperialism as an Irish subject (Budgen 346). Joyce flirted with socialism and even non-violent anarchism while nostalgically yearning for the old Austro-Hungarian Empire that was fast disappearing (Manganiello 148-174). Manganiello (1980), Duffy (1994), Nolan (1995), Gibson (2013) and others have thus analyzed Joyce's complex negotiations with nationalism, national language and certainly, the events of 1916. Looking back at 1916, Joyce's published correspondence has shown beyond doubt that he was well-aware of the events in Ireland, of the death of Thomas Kettle for instance (*LI* 96). A letter from May Joyce on 1 September 1916 describing "The place [the former office of Maunsell and Co.] in Abbey St. was destroyed last April and they have taken a place in Baggot Street now" also help to show that Joyce was aware of everyday realities of his homeland, not only from newspapers but also from more direct, first-hand accounts (*LII* 383). After an anxious journey where Joyce's papers (which included those belonging to his friend Mario Tripcovich considered a traitor by the Austrian government) passed scrutiny, Joyce reached "neutral" Zurich from Trieste on 30 June 1915 (Stanzel 365). As Franz K. Stanzel has shown, he was still under surveillance: Triestine police papers from 1916 described Joyce having "a doubtful reputation" as a political subject and the Imperial and Royal Military Attaché in Bern sent out a spy to confirm that he was a genuine Sinn Féiner (368).

But while Joyce's published works, correspondence or memoirs by contemporaries have been examined to interrogate his sometimes nationalistic, sometimes neutralist position in political matters, his pre-publication notebooks which often acted as receptacles of his current interests, ideas, remain comparatively less studied in this regard. The following enquiry is inspired by a simple question: If we focused on a single year, 1916, what would Joyce's notebooks from 1916, tell us about his political opinions in the midst of a turbulent World War and the Easter Rising in Ireland? I contend that Joyce's VIII.A Notebooks at Buffalo could still be relevant in this regard.

The VIII.A Notebooks at Buffalo:

The VIII.A Notebooks at Buffalo comprise Joyce's Zurich Notebooks. Rodney Wilson Owen's pioneering study of these notebooks (140-171) and the University at Buffalo James Joyce Catalog prepared by Peter Spielberg and Luca Crispi tell us that they were composed between 1915 and 1919 ("UB Joyce Catalog: VIII. Other Notebooks"). Three among the five separate notebooks VIII.A. 1-5 and the ten separate sheets that make up VIII.A. 6. a-j have entries from the year 1916. The dominant theme of these notebooks is language. In 1916, Zurich, amidst

"chronic impecuniosity" while *A Portrait* was being published, Joyce was learning modern[i] Greek, sharpening his French and was also translating articles from German into English for the *Internationale Rundschau/International Review*. Unsurprisingly therefore, most of the entries are vocabulary notes and grammatical exercises. However, since Joyce's aim must have been to read longer passages in Greek, he copied newspaper reports, songs, the Lord's Prayer and even business letters in Greek ("UB Joyce Catalog: VIII. Other Notebooks"). Some of these longer excerpts are explicitly political in nature, as are the four pages in English translation of a German essay published in the *Internationale Rundschau/International Review*. I will try to show that the importance of these notes which refer to significant political, historical events of 1916 resides in the fact that they do indeed show a consistent pattern in establishing an interest in neutralist, pacifist politics. I will then try to argue how far, seen in their contexts, these entries could go on to give us a glimpse of Joyce's political beliefs during this period and if they in turn complicate such a picture in some ways.

Greek Notes in the VIII.A. Notebooks:

As John McCourt has shown, Joyce had ample opportunities to acquaint himself with the Greek community in Trieste well before 1916 (56-62). The Greek community in Trieste was culturally active and had their own newspaper (Ibid 57). Some of them were Joyce's pupils. In Zurich too, Joyce found a Greek tutor in Paul G. Phocas, himself an émigré. The notes begin with the usual instructions on Greek alphabets in VIII. A.6.a.1 (*JJA* 3.288), with common Greek phrases in modern Greek, such as "It is a good weather…It is raining etc." The next page (VIII.A.6.a.1-v, *JJA* 3.289) contains routine exercises on Greek declensions of nouns like father, mother, child etc., not in Joyce's hand. But as R.J. Schork notes, these fairly routine vocabulary notes are interrupted by randy linguistic games at times[ii]. An example is the clever play on the name "Soutsos" in VIII.A.2.2 (*JJA* 3.338), where the reader, a "dear lady", is instructed to remove the first "s" from the name and substitute it with a "p" to arrive at "poustos," Greek for the male organ (Schork 243). Among these funny, slightly bawdy passages will fall the song on VIII.A.6.d-1 (*JJA* 3.293), which begins with the lines "μολ'σ βράδυ βράδυ την δουλια τελεόσω" ("Only when evening will slowly fall, will I end my chores"). According to Mantō (Mando) Aravantinou, who was possibly the first (1977) to describe these Greek notebooks in detail, Phocas was quoting from memory, and thus misquoting, skipping words even stanzas of a song from vaudeville theater, from the *revues* of Panathenaia 1911, a piece called "Zampetta" (206). Bruce Merry points out that the Panathenaia was an annual event and these *revues* (or the *επιθεοωρησε* as they were called) were skits which were "the only form of comedy current in Athens at the turn of the twentieth century" (80). Aravantinou's transcriptions[iii] of the song deviate very strongly from the entry on VIII.A.6.d but they are also cataloged in Thodoros Chatzepantazes's anthology of Athenian revues *Hē athēnaïkē epitheōrēsē: mer. 1. Eisagōgē stēn athēnaïkē epitheōrēsē* (284). At any rate, the song itself, describing the fantasies and aspirations of a chambermaid, apart from corresponding to what Wim Van Mierlo's recent description of Joyce's "middlebrow" reading habits, offers little in terms of the political realities of 1916 (141-162). There is a similar rhymed stanza on VIII.A.1-9 (*JJA* 3. 349) which describes the erotic

fantasies of a woman directed at her partner who is still asleep, beginning with the lines "και όταν ξοπνήσες (sic) το πρωί / από του ύπνου του γλυκύ" ("And when, in the morning/ he woke from his sweet sleep"). I have not been able to identify this passage but it is followed, with strict Joycean irony by the Lord's Prayer in Greek on the same page (*JJA* 3.349).

VII.A.4 also similarly contains commercial letters to the National Bank of Greece which Joyce copied and learnt vocabulary notes from and also post-cards all in Greek (*JJA* 3.320, 3.329, 3. 299-300). This is why, the entries on VIII.A.6f-1 (*JJA* 3. 295), VIII.A.4.23 (*JJA* 3. 325), VIII.A.6.h (1-1v) (*JJA* 3.297-298) and VIII.A.3.36-40 (*JJA* 3. 370-374), will prove more significant as chronicles of key political events of 1916.

VIII.A.6f-1 (*JJA* 3. 295)

When Joyce copies and then translates a Greek newspaper report entitled "The Flags of Warships" (VIII.A.6. f, *JJA* 3.295) he is reading a report that describes the slow collapse of Greek neutrality in World War I, in October 1916. The translated report reads something like:

> Yesterday,
>
> The French admiral by an officer made known to the Greek vice-admiral Mr. Ippitis Kunsch that the greek banners may be left on the warships as they continue to remain Greek. But Mr. Ippitis denied to admit it and the admiral Fourgné ordered other flags new to be made and hoisted on the foremasts […]

The report refers to a climactic moment in Greek politics after months of developments. According to George B. Leon, when German forces aided by Bulgaria occupied Fort Roupel, an outpost in Macedonia within "neutral Greece" facing little resistance around 26th May 1916, the French forces became more and more convinced of foul play (359-360). The former Greek Prime Minister Venizelos (who will be known later as the Ethnarches, "leader" of modern Greece), had long suspected the King of being in collusion with the Germans. According to Venizelos, the Germans under the pre-text of respecting territorial integrity of the Kingdom had been slowly gathering their forces and occupying parts of Greece. After the fall of Fort Roupel, Venizelos began organizing an insurrection in June, which would not be directed at the King but would be forced to take note of "two Greeces": "…the official Germanophile Greece and his pro-Ally Greece, which would include the whole of Macedonia, Epirus and the islands" (quoted in Leon, 366). After a complex turn of events which will see London headquarters opposing any mobilization of forces in the area, while Rome would support Venizelos to frustrate Allied hopes in Greece, the French under General Sarrail would begin the offensive by blockading Greek ships, declaring martial law in Salonika on June 3. On 30 August the Greek Prime Minister Zaimis would inform the British diplomat in Greece Sir Francis Elliot that Greece was ready to reconsider its policy and side with the Allies. In the months that followed, Venizelos would form a Provisional Government on 26 September and move his government to Salonika on 9 October (Leon 416). "The Flags of Warships" report refers to this month when the French admiral

Dartige du Fournet gained control of the harbor at Salamis and replaced the Greek flags with French ones.

VIII.A.4.23 (*JJA* 3. 325)

Another newspaper report in Greek from VIII.A.4 titled "το πρώτον σωμα της αμυνες εις το μετωπον του πολεμου" (literally, "The First Defense Corps into the War Front") reads as:

> According to news from Thessaloniki, the first Greek regiment, structured fully by the national defense committee, will leave for the front of war during this week. ...General Sarrail expressed the desire to watch the parade from the Square of Liberty where all the leaders of the revolution will be seated. (translated, quoted in Owen, 162)

It thus refers to the newly enlisted troops under Venizelos's direction who joined the French forces commanded by General Sarrail. Leon points out that this proved to be more difficult than was assumed at first. This is because it was difficult to convince Old Greece that the Provisional Government was not against the monarchy but was only hoping to fight off the Central Powers from Greece. There were also rumors of intrigues within Venizelos's circles. Leon says that by the end of September, the Provisional government had at its disposal only about two thousand men, conscripted by the National Defense Committee, and conscription was met with active Royalist propaganda (Leon 417-419). When the first battalion left to join General Sarrail on 22 October 1916 the numbers were not more than a few thousand. However, they improved vastly when Venizelos began to directly control the state of affairs in Salonika. Owen thus dates the report to be a few days before 22 October 1916, before the first battalion left Salonika to join the French.

But there were new developments from the King's side as well. Between 17-23 October, after various exchanges with the Allies, King Constantine tried to bridge the gap between the Allied powers and the Greek monarchy. He acceded to the demands of the British and the French to not only demobilize his troops but to surrender all war material, ammunition, artillery pieces and even the navy on 23 October and declared that:

> […] all that I desire is that France request them from me and give me to understand that it is the price of neutrality, that I shall remain absolutely free to observe it, and that Greece will be indemnified generously for the value of the material. (quoted in Leon, 422)

VIII.A.6.h (1-1v) (*JJA* 3.297-298)

In this context, the popular marching song of the Hellenic army "Black is the Night in the Mountains" ("μαύρη είν'ή νύκτα στα βουνά") which Joyce wrote an interlinear translation to in VIII.A.6.h (1-1v) seems peculiarly poignant. Penned by Alexandros Rangavis to inspire a revolution against Turkish/Ottoman "tyrants" the song eulogizes the ruthless courage of the Klephts— anti-Ottoman insurgents fighting stealth war in the mountains. It praises Greek sovereignty and independence. Joyce copied the song from VIII.A.4-21 (*JJA* 3. 323) till the penultimate stanza. The entry of the song in 1916 at a time when Greek neutrality and sovereignty were being severely compromised, could not have been more apt. For unsurprisingly, despite Venizelos's popularity, as Leon notes, anti-Allied demonstrations on 16

October organized by the Reservists against Venizelos was attended by six thousand in Athens alone (414). Earlier, in June when the demobilized Greek army returned home, they were carrying pictures of the King and Dimitrios Gounaris, the leader of the People's Party and still singing the King's war-song, *The Eagle's Son*.

The collapse of Greek neutrality might have attracted Joyce for many reasons. According to Dominic Manganiello, Joyce's politics during the war was complex if not paradoxical. Although seen with suspicion by the Austrian secret service, Joyce believed in his "neutrality" during the War (151). Manganiello feels that this might have drawn him towards Siegmund Feilbogen, former Professor of Economics at the University of Vienna, whom Joyce famously described to Budgen as having an "ear trumpet which he oriented and occidented night and day to catch rumors of peace anywhere at any hour" (xiv). Feilbogen staunchly situated himself as a "neutralist" and helped Joyce obtain temporary employment as translator for the *Internationale Rundschau/International Review* (*JJII* 398). The *Review's* advocacy for neutrality that made it declare in its program that they "shall refute pamphlets directed against the honor of any nation whatsoever" could have appealed to Joyce echoing his distaste for violence and neutrality (quoted in Manganiello 151). But perhaps the only evidence we have about his work as a translator in the journal are four pages in lead pencil at the end of VIII.A.3, which were no doubt part of a larger draft.

VIII.A.3.36-40 (*JJA* 3.370-374)

These four pages of notes in English appear after 19 blank pages (16-35), and are to be read backward, since Joyce seems to have begun writing from the last page of the notebook and continued. These pages, as Rodney Wilson Owen pointed out, are near literal translations of the German essay "Zur Krise des Pazifismus" (146-150). The essay was an "answer" by the neo-Kantian, Professor Paul Natorp to Professor Otto Koester in the journal *Internationale Rundschau* of February 1916, edited by R.W. Huber.

VIII.A.3.40 (*JJA* 3.374) corresponds to page 79 (line 34) of the German essay, with the parenthetical observation "(Űber den genaueren Sinn dieses,, Nein " siehe weiter unten!)" becoming the first sentence of VIII.A.3.40: "(For the more exact meaning of this negative vote see farther on)." The following sentences articulate the demands of Dr. R. Broda, the editor of the Swiss weekly, *Le Voix de l'Humanité* demanding "creation, immediately after the signing of the peace treaty, of a permanent international law court with powers to decide all points of conflict between peoples and having at its disposal a standing international police force to which all the state parties to the said treaty, shall contribute in common" (*JJA* 3.374). As Owen has shown, very few changes were made to the English translation of the essay when it appeared on 20 February in the *International Review* (148). In the notes that exist in Joyce's hand, various appeals for peace with "a sacred solemnity and an unswerving faith in the great cause of world-organization" are discussed (*JJA* 3.370). The essay discusses the Anti-Oorlog Rad, a Dutch anti-war organization founded in 1914 that "made appeal to the Dutch peoples (8 October) and a circular widely published) to draw up a present programme for interstatal organization" (*JJA* 3.

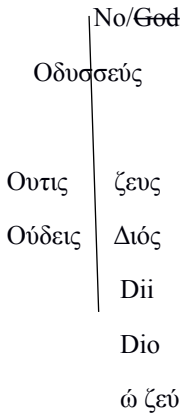
370) The essay similarly considered measures to put limitation on armament industries, to build a new world organization to negotiate for peace.

A translation of an article which discusses the functions of the Lausanne league or the International Peace Bureau of Berne (who were recently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1910) and declares that "as soon as serious peace negotiations begin, the great horn of pacifism will be at hand" would itself be a political act in 1916 (*JJA* 3.371). Although Owen finds it distressing to see Joyce engaged in such "hackwork," nevertheless, in the light of the events of 1916 the essay seems almost prophetic (149). Even though Yeats had lobbied to Edmund Gosse to get Joyce the Royal Literary Fund on 28 August 1915, saying that Joyce "had never had anything to do with Irish politics" and that he "disliked politics" Joyce's distance form Irish politics would be short-lived (*LII* 362). Joyce would be writing to Mrs. Thomas Kettle and her family on 25 September lamenting Kettle's death in the Battle of Sommes, and the misfortunes of "these evil days," referring perhaps to yet another tragedy in her family: the killing of the pacifist-feminist Sheehy-Skeffington in April as well *(LI* 96).

Thus seen in their historical contexts, read together, these "notes" appear to present a coherent image, an almost systematic selection. The picture appears all the more coherent because the notes indubitably reflect a concern for sovereignty, neutrality and peace. But this image of consistency becomes unsustainable once the context of the *notebooks themselves* are taken into account. For, do these notes reflect Joyce's political belief in and around 1916? Or are they mere notes on Greek language and German translations which simply happened to be political in nature which Phocas could have provided him with? For it is undeniable that the notes appear within vocabulary, grammatical exercises. As Owen points out, Joyce used the vocabulary learnt in the report on "The Flags of the Warships" in VIII.A.1 specifically to enhance his Greek. Greek for words like "flag," "deny," "order," "mast," "yesterday" and "French" appear on the first page of the notebook, extracted from this newspaper report, without reference. This is why, even when Owen claims that the Greek sentences on VIII.A.1-7 (*JJA* 3.341-347) can "divulge entirely fresh biographical information" he is careful to note that the sentences seem as much drawn from Joyce's everyday life as from random grammatical exercises (165). So that even if sentences from VIII. A.1 (*JJA* 3.341) such as, "My father-in-law wrote to me yesterday" (line 21) or "While Achilles was the most fearless among the Greeks, Odysseus was a world-traveler" (line 15) appear to reflect Joyce's current concerns and interests, they are interspersed with sentences which have little or no bearing on his life. Consider for instance: "Watch out Miss, a cab is coming!" (line 1) or the reassuring "Don't bother, it was only a joke" (line 4) from the same page. Similarly, the very fact that Joyce chose VIII.A.3—— a notebook otherwise devoted to grammar and vocabulary to draft his translation of "Crisis of Pacifism" (the nineteen blank pages are preceded by notes on French vocabulary) reinforce the fact that even while it must have been breadwinning job for a political journal, it was also perhaps an exercise in translation.

Moreover, Joyce's larger project, that of composing *Ulysses* also appears from time to time. On VIII.A.4.20 (*JJA* 3.322), after jotting down a list of Greek words and their English counterparts, Joyce writes "I owe you £5.00, I.O.U." Ten pages later, on VIII.A. 4.30 (*JJA* 3.332) entries on

Greek for “house” and “house-rent” is followed by a column where Greek for “no” and “No one” are opposed to Zeus/Dios. Odysseus, interestingly, falls in the middle of the column, being at once Godlike and No One/Noman:



Here too, this important observation becomes indistinguishable from a declension exercise. The column on the right, after opposing “ζευς” (“Zeus”) to Οὖτις (“Noman”) breaks down into a declension table for the noun “Dios” (“Zeus”/ “God”) ending with the vocative case. Likewise, situated within a book of grammatical exercises, oddly enough, the political and the grammatical overlap. On the one hand, Joyce’s politics, his “neutrality” during the war, his ambivalence towards the British or Allied war efforts and his hatred for violence appear more and more prominent. At the same time, placed within these notes on vocabulary and grammatical exercises, the excerpts seem inextricable from elementary exercises on language and efforts to extract, learn and use them for one’s own immediate purpose. Thus when we see Mr. Dooley around the same time:

> […] as he contorts himself in mirth
>
> To read the blatant bulletins of the rulers of the earth […] (*CW* 246)

we realize that Joyce’s reading of political bulletins in 1916 were not without some contortions either.

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i Joyce seems to have been more interested in learning demotic Greek rather than classical Greek, because only VIII.A.2 (*JJA* 3.337) contains two famous, oft-quoted lines from Homer's *Odyssey* in Homeric Greek: "ουτις εμοί γ'όνομα" ("My name is nobody") and "επί οινοπα πόντον"/ ("Upon winedark sea"). They appear to have been copied from entries a few pages earlier on VIII.A.4. 29 (*JJA* 3.331) where the two lines are quoted in full from the *Odyssey*. As is well-known, the first acts as a veritable motif in *Ulysses* with Bloom functioning as both Everyman and Noman (*U* 17:2008) and the latter was quoted by Buck Mulligan and Stephen in *Ulysses* (*U* 1:78; 3:394; 15:4180).

ii Schork feels that the dictation technique used in the notebook is a variation on the Berlitz "aural-oral pattern practice" that Joyce, no doubt was familiar with (243).

iii Aravantinou's commentary, especially her transcriptions came under scrutiny on publication in 1977. M. Byron Raizis noted that that "Miss Aravantinou's page 129 is full of such gross misreadings or reconstructions which ingeniously turn Joyce's innocent parodies of classical Greek into disguised pornography in Modern Greek. To boot, several of the words mentioned on her page 129 are not found in the texts or any known lexicon or concordance […]" (523). Vouvoula Skoura's recent documentary *The Red Bank: James Joyce: His Greek Notebook* (2013) pays tribute to her work on the Greek notebooks.