

# *Notes on Mário de Andrade's Marginalia to Ulysses*

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**Abstract:** *These Notes have the aim to place Mário de Andrade's comments on Ulysses among the early criticism of Joyce's novel.*

Since 1922 James Joyce's *Ulysses* has been the source of innumerable critical attitudes in all languages; throughout the ninety years of its publication, an enormous number of reviews, articles and essays, introductions and books have tried to understand and explain it through different approaches. Among the early reactions in the nineteen-twenties, one can read impressions, perplexities and criticisms on that novel by such writers as Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, T.S. Eliot, W. Carlos Williams, Stephan Zweig, Arnold Bennett, Frank O'Connor, Sean O'Faolain, Austin Clarke, G.K. Chesterton and Ernst Curtius, just to mention a few; they have commented on the famous book in short pieces, generally, produced by a first encounter. These writers-critics, by reflecting upon their work or on others', raise questions which are significant for they are based on their experience and anxieties as creators. In relation to *Ulysses*, one topic calls our attention – the difficulty it offers the readers. Stephan Zweig, in an ironic tone, acknowledges the complexities of the text and gives us “directions for use”:

One should first seek a solid support so as not to have to hold the book in his hand forever; this volume is almost 1500 pages long and makes one weak in the knees . . . . Then sit yourself down in an armchair (because it will last a long time) and restrain all patience and judgment (because it will also make you angry) and begin (Deming 444).

In a more serious mood, Ernst Curtius acknowledges the difficulties of “the huge and monstrous work” (available to German readers in 1928), strives to understand its intricacies, and is aware that “time is not yet ripe for a final judgment; only after decades will we be able to measure what Joyce means for our era” (*op. cit.* 447).

Not quite happy after reading the novel, W. Carlos Williams comments briefly in a letter to Sylvia Beach in 1928: “I require a very explicit, limpid, flaringly truthful development of the meaning as contrasted with all more important words – from Joyce” (*op. cit.* 452).

Another point discussed frequently in the criticism of the twenties is the extent in which *Ulysses* would inspire or influence the new generation of writers. Austin Clarke, in 1930, referred to Joyce's "revolutionary art, an influence working, for good or bad, in the minds of younger writers" (*op. cit.* 527). Scott Fitzgerald also realized the impact of the novelties in *Ulysses* when he wrote: "The book makes me feel appallingly naked . . . must listen to conversation style à la Joyce" (*op. cit.* 420). However, in the "Paris Letter" to *The Dial* in 1922, Pound would make it clear that "*Ulysses* is, presumably, as unrepeatable as *Tristram Shandy*; I mean you cannot duplicate it; you can't take it as a 'model', as you could *Bovary*" (Pound 405). Like these, and many other writers-critics who examined *Ulysses* just after its publication, the Brazilian poet, novelist and leading literary critic Mário de Andrade, read it in the French translation of Auguste Morel and Stuart Gilbert, entirely revised by Valéry Larbaud and by Joyce himself. The existence of side-notes as marginalia to the novel was pointed out to me by Telê Ancona Lopez, from the Institute of Brazilian Studies (IEB) at the University of São Paulo while I was doing my research on the reception of James Joyce in Brazil in journals, literary reviews, translations and literary histories. The Institute of Brazilian Studies, now celebrating half a century of its existence, houses invaluable treasures such as the archives of Graciliano Ramos, Guimarães Rosa and Mário de Andrade, the latter one of the leading figures of the "Semana de Arte Moderna" whose objective was to start the modernist movement here in 1922.

In the "Marginália Vária: Acervo de Mário de Andrade", at IEB, six loose small sheets (p. 15-21) register his impressions of *Ulysses* in 1930. His main criticism of the book is based on the problem of realism and truth in art. One is surprised by his concerns with realism since his *Macunaíma* (1928) was criticized because instead of adopting the mimetic tradition, it embraces the mythical and the fantastic; however, let us verify what Mário wrote in the marginalia. The Brazilian critic begins by affirming that the problem of *Ulysses* is not properly the author's value, which is obvious, not even the value of the book. In an objective analysis which refrains from too much criticism or praise, he considers the first problem, whether the artist may say everything in his representation of life. By 1930 *Ulysses* had become notorious for its "indecenty." After exemplifying with excerpts from pages 75 and 76 in his French edition, Mário dismisses the charge of obscenity:

The first impression we have is that Joyce had no half-measures at all – what he had to say, he would say it . . . this impression comes from the belief that so far no one has had enough courage to say what Joyce said. However, the real truth, terrible as it may be, but deeply human, is that Joyce hasn't said everything . . . There, as in other excerpts, considered equally disgusting or immoral, his language reflects only half-truths, which, however affronting the language might be, this does not mean it isn't half-true [. . . ] the first problem casts us in the terrible ocean of good taste or bad taste, something that changes with time.

On the other hand, Mário de Andrade is more concerned with different aesthetic aspects in *Ulysses*, as for example, the realistic approach to art:

And if the problem of realism in art reaches a more violent intensity in *Ulysses*, this does not mean that Joyce has solved it. On the contrary, he has not moved one step further. Whoever analyses the pages in which he says things one does not say, will arrive to this conclusion – perhaps not very flattering to human beings, but indisputable: Joyce did settle for half measures . . . now, if art allows everything to be said, and still remains artistic, then we have to say everything. Joyce's truth will not go beyond Shakespeare's and Victor Hugo's audacity. Joyce has not solved the problem – he has used violence against it. So here we are.

As to character building, Mário's opinion is that the main method used by Joyce is “interior soliloquy” (his words) which leads to “acuity and detail never achieved before”. Have these characteristics helped Joyce find a solution to a new truth? – Mário answers:

From the artistic point of view I dare say he hasn't. He does not go any further than mme. de La Fayette. On the contrary, he fell behind her; because with him, and also with Proust – though to a lesser degree – characters are not distinguishable. They lose their most prominent traits – external traits, so to speak – which form the character of a psychological being; for such features, specially under Joyce's analysis, having no levels, are of the same importance and intensity as the other features – features that we share with everybody. Now, if heroes – from Shakespeare to Molière – lose their typical characteristics as human reality because of their towering figures, they are still profoundly human, gaining in human values what they lose in human realism.

After reflecting upon these issues, the Brazilian writer-critic goes back to the question of art and truth in character building by arguing that “art will never be aesthetically a realization of truth (for, then, it would be one with it). Would Hamlet be less human than Bloom because Shakespeare's method of characterization is different from Joyce's? Mário concludes: the characters “in mme de La Fayette, in Maupassant, and in Machado de Assis are more artistic and more profoundly human”. Why so?

More artistic because they are not scattered in a vague and fleeting reality. More profoundly human because of the use of levels which stress their essentially human characteristics. Life is not vital; vital is the destiny we arrive at. It is not the man–animal who is properly human but that part of us that makes us different from a horse, a butterfly and Well's most brilliant spider.

The last topic approached by Mário de Andrade refers to the extreme literariness of *Ulysses*:

There is no denying that the book is most interesting; however, it is also drenched in deep literariness. The first and most obvious reason is that as the movements of reaction, of association (in general), of physiological reflexes are inscrutable, and as we can only determine them within ourselves, not in other people, it follows that the book is about all this in Joyce, not about his characters:

According to Mário de Andrade, the exaggerated literariness of the book results in “the lack of profound life, heart-moving life, tedious life, Life.”

A great deal of what Mário de Andrade wrote in those four loose sheets has been here summarized; the quotations are long and numerous since one of the objectives of these notes is to make the critical views of one of Joyce’s contemporaries known and to add them among the early reactions to *Ulysses*. Mário de Andrade’s reflections raise questions which concern all literature written after 1922, not Joyce’s novel alone. As T.S. Eliot affirmed about *Ulysses* in 1923, “all that we can do this time . . . is to elucidate any aspect of the book – and the number of aspects is indefinite – which has not yet been fixed” (198). Eliot was, perhaps, the first author-critic to value the greatness of Joyce’s novel: “I hold this book to be the most important expression which the present age has found; it is a book which none can escape” (198). Eliot’s statement was so true that criticism from 1922 to the present day has not diminished; it has developed new ways to examine the “super-novel”, as Pound defined it (406).

Today it would, certainly, be irrelevant, for example, to discuss whether the book is obscene or immoral. In the twenties, however, this was the main target of its detractors; since then, many other unexplored points have called the attention of the critics to new ways of revealing the greatness and complexity of Joyce’s work. If, sometimes, the various approaches seem to be conflicting, they are also provoking and become the source of an intriguing dialogue which does not seem to end the discussions about *Ulysses*. In spite of the new tendencies, Mário de Andrade’s marginalia should have its place in the reception of Joyce’s contemporaries and – of the utmost importance – writers-critics who, as the Brazilian poet and novelist, voiced their impression on their first reading *Ulysses*, in letters, diaries, reviews, articles and marginalia written shortly after *Ulysses* was known to the public.

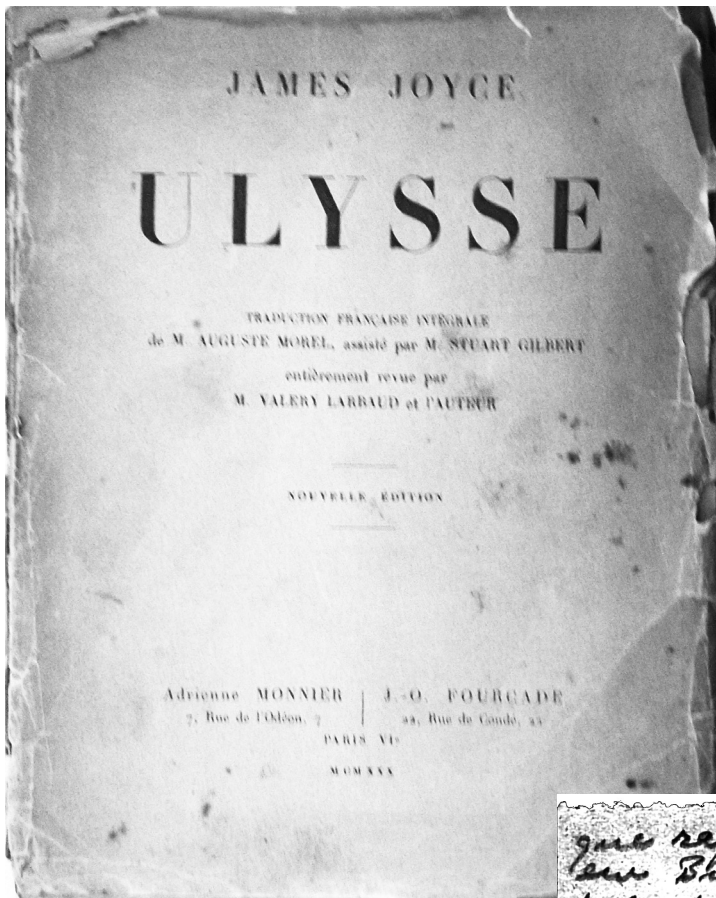
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Cover of James Joyce's *Ulisse* – French translation of Stuart Gilbert revised by Valéry Larbaud and Joyce. IEB Brazilian Studies.

que razão tem pro verso re-<sup>MA-MA</sup> <sup>158</sup> <sup>2</sup>  
levo Buck Mulligan, a não ser  
pela razão - Joyce? Aí a fal-  
sificação pluriária e in-  
tencional. O que justifica o  
livro não é mais a vida, <sup>3</sup>  
mas a literatura. De Joy-  
ce. Mas não fica nichado  
o defeito ou erro (vital) do  
livro. Tratando de seres  
literarizados, Joyce literari-  
zou a realidade bio-psíqui-  
ca deles. E aliás forceou a  
nota. Há citações, recortes re-  
cordados de leitura por de-  
mais. Na vida real, ban-  
cando diante dos outros a  
gente pode ser assim, na  
vida interior pra si mes-  
mo: não. Há um relento e-  
nagurado de literatice  
no livro e disso uma  
falta de vida profunda,  
de vida comvida, de vida <sup>45-TEB</sup>  
besta, de Vida - dessa parte  
de nós em que o literatizado  
se confunde com o marimbei-  
ro, o doutor, e o negro da África.

One page of Mário de Andrade's margubakua  
tto James Joyce's *Ulisse*. IBE.