

'Joyce, un pornographe': *Ulysses*, *Portrait* and the Sally Mara Novels of Raymond Queneau

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On 7 December 1921, at Adrienne Monnier's bookshop in Paris, Valery Larbaud delivered a lecture on James Joyce.¹ The talk focused particularly on *Ulysses*, with descriptions of Joyce's notebooks and working methods as well as summaries of the Calypso and Aeolus episodes, even though the novel's publication in English was still more than two months away. It began, however, with an account of the meteoric rise of Joyce's reputation in the Anglophone literary world, before adding this wry caveat:

on the other hand, if you go and ask a member of the (American) Society for the Suppression of Vice, "Who is James Joyce?" you will get the following reply: "He is an Irishman who has written a pornographic book called *Ulysses*."²

Larbaud's lecture provided, as Monnier puts it, "one of the memorable gatherings at our establishment",³ and went on to become a celebrated and well-known piece of criticism, expanded for the *Nouvelle revue française*, abridged (and translated) for *The Criterion*, and revised a few years later as the preface to the French translation of *Dubliners*.⁴ Looking back, in a talk of her own a decade later, Monnier declared Larbaud's lecture to be

something unique in the history of criticism. It is, I think, the first time that an English-language work had been studied in France, by a French writer, before it had been in England or America.⁵

Critically, when it came to Joyce, the French were proudly ahead of the game.⁶ So it is a curious thing to hear that French *literary* responses - that is, to the extent that Joyce was taken up as an influence by French writers - were, as Sam Slote

puts it, “minimal” in the first few decades after *Ulysses*.⁷ Here is René Albérès in his survey of the twentieth-century French novel:

Joyce does not seem to have had an immediate influence in France, where the aestheticism of people like Gide and Giraudoux dominates, where the metaphysical novel, the tragedy of the human condition, will be developed in writers like Mauriac, Barthes, Malraux and Julien Green.⁸

Albérès speaks of Joyce’s “slow influence”, arguing that it is so slow as to be not really felt until the age of the *nouveau roman* dawned in the early 1950s.⁹

As Slote notes, however, the exception - overlooked by Albérès - is Raymond Queneau.¹⁰ Best-known, at least in the Anglophone world, as co-founder of the Oulipo, the literary working group devoted to the investigation of writing with constraints (with Georges Perec's 1969 work *La Disparition*, a novel which avoids using the letter *e*, the group's most notorious output), Queneau's association with the avant-garde spanned half a century and took in several of its most important groupings. Born in 1903, he had been a member of the Surrealists in the 1920s before falling out with Breton in 1929; in 1937, along with Eugène Jolas, Henry Miller and others, he founded the literary journal *Volontés* which ran monthly until the outbreak of the war; and on 11 February 1950 he joined the Collège de 'Pataphysique, the absurdist, Jarry-inspired society that would spawn the Oulipo ten years later. By this time, Queneau had begun to have some publishing success of his own, both with his novels and, in 1947, with *Exercices de Style*, an enduringly witty book about the practice of writing, in which the same story is told in ninety-nine different versions, its words scrambled, translated into butchers' slang, rewritten as verse, and so on.¹¹ Meanwhile, alongside his avant-garde activities, Queneau also had one foot in the

literary mainstream, having joined the publishing house Gallimard in the 1930s where he would work as a senior editor for the rest of his life.

Queneau is explicit about Joyce's influence on his own writing. Four novels into his literary career, in a 1937 article for *Volontés* on novelistic technique, he writes,

I must first of all [...] acknowledge my debt to the English and American novelists who taught me that there is such a thing as a technique of the novel, and most particularly to Joyce.¹²

Elsewhere, in a piece written “pour bien comprendre” - “to really understand” - the linguistic method of *Finnegans Wake*, Queneau rewrites the opening paragraphs of his second novel, *Gueule de pierre* (1934) as a Wakean explosion of puns, mishearings and portmanteau terms.¹³

In this article, however, I wish to draw attention to two more novels from the period before the *nouveau roman*, this time from the late 1940s, both of which, in different ways, clearly reflect a Joycean influence. What is most striking about them is that they are aimed at a very different readership from the one who might buy a book by Raymond Queneau, or by James Joyce. Both are mass-circulation novels - pulp fiction - and both are explicitly pornographic.

In November 1947, Les Éditions du Scorpion, a relatively new publisher, brought out a novel entitled *On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes* (or *We Always Treat Women Too Well* in Barbara Wright's English translation).¹⁴ The cover, in Scorpion's black, white and red house style, informs us that author is Sally Mara, though it tells us too that the novel is a translation, translated from the Gaelic by a gentleman named Michel Presle.

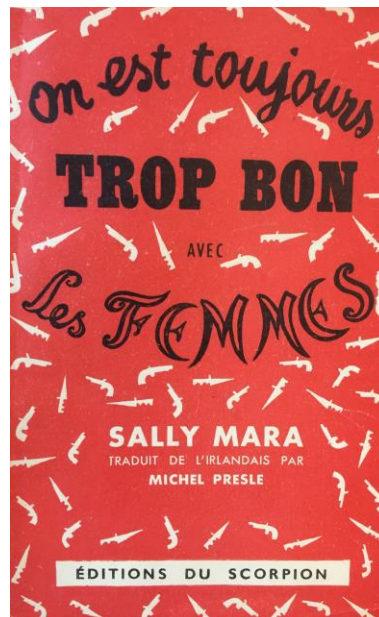


Figure 1: The cover of the original Scorpion edition of *OETTBALF* (1947).

The text includes a short introduction by Presle - really a Translator's Preface - with a few words about Sally Mara's life and how he came to translate her novel.¹⁵ Presle tells us that he first met Mara when he was in Ireland, though at the time he thought that she was "a young woman about whom there was nothing remarkable other than her date of birth: Easter Monday 1916".¹⁶ Presle visited Ireland a few times during the 1930s, but the war interrupted this. Returning in 1946 after a six-year absence, a friend, Padraic Baoghal, gave him a sealed package:

It was the novel now presented to the French public. Sally Mara died simply and obscurely of an illness in 1943. She entrusted to me the task of translating into French a manuscript that she knew to be unpublishable in its original language.¹⁷

There are a few important things to note here. Firstly, that Mara was born on the first day of the Easter Uprising. Secondly, that the text appears in French because it was unpublishable in *its* original language - not in *her*, i.e. Mara's, original language. Although she was a Dubliner, Mara's native language was English, not Gaelic. We will later learn that Mara studied Gaelic - a language that was

unfamiliar to her - specifically in order to write *OETTBALF*, even though she knew that her novel could not be published in her homeland. But in fact, this is all a total fiction. Sally Mara is a made up character - a pseudonym with a backstory - and so is Michel Presle. Both the novel's supposed author and its supposed translator are alter egos of Raymond Queneau.

In spite of his position at Gallimard and the relative success of *Exercices de style*, Queneau was perennially short of cash. A couple of diary entries illustrate the point:

ten days a month I have a hundred francs or less in my pocket.

My financial situation is detestable. Two days with 35 francs. Only one pair of shoes and they're split. Two hundred thousand francs of various debts, a million at Gallimard. And a tiredness, a weariness.¹⁸

In post-war Paris, experimental literature was not a lucrative pursuit. For some publishers, the solution to this problem was to maintain a list which combined the avant-garde with the pornographic. Maurice Girodias would reflect on the economic balance which had to be struck between erotica and experimental literature at his father's Obelisk Press: "the printer also had the right to veto any book that he would consider too literary to be easily saleable."¹⁹ Thus if the two genres might come together in the same work - as, for example, with Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* which Obelisk published in 1934 - then this was a consummation devoutly to be wished.

In 1946, the 23-year-old Jean d'Halluin had noted the French taste for US hardboiled fiction that had arrived with the American GIs during the Liberation. James Hadley Chase's violent, sexually explicit *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, published in French in the spring of 1946, had seen huge sales with Gallimard, and it was this success that inspired d'Halluin to establish Les Éditions du

Scorpion.²⁰ Knowing that the writer and jazz musician Boris Vian had some expertise in this type of material, d'Halluin approached him to suggest titles that his new press might translate. Vian did more than that. His response was "Je vais te le faire, moi, ton best-seller": "I'll write your best-seller myself."²¹ And thus, in just a fortnight, in August 1946, Vian came to write *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* [*I Shall Spit on your Graves*]. The novel was published in November that year, and the cover bore Vian's name, but as translator not as author: the book was credited to one Vernon Sullivan. Scorpion were going for authenticity - this was a novel set in the US, in the same lurid, shocking mode as Hadley Chase, and the use of pseudotranslation was a marketing trick, a way of implying to their readership that this was the real thing, a genuine American work. It sold in droves, the best-selling novel of 1947, quickly running to 120,000 copies.²² It was also, however, implicated in a copycat killing. In March 1947, a commercial traveller in Paris strangled his mistress in the manner of one of the book's killings, and the novel was found by the bedside at the crime scene. Faced with a court action over the book, Vian hastily produced an English translation, which d'Halluin equally hastily printed under the imprint of the Vendôme Press, an attempt to deflect blame from themselves by fleshing out the pretence that *J'irai cracher* really was a translation and not their own invention.²³ It didn't work. Both Vian and d'Halluin were hit with hefty fines, and unsold copies of the novel destroyed.

Scorpion also instituted the Tabou literary prize, named for the bar in Paris where it was awarded. Launched in February 1948 and running up until Scorpion's demise in 1964, the Prix du Tabou was a fix: the winner would always

be one of Scorpion's own authors.



Figure 2: The votes are cast for the Prix de Tabou, 1948. At the back of the group, facing the camera, is Raymond Queneau. Vian is beside him to the right. In the background, to the left, is Simone de Beauvoir. ©Bridgeman/Rue des Archives

In his *Manuel de Saint-Germain-des-Prés*, Vian wrote that, being fixed in advance, the Prix du Tabou was “just like all the other [literary prizes] except for the distinction of being the only one to acknowledge this without the least embarrassment,” and thus “the only honest prize in the calendar”.²⁴ The prize’s first winner was Sally Mara. Not everyone was in on the joke when Raymond Queneau collected it in her absence.

What should be apparent from this is that Scorpion were quite a different operation to Queneau’s employer and usual publisher, the venerable Gallimard. (Indeed, Anne Isabelle Queneau recalls her father’s glee when Gaston Gallimard buttonholed him to enthuse about “la mystérieuse romancière irlandaise, Sally Mara”).²⁵ Playful, certainly, but also not entirely reputable - *chancers*, one might say - and with a clear literary taste for sex and violence, Les Éditions du Scorpion were pitched at a different market, a different readership, to the *Nouvelle revue française*. It is especially interesting then that Queneau’s stated admiration for

Joyce should have freer rein in these works than anywhere else in his considerable novelistic oeuvre.

Thinking about Joyce's influence on Queneau, Jean-Michel Luccioni has written:

For Queneau in particular, [Joyce's] playful and parodic side would have appealed, and, when it came to sex, not simply the fact that it was mentioned, often, but that it was even joked about.²⁶

OETTBALF exhibits these characteristics - playfulness, parody and comical obscenity - in abundance. The novel takes the form of a romp set during the Easter Uprising in 1916. (This is the reason for the revelation in the Preface that the novel's supposed author was born in Easter 1916. The implication is not that Sally was born under a revolutionary sign, but that she came into being at the same moment as her work.) The protagonists are a band of rebels who occupy a post office in Dublin – not the GPO, but another one around the corner on Eden Street. In taking over the building, the rebels either expel or kill all of the post office staff working there – the clerks, tellers, managers and guards – with the exception of one woman, Gertrude Girdle, otherwise known as Gertie, who was in the toilet when the occupation began. The rebels discover Gertie, and during the course of a somewhat existential interrogation, she finds her faith in the infallibility of George V irremediably shaken. Here is the scene:

“But we keep telling you that your King is a stupid cunt! As witness the fact that he can't beat the Germans, that the Zeppelins are bombarding London, that millions of English soldiers are getting themselves killed in the Artois just to let the French establish their dominion in Europe. Which isn't very clever!”

“That's true,” Gertie conceded.

“You see! And all Ireland knows that he indulges in the solitary vice, and that it makes him so moronic that he's incapable of understanding the slightest connection. Absolutely.” [...]

“But,” cried Gertie, “if the King of England is a stupid cunt, then we can do whatever we like!” (WATWTW 74)

Having reached this mock-Nietzschean conclusion, Gertie sets about undermining the rebels, sowing confusion and dissent by systematically seducing them. The remainder of the novel is largely a series of sex scenes and death scenes. It closes as the last two remaining rebels have just taken it in turns to have anal sex with Gertie who, for complicated reasons, is wearing a wedding dress for this particular episode. Just as they are finished, they are apprehended by the British, led by Gertie's fiancé, Commodore Cartwright. The following exchange ensues between Cartwright and Gertie:

“My dearest, forgive me asking you such a question, but these rebels, did they...how shall I put it...did they behave correctly towards you?” [...]
 “No,” said Gertie. “They tried to lift up my beautiful white dress to look at my ankles.” (WATWTW 173)

As the appalled Englishman leads the rebels away to be shot, Gertie sticks her tongue out at them, and one of them mutters the novel's title – “We always treat women too well” – as a rueful reflection, meaning perhaps that it would have been better if the rebels, like the British, had executed their captives.

The seductress, then, is named Gertie, and if we were wondering if this is a reference to Gerty McDowell from the Nausicaa section of *Ulysses*, the answer is a most emphatic Yes. The rebels, meanwhile, are named Corny Kelleher, Mat Dillon, Cissy Caffrey, and Larry O'Rourke – all minor characters from *Ulysses* (notwithstanding Cissy's gender reassignment) - while Joyce's friend, the Irish tenor John MacCormack, becomes the leader of the gang. The rebels' battlecry is “Finnegans Wake!” and they yell this at each other continually throughout the novel, as in this scene when some other rebels arrive at the post office:

His discourse was interrupted by the sudden arrival of an open car, sporting the Orange, Green and White flag, which ground to a halt in front of them. A chap jumped out of the car and ran over to them.

"Finnegans wake!" he shouted.

"Finnegans wake!" the three men shouted back. (WATWTW 26)

"Finnegans wake!" is also the password when the rebels telephone for instructions from the leaders of the Uprising based at the GPO (WATWTW 15), and it is what Kelleher and Dillon both cry out when they're having sex with Gertie near the novel's end (WATWTW 171). Meanwhile, during Gertie's interrogation, we see this exchange:

"She certainly is a protestant," said Caffrey, with indifference.

"No," said Gertie, "I'm an agnostic."

"A what? A what?"

Caffrey had begun to panic.

"An agnostic," O'Rourke repeated.

"Well well," said Caffrey, "we're certainly learning some new words today. Anyone can see we're in the land of James Joyce." (WATWTW 65-66)

There is a triple play here. For Caffrey, the land of James Joyce means being in a situation where unfamiliar words are being bandied about (although of course the joke is at Caffrey's expense since *agnostic* is no Wakean portmanteau). Then of course, the novel is set in Ireland – literally, the land of James Joyce. But the final level of meaning, for the more cultured reader who just might be thumbing through a dirty book from Éditions du Scorpion - for Jacques Lacan, perhaps - is that we are in the *fictional* land of James Joyce, the land of *Ulysses*: these are his characters, twelve years on, mixed up in the politics of the time.²⁷ To finish the joke off, there is a footnote initialled by Sally Mara here admitting, "There is a slight anachronism here, but Caffrey, being illiterate, could not have known in 1916 that *Ulysses* had not yet appeared" (WATWTW 66).

These are just a few of the more explicit references to *Ulysses* in Queneau's novel. Others exist, but it is difficult to know how much else of the novel's play is consciously Joycean, given that Queneau is the first to admit the

debt his own style owes to Joyce. Here is another example, where once again the footnotes (this time initialled by Michel Presle) play off the main text:

The Irish mind, as we know, doesn't obey the rules of Cartesian rationalism, any more than it obeys those of experimental method. Neither French nor English, but fairly close to Breton, it proceeds by "intuition."

As Caffrey couldn't open the door, he therefore had the *ankou* (1) that someone was locked behind it This *anschauung* (2) immediately tied his guts up in a knot. Wiping away the sweat that was trickling down his puss, he forgot his egocentric troubles and, discovering his duty *d'un seul coup d'un seul* (3), he decided to inform MacCormack of the discovery he had just made.

(1) Celticism for "intuition" (M.P.)

(2) Germanism for *ankou* (M.P.)

(3) Gallicism for *anschauung* (M.P.) (WATWTW 45)

It's a kind of language soup, a joke about the needless insertion of foreign terms - a circular reference which takes us through Gaelic, German and back to French again. It certainly might be deliberately Joycean in its linguistic cosmopolitanism, but it is also vintage Queneau.

In 1962, in a dossier of the Collège de 'Pataphysique dedicated to Queneau, Pierre-François David assembled a seven page table of all the parallels between *OETTBALF* and *Ulysses* in adjacent columns.²⁸ The list begins with the characters' names, followed by named locations in Dublin and the fact that both novels are set on a single day, before moving on to more esoteric - and debatable - comparisons, themes such as "Respect for a head of state" (*OETTBALF* 9 [WATWTW 11]; *U* 15.4519-20) or "the hygiene of the British" (*OETTBALF* 37 [WATWTW 37]; *U* 7.491-5). As is customary with 'pataphysical research, David's article finds its natural space on the border between seriousness and parody, pushing its comparisons further than they can reasonably be taken. Nevertheless, since Queneau's work exhibits a similar relationship towards Joyce - at once both learned and serio-comic; respectful and playful - there is always a

chance that David's exhaustiveness will throw up a moment of conscious Joycean tribute which we might otherwise not have noticed - a lyrical reference to the Gulf Stream, for example (*OETTBALF* 64 [*WATWTW* 59]; *U* 1.476), or Gertie and Molly's twin musings on "mammary aesthetics" (*OETTBALF* 156 [*WATWTW* 144]; *U* 18.535).

Yet, for all that *OETTBALF* owes to Joyce, it would be wrong to suggest that *Ulysses* provides the structure for Queneau's novel, in the way that Homer provides the structure for *Ulysses*. The parallels, instead, are added over the top. It would be nice to think of Queneau operating according to an agenda, liberating Joyce's Gertie by transforming her from object to subject, from the focus of Bloom's voyeurism to all-conquering agent, the novel's prime sexual mover. This, however, would be a stretch too far. As with the Kelleher, Dillon, O'Rourke et al., the naming is merely a tribute, and it is the title alone - not the character - that has been carried over from *Ulysses*. This is not just hardboiled Joyce, it is spray-on Joyce too. In Sally Mara's next work, however, the Joycean influence goes rather deeper.

From the time of *OETTBALF*'s release, the intention was always that there would be a follow up, and that instead of being another novel it would be Sally's intimate journal, her diary. The first edition of *OETTBALF* carries an advertisement for its sequel on the flyleaf facing the title page:

A PARAITRE

Journal intime de Sally Mara, traduit par MICHEL PRESLE.

In fact, when the *Journal intime* eventually appeared, it did not claim to have been translated by Presle. The *Journal intime* is pseudonymous, but it is not a

pseudotranslation: Sally's diary makes a point of being written in French. Rather than being translated by Presle, instead it is dedicated to him. Presle, we learn, was Sally's French teacher, and she was in love with him. The book begins with an entry for 13 January 1934, when Sally is seventeen. It is the day that Presle leaves Dublin to return to France:

In his honour, in memory of his leaving, I mean, from today, now, I shall write my diary in his mother tongue. It will be my French writings. As for the others, my English, I'll chuck them in the fire [je vais les foutre au feu].²⁹

That phrase *foutre au feu* is innocent enough, but when Sally starts to consider the word *foutre* in isolation - where it means *fuck* - we realise that Presle hasn't been entirely honest with her as a French teacher:

“*Foutre*,” he used to tell me, “is one of the most beautiful words in French.” It means *to throw*, but more vigorously.³⁰

From the opening page, then, the novel displays the type of cross-language play which is Queneauian-via-Joyce. Queneau's notebooks indicate that the joke here is a late addition in the writing process. In an earlier draft, there is no mention of Presle misleading her - here she *knows* that *foutre* can be a swear word, musing,

I imagine many years from now when my husband or my son or my daughter reads this bugging intimate diary, they'll be extremely surprised to find this type of word in my hand. I mean cunt, fuck and bugger.³¹

The notebooks and drafts for the novel indicate a text that was still quite fluid until the last minute, where the plot was being considered and changed, and details - Sally reading *Ulysses*, Sally reading Freud - were suggested, sometimes even drafted, but not included in the final text.

Sally in fact makes two resolutions in her first diary entry. Firstly to write her diary in French, and secondly to write a novel:

Thus I am doubly resolved, on two points, first, *primo*, to write my diary, no longer in English [...] but in French, [...]; next, *secundo*, to write a novel. But a novel that's cultured; one which doesn't have the air of having been written by an unsullied young woman; and on top of all that, in Irish, a language I don't know.³²

She is turning her back on English, both in her diary and in her future novel. The novel must be in a new language for her, Gaelic, and much of the subsequent diary is taken up with her encounters with her Gaelic teacher, the lecherous poet Padraic Baoghal, of whom we first heard of in the spoof Translator's Preface to *OETTBALF*.

Thus, while there can be no doubt that the *Journal intime* certainly is an erotic novel - it has its porno set pieces, to be sure - it is also a coming-of-age story about a young student in Dublin, their first experiences of sex, their resolution to become a writer, and their struggle to find the language in which they will achieve that. We should be aware too that Sally's decision to learn Gaelic has nothing to do with the regressive linguistic nationalism she observes in those around her:

Today I took the tram to Dunleary - that is, Kingstown, the port of Dublin. I say Dunleary in imitation of my teacher Padraic Baoghal. Actually, I find this linguistic patriotism a bit nuts, but then again I can allow myself that in my journalintimacy [journalintimité].³³

(Note, incidentally, the Joycean compound - *journalintimité* - slipping into Sally's diction here.) The novel ends with Sally leaving Dublin, catching the boat for France to live in Paris, her great Irish novel still ahead of her. One can only hope that *OETTBALF*, in all its polymorphous perversity, is not the uncreated conscience of *anybody's* race. Nevertheless, what the plot of the *Journal intime* does is to set up a version of *Portrait of the Artist* retro-fitted onto *OETTBALF's* bizarre take on *Ulysses*.

Throughout his life, Queneau kept a list of the vast quantity of books he read. We know, therefore, that *Portrait of the Artist* was his first encounter with Joyce, in January 1922, and parts of that novel's structure - besides those corresponding to Sally's writerly development - seem to have been appropriated for the *Journal intime*.³⁴ For example, in an excursion halfway through the novel, Sally, like Stephen, leaves Dublin for a few days to visit Cork. Similarly, in the *Journal intime*, the pandybat scene, where the young Stephen is beaten by his teacher, is replayed for titillation and humour:

—I usually punish all absentmindedness with the most extreme severity, he continued. [...]

He backed into his chair and ordered me to come closer. [...]

—What for, sir?

—So I can punish your inattentiveness.

—And how are you going to punish me? I asked with a sweet air but a mocking voice.

—You'll see. Come.

But he started to get embarrassed and even slightly worried.

—Are you going to lift up my skirt, I continued, take my panties down and redden my arse?

—Oh, horrible word! Sally, aren't you ashamed? You will be doubly punished for that.

He wriggled in his chair, all red, but not really knowing any more what to do.

—That's it, isn't it? You're going to spank me?

—Yes, that's it, he murmured timidly.³⁵

Unlike *Portrait*, here the teacher comes off worst. He starts to beg, then chases Sally around the room before tripping, banging his head on the wall and knocking himself out. At this point, as a final insult, the teacher's maid Mève enters the room, swiftly seduces Sally, and the two make love energetically on the sofa next to the unconscious Baoghal.

In Queneau's notebook where he planned out the novel, we find this line: "apparition de Joyce": "appearance of Joyce".³⁶ It is difficult to know what Queneau had in mind at this stage. As noted before, much of what is plotted in

this early sections of the notebook doesn't make it into the final novel, not least Sally's visit to Paris and her encounter there with a man named Queneau. But Joyce does in fact make an appearance in the final novel, or at least an appearance by allusion. In the penultimate scene, when Michel Presle is visiting Sally again, we hear this:

Then he told me about a guy from Dublin called Joyce, a pornographer who had to have his books printed in Paris.³⁷

If this is the "apparition de Joyce" Queneau had planned, then it is barely even a cameo - just a brief mention, reduced to "a guy from Dublin." And yet it is rather brilliant. How fitting for a Scorpion Edition that tribute should be paid in these terms - not to Joyce the great writer, but to Joyce the pornographer - and in a phrase which also recalls the estimation of the vice official in Larbaud's essay: "He is an Irishman who has written a pornographic book." The mention may be brief, but it is also pivotal for Sally, who doesn't fail to take the hint. The next page - the last page - finds her following Joyce's example, boarding the ship that will take her to Paris, where she too will become *une pornographe*.

Among Queneau scholars in France, the Sally Mara novels have been largely overlooked. As Evert van der Starre, their principal champion puts it:

Nearly all of the novels of Raymond Queneau have been abundantly scoured, deciphered or glossed. Among the few exceptions, however, the most curious case is perhaps that of the *Oeuvres complètes de Sally Mara*. This novel has been passed over in silence; it has been either received with circumspection or rushed over in a few pages, rapid summary naturally being a convenient means to speak of a novel without responding to the questions it raises.³⁸

Meanwhile, the editor of Queneau's *Oeuvres complètes* suggests why this might be when he writes that the two Sally Mara novels

were written with the intention of earning money (as we might say "to write a bestseller") and without concern (at least apparently) for

producing a literary work in the noble sense of the term. Thus from the start there is a difference in their aesthetic project: marginal to the novels and poems which conform to a concerted poetics, which pursue “elevated” objectives, we have in these minor, less known texts, occasional writings, which are thus supposedly of an inferior quality.³⁹

It is an assessment which, although widespread, is not entirely fair. Again, looking at Queneau’s notebook for the *Journal intime* we see, early on, this note-to-self: “où sont mes ambitions littéraires?”: “where are my literary ambitions?”⁴⁰ One way to answer this question would be by reference to the way that the Sally Mara novels bring Joyce - Joycean characters, Joycean wordplay - to a new audience, **an argument which is as true for *OETTBALF* as it is for the *Journal intime*.** When the latter novel appeared in February 1950, it was trailed with a double-page advertisement in the trade journal *Bibliographie de la France* trumpeting that sales of *OETTBALF* had reached 50,000 copies.⁴¹ Compared to Queneau’s other novels, this is an extraordinary figure. Going by the handwritten record he kept of annual sales for each of his Gallimard books, the only other work to have sold even 10,000 copies by this stage was the 1942 novel *Pierrot mon ami*.⁴² Fifty thousand may, indeed, be an inflated number, another ruse by a publishing house not overly concerned with scrupling honesty. Nevertheless, Paul Fournel’s research on Queneau’s sales suggests that the figure might well be accurate. For comparison, sales of the German translation of the Sally Mara novels published as a single edition (albeit decades later, when Queneau’s reputation was considerably greater) were in the region of 60,000, the highest of any of his works.⁴³ The *Bibliographie de la France* advert certainly offers the tantalising possibility that, in 1950, a book about what the *Ulysses* characters did next might genuinely have reached a mass readership.

But even if we refuse to trust Scorpion's advertising, if we convince ourselves that *OETTBALF*'s Joycean proselytising was more limited than this figure implies, the publication of the *Journal intime* turns Queneau's Sally Mara venture into something rather dazzling. In working retrospectively to draw *OETTBALF* into its own fiction, the *Journal intime* also deepens exponentially the relationship between Sally Mara and Joyce: it mimics the relationship between *Ulysses* and *Portrait of the Artist* - the latter's autobiographical aspect, its role as a fictionalised prehistory to the creation of the former. Taken together, the Sally Mara novels offer up a vertiginous view of authorship and fictionality, one that is founded on and intertwined with not only Joyce's work but also his career.

It is a postmodern performance that would become even more convoluted in 1962 when the novels were reissued - by Gallimard, and in Queneau's own name - in a single volume. *Les Oeuvres complètes de Sally Mara* sanctifies the novels by finally admitting them into the canon of Queneau's work, while laundering their contents by presenting them between Gallimard's famously austere cream and red covers. Republished in this format, the novels' salaciousness is tacitly downgraded in favour of what we might think of as characteristically Queneaunian about them: their literary experimentation. Appropriately then, Queneau would mark the occasion by ramping up their convoluted authorship with a new Preface, this time supposedly by Mara, in which she rages at the novels' "so-called real author", denies that Michel Presle ever existed, attacks her editor at Gallimard ("un certain Queneau"), and inadvertently disproves her own existence.⁴⁴ The Preface is a *tour de force* of Queneaunian proto-postmodernism, but in truth it only builds slightly on what had been there all along on the cheap paper of the original Scorpion editions,

albeit dispersed across two works and obscured by those novels' vaunted emphasis on sex and violence. With their character borrowings from *Ulysses*, their twinning of Sally and *Portrait's* Stephen, and their Künstlerroman/masterpiece relationship to each other and to Joyce's work, *OETTBALF* and *Journal intime* play, from their first appearance, at an exhausting intertextuality, a disassembly of authorship which is at once zany and sophisticated, bookish yet often boorish, and in every way a product of the Bar du Tabou.

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¹ The date is notable. As Larbaud would later recall, “quelques heures avant ma conférence, les journaux annonçait la signature de l’armistice entre l’Irlande et le gouvernement britannique; et la conférence se fit dans l’atmosphère créée par cette nouvelle, présente à tous les esprits” [“a few hours before my lecture, the papers announced the signing of the armistice between Ireland and the British government; and the lecture took place in the atmosphere created by this news, which was present in everyone’s mind”]. Valery Larbaud, “À propos de James Joyce et de Ulysses,” *Nouvelle revue française*, no. 136 (January 1925): 9n1.

² Valery Larbaud, “James Joyce,” *Nouvelle revue française*, no. 103 (April 1922): 385–86. [“si, d’autre part, vous allez demander à un Membre de la “Société (américaine) pour la Suppression du Vice”: Qui est James Joyce? vous recevrez la réponse suivant: C’est un Irlandais qui a écrit un ouvrage pornographique intitulé *Ulysse*.”]

³ Adrienne Monnier, “L’*Ulysse* de Joyce et le public français,” in *Les Gazettes d’Adrienne Monnier, 1925-1945* (Paris: René Julliard, 1953), 211. [“un des séances mémorables de notre maison”]

⁴ Larbaud, “James Joyce”; Valery Larbaud, “The ‘Ulysses’ of James Joyce,” *The Criterion* 1, no. 1 (October 1922): 94–103; Valery Larbaud, “L’Oeuvre de James Joyce,” in *Gens de Dublin*, by Joyce, James, trans. Eva Fernandez, Hélène du Pasquier, and Jacques-Paul Reynaud (Paris: Plon, 1926), i–xxxvi.

⁵ Monnier, p. 212. The piece was originally delivered at Monnier’s shop in 1931. [“un fait unique dans l’histoire de la critique. C’est bien la première fois, croyons-nous, qu’un ouvrage de langue anglaise ait été étudié en France, par un écrivain français, avant de l’être en Angleterre ou un Amérique.”]

⁶ The *Criterion* version of Larbaud's essay notes that it is "still the best introduction that has been offered to Mr. Joyce's book" [Larbaud, "The 'Ulysses' of James Joyce," 95n1]. Nevertheless, three years later, in an article defending the original piece from the criticism of Ernest Boyd, Larbaud complains that "certains critiques de langue anglaise ont une fâcheuse tendance à considérer les lettrés continentaux qui s'occupent des littératures de langue anglaise comme des provinciaux mal renseignés" ["certain English-speaking critics have an annoying tendency to view continental scholars who concern themselves with English literature as ill-informed provincials"]. Larbaud, "À propos de James Joyce": 8.

⁷ Sam Slote, "Après mot, le déluge" 2: Literary and Theoretical Responses to Joyce in France," in *The Reception of James Joyce in Europe*, ed. Geert Lernout and Wim Van Mierlo, vol. 2 (London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004), 382.

⁸ R.-M. Albérès, *Métamorphoses du roman* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1966), 186. ["Joyce ne semble pas avoir eu une influence immédiate en France, où dominant des esthétismes comme ceux de Cocteau et de Giraudoux, où va se développer avec Mauriac, Barnanos, Malraux, Julien Green, le roman métaphysique et tragique de la condition humaine."]

⁹ Ibid., 187, 190.

¹⁰ Slote, "Après mot, le déluge," 382.

¹¹ Queneau, Raymond, *Exercices de style* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947); Queneau, Raymond, *Exercises in Style*, trans. Barbara Wright (London: Gaberbocchus, 1958).

¹² Raymond Queneau, "Technique du roman," in *Bâtons, chiffres et lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), 28. ["il me faut d'abord [...] reconnaître ma dette envers les romanciers anglais et américains qui m'ont appris qu'il existait une technique du roman, et tout spécialement envers Joyce."]

¹³ Raymond Queneau, "Une traduction en joycien," in *Bâtons, chiffres et lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), 171–73. A facsimile of Queneau's working notes for this exercise, the accreted work of a number of years, appears as "Une traduction en joycien," *Temps Mêlés: Documents Queneau 150+1* (1978): 9–17.

¹⁴ Queneau, Raymond, *On est toujours trop bon avec les femmes* (Paris: Scorpion, 1947); Raymond Queneau, *We Always Treat Women Too Well*, trans. Barbara Wright (London: John Calder, 1981). Hereafter *OETTBALF* and *WATWTW* respectively. References to these editions will be given inline.

¹⁵ The English edition does not include Presle's introduction, hence quotations from this section are given in French followed by my own translation.

¹⁶ "une fillette qui n'avait de remarquable que sa date de naissance: le lundi de Pâques 1916" (*OETTBALF* 8).

¹⁷ "C'était le roman que nous présentons aujourd'hui au public français. Sally Mara était morte très simplement et très obscurément d'une maladie quelconque en 1943. Elle me confiait le soin de traduire en français un manuscrit qu'elle savait impubliable dans sa langue originale" (*OETTBALF* 8).

¹⁸ Entries for 2 January 1951 and 20 June 1951 respectively. Raymond Queneau, *Journaux 1914-1965*, ed. by Anne Isabelle Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 746, 763. ["dix jours par mois je n'ai que cent francs ou moins en poche"; "Ma situation financière est toujours détéstable. Deux jours avec 35 frs. Une seule

paire de souliers, et fendus. Deux cent mille francs de dettes diverses, un million chez Gallimard. Et une fatigue, une lassitude.”]

¹⁹ Maurice Girodias, *The Frog Prince* (New York: Crown, 1980), p. 88.

²⁰ James Hadley Chase, *Pas d'orchidées pour Miss Blandish*, trans. Marcel Duhamel (Paris: Gallimard, 1946).

²¹ Guy Durliat, ‘Jean d’Halluin, apprenti scorpion’, *Capharnaüm*, 4 (2013), 12.

²² Durliat, p. 13.

²³ A Preface in this edition - in English and ascribed to Vian - claims that, before meeting d’Halluin and showing him the manuscript, Sullivan had tried unsuccessfully to get his novel published in America but had become convinced of “the inutility of any attempt to publication in his country” (3). This motif - the manuscript unpublishable in its native context - echoes the framing narrative which *OETTBALF* employed a few months previously. Vernon Sullivan, *I Shall Spit on Your Graves* (Paris: Vendôme, 1948), 3. Vendôme Press, meanwhile, had been the name of the right-bank printworks run by Herbert Clarke which had undertaken the printing of *Pomes Penyeach* for Sylvia Beach and which became Obelisk Press under Jack Kahane after Clarke’s death.

²⁴ Boris Vian, *Manuel de Saint-Germain-des-Prés* (Paris: Pauvert, 1997), p. 192 (Original edition, Paris: Scorpion, 1951). [“comme les autres mais qui présente cette particularité d’être le seul à l’avouer sans la moindre gêne”; “le seul prix honnête de l’année”]

²⁵ Anne Isabelle Queneau, *Album Queneau* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 135.

Gallimard would eventually publish the two Sally Mara novels in 1962, under Queneau’s own name, as *Les Oeuvres complètes de Sally Mara*.

²⁶ Jean-Michel Luccioni, “Joyce chez Sally,” in *Etudes sur les Oeuvres complètes de Sally Mara*, by Evert van der Starre (Groningen: Institut de langues romanes, 1984), 22. [“À Queneau spécialement pouvaient plaire le côté ludique et parodique, et, en ce qui concerne la sexualité, non point seulement le fait d’en parler, souvent, mais même celui d’en plaisanter.”]

²⁷ Lacan, a longstanding friend of Queneau, would reveal *OETTBALF*’s true authorship in his 1954-55 seminar: “There is a small pornographic work, written by someone with an eminent literary name, currently a member of the Académie Goncourt, Raymond Queneau. In this book, one of the most delightful one could hope to read, a young typist, [...] gets caught up in the Irish revolution and some very scabrous misadventures. [...] The title of the book has to be – *One is always too good to women*.” Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1988), 127–28.

²⁸ Pierre-François David, “Consubstantialité et quintessence d’une fiction dérivée,” *Dossiers asénonètes du Collège de Pataphysique* 20 (July 1962): 14–20.

²⁹ Raymond Queneau, *Journal intime* (Paris: Scorpion, 1950), 10, hereafter *Jl*. [“En son honneur, en souvenir de son départ, je veux dire, je vais à partir d’aujourd’hui, maintenant, écrire mon journal dans sa langue maternelle. Ce seront mes écrits français. Et les autres, mes anglais, je vais les foutre au feu.”]

³⁰ [“Foutre, me disait-il, est un des plus beaux mots de la langue française. Il signifie: jeter, mais avec plus de vigourosité.”] (*Jl* 10)

³¹ Raymond Queneau, "Typescript of *Journal intime*," 1, Raymond Queneau Collection, Box 5.8. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin. ["Je suppose que dans quelques années lorsque mon mari ou mon fils ou ma fille lirant ce journal bougrement intime, ils seront extrêmement surpris de trouver des mots semblables sous ma plume, j'entends con, foutre et bougre."]

³² ["Je pris donc la double résolution, deux points, d'abord, primo, de rédiger mon journal, non plus in anglais [...] mais bien en français [...]; ensuite, secundo, d'écrire un roman. Mais un roman quelque chose de pommé, un qui n'ait pas l'air d'être rédigé par une jeune fille pas exploitée; en irlandais par-dessus le marché, langue que j'ignore."] (JI 11)

³³ ["J'ai pris aujourd'hui le tram pour Dunleary - c'est-à-dire Kingstown, le port de Dublin. Je dis Dunleary, à l'imitation de mon maître Padraic Baoghal. Je trouve d'ailleurs un peu noix ce patriotisme linguistique, mais enfin je peux me permettre ça dans ma journalintimité."] (JI 24)

³⁴ Florence Géhéniau, *Queneau analphabète : répertoire alphabétique de ses lectures de 1917 à 1976* (Brussels, 1992), 519-20.

³⁵ [—J'ai l'habitude de punir toute distraction avec la plus extrême sévérité, continuait-il. [...]

Il recula sa chaise et m'ordonna de venir près de lui. [...]

—Et pour quoi faire, monsieur?

—Pour vous punir de votre inattention.

—Et comment allez-vous me punir? lui demandai-je d'un air innocent mais d'une voix narquoise.

—Vous allez voir. Venez.

Mais il commençait à être embarrassé et même légèrement inquiet.

—Vous voulez, continuai-je, relever ma jupe, baisser mon slip et faire rougir mon cul?

—Oh! l'horrible mot! Sally, vous n'avez pas honte? Vous serez doublement punie. Il se trémoussait tout rouge sur sa chaise mais ne sachant absolue plus quoi faire.

—C'est ça, n'est-ce pas? Vous voulez me fesser?

—Oui, c'est ça, murmura-t-il timidement.] (JI 156-57)

³⁶ Raymond Queneau, "Notes for *Journal intime*," 23, Raymond Queneau Collection, Box 5.8, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

³⁷ ["Ensuite il m'a parlé d'un gars de Dublin, un nommé Joyce, un pornographe obligé de faire imprimer ses bouquins à Paris."] (JI 253)

³⁸ Evert van der Starre, 'Sally Mara romancière? Exercices de style?', in *Au ras du texte: Douze études sur la littérature française de l'après-guerre* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 9. ["Presque tous les romans de Raymond Queneau ont été abondamment glosés, déchiffrés ou épluchés. Parmi les quelques exceptions, le cas le plus curieux est peut-être celui des *Oeuvres complètes de Sally Mara*. Ce roman a été passé sous silence, reçu avec circonspection ou expédié en quelques pages, le rapide résumé étant bien entendu un moyen commode de parler d'une oeuvre sans répondre aux questions qu'elle soulève."]

³⁹ Jean-Yves Pouilloux, "Notice sur *Les Oeuvres complètes de Sally Mara*," in Raymond Queneau, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 3:1719. ["ont été composés dans l'intention de gagner de l'argent (comme on dirait "faire un best-seller") et sans le souci (du moins apparent) de faire oeuvre littéraire au sens noble du terme. Il y aurait ainsi dès départ une différence dans le projet

esthétique: en marge des romans et poèmes conformes à une poétique concertée, et poursuivant des objectifs "élevés," on aurait ces textes mineurs, non reconnus, écrits de circonstance donc supposés de qualité inférieure."]

⁴⁰ Raymond Queneau, "Notes for *Journal intime*," 9, Raymond Queneau Collection, Box 5.8. Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁴¹ *Bibliographie de la France* 139, no. 5 (3 February 1950): 324-25.

⁴² Reproduced in Paul Fournel, "Queneau in quelques chiffres," in *Queneau aujourd'hui* (Paris: Clancier-Guénaud, 1985), 231.

⁴³ Fournel, "Queneau in quelques chiffres," 228.

⁴⁴ Raymond Queneau, *Oeuvres complètes de Sally Mara* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 8 ["soi-disant auteur réel"], p. 7. For more on the postmodern traps and tangles of this Preface see Sam Ferguson, "Metalepsis and the *Auteur Supposé* in Raymond Queneau's *Oeuvres complètes de Sally Mara*," *French Studies* 66, no. 2 (2012): 178-92.