



## Miranda

Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone /  
Multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on the English-speaking world

4 | 2011

Samuel Beckett : Drama as philosophical endgame ?

---

# “R.C.”: Rosicrucianism and Cartesianism in Joyce and Beckett

Steven Bond

---



### Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/1939>

DOI: 10.4000/miranda.1939

ISSN: 2108-6559

### Publisher

Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès

### Electronic reference

Steven Bond, ““R.C.”: Rosicrucianism and Cartesianism in Joyce and Beckett”, *Miranda* [Online], 4 | 2011, Online since 24 June 2011, connection on 16 February 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/1939> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.1939>

---

This text was automatically generated on 16 February 2021.



Miranda is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

---

# "R.C.": Rosicrucianism and Cartesianism in Joyce and Beckett

Steven Bond

---

## Introduction

This paper explores the possible theosophical and philosophical implications of James Joyce's recurrent use of the initials "R. C.," which appear once in *Ulysses* and three times throughout *Finnegans Wake*. Historically, the initials have been conceived both as the seal of the *Rose Croix*, or Rosicrucian Brotherhood, and as a pseudonym for René Descartes, either as René des Cartes or alternatively under his Latin designation of *Renatus Cartesius*. We consider both of these theoretical frameworks as likely reference points for Joyce, making extensive use of the early works of Samuel Beckett in arguing for each case.

Section I takes as its starting point W. B. Yeats' interest in the Brotherhood of the Rosicrucians, a 'society' which originated as a loose conglomerate of texts published primarily in Ulm in the early years of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Rosicrucian imagery of the blooming rose, as significant of the Virgin Mary, is traced through its various manifestations in Yeats, Joyce and Beckett. The suggestion, which is well corroborated if not conclusively confirmed, is that Joyce and Beckett were creating an intertextual mosaic of Rosicrucian allusions, most clearly evidenced in Joyce's use of the "R. C." initials. Beckett's *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* plays a central role in this context. Section II, which argues conversely for Joyce's invocation of *Renatus Cartesius*, avails instead of Beckett's first separately published work, 'Whoroscope,' a notoriously cryptic account of the life of Descartes. Again, the suggestion is that Beckett makes conscious references to Joyce that assist us in understanding certain aspects of the latter which would otherwise remain beyond our grasp. Our aim is not to argue for the use of one theoretical vantage point above the other, or to prove conclusively that Joyce used either, but to highlight the likelihood of a multi-referential method evidenced in his ambiguous use of the "R. C." abbreviation. The connections fashioned

between Joyce and Beckett, if accurate, are some of the more concrete yet uncovered, and will add to our understanding of their relationship more generally.

## 1. "R. C." as *rose croix*

Joyce, notoriously superstitious about birthdays and anniversaries, may have been aware that Yeats became founding chairman of the Dublin Hermetic Society on 16 June, or Bloomsday, 1885. This detail, had he known it, would doubtless have appealed to him. In 1887 Yeats met Helene Blavatsky and in 1890 joined the Rosicrucian oriented Order of the Golden Dawn. Joyce's attitude to Dublin's "druidy druids" (1992b, 11) is undeniably scathing at times, such as when "they creepycrawl after Blake's buttocks into eternity" (1992b, 238). The attitude of Yeats, who fancifully conceived of Blake as a Rosicrucian initiate (Raine 213) and a descendent of the Irish O'Neill's (Flannery 41), stands starkly opposed. But regardless of whether Joyce was humoured by the contemporaneous fascination with the occult, his works yet betray an avid interest in such matters. For brother Stanislaus, Joyce was feigning a farcical attitude to the occult, when in reality he took it "as much in earnest" as did George Russell (Joyce 1958, 180). James Atherton notes almost a score of references to Madame Blavatsky in *Finnegans Wake* (Atherton 236), and a copy of Rudolph Steiner's *Blut ist ein ganz besonderer Saft* was left in Joyce's Trieste library (Ellmann 128). Amongst other occult works by Steiner, 'Goethe's Secret Revelation' offered a Rosicrucian interpretation of Goethe's fairy story *The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily* (*Das Märchen*). Terrinoni's *Occult Joyce* lists Steiner and Yeats as two "revivalists of modern Rosicrucianism" with whose works Joyce came into contact (18). The debt to Yeats of course is the more significant of the two.

Joyce learnt two of Yeats' Rosicrucian stories off by heart, 'The Tables of the Law' and 'The Adoration of the Magi,' Stephen Dedalus also having read both in *Stephen Hero* (178). Weldon Thornton outlines "some striking parallels" with both throughout the early sections of *Ulysses* (Thornton 47). Allusions to Yeats' poetry specifically recall his treatment of the mystical Rose, with direct references to 'The Rose of Battle' and 'To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time.' In this context, it is worthy of comment that two of Joyce's primary characters are designated a surname ('Bloom') which Yeats and the wider Rosicrucian tradition repeatedly utilized in describing the mystical Rose. With Yeats, these begin with the magic "scarlet bloom" of *The Island of Statues* (Flannery 29), though being published in 1885, its 'bloom' may not have had the occult connotations that were evident in Yeats' grouping of some shorter poems under 'The Rose' eight years later. 1895 saw the publication of Yeats' essay, "The Body of the Father Christian Rosencrux," which discusses the tomb of the mythical founder of the Rosicrucian order (Yeats 1903, 308-11). In 'The Mountain Tomb,' from 1914's *Responsibilities*, Yeats is yet forging a direct connection between the blooming rose and Christian Rosenkreuz.

Pour wine and dance if Manhood still have pride,  
Bring roses if the rose be yet in bloom;  
The cataract smokes upon the mountain side,  
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb (Yeats 1914, 64).

Yeats' engagement with the occult, inclusive of Rosicrucianism, is well documented. Jeffares outlines that Yeats' rose signifies the "mystic marriage" of rose and cross which is central to Rosicrucian symbolism: "the rose possessing feminine sexual elements, the cross masculine; the rose being the flower that blooms upon the sacrifice

of the cross" (Jeffares 21). This connection is most succinctly surmised in the well known Rosicrucian Greeting "May the Roses Bloom upon your Cross," which was certainly in circulation before the 1911 publication of Max Heindel's *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception* (Heindel 538). The electronic copy utilized here, incidentally, is stamped "Ex Libris C. K. Ogden," the British philosopher and linguist who later prefaced Joyce's *Tales Told of Shem and Shaun* and recorded the 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' section of what was then *Work in Progress*.

Overt references to the Rosicrucian order are evident in Joyce's work as early as the first story of the *Dubliners*, when the narrator of 'The Sisters' is jocosely referred to as "that Rosicrucian there" (2). The order resurfaces in "the crucian rose" and the "russicruxian" of *Finnegans Wake* (122, 155). Given that Joyce's invocation of the Rosicrucians thus spans the composition of *Ulysses*, and the influential role of Yeats' mystical bloom at precisely this time, the rose imagery of Molly Bloom in the final pages of Episode XVIII is highly suggestive. Molly is, as Joyce likewise referred to Nora, a "Flower of the mountain" (932). "Id love to have the whole place swimming in roses" she says (931). *Ulysses* closes with Molly's reminiscence, "when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used" (933). It becomes a question of whether Molly's many roses do not, at one level, constitute 'The Rose of the World,' which Joyce encountered in Yeats. To put it another way, we are enquiring as to whether Buck Mulligan's "primrose" waistcoat does not already imply its etymological grounding in the *prima rosa* (first or early rose), so clearly encapsulated in the "primerose" of *Finnegans Wake* (361). At an abstract level, Molly Bloom, "the third person of the Blessed Trinity," is easily conceived as Joyce's rose upon the cross (Joyce 1992b, 693). Such deductive leaps would be bolstered by more concrete references to Rosicrucianism in *Ulysses*, which leads us firstly to the 17<sup>th</sup> century founding of the order.

Historically, the order begins with the anonymous 1614 publication of *Fama Fraternitatis*, which foretold of cataclysmic changes afoot with the coming of the Brotherhood. *The Confessio Fraternitatis* (1615) and *The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz* (1616) soon followed. Mythologically, the Brotherhood traced its origin to the figure of Christian Rosenkreuz, who was attributed with having founded the doctrine in 1407 as well as having lived to the age of one hundred and six (1378-1484). Yeats read these works, his most likely source being Arthur Edward (A. E.) Waite's translations published in the *The Real History of the Rosicrucians*. The *Fama* there appears under its full title *The Fama Fraternitatis of the Meritorious Order of the Rosy Cross, addressed to the learned in general, and the governors of europe*. Christian Rosenkreuz is "our Brother, C.R. C." (Waite 66) or "Brother R. C." (68). One of the six articles of the Order is "The word R.C. should be their seal, mark, and character" (73). At another point, "Brother R. C." becomes "Brother C. R." (75), the two representing the initials of the *Rose Croix* order and Christian Rosenkreuz respectively. That R.C. appeared in the title of the Latin original, "... *Confessione Fraternitatis R. C.*" (85), ensured the persistence of this formulation into the literature of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Rosicrucian revival and, furthermore, into James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

The "R. C." abbreviation appears in Episode VIII, as Bloom is scouring the ads of the *Irish Times*. "There might be other answers lying there. Like to answer them all. Good system for criminals. Code." He provides a list of adds. "Wanted live man for spirit counter. Resp girl (R. C.) wishes to hear of post in fruit or pork shop. James Carlisle made that" (Joyce 1992b, 202). Tracing the term 'Carlisle' retrospectively through

*Ulysses* brings us to "the red Carlisle girl, Lily," who in Episode I is found spooning on the pier with Seymour (26). That the "red C" of "red Carlisle" intends the rose cross is further suggested by the forename, Lily, another traditional floral depiction of the Virgin Mary, whom the rose likewise signifies. The overlap with Goethe's 'Beautiful Lily' may be coincidental, but the depiction of Lily as Virgin is not, as evidenced by the footnotes of *Finnegans Wake* II.2, when Joyce next returns to the use of "R. C." "3. R. C., disengaged, good character, would help, no salary. 4. Where Lily is a Lady found the nettle rash" (306).

Samuel Beckett was likely privy to this strand of thought in Joyce, for his use of Rosicrucian imagery in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* is likewise prefaced by a reminder of Lily the red Carlisle girl, spooning on the pier. Chapter Two of *Dream* begins, "Belacqua sat on the stanchion at the end of the Carlyle Pier in the mizzle in love from the girdle up with a slob of a girl called Smeraldina-Rima..." (Beckett 1992, 3). Later, she becomes "his distant bloom" (40), "The bloom" (41), "the lady" (97), and "a rival of Saint-Bridget the Rose" (97). Belacqua describes his going to Smeraldina as a movement "From the rosa mundi ... to the rosa munda" (106). Both Yeats' 'The Rose of the World' and Aleister Crowley's 'Rosa Mundi' provide possible modern allusions, but Beckett was more likely attracted by the legend surrounding the mistress of Henry II, Rosamund Clifford. The engraving on Fair Rosamund's tomb prefigures *Dream* in uniting the *rosa mundi* (rose of the world) with the *rosa munda* (pure rose): "Hic jacet in tumulo Rosa mundi non Rosa munda" (Hutton 118). If the somewhat modified history of Fair Rosamund's labyrinth is indeed Beckett's intended referent, the attraction was doubtless fuelled by the role traditionally assigned to Thomas Becket, Chancellor of England and later Archbishop of Canterbury. Tennyson's *Becket*, for example, closes with "Rosamund seen kneeling by the body of Becket" (Tennyson 213). That Joyce's solitary use of "becket" in the *Wake* should occur two lines prior to "I considered the lilies" is again suggestive (543). As is Beckett's choice of "the Alba" as the name of one of the primary characters in *Dream*, Alba being a class of rose translating literally as 'white'. Martin Schongauer's 1473 painting, *Madonna of the Rose Bush*, in which the Virgin's head inclines towards the solitary white rose on a bush of reds, well exemplifies the traditional association. And so it is that the bloom of rose and lily are consistently entwined in Joyce and Beckett, most probably as repeated references to the Virgin.

The Empress Wu of China is another enfolded in the embrace of Beckett's *rosa mundi*. "The lily was nearly as fair and the rose as lovely as God Almighty the Empress Wu. 'Bloom!' she cried to the peonies 'bloom, blast you!' " (Beckett 1992, 111). The list goes on. From the postman's whistling of *The Roses are Blooming in Picardy* (146) to the 'blood cross' of "Himmisacrakrüzirkenjesusmariaundjosefundblütigeskreuz" (239), Beckett's *Dream* is never far from the imagery of the Rosicrucian tradition. Nevertheless, we must remain wary of Beckett's warning that "the danger is in the neatness of identifications" (Beckett et. al. 3), and avoid imposing selective narratives upon the porous terrain of Beckett's early works. Concluding "Brother R. C." as the reason that Dick Deadeye works for the "R.A. C." (Beckett 1992, 158), for example, would be to over-interpret. If Beckett used "R.A. C." in a sentence about lilies and blooming roses, this interpretation would acquire a greater degree of corroboration, but it would remain an interpretation. It is not a question of finding conclusive proof, but of finding an interpretative framework that works. The Lily, blooming rose, Carlisle pier and "R. C." initials are scattered haphazardly throughout *Ulysses*, and one takes license when inferring their

Rosicrucian intent. This inference, however, acquires corroboration via *Finnegans Wake*, when "R. C." is unmistakably brought together with the Lily and the Virgin (Lady). Further corroboration comes in Beckett's *Dream* when the lily and the rose are brought together with the Carlyle pier. The presumed unity of selected sections from *Ulysses* is justified when these same elements are later brought into direct contact. That the perceived unity hinges necessarily upon "Brother R. C." thus justifies our invocation of the *Rose Croix*. This is not to claim that our interpretation corresponds in all respects with the facts of composition. Our asserting the theory with a high degree of confidence is the most that textual support allows us. *Finnegans Wake*, III.3, illustrates well how the Rosicrucian interpretation engenders such confidence.

This chapter finds Joyce again using the "R. C." initials (Joyce 1992c, 520). If we are correct that they signify "Brother R. C.," then further Rosicrucian imagery will lie in close proximity. "Rose Lankester" (485), "maryfruit under Shadow La Rose" (495) or even "maypole" (503) are possibilities, with the York and Lancaster Rose typically (though inaccurately) associated with the *Rosa Mundi* species. Similarly 'rosy' phrases, however, are evident in many Chapters of the *Wake*. We cannot say the same of the "recriution trousers" (491) and "a rouseruction of his bogey" (499), which are two of the *Wake*'s closest approximations to 'Rosicrucian'. We also find "A. Briggs Carlisle" (514) and "forte carlylsle," their only appearances in the *Wake* in either formulation. All of this serves to justify the earlier leap from the initial "R. C." of Bloom's newspaper add to the "red Carlisle girl" of Episode I. The red Carlisle girl we conclude, like a myriad of female characters in the works of Joyce and Beckett, is symbolic of the Virgin Mary. What makes Lily's case particularly interesting is the derivation that Joyce was consciously and covertly referencing Yeats' "crucian rose" long before it's more overt appearance in *Finnegans Wake*. And given that the rose imagery is most evident in Joyce's treatment of Molly Bloom, Rosicrucianism must be considered as a possible source for her and Leopold's surname.

Rosicrucianism is at times well hidden in *Ulysses* and it would be easy to overlook the single appearance of "R. C." therein. It may be, however, that the nomenclature of Joyce's protagonists finds Rosicrucianism overlooked rather because it is virtually omnipresent, a nice illustration of Wittgenstein's remark in *Culture and Value*: "How hard I find it to see what is right in front of my eyes!" (Wittgenstein 39). Again, one expects to find further textual support for such flights of theoretical fancy. Joyce provides it. Molly, or Marion, is itself derived from Mary and it is not novel to suggest that this signifies the Virgin. In the final Episode of *Ulysses*, Molly recalls reciting the Hail Mary, singing Ave Maria and we learn that she shares the Virgin Mary's birth date of September 8. It does not require great feats of interpretation to perceive the parallel, and there is no reason to suppose that the traditional depiction of the Virgin as bloom does not likewise inform Molly's surname. Leopold Bloom, on the other hand, writes secret love letters under the pseudonym of Henry Flower. His father converted his name to Bloom from 'Virag' (Joyce 1992b, 438), translation 'flower'. To Molly, he is "the great Suggester Don Poldo de la Flora" (926) and earlier appears as "Herr Professor Luitpold Blumenduft" (394). That the Bloom is a flower is patently obvious and it is something of an oversight that the name has not yet been traced to Joyce's much attested fascination with the Rosicrucian works of Yeats. We might conclude that Arthur Edward Waite's texts were also a source for Joyce, as evidenced in Bloom's musings upon A. E., which is also the occult pseudonym of Irish mystic George Russell. "Mr Geo. Russell. That might be Lizzie Twigg with him. A. E.: what does that mean? Initials perhaps. Albert Edward,

Arthur Edmund, Alphonsus Eb Ed El Esquire" (210). That the two further A. E.'s considered form the compound Arthur Edward may not be coincidental. Nor the fact that Bloom pre-empts Russell's appearance when musing upon "A. E. (Mr Geo Russell)" immediately prior to spotting "R. C." in the *Irish Times* (202). Or perhaps we have merely hit upon a point at which Joyce's many elements "begin to fuse of themselves" (Gilbert 204). Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume Joyce's knowledge of Waite, who was leader of the London temple of the Golden Dawn as well as the creator of the world's most popular tarot deck. Such a careful occlusion of the occult, which we likewise witness in his treatment of "Brother R. C.," would capture well the synonymy of form and content which Beckett admired in his 'Dante ... Bruno. Vico ... Joyce' (Beckett et. al. 14).

One further possible Rosicrucian reference in Beckett's *Dream* is deserving of mention as it strengthens the case for an occult intertext operating between Beckett's early works and the late works of Joyce. We refer to the description of Lucien as "a crucible of volatilisation...Looking at his face you saw the features bloom, as in Rembrandt's portrait of his brother" (Beckett 1992 116). When Belacqua returns to thoughts of Rembrandt's "portrait of his brother," he conceives of himself as "a positive crucible of cerebration," and the bloom now becomes "the blown roses of a phrase [that] shall catapult the reader into the tulips of the phrase that follows" (138). According to Pilling, Beckett saw in the Louvre the Rembrandt portrait which tradition has associated with his brother, though the identity has been questioned since Rembrandt's time. Today, the identity of the painter is also under scrutiny (Milz 152). Pilling's account surely captures Beckett's intent. Given the proximity of the "bloom," "roses" and "crucible," however, "Rembrandt's portrait of his brother" likely alludes simultaneously to his portrait of "Brother R. C." For tradition also has it that Christian Rosenkreuz, in a 17<sup>th</sup> century manifestation, is the subject of Rembrandt's portrait *A Man in Armour* (1655). Rudolph Steiner is typically credited for this piece of misinformation, though the specific source has thus far proven elusive. The painting is likely recalled in *Ulysses* with Stephen's "Doctor Swift says one man in armour will beat ten men in their shirts" (687). Doctor Swift never said this. What Swift said was that "Eleven men well armed will certainly subdue one Single Man in his Shirt" (Atherton 123). If the one "man in armour" is thus a deliberate distortion of Swift, Rembrandt's painting of the same name is the likely reason for said distortion. *Finnegans Wake* has its counterpart, "For one man in his armour was a fat match always for any girls under shurts" (23). "Sir armoury" is less convincing, but notably follows shortly subsequent to both "The rose is white in the darik" and "Lillytrilly" (96). The aforementioned "primerose" follows a few lines after "How a mans in his armor we nurses know" (361), and this in a chapter which also mentions the "fourstar Russkakruscam" (352). The Five Pointed Star is another central emblem of the Rose Cross. Finally, just two pages subsequent to one final Wakean appearance of the "R. C." initials, Joyce wonders "If I've proved to your sallysfashion how I'm a man of Armor" (446). Certainly, he has proved to this reader's satisfaction that he knew of the presumed link between "Rerembrandtser"'s (Joyce 1992c, 54) *A Man in Armour* and "Brother R. C." Frank Budgen remarked of Joyce and Rembrandt that they "both take ancient legends and present them in the dress and accent of their own day" (Budgen 178), a nice touch considering that the legend in this instance is one and the same. And if we can conclude "Brother R. C." to be Joyce's "man in armour," we can moreover use this information to expose the likelihood of further occult undercurrents in such simple phrases as "I rose up one

maypole morning" (Joyce 1992c, 249). One might judge Joyce to be playing upon just such a literal interpretation when Mulligan figuratively enquires of Lily, the red Carlisle girl, "Is she up the pole?" (Joyce 1992b, 26) As *Finnegans Wake* attests, the flower is frequently to be found up the pole.

At some point one is lured into over-interpretation, but that does not alter the fact that much suggests a covert Rosicrucianism at play in Joyce and Beckett. Nor should Beckett's devotion to Joyce at this time subordinate his role to that of mimic. Beckett's interest in Rembrandt, for example, dates to undergraduate visits to Dublin's National Gallery (Haynes and Knowlson 59). We must also save a significant role for Yeats, Joyce's most likely source here and also a possible influence upon Beckett. We can certainly conclude that Joyce influenced Beckett directly, as the latter weaves together some highly idiosyncratic Joycean allusions (Carlisle, Rembrandt) to suggest that *Dream* is in part a direct commentary upon the hidden Rosicrucianism of *Ulysses*. But then this is to say little new, with one early reviewer rejecting *Dream* as "a slavish imitation of Joyce" (Beckett 1992, vii). This is harsh on Beckett, who does an equally sublime job of occluding the occult whilst keeping it close enough to the surface to appear suddenly obvious upon exposure. It now seems self-evident that Molly Bloom's surname derives from, or at the very least is subsequently linked to, the rose upon the rood of time. That is not to deny the possibility of further significations, but that the Rosicrucian significance of the bloom was somehow lost on Joyce is seriously undermined in the light of above considerations.

## 2. "R. C." as Renatus Cartesius

We shift now from a likely theosophical referent for Joyce's "R. C." to a likely philosophical one, that is, René Descartes under the Latin translation of *Renatus Cartesius*. Once again we will avail of the early Beckett, particularly the Cartesianism of 'Whoroscope,' in fashioning an intertext which sheds light on the works of both. A stalwart in Beckett interpretation since the early sixties (Kenner, Esslin, Hoffmann, Hesla, Morot-Sir, Topsfield), Descartes has thus far played a marginalized role in Joyce scholarship. There are the seven references spotted by Adaline Glasheen in *Finnegans Wake* (Burns et. al. 140; Glasheen 72-3), and a single article by Phillip Sicker on the role of Descartes' famous 1619 dreams/prophecies in *Ulysses* (Sicker 1984). This author has expanded on these attempts in two forthcoming articles, but will avoid where possible repeating what has been said there. We are now solely interested in Descartes' historical or mythological connection with the Rosicrucians.

That Descartes' initials (Renatus Cartesius) match those of "Brother R. C." may have had as much to do with their traditional association as Descartes' travelling in 1619 to Ulm, the foremost printing place of early Rosicrucian texts. That he there studied mathematics with self professed Rosicrucian, Johan Faulhaber, and availed of Faulhaber's symbolism when writing early notebooks added grist to the mill. There is also the content of the notebooks (transcribed by another alleged Rosicrucian, Leibniz) wherein Descartes announces his plans to compose *The mathematical treasure trove of Polybius, citizen of the world*. It is to be written under the pseudonym of Polybius *Cosmopolita*, professes to solve "all the difficulties in the science of mathematics," and will be offered to "the distinguished brothers of the Rose Croix in Germany" (Descartes 1985, 2). Then there is Descartes' adoption of Ovid's phrase '*Bene vixit, bene qui latuit*' -



"He who lives well hidden, lives well" - it being the Rosicrucian motto at this time (Descartes 1991, 43). Adrien Baillet, Descartes' most important biographer, states that Descartes went to Germany in search of them, justifying his interest in the order as follows.

He found himself so much the more concern'd at it, because he received the News at the very time when he was the most busy concerning the Mediums he was to propound to himself for the finding out of Truth. (Baillet 1693, 37)

Baillet adds that Descartes never found them. The question of the connection has nevertheless reappeared at various times since Descartes' own lifetime, the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century being a case in point. Mahaffy's *Descartes* (1902) and Haldane's *Descartes His Life and Times* (1905) provide two popular contemporary accounts. Given that Joyce's treatment of Descartes' dreams guarantees his use of Baillet's unabridged 1691 *Vie de Descartes*, however, we do not need to seek further sources in establishing Joyce's knowledge of the Rosicrucian connection. Furthermore, if Joyce did envision "R. C." as *Renatus Cartesius*, he may yet have been playing the "scissors and paste man" in doing so (Gilbert 297). For the ambiguity of the initials was highlighted in the Descartes biography of Charles Adam, the twelfth and final volume of the standard French edition of Descartes' works (1897-1910): "his seal, with the two interwoven initials R and C (René des Cartes), happened to be exactly the seal of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood" (Harvey 25). "R. C." was in fact the cachet of Descartes' correspondence, and so the equation with "Brother R. C." was not a difficult one to make. Nor were such accusations saved for Descartes alone, Francis Bacon providing the English with their own candidate for Rosicrucian authorship. Descartes' seeking the Brotherhood, however, the adoption of *Renatus Cartesius* above the designated Seigneur du Perron, and the subsequent use of "R. C." as his seal make his case especially alluring. The textual support for Joyce's use of "R. C." as indicative of Descartes is hardly definitive, but a few points of support certainly merit mention.

There is the fact that Joyce's first Wakean allusion to "R. C." comes in II.2, which contains four of the seven Cartesian allusions hitherto spotted by Glasheen. "Reborn of the cards" in particular finds Joyce encoding Descartes' name i.e. 'born' in French becomes 'né' and 'of the cards' becomes 'Des Cartes.' This encryption, occurring three lines above "cog it out, here goes a sum" (*cogito ergo sum*), is just two pages prior to "R. C." Joyce's preoccupation with encoding Descartes' name in this section provides the required context. A second use of "R. C." occurs just six pages subsequent to another of Glasheen's finds, though the third and final "R. C." negates this general trend. Probability alone suggests that one of Glasheen's seven references to Descartes should occur in one of the three "R. C." chapters, whereas five of the seven are to be found in such proximity. Additional Wakean allusions to Descartes detected by this author follow this general trend.

Beckett's *Dream* too, which makes extensive use of Descartes, is worthy of interest despite its more overt references to Rosicrucianism and Cartesianism not occurring side by side. More productive is a turn to Beckett's 'Whoroscope,' a 98 line summation of Descartes' life which refers directly to his flirtation with the Brotherhood. I have drawn attention elsewhere to the as yet unexplored fact of Beckett's 'Whoroscope' being belatedly delivered for a poetry competition on 16 June, or Bloomsday, 1930. Like Joyce in *Ulysses*, Beckett makes covert references to the famous dreams of Descartes' stove-heated room in Germany, "Them were the days I sat in the hot-cupboard throwing Jesuits out of the skylight" (Beckett 1984, 2). Or again, "A wind of evil flung

my despair of ease against the sharp spires of the one lady" (3).<sup>1</sup> Beckett was entirely devoted to Joyce at this time, and it may not be coincidental that his interest in Descartes was renewed in the same year that he befriended Joyce, 1928. That Beckett could have independently and unknowingly delivered a Bloomsday composition which followed *Ulysses* in its treatment of Descartes' dreams seems unlikely, the probable conclusion being that Beckett is again offering a direct commentary upon some of Joyce's more covert themes. Bearing this striking correlation in mind, consider Beckett's treatment of Rosicrucianism in 'Whoroscope,' "and farewell for a space to the yellow key of the Rosicrucians" (3). Johannes Hedberg, a Swedish scholar attempting to unravel 'Whoroscope,' was given pause by the above sentence. The fact of the matter is that there is no "yellow key of the Rosicrucians." Hedberg's idea, and a very good one at that, is that Beckett is referring to the shape of the Rosicrucian cross. "The emblem of the Rosicrucians was a golden cross with looped ends and a rose right in the centre, thus it looked not unlike a key" (Hedberg 21). Without detracting from Hedberg, we wish to alter his analysis slightly. The Rosicrucian cross looks like two keys, crossed. As with the treatment of Descartes' dreams, we must consider the possibility that Beckett is again commenting directly upon Joyce. For although there is no historical "yellow key of the Rosicrucians," there is a contender for a Joycean one.

In *Ulysses*, Episode VII, Bloom is at work in the offices of the *Freeman's Journal*. *Freemason's Journal* may have been the implication, as we later hear rumours that Bloom is "in the craft" (226). He is running an advertisement for his client Alexander Keyes, a grocer and wine merchant, past the printing foreman Joseph Nannetti.

But wait, Mr Bloom said. He wants it changed. Keyes, you see. He wants two keys at the top....Like that, see. Two crossed keys here. A circle. Then here the name...You see? Do you think that's a good idea? (152-3)

If intended as a further encoding of Rosicrucian symbols, it is a fantastic idea, though the intent remains highly speculative. There are further invocations of the rose in 'Whoroscope.' "Leider! Leider! she bloomed and withered" is linked by Hedberg, via the German *leiden*, to the suffering of Christ from Gethsemane to Golgatha (Hedberg 26). Beckett possibly recalls this line in *Dream* with "rose like a Lied" (33). 'Whoroscope' also sees Descartes described as "the chip of a perfect block that's neither old nor new, the lonely petal of a great high bright rose" (Beckett 1984, 4). Harvey sees an allusion to Dante's "rosa sempiterna" from Canto 30 of the *Paradiso*, and likely grasps authorial intention in doing so (Harvey 31). This is not to somehow negate Beckett's concern, when detailing the blooming rose on Bloomsday, with the Cartesian-Rosicrucian connection most neatly encapsulated in Joyce's ambiguous use of the "R. C." initials. On the other hand, there is no attempt here to narrow the mystical rose to an offshoot of Cartesianism. Most likely, the rose provided Joyce and Beckett with a transcendent image under the rubric of which one could encompass various historical personages. In each case, Descartes plays his part, though Dante does not go unmentioned.

The identity of "Brother R. C." too surely appeals not simply for the opportunity to hide Descartes, but rather for its ambiguity. As such, the legends of the Rosicrucian tradition may provide us with further source material. It is noteworthy for example that Francis Bacon, the primary English contender for a historical Christian Rosenkreuz, also appears in 'Whoroscope,' "In the name of Bacon will you chicken me up that egg. Shall I swallow cave-phantoms?" (Beckett 1984, 3) When Joyce turns to Bacon in *Ulysses*, it is to invoke the Baconian authorship of Shakespeare's plays, which is seemingly unrelated

to our search for Rosicrucian intent. A closer reading, however, suggests the possibility of further covert allusions.

The highroads are dreary but they lead to the town.

Good Bacon: gone musty. Shakespeare Bacon's wild oats. Cypherjugglers going the highroads. Seekers on the great quest. What town good masters? Mummied in names: A. E., eon... (250).

Stephen Dedalus provides Brandes as his source for this theory, a claim confirmed in William Schutte's classic *Joyce and Shakespeare: A Study in the Meaning of Ulysses* (Schutte 1957). Another likely and more covert source is *Bacon, Shakespeare and the Rosicrucians* by William Francis Wigston. When Stephen is asked for Mr Sidney Lee's opinion on Baconian authorship, he does not respond with the historically accurate "There is no need to confute the theory, which confutes itself" (Lee 143). Instead, he expounds upon the names of three female characters from three separate Shakespearean plays, "Marina, Stephen said, a child of storm, Miranda, a wonder, Perdita, that which was lost" (250). Wigston's *Bacon, Shakespeare and the Rosicrucians*, in a discussion of the harmonious balance between character names and parts in Shakespeare's plays, anticipates Joyce in thus uniting *Pericles*, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* upon a single page of text. "For example, this name of Perdita is connected with her loss. Similarly, Marina, in the play of *Pericles*, is named after her birth at sea...Ferdinand, on beholding Miranda, exclaims – "O you wonder!" (147). None of the three names appear in Lee's refutation of Baconian authorship, leaving us with another striking correlation and leading us to the conclusion that Wigston's Rosicrucian text was rather Joyce's source here. The name of Perdita, Wigston's "Briar Rose" (65), is especially suggestive in this context. So is the forehead of Joyce's quaker librarian, "enkindled rosily with hope" (251), and the "Primrosevested" (253) Buck Mulligan who shortly thereafter interrupts the discussion. "The highroads ... [that] ... lead to the town" may also come from Wigston, who relates Dr Andrew's "vile pun upon the town and title of St Albans, by saying some doggerel verses that it was on the high road to *Dunce table*, i.e., Dunstable" (274). It may not have been lost on Joyce that the following page invokes "the adventures of Ulysses" upon the piazza walls of Bacon's youthful residence, Gorhambury (275). Similarly, that Joyce encountered Yeats' 'The Body of the Father Christian Rosencrux' in the 1905 collection *Ideas of Good and Evil*, in which it immediately precedes 'The Return of Ulysses,' may have prompted the inclusion of Rosenkreuz in Joyce's Ulyssean web of allusions (Yeats 1903). Given that two copies of Bacon's supposed Rosicrucian treatise, *The New Atlantis*, are also listed in Joyce's Trieste library (Ellmann 99), Bacon may well provide a fruitful avenue for continued research. Bacon's Christian priest, for example, who wears a white turban "with a small red cross on top" (Bacon 243) may inform Joyce's "handsome Moors all in white and turbans like kings" (932) who surface amidst the rose imagery which closes Molly's monologue. The correspondence is only distantly suggestive, but Joyce's evident interest in the Bacon/Rosicrucian connection warrants further exploration. As the case of Descartes attests, both Joyce and Beckett were likely invoking the blurred distinction between theosophical and philosophical matters which characterized the period of the late Renaissance.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, while Descartes' direct influence on Joyce is hitherto underestimated, we can say that his use of "R. C." specifically can be linked with greater confidence to *Rose Croix* than it can to *Renatus Cartesius*. The surrounding text in each instance clearly expounds Rosicrucian symbolism to a degree that it does not in Descartes' case. Nevertheless, the use of "R. C." in the very section of the *Wake* most preoccupied with encoding Descartes is suggestive, in particular the appearance of "reborn of the cards" just two pages previous. It is more difficult to draw definitive conclusions concerning the Bloomsday birth of Beckett's Cartesian creation, but the Rosicrucianism contained therein makes for another interesting intersection. Granting the yet speculative assumption that the rosy or blood crosses of Joyce and Beckett intend both Rosicrucianism and Cartesianism unearths some interesting parallels, suggesting a yet underexplored collaboration between the two authors. To take one further example, when referencing Yeats' *The Table of the Law*, it is to the presence of the Italian mystic Joachim of Abbas Joyce turns. Joachim's tripartite account of history saw it divided into the eras of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Descartes' father was also called Joachim, likely a coincidence but one that should not go unmentioned for two reasons. Firstly, Joyce refers to Joachim as "Abbas father" (Joyce 1992b, 49), the subtle switch to lower case "father" suggestive of parenthood before priesthood. Secondly, Line 81 of Beckett's own Bloomsday composition runs "nor Joachim my father's" (Beckett 1984, 4). Again, this may well be mere coincidence, but one ought not to conclude as much without further research in this direction. The extent to which Beckett recapitulates Joyce's meaning, as opposed to re-interpreting Joyce's texts for his own ends, is difficult to determine. In the end it may prove impossible to draw the line past which history is simply playing into their hands, but that the texts explored above should so strongly support our thesis without Joyce or Beckett's conscious assistance would be a remarkable coincidence indeed. At the very least one might conclude that when grafting Rosicrucianism onto Cartesianism, or vice versa, Joyce and Beckett were welcoming of the hand which history played them. What is more, they may have welcomed it together.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Atherton, James S. *The Books at the Wake: A Study of the Literary Allusions in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake*. 1959. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009.
- Bacon, Francis. *The Advancement of Learning and The New Atlantis*. London : Oxford University Press, 1906.
- Baillet, Adrien. *La Vie de Monsieur Des-Cartes*. 2 Vols. Paris: Daniel Horthemels, 1691.
- . *The life of Monsieur Des Cartes*. S. R. trans. London: Printed for R. Simpson, at the Harp in St. Paul's Church-yard, 1693.

- Beckett, Samuel et. al. *James Joyce/Finnegans Wake: A Symposium*. 1929. New York: New Directions Books, 1972.
- . *Samuel Beckett Collected Poems*. London: John Calder, 1984.
- . *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992.
- Budgen, Frank. *James Joyce and the Making of 'Ulysses'*. 1934. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Burns, Edward et. al. (eds.). *A Tour of the Darkling Plain: The Finnegans Wake Letters of Thornton Wilder and Adaline Glasheen*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2001.
- Descartes, René. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (vol. 1). J. Cottingham et. al. trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- . *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (vol. 3). J. Cottingham et. al. trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Ellmann, Richard. *The Consciousness of Joyce*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. New York: Doubleday, 1961.
- Flannery, Mary Catherine. *Yeats and Magic: the earlier works*. Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Limited, 1977.
- Gilbert, Stuart (ed.). *Letters of James Joyce*. London: Faber and Faber, 1957.
- Glasheen, Adaline. *Third census of Finnegans Wake*. California: University of California Press, 1977.
- Haldale, Elizabeth S. *Descartes His Life and Times*. London: John Murray, 1905.
- Harvey, Lawrence. *Samuel Beckett Poet & Critic*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970.
- Haynes, John and James Knowlson. *Images of Beckett*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Hedberg, Johannes. *Samuel Beckett's Whoroscope: A Linguistic-Literary Interpretation*. Stockholm: Moderna språk monographs, 1972.
- Heindel, Max. *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception*. Third Edition. California and London: The Rosicrucian Fellowship, 1911.
- Hesla, David. *The Shape of Chaos: An Interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971.
- Hoffmann, Frederick. *Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962.
- Hole, S. Reynolds. *A Book about Roses*. Third Edition. London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1870.
- Hutton, Edward. *A Book of the Wye*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1911.
- Jeffares, Alexander Norman. *A New Commentary on the poems of W. B. Yeats*. 1968. California: Stanford University Press, 1984.
- Joyce, James. *Dubliners*. 1914. London: Penguin Books, 1992a.
- . *Ulysses*. 1922. London: Penguin Books, 1992b.
- . *Finnegans Wake*. 1939. London: Penguin Books, 1992c.
- . *Stephen Hero*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1944.
- Joyce, Stanislaus. *My Brother's Keeper*. London: Faber and Faber, 1958.

- Kenner, Hugh. *Samuel Beckett A Critical Study*. New York: Grove Press, 1961.
- Lee, Sidney. *Shakespeare and the Modern Stage with other Essays*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906.
- Mahaffy, John Pentland. *Descartes*. New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1902.
- Milz, Manfred. "Echoes of Bergsonian Vitalism in Samuel Beckett's Early Works." In *Borderless Beckett*. Eds. Minako Okamuro et. al. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008. 143-154.
- Morot-Sir, Edouard et. al. (eds.). *Samuel Beckett: The Art of Rhetoric*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1976.
- Raine, Kathleen. *Yeats the Initiate: Essays on Certain Themes in the Work of W. B. Yeats*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990.
- Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. *A Man in Armour*. 23/09/2010.  
<URL Address [http://www.rembrandtpainting.net/rmbrndt\\_1655-1669/armour.htm](http://www.rembrandtpainting.net/rmbrndt_1655-1669/armour.htm)>
- Schongauer, Martin. *Madonna of the Rose Bush*. 23/09/2010.  
<URL Address <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/s/schongau/rosebush.html>>
- Schutte, William M. *Joyce and Shakespeare: a study in the meaning of Ulysses*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.
- Sicker, Philip. "Shades of Descartes: An Approach to Stephen's Dream in *Ulysses*." *James Joyce Quarterly* 22:1 (1984): 7-24.
- Steiner, Rudolf. "Goethes Geheime Offenbarung." *Magazin für Literatur* 34 (1899) 86-99.
- Tennyson, Alfred Lord. *Becket*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1885.
- Terrinoni, Enrico. *Occult Joyce*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.
- Thornton, Weldon. *Allusions in Ulysses: An Annotated List*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961.
- Topsfield, Valerie. *The Humour of Samuel Beckett*. London: Macmillan, 1988.
- Waite, Arthur Edward. *The Real History of the Rosicrucians*. London: George Redway, 1887.
- Wigston, William Francis. *Bacon, Shakespeare, and the Rosicrucians*. London: George Redway, 1888.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Culture and Value*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980.
- Yeats, William Butler. "The Rose." In *W. B. Yeats The Poems*. Ed. Richard J. Finneran. London: Gill and Macmillan, 1983. 31-51.
- . *Ideas of Good and Evil*. London: A.H. Bullen, 1903.
- . *Responsibilities*. 1914. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916.

## ENDNOTES

1. See my "Joyce, Beckett & the Homelette in the Poêle" for an in depth exploration of this particular overlap.

## ABSTRACTS

This paper explores the possible theosophical and philosophical implications of James Joyce's recurrent use of the initials "R. C." in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Historically, the initials have been used both as the seal of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood and as the cachet of René Descartes (René des Cartes). We consider both of these theoretical frameworks as likely reference points for Joyce, making extensive use of the early works of Samuel Beckett in arguing for each case.

Nous observerons dans cet article les possibles implications théosophiques et philosophiques de l'usage récurrent par James Joyce des initiales "R. C." dans *Ulysse* et *Finnegans Wake*. Historiquement, les initiales ont servi, d'une part, de sceau à La Fraternité Rosicrucienne, et de l'autre, de paraphe à René Descartes (René des Cartes). Nous considérerons ces deux hypothèses théoriques comme des points de références probables dans l'usage que fait Joyce des initiales, ceci en nous appuyant sur les premiers écrits de Beckett.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** Bloom, cartésianisme, dream of fair to middling women, Finnegans Wake, R. C., rose, rosicrucianisme, Ulysse, Whoroscope

**Keywords:** Bloom, cartesianism, dream of fair to middling women, Finnegans Wake, R. C., Rose, Rosicrucianism, Ulysses, Whoroscope

## AUTHORS

### STEVEN BOND

Lecturer

Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick

steven.bond@mic.ul.ie