Tirades of Abuse: Marryat’s *Jacob Faithful* and Joyce’s ‘Counterparts’

There is some evidence that Joyce read (and remembered) Frederick Marryat’s novels. Nash from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* declares him ‘the greatest writer’, while Buck Mulligan likens Stephen Dedalus to Marryat’s ‘Japhet’ in *Ulysses*.[[1]](#footnote-1) ‘Counterparts’, the ninth story of *Dubliners*, features Farrington hurriedly finishing his paperwork, copying out letters long overdue. Distracted by a parched throat and thoughts of the local, he does not hear his boss approach.

His imagination had so abstracted him that his name was called twice before he answered. Mr Alleyne and Miss Delacour were standing outside the counter and all the clerks had turned round in anticipation of something. The man got up from his desk. Mr Alleyne began a tirade of abuse, saying that two letters were missing. The man answered that he knew nothing about them, that he had made a faithful copy.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Farrington lies about completing the duplication, but Joyce makes a somewhat faithful copy of his own. In *Jacob Faithful,* Alleyne’s temper finds a predecessor in Mr Hodgson, the clerk overseeing Jacob’s waterman apprenticeship.

I had not taken my seat at my desk more than a minute, when Mr. Hodgson entered, and commenced a tirade of abuse, which my pride could no longer allow me to submit to. An invoice, perfectly correct and well-written, which I had nearly completed, he snatched from before me, tore into fragments, and ordered me to write it over again.[[3]](#footnote-3)

It seems that Joyce embedded both Marryat’s clerical plot and its language into ‘Counterparts’, substituting ‘began’ for ‘commenced’ before the phrase ‘tirades of abuse’. As if winking at the reader, Joyce’s use of ‘faithful copy’ encrypts the title of his source. Despite connections such as these — and his wider penchant for nautical tales — there has been little research on Joyce and the Captain.

Perhaps it is time for this to change?

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1. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Viking, 1976) 80; *Ulysses* (New York: Vintage, 1986), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Dubliners*, ed. by Margot Norris (New York: Norton, 2006), 74, italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Frederick Marryat, *Jacob Faithful*, (New York: Croscup and Company, 1896), 159, italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)