

Where A Father Comes Across A Son : An Essay on *Ulysses*

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Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses*, the artist as a young man back home in Dublin, seems to have come to a fatal deadlock. Buck Mulligan reports mockingly that there is talk Stephen may be suffering from '[g]eneral paralysis of the insane' (1:129), while Haines, another friend of Stephen's, seriously expresses his conviction that Stephen 'has an *idée fixe*' (10:1068). Whatever pathological terms may be applied to Stephen's peculiar loss of mental suppleness, it is a very ironical situation for Stephen himself; for it was none but Stephen who had peremptorily professed in the last chapter of *A Portrait* to devote himself to a quest of freedom:

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use — silence, exile, and cunning.

(P, 222)

Obviously the irony of Stephen's pursuit of freedom is to be attributed partly to his attitude itself which is essentially negative. He will persist in his rejective '*Non serviam!*,' and even in professing his positive 'I will' the 'arms' he mentions are characterised by some tint of negativity: I will not speak, I will not remain, and I will not, say, do it straight. Therefore, it is apparently

quite natural that he should fail to establish any positive attitude towards life and eventually find himself in danger of a fatal paralysis. Stephen's 'No!' in *Ulysses* has lost much of its original tone of extrovert ambitiousness; it now tends to be turned against himself and confine his thoughts in a flatly deflating mechanism of self-mockery, as typically seen in his all too irresponsible 'No' on being asked if he believes his own theory, after all his elaborate exposition of how 'Shakespeare's ghost is Hamlet's grandfather' (9:1067).

However, the real problem for Stephen consists not so much in his negative attitude itself as in his failure to find the proper 'mode of life or art' to express himself 'freely' and 'wholly.' We must try to understand what it was he found necessary to articulate and why he failed to do so, instead of dismissing his apparent failure as '*Jetez la gourme* [Sow the wild oats]' as he finds himself mumbling deliriously in 'nighttown' (15:2094). In order to do so it becomes necessary to consider Stephen's negativity in a different context.

'To be or not to be,' the fatal aporia which preoccupies Stephen throughout the day, is essentially the problem of a choice between positivity and negativity. What troubles Stephen fundamentally, who aspires to attain 'freedom' in a 'whole' way, is the difficulty of articulating things with due reference to both their positive and negative sides. This difficulty is epitomized in his peculiar impatience with the fatal one-sidedness that haunts the human activity of telling a story — here we may also

recall its etymological variant 'history,' which is for Stephen 'a nightmare from which [he is] trying to awake' (2:377). Undeniably it is very difficult to 'wholly' articulate, for instance, what has taken place in the long history of Ireland, which crucially involves that of Britain, and vice versa. An oversimplified and nonetheless very confused version of the history of Ireland, the story told by Mr Deasy in the Nestor episode, brings the problematic one-sidedness into bold relief. Stephen's impatience with the incompleteness immanent in the activity of telling a story/history explains why he includes 'silence' in his 'arms.' He would rather be silent than venture to tell his own version of a story/history at the risk of being one-sided and thus impairing his dream of total freedom.

That is undeniably absurd. But curiously enough, this is a kind of absurdity of which Stephen is conscious from the very first, for he had maintained in *A Portrait*, a few pages before the passage quoted above:

— I said that I had lost the faith . . . , but not that I had lost selfrespect. What kind of liberation would that be to forsake an absurdity which is logical and coherent and to embrace one which is illogical and incoherent? (P, 220)

Stephen Dedalus' *raison d'être* lies in the very absurdity which he is commissioned to draw as a 'logical' (?) conclusion entailed by his persistence in a total disbelief in any one-sided authority which tells its story/history in its own way. At the risk of being absurd he is doomed to stick to his negative attitude of 'silence, exile, and cunning.'

The 'logical and coherent' absurdity which Stephen is trying to articulate should be assessed in view of his 'theory' on Shakespeare's 'ghost':

— What is a ghost? Stephen said with tingling energy. One who has faded into impal-

pability through death, through absence, through change of manners. (9:147-9)

As an idea of the author turning 'impalpable' and 'absent' it is obviously a variation of the 'impersonalized' artist who 'finally refines itself out of existence' (P, 194). Only, while 'the artist' in *A Portrait* is easily nonchalant 'paring his fingernails,' Shakespeare the artist as Stephen imagines him cannot afford to perform such a carefree impersonalization but rather all too humanly gets irritated, significantly just as Stephen in *Ulysses* is irritated. For this is the very image of the father for Stephen which he cannot imagine otherwise and, understandably, fears to identify himself with. 'A father is a necessary evil' he says (9:828). For him a father is a fatally incomplete image of the Father and therefore doomed to be fatally ineffectual, or we may say 'paralysed.' While it might be said that only the Father (through Christ) can tell the Word, the original and/or final Truth, a human father's tale is a fatally incomplete story/history for which there is no assurance of certainty.¹

In Stephen's theory the problem of adultery is loaded with obsessively nightmarish significance, for it epitomizes the fact or threat of one incomplete human story/history being replaced by another story/history, more effective, if not more truthful. And what is truth, Stephen wonders, when one begins to suspect that '*Amor matris*, subjective and objective genitive, may be the only true thing in life' (9:842-3), that a truth may become the truth and a history may become the history only when they 'embrace' and are 'embraced' in turn by a 'mother,' whose all-too-human acceptance and love of the true story/history (as distinct from the Truth in his view) is overwhelmingly irritating for him? Thus, a father as imagined by Stephen is full of resentment, demanding to be revenged for being fatally dethroned or threatened to be so dethroned from his apparently authoritative position of fatherhood, let alone the Fatherhood:

Is it possible that player Shakespeare, a ghost by absence, and in the vesture of buried Denmark, a ghost by death, speaking his own words to his own son's name . . . is it possible, I want to know, or probable that he did not draw or foresee the logical conclusion of these premises: you are the dispossessed son: I am the murdered father: your mother is the guilty queen . . . ?

(9:174-80)

It is in response to this negatively conceived father's resentful demand that Stephen tends to imagine himself as a Messianic son who is commissioned to restore all the worldly paralyses of the words of story/history to an eschatological originality and/or finality of the Word of Truth. As a matter of fact, however, while '[t]ime's livid final flame leaps and, in the following darkness, ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry' is hallucinated by him in the Circe episode (15:4245), Stephen must eventually acknowledge that in reality '[o]nly the chimney's broken' (15:4285). Stephen's impatiently Messianic tendency must ever be teased by his own realistically mocking but inescapable self-interrogation of 'What's left us then?' (2:11).²

We may constructively criticize Stephen's vulnerability by specifying a critical self-contradiction he comes to betray in *Ulysses* in respect of the 'static' condition, which he had attributed in *A Portrait* to the 'esthetic emotion' attainable by the ideal artist (P, 186). In *Ulysses* he continues to ideally imagine his epiphanic/apocalyptic moment in a peculiarly 'tranquil' way:

Thought is the thought of thought. Tranquil brightness. The soul is in a manner all that is: the soul is the form of forms. Tranquility sudden, vast, candescent: form of forms. (2:74)

On the other hand, however, he is voluntarily

seeking some as yet unknown hand of redemption which will free him from the barrenness of the questionable quietude he finds himself falling into:

What is that word known to all men? I am quiet here alone. Sad too. Touch, touch me. (3:435)

It is neither the '[s]hrunken uncertain hand' of his real father Simon Dedalus (9:861) nor the 'blackened withered right arm' Stephen's dead mother raises towards him, admonishingly crying 'Beware God's hand!' (15:4218-9); Stephen cannot but acknowledge that he does not know how to love his parents truly, as yet. It may possibly be 'a woman's hand' (17:42), the cloud of salvation instinctively so perceived by Stephen; but the nature of his negativity towards life does not allow him to ask with true positive will ('will you?' 'I will') for the hand of whoever she may be, as yet. At least on 16 June 1904 it proves to be Leopold Bloom who eventually raises him, as the Father raised Saul '[fallen] to the earth,' twice calling to him with immediate familiarity: 'Stephen! . . . Stephen!' (15:4927-8).

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According to an answer given in the 'catechism' of the Ithaca episode, Leopold Bloom as a young man of 20 used to occupy himself with the problem of 'the quadrature of the circle' (17:1071). Although from obvious reasons he has given up its solution in due course of time, the aporia is still seen to wake of its own accord in his dream (17:2328). While Stephen Dedalus as a young man is over-scrupulously engrossed with the aporia of 'to be or not to be' throughout the day, ironically at the expense of his 'life' and 'art,' Leopold Bloom, as a middle-aged man has apparently learned to put the solution of aporiae in the hands of he knows not who or what, living meanwhile an apparently very com-

mon life of an advertising canvasser in Dublin. In fact, it is by way of this middle-aged man that *Ulysses* effects a further development of the problem of positivity and negativity that paralysed Stephen.

'No-one is anything' Bloom says to himself in a temporarily depressed mood at 'the very worst hour of the day' walking along Trinity College at lunch time (8:493-4). Contextually stress is placed on the negative *no-one* expressing his melancholic sentiment:

Piled up in cities, worn away age after age. Pyramids in sand. Built on bread and onions. Slaves Chinese wall. Babylon. Big stones left. Round towers. Rest rubble, sprawling suburbs, jerrybuilt. Kerwan's mushroom houses built of breeze. Shelter, for the night. (8:489-92)

Like Stephen imagining the church to be 'founded . . . upon the void. Upon incertitude, upon unlikelihood' (9:841-2), Bloom ruminates over the fatal instability and changeableness of all human edifices, citing the proverbially massive buildings of the ruined civilizations and the various erections Ireland has seen which range from her prehistoric and pre-Norman remains up to the modern low-cost housing. The sentiment can be likened to the rather nihilistic one of the *qōheleth* [preacher] in the Old Testament:

vanity of vanities; all is vanity.
(Ecclesiastes 1,2. AV)

However, there is a Copernican revolution inherent in Bloom's 'no-one is anything'; for, as Bloom the anythingarian proves in practice throughout the day, 'no-one,' i.e. something/somebody that finds itself/oneself not particularly something/somebody (at the expense of one's 'life or art'), is potentially anything/ anyone. So 'no-one' is potentially *anything*; in other words, 'Noman' is potentially 'Everyman' (17:2008).

Bloom's potentiality of being a Noman/Everyman might be linked with the condition of the biblical 'stray sheep' that has fatally wandered from its true shepherd who only knows its proper name and therefore can call it back to its proper fold. Leopold Bloom is essentially an 'exile' (etymologically, one who has 'wandered out of' one's proper place and does not know the way of return) who finds that he is essentially on uncertain terms with any forms or modes of life through which he is to realise his existence. He is certainly an advertising canvasser — only, nobody knows if he will not 'chuck' the job as Molly Bloom fancies 'he ought to' (18:503-4). He does profess to be of Irish nationality in the Cyclops episode simply because '[he] was born here. Ireland' (12:1431) — only, in the subsequent fracas he says 'Christ was a Jew like me' (12:1808-9). In fact, Bloom is essentially a Noman/Everyman in exile.

Noman/Everyman, reduced to extremities, finds that one must speak either 'no word' (which retrospectively reminds us of Stephen's peculiar 'silence') or 'every word' (which prospectively reminds us of the peculiar volubility of the language of *Finnegans Wake*). In *Ulysses* the situation is pointedly highlighted in the trial hallucinated by Bloom in the Circe episode where he must either explain himself by *no-voice* which the '[r]eporters complain that they cannot hear' (15:923-4) while Bloom 'talks inaudibly' (15:937); or, by trying to exploit every possible 'conventional phrases and modes of legal defence irrespective of logic and consequentiality' with the support of his 'appropriate apologist' J. J. O'Molly, the 'failed barrister gone to seed' [phrases borrowed from Harry Blamiers, *The New Bloomsday Book* (1988), p. 161].³

However, for all (or all the more for) his potentiality of being a Noman/Everyman, which is fully revealed in the fantasy part of the Circe episode, Bloom must positively be Somebody in reality. He must finally be Somebody, not by

such apologetically imitative or 'plagiarist' (15:822) way of reference to those forms and modes of life which Bloom as an exile finds essentially strange, as he hallucinated in the fantasy, but by having a positive will to be Somebody *through* them. This final necessity of positive will is hinted in the following pair of answers given in the Ithaca episode, where the direction Bloom has found it necessary to take in the course of life is reversed crosswise to that which young Stephen is striving to take:

[Stephen:] a conscious rational animal proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown and a conscious rational reagent between a micro and a macrocosm ineluctably constructed upon the incertitude of the void.

[Bloom:] a competent keyless citizen [who] had proceeded energetically from the unknown to the known through the incertitude of the void.

(17:1012-5, 1019-20. Emphasis added)

For Stephen all the worldly forms and modes of life are irritatingly 'ineluctable' *outside* or *above* which he is impelled to seek freedom:

No, I flew. My foes beneath me. And ever shall be. World without end. (*he cries*)
Pater! Free! (15:3935-6)

Thus he proceeds from the 'known' ineluctable forms and modes of life to the 'unknown' freedom, which is unknown to us readers too, having recourse to a negative and rather negativistic 'exile.' Meanwhile Bloom the Noman/Everyman must initially acknowledge that he is fundamentally an 'exile,' his proper place in this world being essentially 'unknown'; consequently, with this 'exiled' condition as basis, he 'energetically' wills to realise his worldly existence *through* the 'known' forms and modes of life, however unstable and incoherent they may prove to him in

essence. In fact it is this freedom of will to live energetically through the forms and modes of life which is known to Bloom the Noman/Everyman, and to us readers as well.

In this sense it is very apt that Leopold Bloom should have chosen to be an advertising canvasser; for, while given his advertisement *in posse* of 'a transparent showcart with two smart girls sitting inside writing letters . . .' (8:131-2) it might be difficult to call Bloom's 'a gentle art' (7:608), his art as it stands does enable him to establish himself on critically dynamic terms with the forms and modes of life available to him in such a way as Stephen, for all his claims to be the artist, failed to do. It is this dynamic or 'kinetic' as against 'static' property of his art that Bloom proves it necessary to recover as Noman/Everyman who positively wills to live. In *A Portrait* Stephen had opposed these two properties of art:

The feelings excited by improper art are kinetic, desire or loathing. Desire urges us to possess, to go to something; loathing urges us to abandon, to go from something. These are kinetic emotions. The arts that excite them, pornographical or didactic, are therefore improper arts. The esthetic emotion (I use the general term) is therefore static. The mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing.

(P, 186. Emphasis added)

Stephen has strived to 'do wonders' (3:192) in a totally 'static' way with a peculiar abhorrence of 'desire' which, although he has particularly attributed to what he assumes he is *not* (specifically to femininity which he ambivalently finds both enticing and 'loathsome'), eventually proves to be exactly what he critically needs to save himself — let him find his essential desire to be something at all, but hopefully the desire for 'that word known to all men,' i.e. love. Anyway, it is in this respect that Bloom is entitled to be

the critical father figure Stephen needs to come across, for it is he who knows precisely what a young man lacks/needs as well as exactly how much suffering and bewilderment are caused by the lack/need — once having been and still being more or less a young man himself — that has the potential for being *the* father to a son. This is why in the conversation with Stephen at 7 Eccles Street Bloom lets the young man tell a story of his own:

He preferred himself to see another's face and listen to another's words by which potential narration was realised and kinetic temperament relieved. (17:637-8)

For story/history, instead of being abhorred as 'a nightmare,' must be respected in a positive way at any rate.

This positive acknowledgement of human story/history establishes Bloom the advertising canvasser as a modern version of the kind of essentially positive prophet (as against the negatively nihilistic preacher of Ecclesiastes) that can afford to place his own life in such an extensive vision of the dynamic vicissitudes of all the forms and modes of life as depicted in the Book of Job:

[The earth] is changed like clay under the seal, and it is dyed like a garment.
(Job 38, 14. RSV)

Only, while the prophets of the Old Testament were ever warned against false prophesy by the Lord, Leopold Bloom the 20th century advertising canvasser must ever wonder whether the inspiration he receives is true or false, for no one can exactly tell which in view of the various human desires and human dreams it involves. But it is positively true that his inspirations, together with those received by all the other modern 'prophets' including 'The Wonderworker' (17:1819) and '*Physical Strength and How to Obtain It* by Eugen Sandow' (17:1397), do have their origin in the earnest desires and dreams of the

human being.⁴ Therefore, the desire and dream of telling a story/history must remain. And the kinetic dynamics of human desires and dreams finding and losing their realization in this world, the mystery of 'to be *and* not to be' involving 'all the living *and* the dead' (D, 201. Emphasis added), is surely a 'wonder' Stephen Dedalus has yet to learn.

Notes

1. Retrospectively, *Dubliners* begins with "The Sisters" where a boy ruminates over the 'paralysis' (D, 7) and death of his spiritual father, Father Flynn.
2. Cf. Marilyn French on the Oxen of the Sun episode: In the fallen world which is the only one man knows, all acts suffer from incompleteness, inadequacy, perversion, or limitation. The paralysis and disease that Dublin suffers are the paralysis and disease of the world The limitation of any style are basic human limitations: the great metaphor for these limitations is original sin, but unfortunately, no baptism can ever wash them away. [*The Book as World* (1976), p.172]
3. The critical problem of the paralysis of human speech Joyce reveals might be compared with the literal and/or figurative situation of dumbness specifically articulated in the Bible:

And Moses said unto the LORD, Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. [For the underlined phrase *Living Bible* reads 'for I have a speech impediment.' LB also gives a literal translation 'my speech is slow and halting' in the footnote.]

And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.

(Exodus 4,10-12. AV)

Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.

(Isaiah 35,6. AV)

. . . Jesus met a man who couldn't speak because a demon was inside him. So Jesus cast out the demon, and instantly the man could talk.

(Matthew 9,32-33. LB)

And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:

(Matthew 15,30. *AV*)

4. 'The Wonderworker' may or may not be fictitious [Don Gifford & Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses* (1988), p.596]. For Eugen Sandow 'the music hall muscleman' and his 'physical improvement manual' see Cheryl Herr, *Joyce's Anatomy of Culture* (1986), pp.193-4, and Gifford, p.75.