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COMMENT

Research For Meaning

IN *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Cranley says: "Alone, quite alone. You have no fear of that. And you know what that word means? Not only to be separate from all others but to have not even one friend." Then in the thoughts of Stephen Dedalus: "His words seemed to have struck some deep chord in his own nature. Had he spoken of himself, of himself as he was or wished to be?"

Apart from the meaning of Cranley's words, apart from their vividness and the great caesura here created by James Joyce in which we may sense the potential of young Stephen, even the inevitability of *Ulysses*, this is a passage worthy of careful examination for the light it casts upon the peculiar understanding that has become characteristic of our time. Cranley says "you" and yet he speaks in such a way that Stephen is compelled to ask of him: "Of whom are you speaking?" Stephen recognizes that Cranley speaks of himself, because he, too, has used indirection all too often. He observes the inverted gaze and senses that here is a man who speaks of himself though he employs the "you," and when Stephen calls Cranley "the child of exhausted loins," may we not also ask of Joyce: of whom are you speaking? What is peculiar about this kind of understanding is its use of the inward gaze. Some speak of the force of the intuition, but this is an inaccuracy. Only self-knowledge permits one to sense the feelings of others, and this comprehension may be either conscious or unconscious, for we may at some time realize we understand because we see something of ourselves in the other person, or at other times understand without knowing quite why we do (perhaps because we do not care to see ourselves reflected in the other). It is a paradox that in an age which extols objectivity and the scientific our greatest weapon of understanding has been the subjective, the inward gaze. And it is perhaps due to this exaltation of the concrete and the factual that we have in our literature and psychology moved so fiercely to subjectivity.

I make this comment on an attitude because the whole process of thought involved in my writing this piece has been bound up in the nature and force of my own subjective experience in reading Joyce's *Ulysses*.

The first time I read *Ulysses* I was twenty and deeply impressed by my second reading of the *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. I was intent upon following Dedalus, for I could not forget the smart of the pandybat on Stephen's palm. Here and there as I scurried through

Ulysses I was aware of the name of Bloom and began to feel some faint contempt stirring in me each time the name reappeared, partly because Bloom seemed too much a "Yid" and an old woman, partly because he seemed so downtrodden, so unaspiring, such a simple soul—all too common for the likes of me. For I had sullenly turned my back on home, Judaism, father, mother; I found myself in love with things beyond and above, sought a figure strange and strong and sneered at Bloom.

A few years later, rereading *Ulysses*, I found myself entirely with Bloom and strangely enough more than a little scornful of Stephen, whom I found to be a bit of a prig and a stuffed shirt. (I hear myself younger mouthing fine words as Stephen does and feel ashamed.) Could it be merely the difference of a few years, I asked myself. Even if my new feeling about the book stemmed from my own growth and fuller experience, I was certain that something in the nature of the work itself provides such fodder for rumination. *War and Peace* re-read yielded little more than a revival of certain favorite images and relationships within the novel. But I felt in reading *Ulysses* as a blind man brought back to a strange country he had once visited and who is suddenly able to see. Everything comes back to him, but with such force that at once all the mysteries he could only sense before are now comprehensible to him.

One other incidental decided that I would attempt to discover for myself the meaning of Bloom: to the question why did Joyce make Bloom a Jew, Professor William Troy matter-of-factly set aside the question: because the Wandering Jew served as a meaningful symbol. But there is more to a Jew than his wandering, I thought in protest, and Bloom is more than a nightwanderer; he is not even a persecuted man, and his loneliness is compounded of things other than rootlessness and persecution. Even linking Bloom to Jesus as William York Tyndall does in his book on Joyce did not satisfy me, for Bloom is no leader of men. He is not bent on things of the spirit nor upon dying and saving. Bloom's is too narrow a vision, too inverted a view, to admit comparison to Jesus. True, Bloom's essential nature is humane, compassionate, but his humanity and compassion are passivity and simplicity themselves. There is something Jesus-like in his suffering (he suffers but he is not persecuted), but he is too incomplete to be a Jesus.

As Bloom observes the typesetter at the newspaper plant he is reminded of "Poor Papa with his hagadah book, reading backwards with his finger to me. Pessach. Next year in Jerusalem. Dear, o dear!

All that long business about that brought us out of the land of Egypt and into the house of bondage alleluia. Shema Israel Adonai Elohenu. No, that's the other. Then the twelve brothers, Jacob's sons. And then the lamb and the cat and the dog and the stick and the water and the butcher and then the angel of death kills the butcher and he kills the ox and the dog kills the cat. Sounds a bit silly till you come to look into it well. Justice it means but it's everybody eating everyone else. That's what life is after all." Bloom's Judaism is only surface and not integral with his nature; he possesses, in fact, few of the true qualities of the Jew, and this is so I believe because Joyce himself was no Jew and could neither assimilate nor simulate these qualities—the deep-dredged melancholy, the self-pity and self-abasement that go hand in hand with terrible pride, and the acidic humor, that strange combination, perverse conjunction of lamentation and self-mockery.

Why did Joyce write of Bloom to the degree that he did? Leopold might have been served up as a thin wafer of a symbol, a shadow of the archetypal pater. But Joyce insists upon lavishing attention on this pale, drab sentimentalist, mocks him too little to allow us to shove him aside as merely symbol of wanderer and father. In effect he drapes him about with a semblance of light and patheticizes him, focuses on him such a tender cameraeye, that in the end we not only love Bloom but feel him as though he were compounded of love itself, for in himself he seems to embody love of humanity more than Jesus, and he almost becomes the quality and concept of love itself to the obliteration of Bloom the man, who is so terribly human, so fully etched upon the backdrop of Dublin town.

We see Bloom watching "curiously, kindly, the lithe black form" of the cat. "They call him stupid," he thinks. "They understand what we say better than we understand them. She understands all she wants to. Vindictive too. Wonder what I look like to her. Height of a tower? No, she can jump me." This is the kind of mind-activity we find in children—especially lonely children who go about trying to fit themselves into every nook, trying to feel themselves a part of a place. Only a lonely man suffers his mind to go awandering after legs and miaouws and the sights and sounds of external life, for thus may he bind himself to something of the world, thus may he sever the vacuole in which he is forever digesting the contents of his self.

In this second reading of *Ulysses* I became more and more aware of Bloom's loneliness and the nature of his isolation, yet I had not forgotten the loneliness of Stephen that led me originally to follow after

him through Dublin. But Stephen exiles himself. In all of Joyce no scene more clearly and fully evokes the sense of the struggle of the youth who embarks on the search after blooms as when Stephen cries: "Look here, Cranley . . . 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." The consciousness with which Stephen sets about severing himself from that which has created him is what distinguishes him from Bloom in the main. Here we have revealed the self-conscious nature of the artist-creator.

Stephen says first he will not serve home, fatherland or church. He rebels against being made to feel as one who serves; he cannot accept power over him; he rebels against the role of a lesser one, of one who must submit, who is without power. He asks to express himself, he wills that he set out to express himself freely and wholly. And he sets out as one who must do battle. He chooses his weapons with care—the cloak of silence that will conceal him from the eyes of all. This failing, then total exile—and the sword of cunning by which he may avenge and revenge himself upon those who have sought, will seek, to enslave him. And he does not see that going, thus armed he wholly negates himself, blind to the fear and anger that sends him off in fear enraged. Stephen speaks of a mode of life or art, as if art were a way one might sustain apart from living.

I myself in coming to understand Bloom denied Stephen, pressed him out of mind as a pompous puppy, thinking of myself, how I too had set forth in such a way, so self-consciously. Yet all too soon I learned that denial does not yield freedom, for denial is indicative of great fear, and fear always points to an old enslavement. Only in acceptance and in the full comprehension of reality do we find freedom and expression. Stephen watches Cranley (as I watch Stephen) as he watches everyone, even himself—and Stephen recognizes that Cranley is speaking of himself, because Stephen too, in fear, uses indirection all too often. But it is his mother who recognizes the great lacks in Stephen—the element of the positive, the element of growth, the quality of the female—lacks which will prevent his becoming a great artist and a whole man. He will never know life nor fully live if he moves through the world as cold, as observing, denying, and despising as he does. If he does not permit himself to feel within the pain of living and thus to know the pain of others because he has admitted to being human and culpable, weak and fallible, in need of others, in need of

father, mother, woman—people—then he will never fully know himself, remaining exiled in ignorance and aloofness.

Both Stephen and Bloom are embarked upon a search. As lonely men they set out on journeys into nowhere. They know not even what they seek; Stephen may articulate as the conscious artist and yet Bloom, no artist at all, knows he seeks a son and still does not understand this hunger for a son. For all his consciousness, Stephen is not even faintly aware that what he is seeking is to *be*—to be god-creator, to feel by the expression of himself what he is, of what he is capable, to feel the power of creation. It occurred to me that when I first encountered Stephen in Dublin I, too, had set about denying home and history with as much ague and anguish as he had. Yet now that I have come in a sense home again or at least to accept my history I feel with Bloom and comprehend his loneliness to be akin to mine. And because Bloom can only be an extension of Joyce it occurred to me that Stephen and Bloom meeting is not the meeting of father and son (a popular interpretation), but a meeting of minds—in fact, two portions of a single mind. In Stephen we have the conscious mind, that self-aware and self-directing stream of thought and rationality, and in Bloom the unconscious primitive response and emotion, the freely-wandering river that reaches here and there undammed.

And this gave me some hint as to why so many complain of the difficulty of *Ulysses*. I asked myself again and again where had been the difficulty I had originally experienced, where was the obscurity that had driven me from further exploration. I wondered if it were not quite another thing that had hindered my grasping the meaning of the book. I recalled expressing the nub of it all in a sudden fit of impatience: in a course on The Writer and Society we were discussing the effect of Freud upon the novelists, and there had been an attempt to consider the demarcation between the prefreudians and the post-freudians. "There are no new things being said about the nature of man, I exclaimed; it is simply that before Freud and Dostoievsky, writers usually made characters either heroes or villains—and with Joyce we face the hero-villain, man as he really is, and we are unable to face the fact of ourselves being imbued with evil." Joyce showed good and evil in one man and made the one man everyman, whereas before we had in literature innocents and maleficents and were satisfied that the world of fiction was so neatly divided. Now we have no Faust on one hand and the Devil on the other, but the devil in faust and faust in the devil—a nightmare made reality, Circe deified instead of calumniated, and we are all so mixed up we don't know what to do.

Because we're afraid. And a good many people say they don't like contemporary fiction—it's too morbid, ugly, sick.

In the *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Stephen had said to his mother that: "... religion was not a lying-in hospital. Mother indulgent. Said I have a queer mind and have read too much. Not true. Have read little and understood less. Then she said I would come back to faith because I had a restless mind. This means to leave church by backdoor of sin and re-enter through a skylight of repentance. Cannot repent."

Jung lays a finger on part of the conflict in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* when he writes: "How can I be substantial if I fail to cast a shadow, I must have a dark side also if I am to be whole; and inasmuch as I become conscious of my shadow I also remember that I am a human being like any other."

Heretofore man has prayed to spirits external, sought salvation and exoneration from them, often at the cost of his physical self. In return he was linked to city, state, church, and family; he felt himself a part of a tradition and culture, part of a race and a way, he knew his role as provider, male, worker. All the symbols of state and church, of history and culture, tended to augment an image of an ideal to which man felt himself truly attached. He rarely needed to feel or was made to feel the quality of himself alone. If he failed to live up to demands of his ideal, he was consoled and permitted to free himself of guilt and shame by repenting.

Is it a paradox then that in denying absolutes and coming little by little to accept our physical selves, we still have become less whole, creatures affrighted and afloat, as the world expands about us? We touch each other and seek to hold together, huddling to keep warm because cold winds are rising. Yet we have come no closer to finding ourselves whole because we have cut ourselves from all that has created us, denied what we cannot deny—the face of our father as we see it in the cracked mirror we are always straightening our hair in. Even to the end Stephen denies Bloom, denies that which he seeks—that feeling with mankind which lies within himself. Consciously he seeks to set himself up as the god-creator apart from humanity, while Bloom seeks a link to the body of people, self-fulfillment through a son. Partly both men deny the existence of the female, Stephen refusing to recognize that the truly creative partakes of femaleness and Bloom failing to realize that only Molly can truly endow him with a son and self-image. It is not just life that Stephen must go forth to experience. It is life and love, as his mother sees it; he must offer himself to ex-

perience, for love comes only from compassion, not from the detachment of the artist who broods on the sidelines in bitterness, contempt, and longing. Until Stephen can learn to accept both coffee and bun from Bloom, until he can accept this token of affection and friendship, he cannot learn to give and thus express himself as fully as he wishes. Only the fearful man holds back a piece of cake—to be eaten on the sly, or merely to be saved, as consolation for having had to give because of being asked. The free man gives and gives freely and has no need to withhold as symbol.

At first I held Molly as less than the lowest of blooms, failed to understand her as being more than an old mollycoddle of a woeman. But I finally saw her as being the rounding out of the whole, the final link in the holy trinity: Stephen, Bloom and Molly. The ideal man would possess the essential qualities of each, the perception and integrity of Dedalus the artist, the warmth, feeling and compassion of Bloom the humanitarian, and the gusto, the ability to enjoy life-and-feeling of Mother Molly. Stephen is intellectual and aesthete; Bloom the simple homely man craving the normalcy of fatherhood and renewal in the flesh and spirit of a son, to give as a father teaching the fruits of his experience. By Brady's cottages he sees a boy smoking and thinks: "Tell him if he smokes he won't grow. O let him! His life isn't such a bed of roses! Waiting outside pubs to bring da home." Here we see him quench the fatherspirit in him, yet eventually he warns Stephen kindly of the dangers of nighttown.

One might take Molly to be the link between the two men, but I take Bloom to be balance and link between the two poles of Stephen and Molly; Molly is somewhat the incarnation of carnality, Stephen bears the sinister note of the faust legend as cold and compelling creator. Both possess creative power, and where power is there is an element of the unknown and to-be-feared.

The final chapter of *Ulysses* is forty-five pages of unbroken, unpunctuated mollysong, in which Joyce leaves no doubt that in creating the great trilogy of the *Portrait*, *Ulysses*, and later *Finnegan's Wake*, he utterly found himself. He holds nothing from our vision, gives of himself fully—as only a man can who has reached full stature. These final lines are almost a paean to life: "and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes."

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