

"PROTEUS" AND PROSE: PATERNITY OR WORKMANSHIP ?

by

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"PROTEUS" AND PROSE: PATERNITY OR WORKMANSHIP?

Unlike Menelaus in the *Odyssey*, Stephen Dedalus in the "Proteus" episode of *Ulysses*, does not ask why he has been held up so long on his island. He knows the banal financial answer to that. Rather, he is seeking the answer to another question from a Proteus of his own who takes the forms of the Old Men of his Island, mostly dead -- Columbanus, Swift, Berkeley, Wilde -- one figure after another, "nacheinander", his literary fathers; and of some elders still very much alive, "nebeneinander" -- AE, Yeats, Hyde, even Bram Stoker.¹ Each of these men has made a name for himself, and Stephen is wrestling with them to yield an answer to his question: What must I do to be memorable like you my fellow-Dubliners? Or as the catechism question might have put it at Clongowes: What must I do to gain eternal life? On earth, of course, not in heaven.

What must he, an Irishman, do to write for his mother something as good as the Englishman Milton wrote for a friend? -- whether he is really grieved, or is using her as Milton used Edward King. In "Lycidas", that poem recently much in Stephen's mind, Milton said: "Fame is the spur". In his "Verses on the death of Dr Swift", Stephen's Dublin precursor -- a man also much on Stephen's mind here -- had suggested that it might be envy. Is there a difference? Does it matter provided either gives the necessary impetus?

¹ In German *nacheinander* means "one after another in time" and *nebeneinander* means "next to each other in space."

Some of the Irishmen Stephen thinks about here were Wild Geese who had made it out of Ireland with widely different motives, and some of them had returned and become famous.² Others had become famous abroad. The least successful of those who flew was Kevin Egan, the forgotten nationalist, who did not return and was not famous. There is no future, certainly no immortality in imitating Kevin. Immortality lies with Swift and Berkeley and Wilde and Yeats, the writing men, all unionists and Protestants, unlike Stephen and Kevin. But Stephen is like them in one way: they are all men of the Pale, that small area of Ireland that included Dublin, where the English language and English culture prevailed. Their books are Protestant and Protean, *in different forms: perhaps Q (quarto?), F (folio?), W (whatever) (3. 140)*, in many places at the same time like the Catholic Eucharist in which those writers did not believe and about which they did not write. But all copies of Berkeley's philosophical discussions are eucharistic at least in the sense that they are the same wherever seen or read. Occident and immortal and ubiquitous. By contrast, poor Kevin Egan's name will die with the few who remember him, for he only sets in type what others write. His legacy is not protean, eucharistic, immortal. Even his son Patrice does not believe in his father's country, his father's faith, or his father's politics, any more than Stephen does in his father's politics, his mother's faith or his own country.

The scene switches, protean fashion, from Dublin to Paris and back; and the part played by the failed Kevin Egan is unexpectedly prominent, though oddly ignored in most of the commentaries. Kevin's foregrounded presence suggests Stephen's fear that even escape to Paris might be the end of his literary ambitions as it was of Egan's political hopes. At this point Stephen is no more than a thrower-out of other people's thoughts, as Egan is a

² "Wild Geese" was an expression in Ireland for those fighting men who left Ireland after the surrender of Limerick to William of Orange in 1691. The term was sometimes applied later to anyone who left Ireland. See Don Gifford, **Ulysses Annotated** (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), notes to 3.163-4, 7.543 etc.

printer of other people's words. Still, Kevin Egan as a printer **is** a man of letters, and Stephen might turn out to be little better even if he escapes again to Paris. The Dublin men of letters whom he rather arrogantly despises as belletristic, are better off than that. And Kevin had shown daring, courage; had risked prison or death sentence in a selfless cause as none of these literary men had or would, including Stephen, as he acknowledges. And what is Kevin's reward? He is "loveless, landless, wifeless" (253). Unromantic exiled rebel who DID serve all those things that Stephen in **Portrait** said he would not serve. Yet Kevin Egan is not mocked. He has been a failure; not a byronic or luciferian grand failure, just a failure, who had, however, one thing in common with Byron and Lucifer whom Stephen admires: he had put everything on the line. Men who serve a cause, political or literary; men and angels who serve nothing and no one, who say "non serviam", may all end up with silence, exile and nothing.

"Where are my comrades?" was the other question asked of Proteus by Menelaus. The question asked of Menelaus by Telemachus was "Where is my father?" That is not Stephen's question. For, a 21-year-old youth who thinks himself in a league with Byron or Lucifer is not generally in search of a father, especially if he has left his father's house "to seek misfortune." Contrary to much received critical opinion, Stephen is here looking not for a father, either Simon Dedalus or Leopold Bloom, but for fatherhood.³ His own. And not biological, but artistic. He is wrestling, as I have said, with his literary forebears, Berkeley, Swift and the rest, to get the answer to his question: How or when am *I* to father a work of art?

³ Two other critics question the notion of son in search of a father, both of them in **The Augmented Ninth**, ed. B. Benstock (Syracuse UP, 1988): M. Beja in his introduction to "The Unmystical Estate or the Legal Fiction: Paternity in **Ulysses**," pp. 215-218, and M. Rabaté in "Paternity thy Name is Joy"(219-25). In addition, Rabaté glances at the idea of paternity as a metaphor for artistic creation which I examine here in some detail.

By the time that this metaphor has been explored in the episode an unavoidable conclusion had been reached: the artist does not *father* a work of art, does not create it *ex nihilo*. Unlike the body, which is begotten not made by the father, and unlike the Word, which is begotten not made by the Father, the word is made not begotten by the author. It is fabricated by artifice, by the force of the artist's mind and hand working on the protean flux of experience with the language left him by his predecessors and his elder contemporaries; it is forged, as the younger Stephen might have put it, in a smithy with material and tools. Adam, our first father, was not begotten; he was formed from the dust of the earth by his Maker; and Eve was formed from Adam's rib. Hence, Eve "had no navel. ... buckler of taut vellum" (42). An artist, a poet, a writer on vellum, is also a *maker*, to use the apt medieval English word. Hence, he is like God making man and woman, not like God begetting the Word.

Stephen is wrong about his own conception and birth: "Wombed in sin darkness I was too, made not begotten" (45). His own father Dedalus and old father Daedalus and even father Egan begat sons just by the natural act of lust. But Daedalus the artificer had to *shape* the cow with artifice, *make* it so that it was good enough to deceive the bull from the sea -- a trick of sorts, perhaps somewhat like Bishop Berkeley pulling the veil of the temple out of his shovel hat, but certainly not a genetic fact, over which men and bulls have no control after that momentary act of sexual union. And the artistic work must be made alone, with cunning not coupling. You can possibly make yourself immortal by fathering children, an idea that Shakespeare explored in his sonnets, as Stephen well knows; but children too within time's sickle's compass come. You can, however, write eternal lines in books which cannot **all** be destroyed:

*So long as men have breath, and eyes to see,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.* (Sonnet 18)

Not entirely true, of course. The name of the beloved "thee" is not in our minds or on our

lips; we do not know who it was, and we were never meant to know it, any more than we know the identity of "Mr W.H., the onlie **begetter**" of the sonnets to whom the printer's dedication wished "all happinesse and that eternitie promised by our ever-living poet." It is the poet-artist who is ever-living: "So long lives this, and this gives life to *me*." The pen is mightier than the penis or the womb. In the 14th chapter of *Ulysses*, where the idea of fatherhood and creativity is taken up again, Stephen will say "In woman's womb word is made flesh but in the spirit of the *maker* all flesh that passes becomes the word that shall not pass away." (U 14: 292-94).

Given a maker, what about the method and matter of the literature which the maker is to fashion? Well, first the things and people and thoughts that come *nacheinander* (one after the other in time) or *nebeneinander* (next to each other in space), to be ordered into words printed on a page (also *nebeneinander and nacheinander*). Rather like good composing in the printing house: "Proper words in proper places," in the phrasing of that other reluctant Dubliner, Jonathan Swift. Not to mention proper letters. Easier said than done. Later, in "Aeolus", Bloom admires the artifice of a printer: "He stayed in his walk to watch a typesetter neatly distributing type. Reads it backwards first. Quickly he does it. Must require some practice that. *mangiD kcirtaP*. ... How quickly he does that job. Practice makes perfect. Seems to see with his fingers" (U 7: 203- 216). But if you typeset "*mangiD kcirtaP*" it will not come out "Patrick Dignam" or "Dignam Patrick". You need a dayfather, a printing house artificer, Nannetti or Egan, not an ad seller or a midwife, for even the midwife may have to handle a miscarriage of something begotten not made, something that came out *mangiD kcirtaP*, though she is not responsible for it. And even the printer blemishes Bloom's name because of Bloom's interruption (see "Eumaeus," U. 1260), though not as badly as Bloom would have botched Patrick Dignam's. Bloom thinks of the printer: "Queer lot of stuff he must have put through his hands in his time: obituary notices, pubs' ads, speeches, divorce suits, found drowned" (U 7: 197-199). All

of it ephemera. Much of it the substance and accidents of **Ulysses**.

In "Proteus" the mind of Stephen, the would-be poet, is still an incoherent sea of words, phrases and ideas in no printable order: back to front, upside down, in Proteese, with bits of nearly every major European language, alive and dead, and very minor ones like gypsy cant and Gaelic, hence most of them are other people's words and phrases, and some are those that **have** been set in eternal type: the Bible, Catholic ritual (he thought), Shakespeare, Milton -- better quality stuff than the cliches of Deasey's letter, but still not Stephen's original thoughts. To put it (as he does) melodramatically and mixed-metaphorically, he is still a dog "vulturing the dead" (363); more quotidianly, he is a dog sniffing and partly digging up old dogsbodies, an intellectual cocklepicker or a ragman dealing in scraps of texts of poets and philosophers. "Tatters. Outofthat, you mongrel" (U 3: 353). He is a composite of bits of major and minor authors from Aristotle to Taxil, from Arnold and Berkeley to Millevoye and Veuillot.⁴

If we can attribute most of the original language of the chapter to Stephen rather than to Joyce whose schema informs us that the "art" of the chapter is philology, we see that Stephen already has considerable mastery of the protean English language, linguistic skills with which he handles the tools left to him by his predecessors, and tools he has fashioned for *himself* from what they have bequeathed to him. He has the ability, for example, to switch frequently from scene to scene, from time period to time period, to change from

⁴ In all, about one quarter of the whole chapter according to Murray McArthur, "Signs on a White Field: Semiotics and Forgery in the *Proteus* Chapter." **ELH** 53 (1986), 649. The extended list of authors can be found in Erwin Steinberg's, **The Stream of Consciousness and Beyond in *Ulysses***. Pittsburgh: U of P Press (1973), p. 71

first to second to third person the grammar of the apparent narrator.⁵ Protean pronoun changes all refer to the same person : "Stephen closed *his* eyes to hear his boots crush crackling wrack and shells. *You* are walking through it howsomever. *I* am, a stride at a time. ... Open *your* eyes. No. Jesus! If *I* fell over a cliff that beetles o'er his base." (U3: 10-14, my emphases).

He can mint neologisms: *myriadislanded, moondrawn, ghostcandled, unbeheld, shamewounded, longlashed* (390-430), all self-explanatory past participles made from items in an inherited vocabulary. The present participles are nearly as plentiful, inventive and as colorfully pellucid: *vulturing, lowskimming, almosting, redpanting*, etc. And this is merely a selection of the coins he can forge at will.

He can also draw directly on his inherited treasury, selecting with the care of a skald or scop, archaic words with the flavor of the Spenserean Pale rather than the peat smoke of Synges Aran Islands: *jerkined dwarfs, nans and sutlers, a scullion crowned; on a field tenney, a buck trippant, proper, unattired; seamorse; moiety; the dead dog's bedraggled fell; a buckler of taut vellum; a pard, a panther, got in spousebreach; moist pith of farls of bread, her matin incense.* (My emphases).

What else might a literary artist need in addition to manipulated grammar and an endlessly

⁵ "A conscious virtuosity in the handling of language as an end in itself and an exploitation of the affective resonance of words" is how Gilbert defined the 'art' of this chapter, philology. He does little to illustate the truth of this definition. (**James Joyce's Ulysses: A Study.** (NY: Vintage, 1958), p. 116. Others cite Joyce's words to Budgen: "Everything changes: sea, sky, man, animals. The words change too." ... "Almosting!" I said. "Yes" said Joyce. "That's all in the protean character of the thing. Land, water, dog, time of day. Parts of speech change too. Adverb becomes verb" (Budgen 49 & 55). . Even Budgen's commentary on this chapter, which is one of the best, does not do much to display the verbal creativity. J. Mitchell Morse's chapter does a good job on the other transformations in the episode in **James Joyce's Ulysses: Critical Essays** ed. C. Hart and D. Hayman, (Berkeley: U of Cal P, 1974), 29-49.

renewable vocabulary? Verbal sound effects perhaps: onomatopoeia and assonance, alliteration and internal rhyme, all together or separate: "crush crackling wrack and shells" already quoted. "Dead breaths I living breathe, tread dead dust, devour a urinous offal from all dead. Hauled stark over the gunwale he breathes upward the stench of his green grave, his leprous nosehole snoring to the sun." (U 3: 479-481).

But all these verbal resources are apparently not enough to enable Stephen to produce an elegy for his mother. Milton wrote *Lycidas* for "the drowned man", and Wilde wrote *Requiescat* for his sister, just as Tennyson, gentleman poet, wrote *In Memoriam* for Hallam, Gray an elegy for the nameless villagers of Stoke Poges, and Yeats two elegies for Lady Gregory's son. Within the fiction of **Ulysses**, even Deasy has written a kind of elegy for dead or dying cattle, a bullock-befriender, if no bard. With all his rhetorical skills why can't Stephen drive out his demon by writing an effective exorcism, a lament for his mother instead of always bringing back Yeats's poetry or the Catholic ritual to do it for him? If he must turn aside and brood, let him come out with something other than the poet's "Fergus" or the Church's "liliata rutilantium"(U 1: 276, 736). Let him stop caressing his own single phrase, "odor of ashes and rosewood"(U2. 145-6), and fit it into some coherent poem that will "put a pin in it" to hold it down, and give rest to his mother's perturbed spirit and his own.

Wait. "Oomb, allwombing tomb, . . . roar of cataractic planets, globed, blazing" (U3. 402-3). The mountain, no, the universe, is in labor. "Paper!" To deliver a baby on? To deliver a thought on? Quickly. Out it comes from a "parent" alternately solemn or sceptical (408-433). What is it? A poetic prosy version of menstruation just adverted to? (392-7). Then he is **not** pregnant with a great thought. Perhaps it is a miscarriage of a gothic-erotic elegy begotten by the very **thought** of the kiss of the vampire of Bram Stoker, fellow Dubliner, inventor of Dracula: "mouth to her mouth's kiss" (U 3:398),⁶

⁶ The phrase is half quoted again in "Oxen of the Sun" where the implication is that the vampire impregnates with a kiss.

her mouth his mother's, the vampire's kiss her death sentence? Or perhaps his body has just emitted something.⁷

Whatever Stephen has "produced", the effort exhausts him, and he lies down on the rocks to take his well earned post-production rest, like and unlike an earlier Creator, because he looked and saw, or thought he saw, that what he had made was exceedingly good: *Et vidit De(dal)us. Et erant valde bona* (U 3. 439-40). With a contented sigh (?) comes Yeats' line once more, {for the last time, we hope), since Stephen should not need it again:

And no more turn aside and brood

⁷ "Was he short taken?" asks Crawford later when he sees the curtailed letter (7:521). Deasy wasn't, but Stephen was, perhaps. Twenty five years ago David Hayman suggested that the major emission in the episode comes from Stephen's masturbation in the course of an erotic fantasy: Stephen's Masturstroke. Perhaps. But, as I suggest here, you could match Hayman by bringing together phrases to indicate (inconclusively) a number of emissions, real or metaphorical, including the possibility that Stephen is squatting at stool and wiping himself with the part of Deasy's letter, as Bloom does with another piece of journalism. We *are* told that Stephen stuffed the scribbled note back in his pocket with the pencil, but did he wipe himself on the blank part and write his poem over or on the back of the typed part? Stephen does **not** pull it out of his pocket with Deasy's letter in "Aeolus." In "Nausicaa" later Bloom writes his ephemeral inscription on the sand in much the same spot as Stephen composed his poem. Bloom there comes across something: "Mr Bloom stopped and turned over a piece of paper on the strand. He brought it near his eyes and peered. Letter? No, can't read. Better go. Better. I'm tired to move. Page of an old copybook.... All these rocks with lines and scars and **letters**" (13: 1246-61). Did Stephen drop his poem from his pocket when he rummaged for his handkerchief?

On the matter of writing as defecation see **FW** 185-187 especially the Latin on 185 (translated in McHugh). In his Paris Notebooks (slightly modified in **P**, 214) Joyce posed the question "Why are not excrements, children and lice works of art?" His negative answer is: "Excrements, children and lice are human products -- human dispositions of sensible matter. The process by which they are produced is natural and not artistic; their end is not an aesthetic end: therefore they are not works of art." (**CW** p. 146). Whatever about lice, Stephen's answer to the question about the other two seems to be the same as Joyce's.

We should hear no more of "*Liliata rutilantium ...*" or of the dead man or disconnected phrases about Stephen's mother: exorcism by verse or worse, finally. Stephen should be able to set out "Tomorrow to fresh woods and pastures new," to coin a phrase.

The chapter should end about here with a triumphant display of the new production, but it does not. We do not get to see the "*valde bona*". Instead we get another page of prose that tries everything it knows to cover up the fact that we are not hearing the verse that Stephen produced in that moment of creation or excretion. We later learn (in "Aeolus") that he has produced four lines of four words each, all but two of them monosyllables, many from Hyde and others.⁸ It is largely the waste product of what Stephen has ingested mentally, a natural emission, a child's "making" perhaps, but not a mature poet's. Stephen seems to realize this by the time of the "Aeolus" chapter, for there he has enough self-critical taste not to recite the "romantic" verse to the audience, but produces a sardonic prose story (U 7:521 ff). incorporating the solid reality of the two older women on the beach, the ones with the miscarriage (U 3.36).

"Cousin Stephen, you will never be a -- saint" (128). But "poet" not "saint" is the word Stephen is avoiding, the word Dryden used to Swift, writer of great prose, fellow-countryman, fellow-Dubliner of Stephen, and fellow-hater of his neighbor as himself.⁹ What Stephen seems to learn from the beach experience is that he cannot become Yeats's rival, but he can make Swift his master.

Here on the strand looking at the same scene that Swift and Yeats had known before him,

⁸ 3. See Robert Day, "How Stephen Wrote his Vampire Poem," *JJQ* 17 (1981), 183-197.

⁹ Dryden's words to Swift: "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet" quoted in Sir Walter Scott's *Life of Dryden*, ed B. Kreissman (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P 1963), p. 318

Stephen's organs of artistic generation, male and female, imagination and experience, have not managed to unite like the sexual organs of his own father and mother who " clasped and sundered. Did the couplers will" (U3.47). Nothing worth much artistically is either begotten or made. And his physical organs have simply spilled water, seed, faeces, if any of these *is* indeed what has happened. Artistic **making** would need an artificer's imaginative Act of Union between hand and mind, between imagination and protean raw material. For begetting you do not try to control the forces of nature. You have an act of physical union, and some months later, without any further effort, there you are, Daedalus or Dedalus, father of a perfect human specimen, a repeatable miracle. This is creation or procreation; it is not art. God the Father spoke the Word, who was "begotten not made", according to the Creed, and from both Father and Son together "proceeded" the Holy Ghost who brooded upon the void to produce the world: —the mystery of Creation; — and who brooded upon a Virgin to produce the Word made flesh — the Incarnation that began the Redemption, Love's bitter mystery.¹⁰ This is Divine consubstantiality ; more neologically, more irreverently, and indeed more blasphemously, it is "contransmagnificandjewbangtentiality" (50-51). It is not art either. But that newly-minted word **is**.¹¹

Stephen Dedalus, would-be artificer, will not go with Fergus, will not embrace Ireland,

¹⁰ The Nicene Creed was regularly recited at Mass in Joyce's day. The phrases alluded to here are "one lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten son of God, born of the Father before all ages ... begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made" and "I believe in the Holy Ghost ...who proceedeth from the Father and the Son." See Gifford and Seidman 1.612 and 651, 3.45 and 9.838-9.3. For a very full discussion of the credal and heretical ideas on the Trinity that go through Stephen's mind see Frederick Lang, **Ulysses and the Irish God** (Bucknell U.P. 1993).

¹¹ Apparently only *Con-*, *-jew-*, and *-ity* are new; *transmagnificandandual* may have been borrowed without acknowledgement from a letter of Mangan's. See Seamus Deane, **Strange Country** (NY: Oxford UP 1998), p.137. The word *transmanfignimicanbandanduality* occurs in a novel by Michael McCarthy called **Gallowglass** (London, 1904), p. 399. See P Ledden in **JJQ** 37 (1999-2000), p.211. One gets the impression that playing with variations on these word-parts, and substituting some of one's own, was something of a game with nineteenth-century literati in Ireland.

his own country, for he finds her repellent, and such a union would be barren of any artistic issue, he thinks. So he will turn his back on her; he will take with him the assorted legacies left him by his literary "forefathers" mentioned earlier in this paper, together with memories of his own family, city, faith, companions, acquaintances, pissing dogs, seagulls, old women, porter bottles, crucified shirts — and, with the tools at his disposal, he will turn **them** into a work of art which will do honor to him but not to her. The problems to be solved are these: How is he to organize this foul rag-and-bone shop? How control the language of neologism and archaism to be something more than circus animals' tricks? How control the ocean of separate yet conjoined experiences so that **he** rules the waves? How weld *disjecta membra* into a cow good enough to attract a bull, or into a horse impressive enough to subvert a city?

The answer of **Ulysses** seems to be that the task cannot be done in *one* way but, like the metamorphoses of Proteus, only in a variety of ways, by the changing rhetorics of the chapters. The artist must devise artifices to make his work the protean polytropic device of Dedalus rather than the static construct of Daedalus. But for now some of the prose he produces is still Wildean or Swinburnian stuff that he can mass produce or excrete on demand. It is easy to make and easy to leave, pleasantly exhausting perhaps, like a good bowel movement, but not a Purefoy product, -- Beaufoy, maybe.

Stephen, the would-be maker of original things from commonplace things -- from the dust of the earth, from bodily emissions -- does not pare his fingernails coolly; he picks his nose, placing a piece of snot on a rock. *Super hanc petram ... Upon this rock I will put my snot.* We are perhaps present at the founding of a new church of one, with Stephen not a proto martyr who dies for a cause, but an absurd heresiarch, his latin quarter hat doing duty for the beaded Greek mitre of Arius (53), his crozier the ashplant, a branch of Yggdrasil, the giant tree of his Lochlann predecessors whose longships beached here (300-2), and who showed as little reverence for Christian episcopacy as Stephen. Indeed,

this rebel aspires to be like the Lucifer "qui nescit occasum" but may end up like the Lucifer who said "non serviam" and who thereafter and therefore knew a spectacular fall. Or he may end up like Ibsen's Brand (452), who would not compromise and lost everything; or like Icarus "found drowned" (471); like Odysseus who was promised "seadeath, mildest of all deaths" (482) by Teresias, and who was seen on his way "beyond the utmost bounds of human thought" by Lawn Tennyson. He may end like Wilde who brought *himself* down; or like Christ on crosstree, who had dared to say something very different from everyone else, and who died for it.

Ambitious heights and depths. But Stephen is still shown at the end of the chapter wearing another man's suit, another man's shoes, quoting other men's words. He is not, however, going back to the tower, and so he just may be about to shed the intellectual and literary castoffs he has been wearing. His mind may be "homing, upstream, silently moving, a silent ship" where he is the one master. (U3.505). When we next meet him in "Aeolus", the literary work he produces *seemingly* spontaneously is ready, he knows, for immediate albeit oral, publication, and is of an entirely different order from the thing he produced on the beach. It is not something he has emitted; it is something he has *made*.

