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STEPHEN'S OVIDIAN ECHOES IN ULYSSES

In his portrait of Stephen in both *Ulysses* and *A Portrait of the Artist*, Joyce presents a young man who has some biographical connections with his own young life and makes it easy to conflate the two. However, his authority as narrator/protagonist is deliberately qualified by Joyce who is careful to omit personal traits which would have made Stephen more likeable. I will look at how Joyce achieves this balance between Stephen's importance as protagonist and the lack of empathy which readers feel with this 'priggish, mawkish and altogether objectionable young man' (Budgen 1934, 60). I will argue that this is a deliberate technique designed to encourage the reader to weigh Stephen's words more carefully, that it is used elsewhere in *Ulysses* and that it identifies Ovid as a leading classical source for Joyce. To illustrate Ovid's importance to *Ulysses* I will then focus on further Ovidian echoes in 'Nestor' and 'Proteus'.

The most important 'flaw' in the presentation of Stephen is the lack of evidence that his love of art has produced anything worthwhile. Genuine evidence of Stephen's talent would have allowed readers to empathise with his passionate ideals and his outsider status. Instead we must rely on the fear and begrudging respect which he receives from his put upon friends and family. His paltry output is limited to the villanelle to Emily in *A Portrait* and to the four line poem in *Ulysses* which Stephen himself derides. Both attempts highlight his youth rather than his artistic genius, while the composition of the villanelle effectively prevents Stephen from venturing out to meet Emma. In 1900 the young Joyce had by contrast been successful in having his review of Ibsen published and by 1904 a number of his poems had been published in the *Saturday Review* and his short stories had appeared in the *Irish Homestead*. Joyce could legitimately have presented his portrait in a more flattering light but chose instead to present Stephen without any evidence of his credibility as an artist.

Further undermining Dedalus, Joyce omitted any traces of a sense of humour in stark contrast with his younger self who 'much more than his reputation for being clever, his good humour and gaiety made him a favourite with his many sisters and relatives' (Stanislaus Joyce 1958, 76-77). He also omits any display of emotional engagement with friends and family which Stanislaus attributes to his brother, or which Joyce himself allowed Stephen to have in *Stephen Hero*. In *A Portrait* however, Stephen is too embroiled in his aesthetic theories to be capable of humour. Comedy is introduced into *Ulysses*, but even in a fiction in which, as Sebastian Knowles tells us, 'each episode is built upon a joke, an essential incongruity for us to find', Stephen gets the flattest jokes and the ones most appropriate for his situation and character (Knowles 2004, 4). For example, it is the offence to Stephen, rather than to his mother that Knowles says is the incongruity upon which 'Telemachus' is built. Most readers however, will side with Buck Mulligan in dismissing this attitude and so the laugh evoked by the incongruity is directed at Stephen. In 'Nestor' it is the clownish student's definition of Pyrrhus as 'a pier' which evokes laughter and derision among his classmates and Stephen's continuation of the allusion, by defining a pier as a disappointed bridge, is simply met with incomprehension. The laughter in 'Proteus' also falls flat when Stephen thinks:

Qui vous a mis dans cette fichue position?
C'est le pigeon, Joseph. (Joyce 2000, 51)

Evoking the miraculous conception, this joke attempts a slur on the idea of the Holy Spirit who has been changed into a common pigeon. In Catholic doctrine the only sin which cannot be forgiven is a sin against the Holy Spirit and so Stephen, like Lucifer, has fallen. Joyce's own efforts to finally leave the Catholic Church were noted by Stanislaus and bear a striking resemblance to Stephen's attempts in 'Proteus'. In a manuscript note to his *Dublin Diary* Stanislaus wrote that Jim 'is trying to commit the sin against the Holy Ghost for the purpose of getting outside the utmost rim of Catholicism' (Joyce 1962, 50). The jokes in *Ulysses*, especially those associated with Stephen, serve to confuse rather than to entertain, and to alienate and place this young artist outside the understanding of his pupils and beyond the forgiveness of the Catholic Church.

Although Joyce did neglect to show evidence of Stephen's talent and humour, he did not hide any of his own youthful errors, highlighted by Stanislaus Joyce who tells us that his brother initially:

fell in love, like all romantic poets, with vast conceptions, and had believed in the supreme importance of the world of ideas. His gods were Blake and Dante. But then the minute life of earth claimed him, and he seems to regard with a kind of compassion his youth deluded by ideals that exacted all his service... (S. Joyce 1958, 53)

Here it is clear that while the young Joyce recognised these romantic ideals as errors, his character Stephen is still 'in love ...with vast conceptions'. When critics such as William Noon and S.L.Goldberg examined some of these conceptions, they noted the ironic way in which Stephen's aesthetic ideas are treated by Joyce. In *Joyce and Aquinas*, William Noon tells us that Stephen's applied Aquinas is a portrait of his immature aesthetics and that 'the comparison of the artist with the God of creation is the climax of Joyce's ironic development of the Dedalus aesthetic' (Noon 1957, 67). Highlighting the gap in knowledge between Stephen and the young Joyce in *The Classical Temper*, S. L. Goldberg writes that

If we put the theory in the Portrait side by side with those in the notebooks and Joyce's other writings ...we can hardly avoid concluding that the theory Stephen advances in the Portrait is not a satisfactory aesthetic in itself, that its force in the novel is not so much philosophical as dramatic. (Goldberg 1961, 43)

While these theories are developed further in *Ulysses*, Goldberg says that the real difficulty is that Stephen's theories are 'not wrong in any simple, black-and-white sense at all; he is always at least partly right. The weaknesses are a matter of his emphasis – what he neglects, what he over stresses, what he therefore distorts.' (Goldberg 1961, 45).

Joyce has consciously created a flawed Stephen, a young artist who is not to be fully believed or dismissed. What interests me is the possibility the he has deliberately used the same 'weaknesses' – neglecting, over stressing and distorting – in the explication of the key to the classical correspondences in his work given after the publication of *Ulysses*. Correspondences with Homer and the *Odyssey* are partly right, but I believe that he has deliberately overstressed and distorted them, and at the same time neglected to highlight the importance of the Latin writers and of Ovid in particular, to his classical schema. Homer's Telemachus was adroitly helped by the interventionist Greek gods who outlined the course he should take and ensured that when he did act he did so with decorum. Athene's aid to Telemachus leaves us in no

doubt that although the boy is young, he is a worthy son and an honourable figure in his own right. Stephen Dedalus on the other hand is not given that status. His aesthetic theories are genuinely held and genuinely flawed while his artistic worth is based on hearsay rather than output. If on the other hand we take Ovid's precedent, the presentation of Stephen begins to make more sense. Underpinning Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the idea of continual change, of metamorphoses and of metempsychosis and yet in the presentation of this philosophy in Book XV Ovid initially undermines the philosopher responsible for these ideas. Ovid starts and ends this key discussion with a reminder that it was Pythagoras who 'was the first to decry the placing of animal food upon our tables.' (Ovid 1984, 369). He goes on to tell us that Pythagoras was 'learned indeed but [was] not believed in this', knowing full well that the plea for vegetarianism was exactly the kind of argument which had and would continue to undermine the philosopher's credibility. Ovid has therefore gone out of his way to introduce and undermine the argument upon which he has based his entire book. He further undermines Pythagoras by falsely portraying him as a character who would claim credit for theories which were known to have been arrived at by others when he

would teach the crowds, ...the beginnings of the great universe, the causes of things and what their nature is: what God is... by what law the stars perform their courses, and whatever else is hidden from men's knowledge. (Ovid 2005, 369)

This list of topics, David Feeney tells us was widely known to 'fit Epicurus and Lucretius rather than what is known about Pythagoras' teaching' (Feeney 2004, 667). It is only following these assaults on his credibility that Ovid allows Pythagoras to speak on metempsychosis. Ovid is therefore presenting a key theory for his book, but deliberately manipulating the perception of the listener towards the 'expert'. Had he used a more traditional method of presenting his philosopher, one in which Pythagoras was treated with more respect, the audience would accept the theory without question, without debate, and possibly without paying attention. By creating points of disharmony in the presentation of the author, the reader has to read more carefully, and decide for herself whether she agrees with the argument or not. But as we know, if Joyce is going to use any technique in such a key way he would undoubtedly use the same technique elsewhere in the text. In *Ulysses*, one of those echoes appears in his presentation of Mr. Deasy.

Many critics have rightly pointed to the inaccuracies of Mr. Deasy, chief among them being his 'joke' that Ireland never let the Jews into the country. To any contemporary Dublin audience this would have been patently false. In fact the largest immigration into Ireland in the 19th and early 20th centuries of any one race was from Eastern Europe, was mostly Jewish and mostly the new arrivals 'settled ...in Dublin' (www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org 2010). And yet despite obvious mistakes such as these, 'Stephen is as deferential with Mr. Deasy as he is cantankerous with his own contemporaries' (Budgen 1934, 45). In terms of the Homeric correspondences with *Ulysses*, this respect contains a strong echo of the respect with which Telemachus addresses Nestor. The Ovidian correspondences however draw on the fact that Mr. Deasy has been deliberately discredited by Joyce, as Pythagoras was by Ovid, but that he still manages to impart some essential points of information:

– This same 'joke' for example about never letting the Jews into Ireland is in fact a smokescreen to hide a deliberate reference to Daniel O'Connell. O'Connell, a distant ancestor of Joyce, successfully campaigned to repeal anti-Jewish legislation in Ireland and Great Britain. When these laws were revoked he addressed the Jewish population in Ireland saying that their 'ancient race owes us a debt of thanks because we are the one nation *never to have persecuted the Jews*' (McGrath and Whelan 2005, 60-89 my emphasis). The hapless Deasy may be unaware of the importance of this reference, but he nevertheless introduces the sentiments which foreshadow Joyce's introduction of the Jewish ancestry of Leopold Bloom into *Ulysses*.

– Deasy tells Stephen that 'life is the great teacher' – essential information for this young artist because it highlights the futility of Stephen's villanelle to his loved one, if it prevents him from actually venturing out to meet her (Joyce 2000, 43).

– In the middle of a tirade against women, Deasy vents his anger that Helen was a woman who was 'no better than she should be'. The immediate context of this phrase implies a slur on women and yet the phrase itself delivers something quite different. It is intended to highlight the high ideals with which married women were expected to comply and the general attitude should they fail. The paragon of this was of course Homer's Penelope who for centuries was held as an example of female married virtue, an ideal of loyalty which married men were not generally asked to emulate. What Deasy's phrase actually delivers however is the idea that women are flawed which, however shocking for him, is closer to Ovid's attitude than to Homer's ideal. In *The Art of Love* Ovid advises a rejected suitor to persevere saying

‘What is harder than rock, what softer than water? yet soft water hollows out hard rock. Only persevere; you will overcome Penelope herself.’ (Ovid 2004, 45) Ovid’s Penelope will be overcome just as Joyce’s Molly Bloom, after years without full intercourse with her husband, will be overcome. Mr. Deasy has therefore successfully introduced the contrast between the ideal and the flawed female, even if he is unaware of what he is saying and of its importance to the rest of the novel. In doing so he has also highlighted one of the principle points of disharmony between Homer’s *Odyssey* and Joyce’s *Ulysses* and one of the principle points of harmony between Ovid’s Penelope and his own Molly Bloom.

These unintentional nuggets of wisdom indicate that there are two strong classical echoes in Stephen’s deferential attitude to Mr. Deasy. The Homeric correspondence, in which Stephen/Telemachus shows maturity and appropriate etiquette in treating Deasy/Nestor with respect, and the Ovidian correspondence in which he assesses the important information being imparted, despite the dubious credibility of the speaker. Mr. Deasy’s extraordinarily inept delivery implies his own ignorance of the importance of his words but does not prevent the reader and perhaps even Stephen, from learning from this ‘old wisdom’ (Joyce 2000, 42).

In order to fully understand what Joyce might have meant by the phrase ‘old wisdom’ it is necessary now to look at Stephen’s role as author in *Ulysses*. Joyce tells us that

In Rome, when [he] had finished about half of the *Portrait*, [he] realised that the *Odyssey* had to be the sequel, and [he] began to write *Ulysses*. (Borach 1979, 70)

This highlights the strong inter-textual connections between *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*, the most obvious link being the continuation of Stephen’s character from the five episodes of *Portrait* into the first three episodes of *Ulysses*. We have therefore eight episodes during which Stephen is maturing as an artist. At the end of this gestation period I suggest that he is actually born as a practising artist and is the author of Bloom, and, as a good Joycean artist, his personality is deliberately hidden behind his creation. Unlike the God of creation he does not create *ex-nihilo*, but draws on the experiences of his own life, and his creation bears the mark of those experiences, accounting for the curious resemblances between the two main characters. While discussing the ‘Proteus’ section of *Ulysses*, Joyce told Frank Budgen that it was his ‘own preference [and was] ...the opening of the book’ (Budgen

1934, 48). If we are to consider 'Proteus' as the opening of *Ulysses* we must recognise that it is this episode which finally sees Stephen practising his art and creating viable fictions. With regard to the two midwives, it is hard to know what aspects of their story occur outside the mind of Stephen. In a small city like Dublin he may or may not have known their names and occupations, but it is impossible for him to have known what they carried in their bag and yet Stephen describes it all with 'authority'. Stephen creates other fictions out of the experience of his family life and still others appear to be about possible previous lives. In this protean world it becomes impossible to distinguish between Stephen's fictions and the fiction in which Joyce presents him, between what is real to Stephen and what is not. In this labyrinthine novel the Homeric classical thread is well documented. However, a second classical thread is essential to guide us through 'Proteus'. In this episode Stephen is becoming an author inside the text of another author and a strong classical precedent for this technique is given in Book X, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where, as David Feeney writes:

Orpheus takes over the song ...and gives us a series of bizarre love stories, so absorbing that it is easy to forget that he and not Ovid is the narrator. At the end of Book 10 we see a set of 'Russian dolls', as Ovid shows us Orpheus telling his audience ...about how Venus tells Adonis the story of Atlanta and Hippomenes. (Feeney 2004, xxvii)

But perhaps the clearest evidence of the presence of Ovid in 'Proteus' was given by Joyce himself in the Linati Schema. There he specifies that the 'sense' of this episode is the *Prima Materia*. The primary materials are those materials from which humans were created in the various tales of Ovid, mostly from the *Metamorphoses* and from the *Fasti* and they consist of boulders, teeth, ants, urine and the blood of giants. In the *Metamorphoses*, Deucalion and Pyrrha, only survivors of a world wide flood, were advised to fling the stones of mother earth over their shoulders in order to create a new race. In 'Proteus', the stones which Stephen sees take on a new life as 'piled stone mammoth skulls' (Joyce 2000, 52). Skeat's *Dictionary* refers to the origin of the word 'mammoth' in the terms of the Tatar word '*mamma*, [meaning] the earth' (Skeat 1901, 310-11). In pairing the word 'mammoth' with the 'piled stones' Joyce is clearly indicating the Ovidian myth while Stephen's comment on the 'stoneheaps of dead builders' can also be read as a reference to these long dead builders of the new race, to Deucalion and Pyrrha and to the materials they used (Joyce 2000, 55).

According to Ovid, races have also been generated from teeth, from ants, from the blood of giants and from urine. He tells us for example that Cadmus had used dragon's teeth to generate a new race to populate the city of Thebes and that Jason had used some of these same dragons' teeth to generate an army to capture the Golden Fleece. These particular races, however, were fighting races, which makes it particularly appropriate for Stephen to be dubbed 'toothless Kinch, the superman' (Joyce 2000, 64). This echoes his earlier sentiment that he 'will not be the master of others or their slave' (Joyce 2000, 56). The blood which is specified in the *Metamorphoses* as the primary material for a new race is the blood of the giants. This irreverent and pugnacious race had to be killed by Zeus and their blood drenched the earth, and Ovid tells us that

Mother Earth, drenched with their streaming blood, informed that warm gore
anew with life, and ...gave it human form. (Ovid 1977, 13)

Stephen's comment that he is 'the bloody well gigant rolls them bloody well boulders, bones for my steppingstones. Fewfawfum. I zmellz de bloodz odz an Iridzman' gains a new significance because it combines some of these primary materials, of blood, bones and boulders and the garrulous nature of the giants into one nursery rhyme (Joyce 2000, 56).

Perhaps the most important generative element from Ovid, however, comes from the *Fasti* and from the story of Orion. It was important enough for Joyce to repeat it on two separate public occasions, including the 1921 interview with the American writer Djuna Barnes which, as Joe Schork notes, gives:

early and eccentric proof of [Joyce's] mastery of Ovidian etiological myth. [Joyce] explained how the great hunter Orion got his name [when]... Jupiter, Neptune, and Mercury visited earth, where they were amply wined and dined by a poor widower. In exchange for his hospitality the man asked for a son. ...The gods then showered the hide of the ox that had been served at their feast with Olympian [urine]. ...From that divinely "impregnated" hide Orion was born. (Schork 1997, 182)

It can be no accident that in urinating into the sea Stephen creates a 'floating foampool, flower unfurling' (Joyce 2000, 62). Nor can it be an accident that all but one of these symbols for the generation of human beings appear in the 'Proteus' episode and that the one missing symbol appears

later in Bloom's thoughts and is the one which is most appropriate to his situation. Bloom refers to ants in the 'Hades' episode and likens them to men – giving him a degree of creativity of his own – which he may exercise in the creation of Gerty McDowell later on. In the *Metamorphoses*, the race created by the ants – the Myrmadions – were an industrious race, more suitable to Bloom than to Stephen or to what Joyce termed in a letter to his Aunt Josephine, his own 'lovely laziness of temper' (Joyce 1966, 57). Ovid's primary materials, his symbols for the generation of human beings and their attendant implications for the nature of those beings generated, are all used in 'Proteus' by the young artist Stephen. Furthermore, Joyce even associates the most appropriate one with Bloom and employs what Fritz Senn called in his plenary lecture to the present conference the 'disruptive pattern principle'. The '*Prima Materia*' of 'Proteus' therefore given in the Linati Schema clearly refers us to the Ovidian classical references, rather than to the Homeric.

But of course an obvious question is why Joyce would have hidden such an important classical key? Initially, the Homeric correspondence was essential in making *Ulysses* accessible and in gaining a degree of respectability for the book. But might not the most valuable aspect of this key be the fact that it does not fit perfectly? And that therefore it highlights anomalies? Furthermore, Joyce's presentation of a flawed Stephen, or a flawed Mr. Deasy, seems to indicate that he favoured a technique of mis-information above the over explication of his work, expecting his readers to recognise the anomalies. Much valid and valuable work has been carried out to date on the Homeric correspondences, without which the possibility of these anomalies would not have come to the surface. And the hidden presence of Ovid throughout *Ulysses* cannot be a complete surprise when we consider that the younger Joyce had described 'Hellenism in an early notebook as 'European appendicitis' (Ellmann 1983, 103). In *Stephen Hero* we are told that 'a great contempt devoured [Stephen] for the critics who considered 'Greek' and 'classical' interchangeable terms' (Joyce 1986, 35). Although this expresses the idea of the very young artist, it is unlikely that Joyce would have simply abandoned this position and adopted the Greek point of view entirely. It is far more likely that his point of view developed to include an appreciation of both the Latin and the Greek influences in contemporary culture. Stanislaus also tells us that Joyce had already used a 'technique of surprise', of deliberately misleading the reader, as early as 1901. In Joyce's essay 'The Day of the Rabblement' which opened with a reference to 'the Nolan', Stanislaus wrote that his brother had:

intended that the readers of his article should have at first a false impression that he was quoting some little-known Irish writer... – so that when they discovered their error, the name of Giordano Bruno might perhaps awaken some interest in his life and work (Stanislaus Joyce 1958, 153).

Joyce attempted the same technique again but with less success in his 1902 essay on Mangan. It is not difficult to believe therefore that Joyce would have publicised the Homeric correspondences to his book and deliberately hidden the Ovidian, in order to eventually alert his readers to the attention which he felt Ovid deserved, to balance the undue influence which he felt the Hellenic world was having upon writers and critics of the 19th and early 20th centuries and to provide a defence against anyone who might accuse him of overly explicating his work. As late as 1973, Wayne C. Booth wrote for example that ‘Joyce was always explicating his works and it is clear that he saw nothing wrong with the fact that they could not be thought of as standing on their own two feet’ (Booth 1973, 189). By making much of one classical influence and hiding the second, Joyce is using the same method identified by Goldberg when he said that the problem with Stephen’s theory arises because of ‘his emphasis – what he neglects, what he over stresses, what he therefore distorts’ (Goldberg 1961, 45). The most adept commentators spotted the ironic way in which the Homeric key was used and that it did not fit as neatly as Stuart Gilbert seemed to imply. But perhaps *Ulysses*’ classic correspondences require a double key, like John O’Connell’s ‘two keys’ to the graveyard in ‘Hades’, and Bloom’s crossed Keyes advertisement, like the papal allusions to the keys of heaven and to Dante’s double keys to the gates of hell. The traces of Ovid which I am following in ‘Proteus’ and in other episodes of *Ulysses* are certainly strong enough to equal those of Homer. Like that Homeric key, the Ovidian will by no means explain Joyce’s text, but will add to our understanding of what Joyce’s intends by the term ‘classical’, so deliberately emphasised in his early work *Stephen Hero*. Hiding a second key behind the first is also much easier when the characters dealt with by Ovid are those which Homer has written about.

The character of Stephen, a young and obviously flawed artist is, I believe, intended to make us question authority and authorship in the way that Ovid’s listeners would have questioned the authority of Pythagoras. Like those listeners, we are neither being lulled by a sense of awe to accept the important theories being presented, nor to reject them easily either. The method of presenting important ideas with obvious anomalies means we must sift through them for what gold we can find. And instead of simply dismissing

Stephen as a flawed idealist we need to keep in mind the possibility that he has metamorphosed at the end of 'Proteus' into a practising artist capable of producing a character as engaging as Bloom. We also need to keep in mind the possibility of there being two classical threads, the Greek and the Roman, which together may help us through the classical labyrinths of *Ulysses*.

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