

JAMES JOYCE'S HOME

Miriam Rodrigues Gilberti
Instituto Metodista Izabela Hendrix

"Once upon a time and a very good time it was..." A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man has a fairy-tale beginning. And as we surrender ourselves to the first page we enter into an almost mythic Eden, where moo cows walk down the road while Betty Byrne sells lemon platt and "the wild rose blossoms / On the little green place." There are singing and dancing and tenderness.

There is a good reason why Joyce began his spiritual autobiography in the age of innocence and with this sense of pleasure and comfort and security. It seems important for him to stress the fact that Stephen was a happy child by nature and might have developed happily and harmoniously if the world had only let him. But the world would not. A great deal of the Portrait is taken up with the account of the knocks and bruises that young Stephen received from his surroundings, the disappointments and disillusionments, the sordid realities that took such an unfair advantage of a spirit whose only fault was being too sensitive. There were the pandying at school, the quarrels at home, the bankruptcy of his father, the horrified fascination with the revelations of his own body, and much else.

The whole emphasis is on external guilt and subjective

* This paper has been written for rating after the course given by Professor Thomas LaBorie Burns: Seminário de Vida, Literatura e Pensamento de uma época: Joyce e a Literatura Irlandesa.

innocence. We are made to feel that even Stephen's self reproaches are due only to a cruel illusion of personal guilt imposed on him by his education, and to no real or innate wickedness. The portrait of the artist as it emerges shows a temperament determined by the buffetings of the world and by its selfprotection against them.

We may very well question this emphasis. Stephen's temperament and outlook could not be explained by his experiences alone. But we need not go too deeply into the problem of heredity versus environment, nor have we the means to do so. It seems clear enough that there was a period of childhood contentment which might have stamped the developing character more enduringly if the boy's history had been different.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Stephen Hero give many instances of Stephen as being, at least outwardly, a docile child, who accepted the injunctions of his parents and the instruction of his Jesuit teachers without much questioning. His attitude to authority was at first predominantly acquiescent, and his inclinations, on the whole, were pacific and conciliatory.

Thus, at Belvedere College he was ragged by three classmates, and some time afterwards was surprised to find that "he bore no malice now to those who had tormented him. He had forgotten a whit of their cowardice and cruelty but the memory of it called forth no anger from him."¹ Then he was sent for in a peremptory way, and his friend Heron said he ought to take his time in order to demonstrate his independence. But "this spirit of quarrelsome comradeship which he had observed lately in his rival had not seduced Stephen from his habits of quiet obedience. He mistrusted the turbulence and doubted the sincerity of such comradeship

which seemed to him a sorry anticipation of manhood."²

Incidentally, he reveals here that his docility was not just timidity. It was a conscious and reasoned attitude, that of an already maturing mind able to distinguish between the important and the trifling.

He did not always forget his chagrins, however, as is clearly proved by the pandying episode, which is still remembered in Ulysses. Very likely he was set somewhat apart from his companions by his enjoyment of learning. Teachers were not, as to many other boys, his natural enemies. But precisely for that reason they aroused his indignation if he found them unjust or malicious. His companions he could afford to ignore, feeling superior to them, and having learnt to put his trust in intellectual rather than physical activity. His teachers he could not just ignore. He bowed to their authority as long as his intellect agreed. After that he still went through the gestures of acquiescence for some time, but his mind was free.

In Stephen as a young man, in Ulysses, there remained a sort of meekness, particularly noticeable in his relations with the domineering Buck Mulligan which can be considered unnatural that covered a tumult of protest. Stephen seems to have developed a way of retaliation other than direct recrimination. He avenged himself in his works, where he could chastise whom he pleased. That is probably what he meant when he determined to make his weapons "silence, exile, and cunning."³

Possibly the dutiful Eveline in the story of that name, and an extremely meek character, Leopold Bloom, represent to some extent, Joyce's realisation of what, under different circumstances, he might have become. But the belligerency of his character was brought out by humiliations and worries,

and he became a man of fierce intransigence.

There are some people who may seem obedient enough where obedience is due but who are really intensely independent and obstinate; they simply reserve their opinions because they do not wish (and in some cases do not dare) to enter into an argument or become too intimate with other people. Their docility may be essentially a kind of superiority. A moment's reflection will show us that Joyce was not really spiritually obedient. He belonged to the type of people with whom reserve is the curbing factor.

This mixture of meekness and stubbornness is only one of the ambiguities involved in Joyce's work, ambiguity being one of his qualities as an author. And in particular nothing could be more ambiguous than his emotional attitudes to his parents, his church and his country, the three powers that represent his home, physically and spiritually, which exercised simultaneous attraction and repulsion over Joyce. But it is important to remember that ambivalence of emotions does not mean indifference. On the contrary, it is quite consistent with the powerful sway of that object over one's passions. A particular emotion can quite well exist and be denied at the same time. Such a situation obviously causes acute tensions of the spirit, and that is precisely what can be found in James Joyce. We shall see that Joyce's double attitudes of rejection and retention are characteristic of some of the major aspects of his writing.

Joyce's books often deal with friendship, love and marriage. But he seems to have had very little faith in friendship, which is almost uniformly shown to be treacherous; and the love theme is remarkably less prominent in the Portrait and Ulysses than in the earlier Stephen Hero. As for the relation of husband and wife, it is the subject of an

unconvincing play and appears in Ulysses as a "marriage manqué". Compared with these relationships, those of father and son and mother and son seem to have engaged the author far more intimately.

In the Portrait, Stephen was surrounded, from infancy, by the idea of fatherhood. There was not only Simon Dedalus but there were the Jesuit fathers, and on another level, God the heavenly father. His filial position could not have been more strongly impressed upon him. So strong were his filial connections that they served to isolate him from other children: "All the boys seemed to him very strange. They all had fathers and mothers and different clothes and voices."⁴ Those who had other parents could only be strangers to him.

While Stephen was acutely aware of himself as a son, both physically and spiritually, the idea of the father tended to become more and more abstract. This does not mean that it became less vivid, for Stephen had a natural aptitude for abstraction. But Simon Dedalus certainly recedes into the background as we progress from Stephen Hero to the Portrait and from the Portrait to Ulysses. James Joyce's emotional detachment from his real father may have been to blame. John Stanislaus Joyce was probably a charming and entertaining companion to his friends, but he could not have been a very impressive personality to anybody who was dependent on him, least of all to a critical son. Stephen Hero has only bitterness for a Mr. Dedalus who cherishes a fatuous and purely egoistic hope that his home affairs will right themselves "in some divine manner" through the agency of his son. In the Portrait Stephen defines his father vaguely as a little of everything and not much of anything:

A medical student, an oarsman, a tenor, an amateur actor, a shouting politician, a small landlord, a small investor, a drinker, a good fellow, a storyteller, somebody's secretary, something in a distillery, a taxgatherer, a bankrupt and at present a praiser of his own past.⁵

The author's attitude to Mr. Dedalus in the Portrait does not seem to be without affection. Yet his affection was undoubtedly mixed with contempt, for the reign of John Stanislaus was friendly but thriftless. And Stephen's fond thoughts of his father are quickly eclipsed in moments of gravity by those of his mother. So, in a revealing passage, are those of Richard Rowan in Exiles. Richard's father is dead, but Richard gazes at a drawing of him and says "calmly, almost gaily," "He will help me, perhaps, my smiling handsome father." A knock is heard at the hall door, whereupon Richard exclaims suddenly, "No, no. Not the smiler, Miss Justice. The old mother. It is her spirit I need."⁶

The idea of motherhood is much more concretely real to Joyce than that of fatherhood and at least equally obsessive. It is represented variously by May Dedalus (or Mary Jane Joyce), mother Ireland, the mother Church and the mother of Jesus. Joyce seems to have been very intimately attached to his mother and altogether very responsive to the maternal in woman. Harry Levin says that Joyce's heroes are sons and lovers at the same time and his heroines are always maternal.

Stephen's earliest memories were quite naturally connected with his parents. And his mother was singled out from all other people. "His mother had a nicer smell than his father,"⁷ "His mother had told him not to speak with the rough boys in

the college. Nice mother!"⁸

His love of his mother probably took its strength from his dependence upon her as a refuge and sanctuary established for his benefit while he needed her. "He longed to be at home and lay his head on his mother's lap."⁹ And he demanded that she be loyal to him without imposing a complementary obligation on himself. When his friend Cranly asked him whether he loved his mother, he answered, "I don't know what your words mean;" and it was left to Cranly to pay tribute to motherhood:

Whatever else is unsure in this stinking dunghill
of a world a mother's love is not. Your mother
brings you into the world, carries you first in
her body. What do we know about what she feels?
But whatever she feels, it, at least, must be
real.¹⁰

Actually, Cranly gave utterance to what was already becoming an obsession with Stephen. In Ulysses we find him asking himself that very question about a mother's love, "Was that then real? The only true thing in life?" And what about a son's love for his mother? — for "amor matris" was both "subjective and objective genitive."¹¹

It is no easier for us than for Stephen to determine whether he loved his mother with more than a purely egoistic love. From Stephen's later torments we are led to suppose that either he did not really feel affection for her and reproached himself for his inability to reciprocate her love of him, or he loved her and was tortured by the idea of hurting her by abandoning her faith. Possible both explanations are right, by the illogicality of human emotions.

The relationship was complicated by its associations.

Parallel to Stephen's strong emotional attachment to his mother ran the awareness of the Virgin Mary. This was especially intense after he had sinned sexually. "His sin, which had covered him from the sight of God, had led him nearer to the refuge of sinners."¹² Aesthetically, too, he was attracted to the cult of the Virgin, which was obviously one of the things that tied him most powerfully to the Church and to the Catholic faith. "The glories of Mary held his soul captive ..."¹³

From the age of six and a half to the age of twenty, Joyce, as well as Stephen, attended Jesuit schools and a Jesuit university: Clongowes Wood College, Belvedere College, Dublin, and University College, Dublin. Thus he received his education from the representatives of a keen proselytic order. He took part in the religious ceremonies and observances of his schools. He became a prefect of the sodality of the Virgin Mary and at the climax of his religious development at Belvedere, was asked to consider entering the Society of Jesus.

The Jesuits are regarded as excelling both in discipline and in tact, and till he was sixteen Stephen accepted their teaching without too much difficulty. "His masters, even when they had not attracted him, had seemed to him always intelligent and serious priests, athletic and high-spirited prefects."¹⁴ He sometimes doubted their statements, but he would have thought it presumptuous to doubt openly.

In the Roman Catholic faith Joyce apparently found so many avenues of approach to religion and so many easy stages in it that belief did not appear an impossible proposition. If the idea of God was too difficult, there was Mary, and there were the saints to think of and to turn to. And if words were austere to the intellect, they were voluptuous to the ear.

First and foremost, of course, religion filled the place

accorded consciously or unconsciously by most human beings, perhaps by all, to the mysterious and the supernatural. Secondly, it gave a sense of security against real and imagined fears, as when Stephen "heard the voice of the prefect of the chapel saying the last prayer."¹⁵ And, thirdly religion was drilled into the boys until it existed in their lives as a "fait accompli." God was the great and ultimate reality, whose presence the boys were made to see behind everything, and before whom they were taught to stand in veneration and awe.

It would be wrong to suppose that Joyce was scared into belief by sermons on hell and the fear of eternal torment. There is too much to prove the positive attractions that Catholicism held for him. He certainly must have heard fire-and-brimstone sermons that made a profound impression on him, partly because they struck terror into his soul, partly, because they also appealed to the imaginative artist in him. But what occupied his imagination most constantly was the idea of the sacred. His innermost being seemed to be fascinated by the mysteries embodied in and guarded by the Church.

Joyce's aesthetic sense and sensibility were as ravenous as they were delicate. They seem to have developed out of his acute perception of and response to sensations, especially perhaps those of sound and smell. Now, obviously there is in Roman Catholic religious practice much that will appeal to a sensitive lad, avid for impressions of beauty and, in a complementary way, for experiences of ugliness and horror. The legends and symbols, the vestments of mauve and gold, the incense and candles, above all the chants and responses held the boy in a spell from which we can safely assert that he never really freed himself. In picturesque terms Joyce renders Stephen's thoughts of -

the unseen Paraclete, Whose symbols were a dove and a mighty wind, to sin against Whom was a sin beyond forgiveness, the eternal mysterious secret Being to Whom, as God, the priests offered up mass once a year, robed in the scarlet of the tongues of fire.

The imagery through which the nature of kinship of the Three Persons of the Trinity were darkly shadowed forth in the books of devotion which he read ... were easier of acceptance by his mind by reason of their august incomprehensibility than was the simple fact that God had loved his soul from all eternity, for ages before he had been born into the world, for ages before the world itself had existed.¹⁶

The passage indicates the artist, who wishes to admire rather than to understand. And it indicates the priest, who wishes to worship rather than to understand. With Joyce the priest and the artist were fundamentally the same person, and the main duties of the priest as he saw them were those that were carried out in artistic form.

He had seen himself, a young and silentmannered priest entering a confessional swiftly, ascending the altarsteps, incensing, genuflecting, accomplishing the vague acts of the priesthood which pleased him by reason of their semblance of reality and their distance from it ... He longed for the minor sacred offices, to be vested with the tunicle of the subdeacon at high mass, to stand aloof from the altar, forgotten by the people,

his shoulders covered with a humeral veil, holding the paten within its folds or, when the sacrifice had been accomplished, to stand as deacon in a dalmatic of cloth of gold on the step below the celebrant, his hands joined and his face towards the people, and singing the chant "Ite missa est."¹⁷

There is hardly reference at all, in Joyce's books, to the social and humanitarian obligations of priesthood; though there is a clear recognition of the austerities with which the Church counterbalanced her indulgence in softness and splendour, and which utilitarian principles are lost to view. A savage witchdoctor has a more utilitarian attitude, for at least he thinks he tries to cure disease or to secure good hunting. Yet there is in Joyce, too, something impervious to rational activity. The symbolical gestures and vestments, the phenomena of ecstasy, the abundant paraphernalia of worship are common features of magic. Leopold Bloom, watching the communion service in All Hallows Church, definitely sees it as a magic rite: "Shut your eyes and open your mouth. What? 'Corpus,' Body. Corpse. Good idea the Latin. Stupefies them first."¹⁸

More obviously than the modern priest the magician possesses immediate power. And the ambition to wield a supernatural influence was very strong in Stephen. "How often had he seen himself as a priest wielding calmly and humbly the awful power of which angels and saints stood in reverence!"¹⁹ Everything goes to prove his continued belief in the reality of that power, long after he had repudiated the angels and the saints.

Joyce's attachment to his family and his church and his subsequent detachment from them are paralleled by his

attitudes to his geographical surroundings. He does not say much about Dublin or Ireland in the early parts of the Portrait, but he does indicate that after a very brief period of enchantment, Dublin began to repel him.

We must remember that he moved with his family from the attractive suburb of Blackrock, where the road led off to the mountains, where he walked with his great-uncle and where he was allowed to make the rounds at night in the adventurous chariot of the milkman. He was only about ten at the time, and very impressionable; and the removal to Dublin remained stamped on his memory together with the sordid associations of his father's bankruptcy which necessitated it.

He was always a great explorer, spiritually, sensually and locally; and he now explored the streets of Dublin as he was later to explore the doctrines of the Church and the sensations and smells of his body.

And amid this new butling life he might have fancied himself in another Marseilles but that he missed the bright sky and the sunwarmed trellises of the wineshops. A vague dissatisfaction grew up within him as he looked on the quays and on the river and on the lowering skies and yet he continued to wander up and down, day after day as if he really sought someone that eluded him.

Marseilles and the "someone that eluded him" are references to The Count of Monte Cristo and to the ideal world of romance which Stephen was seeking about him. He did not find it in Dublin, and in a full and positive sense he never learned to feel at home in the Irish capital. Nevertheless he continued to roam its streets and record every sight and sound and smell

that met his senses. And in time Joyce must have developed the affection which is bred by familiarity and inescapable association even when the object is unattractive, even when, side by side with the affection, there lingers a deeper and primary repulsion.

Joyce was not devoid of patriotism. Numerous pieces of description show his fondness for Irish scenery, as well as his disgust with certain of its man-made aspects. He obviously took a real interest in the ancient myths and the history of his country and drew upon them extensively. He scorned the thriftless patriotism of his father or of such as Michael Cusack and the Catholic patriotism of the Gaelic League. But he felt himself to be an Irishman, and, next to his art, his main preoccupation seems always to have been the cultural state of his country. Ireland might suffer from cerebral paralysis, but professor MacLugh was possibly right in thinking that the Irish, like the Jews and the Greeks, were the heirs of spiritual values unknown to the materialistic mentality of the Egyptians, Romans or English.²⁰

Dublin always remained the real home to Joyce and the geographical centre of his imaginative world, in spite of his absence from it. His absence was an exile. In the same way, his family and his church remained home to him, and absence from them was exile. It is impossible to ignore the strength of the attachment to them that was formed in childhood and early youth. His sallies against them in the Portrait spring from vexations of a son who cannot deny his origins.

We must consider that Joyce wrote his books in retrospect and trying to show how an originally pacific disposition was gradually embittered by events beyond his own control, and how a young lad was alienated from his city, from his family, and last of all from his religion. It was natural

that he should bring into prominence the events and emotions that explained this development, whilst perhaps omitting a good deal that would emphasise his loyalty.

On the whole, it is probably true that to young Joyce, before puberty and self-searching had activated his revolt, his home and his church gave satisfaction and adequate encouragement, whilst his country and his city at least did not seem too oppressive. Had certain things been different he might have followed his original inclination and become either an opera singer or a priest among his countrymen. Failing that, he might have taken refuge in the neutral territory of medicine, as he sought refuge during two wars in neutral Switzerland. But the faith and emotional habits of childhood were too deeply ingrained to be simply shaken off. Besides, Joyce was a puritan, almost fanatic, in his idealism; as puritan and fanatical, perhaps, as Richard Rowan in his play, who wished to explore the utmost limits of freedom and of love. With Joyce there was no compromise. There had to be either acceptance or revolt. The balance tipped to the side of revolt; and a change began in which nothing was quite effaced. Home and exile became the two great poles of his life and of his authorship.

He denied Dublin and became a cosmopolitan — but he was Dublin haunted. He denied his family and became pseudonymus in his account of himself — but he was parent-haunted. He denied God and became in his art, and seemingly in his consciousness of himself as an artist, a rival god, or a Lucifer — but he was almost pathetically God-haunted.

NOTES

¹ James Joyce, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," in The Essential James Joyce (London: Granada Publishing Ltd., 1981). p. 235.

² Joyce, Portrait, p. 236.

³ Joyce, Portrait, p. 361.

⁴ Joyce, Portrait, p. 181.

⁵ Joyce, Portrait, p. 356.

⁶ James Joyce, "Exiles," in The Essential James Joyce (London: Granada Publishing Ltd., 1981). p. 375.

⁷ Joyce, Portrait, p. 176.

⁸ Joyce, Portrait, p. 178.

⁹ Joyce, Portrait, p. 181.

¹⁰ Joyce, Portrait, pp. 356-7.

¹¹ James Joyce, Ulysses (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1982).

¹² Joyce, Portrait, p. 252.

¹³ Joyce, Portrait, p. 252.

¹⁴ Joyce, Portrait, p. 291.

¹⁵ Joyce, Portrait, p. 284.

- 16 Joyce, Portrait, pp. 285-6.
- 17 Joyce, Portrait, p. 293.
- 18 Joyce, Ulysses, p. 82.
- 19 Joyce, Portrait, p. 293.
- 20 Joyce, Ulysses, pp. 132, 143.

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