Ulysses and "Among School Children": Encountering, and Encounters in, Joyce and Yeats

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Table of Contents

Preface

This project began in the fall of my junior year, reading *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses,* continuing through that winter with a broad survey of Irish literature, where I read some Yeats—all in preparation for a six-week term in Ireland. That year, I grew increasingly interested in myth and modernism, and with my focus on Irish literature, Joyce and Yeats seemed a natural choice. Given the immensity and difficulty of these two writers, perhaps such a selection also reflects what Yeats might term a fascination with what's difficult; though hopefully the result of my fascination has a more cheerful tone that Yeats's poem. In any case, as might be expected, to squeeze Joyce and Yeats into one thesis is no easy task, and I have several times had the sensation that, to use another one of Yeats's phrases, the center will not hold. The thesis evolved considerably during this year of work; it still grew out of myth but shifted away from such a focus.

My original proposal was to examine Joyce, Yeats, and the way that myth in literature related to ideas of progress. The broadness and complexity of this approach had to be modified for an undergraduate thesis—to really follow it would require a comparison of *Finnegans Wake* and *A Vision*, which seems closer to a dissertation—but it helps to consider this view in order to get some sense of this uneasy pair, Joyce and Yeats. Yeats might be seen as an almost reactionary figure, striving himself and urging others to get back to that bizarre abstraction he termed "the folk," certainly some pre-modern, perhaps even anti-modern, essence. His *Collected Poems* begins with the statement that "over is…antique joy" and asks, "Where are now the warring kings?"

("The Song of the Happy Shepherd", CP 7, ll. 2, 13)[1]. Yeats wanted to return to this age of warring kings, and part of what made his Irishness important to him was that he believed Ireland contained an uncorrupted, pre-modern essence. Joyce, on the other hand, embraced the modern, forsaking the Catholic Church and backward Ireland to accept with smiling, perhaps ironic, affection what Yeats would call "the baptism of the gutter" amid Continental Europe. This dichotomy of Yeats as backward-looking and Joyce as forward-looking is helpful (though as all such generalizations, requires refinement), and Joyce himself even seemed aware of the pose he took towards the elder poet.

At age twenty, Joyce met an established Yeats for lunch on the recommendation of George Russel. Joyce showed him some of his verse and his epiphanies, small prose poems, and the two quibbled over their respective aesthetic theories. Yeats urged the folk, while Joyce maintained that his epiphanies came solely from his own mind, which was closer to God than anything else. As Joyce rose to leave, he asked Yeats, aged thirty-seven, how old he was. After Yeats responded that he was thirty-six, Joyce replied with a sigh: "I thought as much. I have met you too late. You are too old" (Ellman, ED 40). An insult stemming from old age must surely have stung the future author of *The Tower*—the above record comes from Yeats's journal—yet it also helps point out the fundamentally different aesthetic orientations of the two writers. At the end of *Portrait*, Stephen writes a note in his diary that demonstrates Joyce's awareness of this divergence: "Michael Robartes remembers the forgotten beauty and, when his arms warp her round, he presses in his arms the loveliness which has long faded from the world. Not this. Not

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[1] Citations to Yeats's *Collected Poems* are abbreviated as CP throughout. Page numbers are also given, followed by line numbers.

at all. I desire to press in my arms the loveliness which has not yet come into the world" (316).

The joke on Stephen (the not-so-funny outcome of which we see in the opening chapters of *Ulysses*) is that his beauty, like Yeats's, still does not exist in this world. When Stephen presses this beauty in his arms, he simply embraces what Shakespeare's Falstaff took to be the real substance of honor: nothing but air. Stephen's ideas of beauty sometimes appear as vacuous to us as the court's notion of honor appeared to Falstaff. Both Stephen and Yeats seem to share a characteristic degree of revulsion towards the tangible present, while Joyce, like Leopold Bloom, apparently comes to embrace, indeed to relish, it; perhaps Joyce's relationship with Nora plays a part in this distinction. In any case, Joyce's work abounds with a continual consciousness of the body, with scatological quips, and the main character of *Ulysses* is sometimes said to be the dirty, dear, loud, affable, maze-like, clunky city of Dublin. In "The Holy Office," Joyce acknowledges his delight in not simply "the gutter," but the toilet:

> But all these men of whom I speak
>
> Make me the sewer of their clique.
>
> That they may dream their dreamy dreams
>
> I carry off their filthy streams... (qtd. in Ellman, ED 43)

At times, a jab at Yeats for dreaming dreamy dreams seems warranted, but his imagination, if sometimes far-fetched to the discerning modern, was relentless, vast, and grand. Ellman records that, "At Yeats's death, Joyce sent a wreath to the funeral, and conceded to a friend that Yeats was a greater writer than he, a tribute he paid to no other contemporary" (JJ 660).

Greatness, I think, is a rather vague trait. In writing this thesis, I have come to deep appreciation of both writers, and perhaps that means I can justifiably call them great. Studying *Ulysses* is rather unique. It is at once obscure and uncomfortable, but the more time spent studying the novel, the easier and more enjoyable it becomes to study, as its zealously innovative approach to writing begins to seem an ever more natural and proper stance to take towards the novel. It persistently rewards, and the rewards seem to grow greater over time and effort; there always remains so much to discover. George Russell would look back fondly on his telling a young Joyce that he did not have the chaos inside him to create a world. The range of Joyce's work—from Bloomian logic, and those small prose poems within that character's conscience; to Stephen's hyperconscious wit and merciless irony; Molly's irreverence; the swing of mood from jocular, flippant lightness to the most somber and tender considerations; the endless innovation of form, to stretch our understandings of language, story, and meaning; the sheer mastery of words and style, of phonetics and punning of all kinds; the continual satiric evasion occurring particularly in the later episodes; and the absolutely massive amount of allusions, references, riddles, minutia and trivia filling the book—seems great, indeed epic, in itself. Melville believed that one cannot write an epic on the flea, but Joyce has shown that countless fleas, countless details, amass to something more monstrous and powerful than the leviathan itself. Simply digesting Joyce's letters describing his intentions in writing this epic, or even of just writing "Oxen of the Sun," is a considerable feat.

In Yeats I find an earnestness and straightforwardness that often gives blunt voice to those mute and unsightly truths which we would rather avoid. He speaks directly of

his bitterness, his struggle, his inability to find complacency—and it immediately becomes clear that he does not speak simply for himself but for part of every individual. I appreciate the form and technique of Yeats's early poetry, the beauty of his sounds and images, but I love the boldness of the later. The strength of the later poetry's assertions seem to come from his sense of the poem as a kind of mask where he could proclaim one view in one poem, and then proclaim its contradiction in another, without sacrificing the integrity of his search for truth, a search he took quite seriously. We might say of Yeats, allowing, as above, for some of Melville's hyperbole, what the great American novelist said of Shakespeare: "it is those deep far-away things in him; those occasional flashings-forth of the intuitive Truth in him; those short, quick probings at the very axis of reality" that make Yeats, Yeats; and further that Yeats "craftily says, or sometimes insinuates the things, which we feel to be so terrifically true, that it were all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character, to utter, or even to hint of them" (522). I would add that the truths in Yeats becomes increasingly more complex than we might think when initially encountering them—which is surely saying something, since upon first inspection they seem remarkably complex, indeed, if not plain mystifying.

But being comparably great, or comparably dense, does not necessarily mean that Yeats and Joyce fit very well together at all. Indeed, their differences are substantial, yet perhaps not totally irreconcilable, as Ellman writes:

> the sharpness of Joyce's perceptions comes from a conviction that all
> things are worth observing, which in turn derives from a sense of the self's
> freedom to observe them, while the vigor of Yeats's aspirations comes
> from an unwilling and yet acute acknowledgment of experience and of its

shortcomings. In this middle ground their troubled friendship was

possible. (56)

It would be unfortunate to sacrifice the integrity of either artist by forcing, through

critical butchering, their exact congruity. It has been there differences that has made the

process of writing this thesis, to recall again Yeats's line, so difficult and so fascinating;

just merely consider the disparate forms of *Ulysses* and "Among School Children":

sprawling modernist epic and condensed symbolist lyric.

There are, however, some very fundamental reasons for examining them together.

First of all, and most obviously, they are both Irish modernists. Both had complex

relationships with Ireland; Yeats celebrated and idealized rural Ireland but spent most of

his time in urban, cosmopolitan London, while Joyce fled from Dublin, the backwaters of

Europe, only to return to it in all his imaginative works of literature; no matter where

Joyce's body went, his imagination still seemed to reside in the streets of Dublin. No

critic I have encountered has taken real issue with their denominations as Irish artists,

which suggests an appropriate critical admission; the complexity of their tie to Ireland is

important, but the tie still remains. Furthermore, they both wrote during the Modernist

era; both are principal players in the Irish Renaissance. T. S. Eliot would say that Yeats

was a figure of his age, without whom it cannot be understood, and I think as much truth

would be expounded if the same were said about Joyce. The two works I examine,

Joyce's *Ulysses* and Yeats's "Among School in Children" from *The Tower*, were written

during or after the time of World War I, a time when many believed universal peace was

being arranged throughout the world, and mass anarchy broke out instead. The works are

also a response to the Irish War of Independence and, for Yeats's (perhaps also for Joyce's), the Irish Civil War.

In this time of political fragmentation, both writers seem to depend on certain structures for maintaining their personal stability. Yeats always sought some kind of structure in his life. In his youth, he joined the Order of the Golden Dawn, a mystical society that institutionalized and structured the intellectual and religious quest upon which Yeats sought to embark. Similar interests would carry through Yeats's life. The Abbey Theatre, during that entrepreneurial stage of Yeats's life, would provide a comparable kind of social structuring. In his later life, as Terence Brown argues, the philosophical structure developed in *A Vision* allowed Yeats a certain ease in living, as if he had given life's experience its own institutionalized structures and meanings. Furthermore, Yeats wrote structured, formal poetry, even when he might be least expected to; even a poem like "The Second Coming" generally abides by formal rules. While other artists of Yeats's time would reflect their own personal, or the general political and societal, fragmentation by disrupting traditional poetic forms, Yeats never abandoned the order and structure of his verse (this is speaking generally, and is not to say, of course, that Yeats never wrote an irregular line—for he did, utilizing them to some magnificent effects).

While Joyce would react against institutionalized forms of religion, ultimately declaring himself incapable of belief in anything other than his own soul, he too shows a dependence on various forms of structure. Though he left the Church and the Jesuits, Joyce would say that his education had taught him how to render complex things in comprehensible lists—and this is surely true of much of his work; the formal catechismal

method of "Ithaca" seems to both celebrate and mock his (and our) scholastic inclination. It is as if Joyce would find in the creative world of art the structure that he spurned in life by fleeing church, country, and family. After reviewing Joyce's process of writing *Ulysses*, Walton Litz determines: "Deprived of the traditional orders of home, country and religion, Joyce had a desperate and rather untidy passion for order of any kind" (54). If one were to count all the words in *Portrait*, the three words falling directly in the center of the novel read "family, nation, state" (Owens)—quite a literal substitution of artistic order for experiential comfort. Joyce's passion for order would lead him to question if he had not, in fact, over-structured his sprawling modernist epic novel.

Joyce's reverence for order is of a different kind than Yeats's choice of formal poetry. When Yeats made neologisms, it was a result of his poor spelling, while Joyce would do so intentionally and repeatedly, not simply to break down linguistic structures but to create his own, presumably superior, linguistic structures. The Joycean engagement with language knocked down walls in an attempt to create a more appropriate edifice, while Yeats used the same words over and over to, Pygmalion-like, slowly chisel a masterfully sculpted set of poetic associations. In Yeats, words become almost like mediums in their ability to conjure evocations so strong that they very nearly take on a life of their own.

It is, ultimately, pure language with which a critic must wrangle, and my treatment of Joyce in the first essay aimed to do just that. What does a neologism like "Siopold," which combines the names of Simon Dedalus and Leopold Bloom mean, signify? How are we to understand it, and what allows it to happen? I aimed to examine this moment in "Sirens" from a linguistic viewpoint, while at the same time trying to

illuminate character interaction, and character connection, in *Ulysses*. This approach of examining a single name to understand the way that characters interact developed, originally, from looking at the way that myth influenced concepts of identity. As my original approach to the essay was to examine myth in *Ulysses*, I was constantly thinking of Eliot's famous statement about the mythic method: "It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." To me, there seemed nothing really simple about this. So I began considering what the mythic method does, or what it implies, and the notion of multiple identities continually arose. At different times, for instance, Stephen "is" Telemachus, Hamlet, Icarus, Lucifer, and so on, demonstrating that characters in *Ulysses* can adopt different *persona*; the question then arose: can characters adopt, absorb other *persons* (that is, other characters in *Ulysses*)?

The essay, then, became a study in the way that *Ulysses* conceives of individual identity and the way that a character interacts with, unites with, another character, namely Simon and Leopold, but also Leopold and Stephen—these crucial connections in the novel. Whether something meaningful actually happens during the course of Bloomsday seems to largely depend on how we interpret such character interactions. As a result, while the scope of my investigation was very narrow in one sense, a single word, it overflowed into the whole of *Ulysses*, due partly to the precise architecture of the book, a book about which we might say the same thing that Poldy recalls his father saying of a favorite opera: "Every word is so deep, Leopold" (76). Judge John Woolsey, who lifted the American ban on *Ulysses*, recognized that, "Each word of the book contributes like a bit of mosaic to the detail of the picture Joyce is seeking to construct for his readers"

(xii). My analysis tried not to constrict or limit itself, but to continually expand, in an attempt to arrive at something approaching a comprehensive account of "Siopold." As Joyce almost always revised *Ulysses* by accretion, rather than reduction or reification, my essay continually expanded and occasionally it seemed as if it could go on endlessly. Thus, I fear that, at times, it may not have the feeling of a discrete, linear argument, but then again this thesis process has made me question whether such a linear argument is the best way to understand a moment in a text, whether it is the best comment on, or critique of, a piece of fiction.

Not coincidentally, then, such questioning of critical argumentation begins the second essay on Yeats. When "Among School Children" is read properly, I argue, part of its message seems to be the utter insufficiency, the absurdity, of modern systems of thought, which continually make distinctions and divisions, abstractions upon abstractions. The poem promotes a more holistic approach to knowledge and to the making of meaning, and, as such, my essay does it best to accommodate such a suggestion by attempting to place the single poem "Among School Children," within the greater whole of *The Tower*. As a single word blossomed into the context of *Ulysses*, so one poem had its meanings rooted throughout *The Tower*; Yeats was a poet who wrote books.

The Yeats essay, similar to the Joyce, addresses the way that the narrator of "Among School Children" was able to envision interchangeability among distinct individuals within his art, and also addresses the way that art, or myth, and experience intermingle in this poem. The poem seemed distinctive because it shows the artist interacting with this world of experience. The early Yeats, like the young Stephen

Dedalus, seems intent on escaping from this world: in "The Stolen Child" to a fairy world because the world of experience is "more full of weeping than you can understand" (CP 18, l. 12); or, in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," he would feel, "in the deep heart's core," his desire for removal from "the pavements grey" (CP 39, ll. 12, 11). On the other hand, in "Among School Children," the narrator is not simply the poet or the artist, but the "smiling public man" (CP 216, l. 8) As does *Ulysses*, the poem, in its interaction between the poet's subjective consciousness and objective experience (the school children) develops a view of individual identity existing within a fundamental human likeness, allowing for metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls. In the essay, I tried to emphasize the experiential component of Yeats's encounters with spirits, as Terence Brown has, to help explain the bizarre conjuring of the "Ledaean body" in the third stanza of the poem.

One result of examining the way that different linguistic structures created connection or union between figures within the text was a consciousness, or a reflection upon, the relationship created by a piece of text between author and reader. How does language unite them, how should we understand the relationship, what makes a connection between author and reader significant, effective? Furthermore, it becomes interesting to consider the way that this occurs in two such drastically different genres of fiction: in the broadest categorization, one a novel and the other a poem. How are we connecting to an author differently when we read a poem than when we read a novel? The ways in which these two forms differ as linguistic constructions and their ability to portray, establish, or enact certain connections between author or text and reader is

beyond the scope of this preface, but I think intriguing questions for further consideration.

The scope of this preface ought, in fact, to be an explanation of the pages which follow it, and from this point of view it must be said that they would not exist without the direction of Marc Conner, who has guided me through Joyce and Yeats as well as several other formidable literary journeys. Nor without Suzanne Keen, who graciously acted as a second-reader, and whose generosity and intelligence has been characteristic of the English Department at Washington and Lee as a whole. But ultimately, in light of the Yeats essay, and if this ought to account for origins, I should close in dedication to my mother, for whom I am ever thankful.

Metaphors and Character Connections in *Ulysses*: An Examination of "Siopold"

> The reconciling factor is the imagination, which, working through wit,
> brings opposite ends of the mind together, and makes our seeming
> unlikenesses suddenly gregarious.
> —Richard Ellman, on the experience of reading Joyce's fiction

> What's in a name?
> —William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

Introduction

Ulysses criticism is a contested arena, and it often appears as if the Joycean

should take nothing for granted and set nothing in stone, even regarding such presumably

fundamental issues as, for example, the book's genre. The reactions to Joyce's work

have ranged from adoration to disgust, from a life's work spent excavating its intricacies

to an indifferent dismissal of such a demanding book. The psychologist Carl Jung saw in

Ulysses a vision of modern despair and meaninglessness ("utterly hopeless emptiness is

the dominant note of the whole book. It not only begins and ends in nothingness, it

consists of nothing but nothingness" (10)), while others such as the Irish Catholic critic

Coilin Owens believe it to be an almost sacred book offering hope, literally "a salvific

book." In this essay, I do not set out to resolve such disputes, but ideally I will shed some

light on a few fundamental features of *Ulysses*. The questions about *Ulysses* that fascinate

me concern interaction: How do the characters interact with one another, with their

world? And how does the reader interact with the text, its fictional world and inhabitants?

These are, to be sure, epic questions about an epic novel. My particular concern

is with the moment in "Sirens" when Simon Dedalus and Leopold Bloom coalesce into

the single neologism "Siopold." It offers extremely fertile grounds for an investigation

into the way that characters interact with one another in this novel, and "Sirens" as a whole is generally recognized as a pivotal chapter in the book, key in the direction that *Ulysses* ultimately takes towards its becoming (in broad and insufficient critical terms for the subtlety and complexity of the novel, yet still illustrative) a tragedy of despair and isolation (nothingness, for Jung), or a comedy of community and union (salvation, for Owens). "Sirens" reveals much of the way that the individual self is being construed in this text (obviously crucial knowledge for understanding the way that two selves interact), and how it relates to the fluidity, arbitrariness, and multiplicity of language. Northop Frye's definition of metaphor supplies an invaluable critical tool for evaluating the way that language and linguistic devices influence, reflect, even dictate the way in which characters perceive their world, how they interact with that world, and with other characters.

The "verbal phenomenon" of a typical metaphor, writes Frye, "takes the form of the statement 'A is B'" ("The Koine of Myth" 7).[2] When a metaphor is examined, there "is, or seems to be, an assertion that A is B, along with an undercurrent of significance that tell us that A is obviously not B, and nobody but a fool could imagine that it was" ("Koine" 7). The significance of metaphor, however, is not simply contradiction, but rather it "suggests a state of things in which there is no sharp or consistent distinction between subject and object. That is, a metaphorical statement is not so much an assertion that A is B as an annihilation of the space separating A and B" ("Koine" 7).

"Siopold," then, is a metaphor that has two people, or characters, as subject and object. One way to think of this type of metaphor would be to imagine a person standing

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[2] Subsequent citations of Frye's essay, "The Koine of Myth: Myth as a Universally Intelligible Language", will be abbreviated as "Koine."

in front of a mirror: the two images (one "real," the other reflection) are not identical, but, nonetheless, somehow equated. The suggestion of "Siopold" is that Simon is, and is not, Leopold, that subject and object are no longer distinct. The same "verbal phenomenon" occurs in the fundamental metaphor of Joyce's *Ulysses*: Leopold Bloom is Odysseus and is not Odysseus, the other two principal Homeric metaphors being that Stephen is and is not Telemachus, and Molly is and is not Penelope. Theoharris Constantine Theoharris, without intending to outline the use of metaphor in *Ulysses*, demonstrates that the basic principle of metaphor as Frye defines it is at the very heart of Joyce's aesthetic and philosophical design:

> … that one highlighted title stands as an emblem for the artistic strategy of *Ulysses* at large—Bloom is and is not Odysseus. The same logic appears throughout the book in hundreds of trivial moments: Stephen is and is not Lycidas in his schoolroom, Molly's lamp is and is not the rose of Paradise Beatrice led Dante to, and so forth, ad infinitum… (67)

From its very title, *Ulysses* establishes a principle of metaphorical identification which the novel continuously compounds, in Theoharriss's view, *ad infinitum*.[3] As seen in "Siopold," characters are even identified, equated with other characters.

What does it mean if the people and things in *Ulysses* are, and are not, other people and objects in this, at times, scrupulously naturalistic novel? How does Joyce

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[3] Critics may quibble, rightly, with the extent that the Homeric parallels stand at the forefront of the novel. It depends to some degree if we are considering the reading experience or the artist's design. While the parallels, as Walton Litz notes, served as "ports of call" for Joyce during the writing process, it does not necessarily follow that they be central to our reading experience. Yet if we are investigating features of what Theoharris calls the "artistic strategy"—certain aesthetic and philosophical foundations on which the book rests—then surely the Homeric parallels loom large.

manifest this principle in the text, how are we to understand it, and what is its significance? Furthermore, how might metaphors move from being implicit or latent to being realized or actualized, as seems to occur with the metaphor "Simon is Leopold" in "Siopold!"? To put in Frye's terms, what happens in moments when there does appear to be something like "an annihilation of the space separating" subject and object? This essay explains and examines "Siopold" in detail in an effort to reveal the world of metaphorical identification underlying *Ulysses*, manifesting itself—in the "Sirens" episode—in the manipulation of syntactical subjects, particularly character names; in sex and eating; and in the aesthetic experience. In the new narrative and linguistic paradigm of "Sirens," both language and identity enter into a state of malleability and manipulation yet to be witnessed in *Ulysses*, propagating both a sense of disturbing fragmentation as well as a sense of liberating freedom, of new, fluid identities and (linguistic and personal) interconnections. Such interpersonal connections come across not only in linguistic manipulation, but also through such naturalistic actions as eating and sex. Ultimately, "Siopold" suggests that the crucial personal interconnection (or personal metaphor) of *Ulysses*, the one uniting Stephen and Bloom, depends upon a divinely aesthetic experience—comparable, perhaps, to the experience of reading *Ulysses*.

I. Stephen: Literary Metempsychosis in Actual Isolation

Central to *Ulysses,* this "book of union" where "both ends meet" and "Jewgreek is Greekjew," are the themes of identity, isolation, and connection (60, 108, 504). The book's characters, particularly Stephen and Bloom, constantly maneuver between these

thematic poles of isolation and connection, but they do so in very distinct ways. Contrasting Stephen with Bloom comes naturally for any critic or even casual reader; it is ingrained in the narrative of *Ulysses*, providing pleasure for readers as it did for the book's creator. As such, while the majority of the essay focuses on Bloom's connection with Simon in the Ormond Bar during "Sirens," it is Stephen who first introduces the themes of the individual self, isolation and connection, and who offers the necessary context for understanding what is at stake in a moment like "Siopold"—and, ultimately, what is involved in, or at stake, in a moment such as "Blephen…Stoom," a moment that we will consider, or re-consider, towards our conclusion.

In general, Stephen lacks the seemingly natural proclivity towards assimilation, incorporation, inclusion, and tolerance that defines Bloom's character. When considering if he would save a drowning man as Mulligan has done, Stephen expresses his wish to solidify individual identity. He thinks: "If I had land under my feet. I want his life still be his, mine to be mine. A drowning man. His human eyes scream to me out of horror of his death. I… With him together down…" (46). Stephen fears the water and the indistinct, fluid notion of identity it connotes, the blurring of subjective and objective worlds. To use a figure from John Donne, Stephen wishes to be an island, unconnected with the mortal, perishing sea of mankind around him. If Stephen opens up to a kind of ecstatic, metaphorical connection to mankind, he will suffer through another's suffering, die when others die ("With him *together* down", my emphasis). In contrast, Bloom's consistent, character-defining empathy suggests that he assumes a metaphorical connection to other people, even to animals. This ability of Bloom, "waterlover," who takes a bath during the day, in contrast to Stephen, "hydrophobe," who has not bathed for an extended period

of time, may explain why Joyce would lose interest in his young artist alter-ego: Joyce would say that Stephen no longer interested him, for he has a shape that can't be changed.

Yet Stephen is not a conventional or stock character; at other times, Stephen wishes to battle against such a rigid view of the self, as seen in an early passage in the "Nestor" episode. In it, Stephen establishes the theme of longing for unity, a union of spatially and temporally isolated individuals.[4] While helping Sargent, one of the students, the teacher of ancient history thinks:

> Like him was I, these sloping shoulders, this gracelessness. My childhood
>
> bends beside me. Too far for me to lay a hand there once or lightly. Mine
>
> is far and his secret as our eyes. Secrets, silent, stony sit in the dark
>
> palaces of both our hearts: secrets weary of their tyranny: tyrants willing
>
> to be dethroned. (28)

There is no suggestion in Stephen's thoughts or in the narrative descriptions of this episode that "Stephen is Sargent," and no nominal fusing (perhaps something like "Stargent") occurs, as it does in "Sirens" episode. Rather, Stephen thinks in the verbal form of simile[5] ("*Like* him was I…"), and he feels too separated from his student to make any physical contact with him, even if just "once or lightly." In addition to physical, or spatial, separation from Sargent, Stephen's thoughts also suggest temporal isolation. Stephen's childhood "bends beside" him but remains "far"—making it also his own past life which Stephen cannot touch. Alienated from others and troubled by the past—both

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[4] The concept of metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls, explicitly appearing first in the "Calypso" episode, will continue this theme, functioning as a kind of *leitmotif*, throughout the entire novel.

[5] Simile seems to suggest a more analytically distanced comparison between two entities, as opposed to the kind of direct identification embedded in metaphor.

his own personal past as well as civilization's past, the ancient history he teaches—
Stephen appears almost entirely engulfed in isolation. At the same time, however,
Stephen expresses the weariness of this isolation, this secrecy separating individuals, and
the longing or willingness for some kind of unity with his graceless, young student.

If Stephen is Telemachus-Hamlet-Icarus-Christ-Lucifer-etc, one might ask: why
can he not be Sargent? There seems to be a kind of disjunction, at this early stage in the
novel, between Stephen's ready identification with literary figures, and his inability to
identify with those "real" figures around him. Such a distinction admittedly begins to
strain the term "literary," for it is certainly the case that the characters inhabiting *Ulysses*
are literary, yet I believe the problems are assuaged if we are allowed to adopt Stephen's
perspective; from this view, Icarus, a figure from Greek myth whom Stephen mockingly
identifies himself with, is literary, while Sargent is not. Perhaps such a strain on defining
what is literary results naturally from discussions of *Ulysses*.[6] Richard Ellman, "certainly
the most reliable of all Joyce scholars" (Harold Bloom 5), puts forth an overarching
thesis in *Ulysses on the Liffey* that views Joyce's novel as the germination of an aesthetic
theory offered by Stephen into, in the words of *Portrait*, "the reality of experience" (318).
Bloom's smearing of feces on the literary page seems the scatological, humorous, self-
mocking representation of this push in *Ulysses*. In other words, the book is primarily
about the movement of literary ideas into experiential reality; as "Ithaca" describes its
two main characters, it is about the coming together of the artistic temperament (literary,
Stephen) and the scientific temperament (experiential, Bloom). As *Ulysses* begins with

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[6] To the annoyance of Richard Best, who "appears" in "Scylla and Charybdis," and
would defend his status as a non-fictional person when asked to do a documentary for the
B.B.C.: "I am not a character in fiction. I am a living being" (Ellman 363-4).

Stephen and moves to Bloom, so metaphorical identification begins as a primarily literary device but becomes in the later episodes an ecstatic union between "real" characters in the novel. In "Sirens," metaphorical identification drastically moves from the literary to the "real," with its moment of ecstatic union between Simon and Poldy ("Siopold!").

II. "Language of Flow": Fragmented Subjects, Fluid Identity

It would be impossible to discuss identity in "Sirens" without analyzing its new narrative and stylistic techniques; *Ulysses* demonstrates at many times the way in which these two, identity and language, become inextricably conditional upon one another. Much has been said of the style of "Sirens," particularly as regards its blending of music and language. Upon first inspection (and perhaps with further inspection), the episode exhibits a discomforting and new employment of language. It begins with a page and a half of "fragmented phrasings from the main body of the chapter" (Cope 218), or "a series of sounds, a fragmentation of the larger fugal patterns to come" (Ellman 102). Critics typically view the opening as an overture to the chapter's symphony, or as the linguistic orchestra "tuning up."[7] Whatever the case, this radical shift in narrative form

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[7] As Andreas Fischer nicely summarizes: "The connection of "Sirens" with music is obvious and fully explicit. In the famous schema reprinted by Stuart Gilbert the "scene" of the episode is given as "The Concert Room [of the Ormond Hotel]," the "organ" is the "Ear," the "art" is "Music," and the "technic" "*Fuga per canonem*" (38). This last, explicit reference to a well defined musical form, namely "a fugue with invariable congruent repetitions of theme" (Bowen) has given rise to a lively debate concerning the musical form of "Sirens." The result appears to be that it is neither a *fuga per canonem* nor any other explicit musical form and that its most musiclike part is the introduction, a kind of overture that introduces "themes," that is, words and fragments of sentences that will recur in their proper context later in the episode" (249).

becomes, as Jackson L. Cope points out, "all the more marked for coming upon the heels of the meticulous narration of 'Wandering Rocks'" (218). This abrupt change was difficult for even Joyce's first supporters to accommodate; Ellman records that, "Among Joyce's friends only Budgen responded to the *Sirens* with the admiration he expected and hoped for" (460).

The drastic shift from "Wandering Rocks" to "Sirens" resulted not simply from Joyce's innovative zeal, but demarcated a new stylistic and thematic section of the book—yet another type of structuring and organizing principle in *Ulysses*. As Hugh Kenner explains:

> A line across the page divides, nine and nine, the first extant list of *Ulysses* episodes, the one Joyce sent John Quinn in Septermber 1920 (*Letters*, I, 145). Correspondingly, the words 'End of First Part of *Ulysses*' appear on the last page of the Rosenbach fair copy of Episode 9, 'Scylla and Charybdis'. If we append to this half its coda, 'Wandering Rocks', we have a ten-episode block, homogeneous in its style and reasonably self-contained in its themes and actions. (61)

Cope sums up: "it is the external authority of Joyce himself that encourages us to seek here a turning-point in *Ulysses*, a new beginning" (222). Thus, "Sirens" represents the stylistic and thematic turn of the novel; in this episode, for the first time in *Ulysses*, metaphorical identification becomes realized in the neologism "Siopold."

Richard Kain writes: "The brilliant climax of Joyce's music is reached in the "Sirens" chapter, where thematic repetition, variation, and cadence are exploited to the full. This episode, like the Anna Livia chapter of *Finnegans Wake*, is the musical quintessence of *Ulysses*" (156).

This realized metaphor takes place towards the middle of "Sirens." At the opening of this episode, Bloom spies Blazes Boylan and follows him to the Ormond Bar, where Boylan has plans to meet Lenehan. Inside the bar, Simon Dedalus drinks; Lenehan quaffs the nectar bowl. From the street, Blazes enters while Bloom chances upon Richie Goulding and the two sit down to share a meal in the Ormond. Blazes, accompanied by Lenehan, leaves for his appointment with Molly as Ben Dollard and Father Cowley arrive at the bar, still chatting about Father Cowley's fiscal unrest. The newly arrived pair encourages Simon to sing a song, and he eventually succumbs. While Goulding and Bloom listen in the dining room, Simon sings Lionel's air, "M'appari," from Flotow's opera, *Martha*, a song of abandoned love (Gifford 292). As Simon performs the air's final lyrics, its climactic "Come to me!", the music has a mysterious unifying effect:

> —*Come!*

> It soared, a bird, it held its flight, a swift pure cry, soar silver orb it leaped serene, speeding, sustained, to come, don't spin it out too long long breath he breath long life, soaring high, high resplendent, aflame, crowned, high in the effulgence symbolistic, high, of the ethereal bosom, high, of the high vast irradiation everywhere all soaring all around about the all, the endlessnessnessness…

> —*To me!*

> Siopold!

> Consumed. (275-6, ellipses not added)

Our investigation into what has occurred here requires the explication of some preliminary understandings. First of all, the narrator's exclamation, "Siopold!" combines

the names of "Simon," the singer, and "Leopold," the listener, as well as including "Lionel," the fictional role in Flotow's opera. This moment of metaphorical identification does not explicitly say "Simon is Leopold," just as the text never says that "Leopold is Odysseus." In the latter, the metaphor is implied through the novel's title, while in the former, the metaphor comes across through a manipulation and conjunction of words, specifically of character names. But what exactly does this nominal fusing indicate—what does "Siopold" ultimately mean? What allows for, or explains, such an apparent textual aberration, and how does the moment fit within the larger context of "Sirens," or within the even larger perspective of *Ulysses*?

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of this moment, it is important to include not simply textual context but also critical context. Michael Stanier argues that "Sirens" constitutes "the most destabilizing section of the novel" (321). He expounds that:

> From the cacophony of noise that opens "Sirens"—bewildering,
> disorienting, alluring, siren voices indeed—the reader should realize that
> this chapter is one to be read with eyes closed. After the fifty-seven pre-
> echoing "sound-bites" which shell-spiral down to "Begin!" (330), "Sirens"
> takes on a form more recognizable and comforting for the reader. But the
> chapter still rings loud. It echoes with assonance, dissonance, word-play,
> and puns in an atmosphere of duplicity and multiplicity…. (326)

Aside from his comment that "Sirens" dissuades visual reading (quite to the contrary, it gives an example of how the visual representation of even a single letter, Henry Flower's Greek *e*, signifies meaning (279-280)), Stanier succeeds in making an essential

connection between the episode's language and the "atmosphere of duplicity and multiplicity." This duplicity and multiplicity entails the fragmentation of the self, in both physical and linguistic components.

Derek Attridge astutely identifies one unsettling aspect of *Ulysses*, overwhelmingly prevalent in "Sirens," as the implication, through basic linguistic constructions, that the self is not one monolithic entity. Attridge begins by stating that, "…most verbs of conscious behavior require a grammatical subject implying an undivided masterful, efficient self of which the organ is mere slave or satellite" (59). After offering examples such as "James wears the ring," Attridge observes, "what a totalizing and naturalizing gesture it is to constitute in language a complete, homogenous, individual subject ("James," "he"), a single coherent separable activity ("wears," "turns"), and a relation between them of pure transitivity" (59). Joyce's prose continually disrupts this natural tendency, having *parts* of a person function as the operating subject. In "Sirens," lips provide a prominent and interesting example, for, as Attridge records, "lips act again and again beyond the reach of a mastering self" (60). Thus, we have: "Her wet lips tittered," "Lenehan's lips over the counter lisped…" "Lips laughing" (257, 264, 275). The effect of this, Attridge believes, is that it "…challenges momentarily our untroubled belief in the human subject as unitary, unconstrained, and capable of originating action from a single center of consciousness…" (59). Thus, in "Nausicaa," when Bloom writes his enigmatic "I AM A…", this synechdochic style suggests that we could fill in the blank with, for example, "hand," as when, in "Calypso," Bloom picks up a kidney from the butcher: "His hand accepted the moist tender gland and slid it into his pocket" (60).

Attridge's exposition of this fragmentation or isolation of bodily parts reveals the concern in *Ulysses* with methods of rendering subject, and thereby the self. The manipulation of character names in "Sirens"—as in "Siopold"—functions similarly to the substitution of names for body parts. The very first words of the episode involve a convolutedly signified subject: "Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons…" (256). These colors, which do the hearing, stand for the two barmaids, and even more specifically, "Miss Douce's head [and] Miss Kennedy's head" (257). Thus, a body part's (the head's) trait (its color) stands for the subject (the barmaids) of the sentence. Still within the opening overture, these colors become embedded in the barmaids' names: "Bronzelydia by Minagold" (257). Such a word combination reinforces what has been demonstrated with the first words of the episode: that "bronze" and "gold" have essentially become new names; the word "gold" signifies the same *thing* as "Miss Mina Kennedy."[8] This nominal multiplicity and manipulation intentionally provokes the questions: what is the *thing* signified, what is the self? Like body parts standing in as subjects, playing with names disturbs the natural assumption that the self which acts as subject is the *whole* self, the *essential* self.

Thus, part of the unsettling nature of "Sirens" and its opening occurs because its name-play presumes an arbitrary relationship between names and the self, which comes dangerously and disturbingly close to promulgating the arbitrariness of all identity. In general, conceptions of the self tend towards an essential connection to proper names. When asked who we are, we respond with our names; identity and names are linked so tightly that they are naturally and unquestionably substitutable. When one says "I am

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[8] This interchangeability appears throughout the episode: "In drowsy silence gold bent on her page" (264).

Lydia,"—to recall our definition of metaphor—there is no "undercurrent of significance that tells us that A is obviously not B" (Frye Koine). Rather, our natural conception of names and identity tells us simply that A obviously is B, that "I" obviously is "Lydia." Yet when something like "Bronze" and "Lydia" become, first, equated and, next, combined, this conception of nominal essentiality no longer seems tenable. Nominal multiplicity must result from either the mutability of language or the mutability of the self—or, if language and identity be inextricably linked, the mutability of both—a consideration *Ulysses* forces upon us.

Other examples help clarify and refine the uncomfortable manipulation and treatment of names in "Sirens." The third and fourth line of the overture read:

A husky fifenote blew.

Blew. Blue bloom is on the

The third line's last word, "blew," repeats as the following line's first word, "Blew", and the sound is again repeated in its homophone, "Blue." A reference to the song, "The Bloom is on the Rye" follows, creating the phrase "Blue bloom"—quite similar to "Bronzelydia." The former, however, does not form a single word or a single name. "Blue bloom" does not refer to hair color or dress, but rather seems to indicate Bloom's sadness at this time of the day, when his wife will consummate her affair with Boylan; indeed, Bloom confides his forlorn feelings in his letter to Martha after finishing his meal of liver and bacon. Bloom's feeling blue, however, does not seem to have become a part of his name, as for Lydia, at this point. Yet about ten lines further down, instead of "Bloom," we have "Bloo" (256). Rather than conjoining "blue" and "Bloom," using primarily a visual linking, Joyce here uses sound and letters to unite Bloom's name and

his current, depressed psychological state. This highlights the importance of two features of language: the sound of a word, and the actual letters which compose this sound; both seem capable of giving meaning. Most importantly, the above example suggests even more strongly than the examples of Miss Douce and Miss Kennedy that identity is *dependent* upon conditions and circumstance, rendering it fluid or temporary. Like the appendages acting syntactically as operational entities, and the barmaid's identification as "bronze" and "gold," "Bloo" troubles the idea of a coherent, simple self. While bronze and gold might be understood as pseudo-essential characteristics,[9] Bloom's current emotional state surely cannot. Similarly, for instance, Mr. Tom Kernan, after over-indulging, becomes "Tomgin Kernan" (287). Blue-eyed Boylan, dressed in blue, becomes "Blazure"[10] (266). While giggling, Miss Kennedy becomes "Kennygiggles" (260). Names enter the world of flux in this turning-point that is "Sirens."

What does it mean for a name to absorb other words? Part of the name-playing we have been examining may be explained by Joyce's stylistic requirements, his attempt to accommodate "the technical resources of music" into imaginative prose, as Joyce described his technique to Georges Borach (quoted in Ellman 459). To understand the effects of Joyce's "musicalization" of prose, it helps to understand what distinguishes music from prose in the first place. Andreas Fischer, in his analysis of "Sirens," has

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[9] Yet "Sirens" even plays with the different associations of "gold," as in this sentence, where it does not designate hair color but emotional state: "Sauntering sadly, gold no more, she twisted twined a hair."

[10] This may create a link between Boylan and "Blue bloom," or "Bloo." This could explain why, in the overture, the two are coupled in a single line: "Jingle. Bloo" (256). Jingle represents Boylan, and perhaps the conjunction of these two figures insinuates Bloom's reason for feeling blue.

outlined four general ways in which music differs from language. His first difference is most relevant here:

> language is exclusively sequential and syntagmatic, the paradigmatic axis only offering options from which a speaker has to select, either choosing one item at the expense of another or placing two or more items in a particular sequence. Thus we must say *John and Mary* (or *Mary and John*) *came to see me*, although *John and Mary* do not semantically represent a sequence. Two speakers could, of course, articulate the words *John* and *Mary* at the same time, but the resulting acoustic signal would be judged as unintelligible rather than as a meaningful combination of the two names. (245-6)

In contrast to this, music is naturally capable of "co-sequentiality":

> Music… is also essentially sequential, but in contrast to language it may employ what I want to call co-sequentiality. Two speakers cannot (or should not) speak simultaneously, but two singers can easily sing together in homophony (singing the same melody together as chords), or in polyphony or counterpoint (singing different melodies). Musical notation easily represents this co-sequentiality with two or more staves written or printed above each other. Language, then, is essentially monophonous, while music may be monophonous, homophonous, or polyphonous. (246)

In "Sirens,"—and, looking ahead in the *oeuvre*, continuously in *Finnegans Wake* (a book Joyce insisted was music)—Joyce seems to fuse words together in order to create a

"meaningful combination of... two names [or words]." Such a technique allows Joyce to achieve in prose the "co-sequentiality" allowed in music.

For example, when Miss Douce and Miss Kennedy laugh simultaneously, the prose combines and also inverts "bronze" and "gold" to create the effect of simultaneity: "Shrill, with deep laughter, after bronze in gold, they urged each other to peal after peal, ringing in changes, *bronzegold goldbronze*, shrilldeep, to laughter after laughter" (260, my italics). The word combination "shrilldeep" evokes counterpoint, a particular type of co-sequentiality, since presumably one of the barmaids' voices is shrill while the other is deep. Simultaneity also features prominently in another name-word combination; the full passage in which "Kennygiggles" appears reads:

> Miss Kennedy lipped her cup again, raised, drank a sip and giggle-giggled.
> Miss Douce, bending again over the teatray, ruffled again her nose and
> rolled droll fattened eyes. Again Kennygiggles, stooping her fair pinnacles
> of hair, stooping, her tortoise napecomb showed, spluttered out of her
> mouth her tea, choking in tea and laughter, coughing with choking,
> crying... (260)

"Kennygiggles" functions as a method of conflating the image of a giggling Miss Kennedy; it freezes this image in its attempt to describe simultaneity. Notice, as Andre Topia points out elsewhere in the chapter, the abundance of the present participle, as well as the repetition of "stooping" and "choking." Miss Kennedy's identity has been frozen at this instance of her giggling, allowing her to be signified as Kennygiggles. So when Kennygiggles "spluttered," we understand that she is both giggling and spluttering (as well as stooping, showing, choking, coughing, and crying). Joyce has brought co-

sequentiality, or simultaneity—perhaps the most striking stylistic innovation of the preceding episode[11]—into the syntax of a sentence and the spelling of a word or name.

Considering the combined effect of all this musicalization and its name-play on the natural assumptions and comfort with which we represent a subject makes it no surprise that Bloom first appears in the body of the episode as "Bloowho," followed later by "Bloohimwhom" (258, 264). The name-playing provokes questions of selfhood, the very kind of question which the text, as Cope points out, almost explicitly asks: Who, or what, is Bloom (230)? The hypersensitivity to linguistic constructs in "Sirens" and *Ulysses* as a whole, self-consciously brings up the notion of Bloom existing as language.[12] As a piece of language, "Bloom" is a sound as well as a series of letters, attributes of which Joyce takes full advantage in "Sirens," as demonstrated earlier. Thus, once more, when Bloom says "I AM A…," we might conclude that Bloom literally is the letter *A,* "Aleph, alpha" (*Ulysses* 38), written language and its phonemes. This notion of character identity as pure language or sound is certainly unsettling to our traditional sense of the world. And it is sound, particularly music, which seems to, at least in part, account for this burgeoning confusion of identity.

Not only do the technical results of musicalization contribute to the atmosphere of duplicity and multiplicity, but the moments when music is actually being played or sung seem to also blur identity. Even before any songs have been sung, Simon, alone in the

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[11] Ellman writes of "Wandering Rocks" that: "Sequence, and with it the natural order of things, is suddenly inapplicable" (97).

[12] For some, this is primarily who, or what, Poldy is. Harold Bloom recalls how he "may never recover from a walk through a German park with a dear friend who is the most distinguished of post-Structuralists. When I remarked to him, in my innocent cunning, that Poldy was the most lovable person in Western fiction, I provoked him to the annoyed response that Poldy was not a person, but only language, and that Joyce, unlike myself, knew this very well" (3-4).

saloon (separated from the dining room and bar), strikes the tuning fork: "From the saloon a call came, long in dying. That was a tuningfork the tuner had that he forgot that he now struck" (264). Kenner calls the syntax of the second sentence "good bad writing" (89). Good or bad, readers have to work to distinguish between identities due to Joyce's (mis)use of pronouns. The first "he" refers to "the tuner," the second one to Simon: musical vibrations are jumbling up identity. During Simon's singing, the intermixing of a character's name with a different character's name begins: "The voice of Lionel [i.e. Simon] returned, weaker but unwearied. It sang again to Richie Poldy Lydia Lidwell also sang to Pat... how look, form, word charmed him Gould Lidwell, won Pat Bloom's heart" (275). In the first example, ambiguous pronouns create ambiguous, non-distinct identities; in the second, the combination of different names suggests some kind of interpersonal connection, akin to "Siopold," occurring through music. "Pat Bloom" seems to move towards a neologism such as, say, "Paloom," but the significance of these two would seem to drastically differ.

What, then, allows for, or accounts for, "Siopold!"? The intensity of Simon's finale might explain a more intense connection between characters—a sound preliminary understanding. Proceeding further, the technique of "Sirens" has been shown to disrupt traditional concepts of the subject by having, for example, lips instead of persons speak and by manipulating names. Instead of identifying oneself in terms of a fully volitional monolithic entity, identity becomes relegated to individual body parts; when attempting to use an encompassing subject, names become truncated and conjoined with other signifiers, while pronouns have been stripped of referential clarity. The mutability of linguistic construction, in "Sirens," translates into the multiplicity of the self; linguistic

disturbances form an interpretative gap allowing for a metaphorical, rather than an essential, understanding of the subject, or the self. Such a metaphorical concept of selfhood would interpret any self-identification equivocally: that they both are and are not the true self. Thus, Bloom is, and is not, a hand, a phonetic sound, a series of letters.

The idea that the self is multiple—that, in the words of Walt Whitman, it is large and contains multitudes—necessarily carries with it the notion of identity as performance. Who one is, to some ambiguous extent, depends upon what role one is playing. Different names, then, seem to proclaim different roles: Tomgin is Tom as drunkard, Kennygiggles is Kennedy as giggler, Bloo is Bloom as sulker. At the end of "Sirens," the narrator appears almost forthright about the self's multiplicity: "In Lionel Marks's antique saleshop window haughty Henry Lionel Leopold dear Henry Flower earnestly Mr Leopold Bloom…" (290). Or again: "…Lionelleopold, naughty Henry with letter for Mady, with sweets of sin with frillies for Raoul with met him pike hoses went Poldy on" (288). There appear to be several Leopold Blooms, several roles being played: Henry Flower, the writer of naughty letters; Mr. Leopold Bloom, the earnest canvasser and man of business; Poldy, the preoccupied cuckold; and Lionel, the abandoned lover. Significantly, in the second quotation, Bloom moves along "with met him pike hoses," Molly's bastardization of metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls. Throughout the day, Bloom's self transmigrates between these different personas, different roles, different identities; the technique of "Circe" consists in part of translating Bloom's transmigrating identities into the visible, audible, tactile realm of sensory perception, literally acting out his different selves. Appropriately, that episode's style adopts the form of drama.

Role-playing constitutes a perfect example of a metaphorical concept of identity. When playing a role, the player both is, and is not, his role; the player (subject) and his role (object) are not clearly distinguished. Actors often speak of finding their roles within themselves and "letting it out," suggesting that when acting they are somehow both their true self and their role. This may be a rather crude attempt to define the psychology of acting, but it points to one indisputable feature of adopting a role. It is the metaphorical concept of identity latent in role-playing, in a histrionic sense of self, that allows Shakespeare's Iago and Viola to both earnestly set forth the logical contradiction: "I am not what I am." As if viewing their identities through the verbal phenomenon of a metaphor, actors are, and are not, themselves.

Thus, as part of the novel's exploration of metaphor and identity, *Ulysses* makes full use of role-playing. Fritz Senn astutely points out:

> The conjunctive potential of [the] word "as" permeates all of *Ulysses*…
> The title *Ulysses* proclaims a role, one Leopold Bloom as Odysseus, or
> Odysseus as modern man. And once we catch on to this new game of
> aliases or analogies, there is no holding back. *Ulysses* is Joyce's
> *Metamorphosis*, a book of roles and guises, a game of identities, of
> transubstantiations. It is pantomimic in the sense of imitating everything.
> (37)

Molly Bloom even complains that her husband is "always imitating everybody," as he most certainly does in the narrative (771). Considering the first forty years of *Ulysses* criticism, John Z. Bennet remarks that Bloom "is Odysseus, or Christ (or a parody of Christ, or an unrealized Christ), or he is Adam, or the Flesh, or the Lion-as-Vegetable, or

the Common Man in Isolation, or Everyman Afoot, and so on through transmutations as imaginative as those he suffers in Nighttown, until he becomes at last, inevitably, a mere Robot" (89). And further identifications exist: Bloom is Hamlet (or the Ghost), Shakespeare, Socrates, Parnell, Elijah, Moses, Orpheus, Paris, the mature Joyce, and so on. One might apply the comment made of St. Paul, a man said to be all things to all people.

Building on the concept that new or modified names suggest multiple selves, Bloom's character appears to reveal that the seemingly infinite creativity expressible through written language directly reflects and parallels the seemingly infinite multiplicity of potential created selves. Thus, Bloom's ability to assimilate different roles coincides with his natural proclivity towards nominal multiplicity and creativity, as seen, for instance, in the anagrams of his name that Bloom made in youth; the list in "Ithaca" reads:

> Leopold Bloom
>
> Ellpodbomool
>
> Molldopeloob.
>
> Bollopedoom
>
> Old Ollebo, M. P. (678)

Each name insinuates some imaginative possibility of identity that the young Poldy was able to envision and assimilate. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that Bloom thinks in "Hades": "If we were all suddenly somebody else" (110).

Such self-transformations *begin* to be realized in "Sirens" (the body of the episode initiates with the command: "Begin!") and reach their climax in the changing roles of

"Circe." In "Sirens," at the moment that Bloom unites with Simon Dedalus, they both play the role of Lionel, the role of deserted lover. Simon has visited his dead wife's grave earlier that day, Bloom has just seen Blazes off to his wife's bed, while Lionel cries out for the loss of his Martha. In the episode's bodily and linguistic "atmosphere of duplicity and multiplicity," in the "highly charged magnetic field" of musical vibrations (Gordon 195), by sharing a role, Simon and Bloom share an identity—though, again, their identities are not *completely* or *wholly* equated, for, as "Sirens" demonstrates, identity itself is neither whole nor concrete but multiple and fluid. Thus, the fragmentation of linguistic norms and of traditional notions of identity can be very disturbing, as it was even for Joyce's contemporary friends and supporters, yet in "Sirens," this fragmentation and disorientation allows for the creation of new words and the combining of separate selves. Ironically, such fragmentation promotes a greater unity, a fluid community; it liberates from the jailhouse of syntax and spelling, and at the same time from the tyranny of individual identity which Stephen struggles unsuccessfully, in the early stages of the novel at least, to overthrow.

III. Consumed: Metaphor as Sex and Eating

This combining of identity in "Siopold" suggests that Simon and Bloom have to some extent overcome their physical, bodily separation, the isolation of inhabiting a distinct and individual body.[13] The word given in the aftermath of this ecstatic union occupies a full line, reading simply "Consumed." Critics such as Kenner have rightly

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[13] Looking in Mulligan's cracked mirror, Stephen wonders: "Who chose this face for me? This dogsbody…" (6).

interpreted this as suggesting consummation, as if these two characters were lovers or betrothed—giving the union between Simon and Poldy some sexual associations. "Consumed" also seems to suggest the process of consuming, of eating. The linking of both sex and eating to the moment of realized metaphor between Simon and Leopold is not coincidental. Rather, sexual consummation and consuming are the naturalistic expression of metaphor's implication that, as Frye maintains, subject and object are no longer distinct. The prevalence, and also the repeated linking, of sex and eating reveals how Joyce incorporated what Frye terms "the apocalyptic realm" within the naturalistic realm.

Sex, viewed by Gordon as, along with music, the other "highly charged magnetic field," permeates "Sirens" continually; in fact, it is music and sex that appear as the two dominant themes of the episode. These two themes continually overlap as well, becoming almost indistinguishable. The human body even takes the form of a musical instrument; Bloom thinks: "Play on her. Lip blow. Body of white woman, a flute alive. Blow gentle. Loud. Three holes all women" (285). Reciprocally, thinking of Howth Hill, Bloom decides that "We are their harps" (271). Correspondences between performing music and having sex abound, such as the joke (made by the priest, no less) about Ben Dollard's voice breaking "the tympanum of her ear" as well as "another membrane" (270). In fact, "the major occurrence of the episode (of *Ulysses*, in fact)" is "an occurrence both sexual and musical—Boylan's trip to Molly, to sleep with and sing with her" (Gordon 196).[14] The most erotic and sensual book in the Bible, it appears, has

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[14] Critics traditionally view this occurrence as what prompts Bloom's watch to stop, but perhaps it was actually Bloom's moment of ecstatic union with Simon, as they escape temporal and spatial confines in one fixed, transcendent moment.

rightly been dubbed "The Song of Songs." In "Sirens," music and sex are linked as driving forces in the union of disparate individuals; both experiences allow for a transcendence of the individual self. Appropriately, then, sexuality seems particularly linked with Simon's singing:

> Tenderness it welled: slow, swelling. Full it throbbed. That's the chat. Ha, give! Take! Throb, a throb, a pulsing proud erect. (274)
>
> Bloom. Flood of warm jimjam lickitup secretness flowed to flow in music out, in desire, dark to lick flow, invading. Tipping her tepping her tapping her topping her. Tup. Pores to dilate dilating. Tup. The joy the feel the warm the. Tup. To pour o'er sluices pouring gushes. Flood, gush, flow, joygush, tupthrop. Now! Language of love. (274)

In these passages, Simon's vocal performance and its effect on auditors appear almost indistinguishable from the physical act of sex: "language of love," indeed.

Thus, Si and Poldy's nominal fusion—ostensibly, a result of this singing— might be said to be as sexual as it is musical. The conjoining of name-parts ("Si" and "opold") corresponds to the conjoining of body-parts during sex. The only other instance in the episode where names similarly weld together occurs as George Lidwell and Lydia Douce flirt with, and seduce, one another. Their sensual interaction allows for the interposing of their names, the anticipated joining of identity: "Lidlydiawell" and "bronzelid" (278, 289). The prevalence of sex, of bodily connection, in a moment like "Siopold," which has to do with the transcendence of material and temporal parameters, may seem somewhat contradictory, but it accords with Joyce's naturalistic aesthetic.

Sex parallels metaphorical fusion, a moment of transcendence and connection, yet it exists within the purely physical, material world; even the sublime Stephen, when trying to connect himself with Sargent, thinks in terms of physical touch. Thus, Bloom's paternal diagnosis of a half-conscious Stephen at the end of "Circe" implies the restoring, regenerative union evident in sexuality: "A girl. Some girl. Best thing could happen him" (609). Also, the crude joke Mulligan tells Stephen, that Bloom "looked upon you to lust after you," (217) appears to contain a certain sagacity, as does Mulligan's comment in the following episode that, "There's a touch of the artist about old Bloom" (235). Bloom lusts after Stephen in his wish to unite their two distinct identities—though not in physical and sexual terms, as Mulligan's (and Joyce's) scatological wit quips, but rather in the union, the consubstantiality, of father and son. Since sex blurs the distinction between subject and object, it accords with Frye's notion of metaphorical identification (and it is this idea of being both distinct and indistinguishable – the "is and is not" of metaphor - which troubles Stephen's, and many other heresiarchs', thoughts on the Trinity, discussed further on). Consider Bloom's cherished, passionate memory on Howth Hill. The two lovers' kiss allows for reversibility, a kind of equivalence, of subject and object: "She kissed me. I was kissed" (176). The center of consciousness moves immediately and seamlessly from Molly as active agent to Bloom as passive recipient. In its reversibility, this moment parallels the almost ecstatic giggling "goldbronze bronzegold," where co-sequentiality lent itself to a conflation and blurring of subjects. On Howth, the sexual exchange appears to have created a relation of metaphor between the two lovers, in which there is "no sharp or consistent distinction between subject and object."

The overt sexuality of Simon's singing, then, seems to serve two principal purposes, in addition to what we might call a general shared experience of self-transcendence achieved in both sex and music. First, it noticeably serves as a reminder of the sex between Molly and Boylan. But second, sexuality pervades the singing because through this song Simon and Poldy will be granted a kind of reversibility, or equivalence, between their two identities—the very thing that sex offered Poldy and Molly in the memory of Howth, that Mulligan quips Bloom desires to have with Stephen, and that Bloom recommends as the optimal remedy for Stephen's stony solitude.

As might be gathered from this brief analytical survey, sex fills not only "Sirens," but *Ulysses* as a whole; as Simon comments upon noticing what is likely semen on the funeral carriage's seat: "After all… it's the most natural thing in the world" (89). In this scene from "Hades," when investigating their carriage, the funeral goers find, immediately before noticing the remnants of sex, the remnants of a meal:

> —What is this, he said, in the name of God? Crumbs?
>
> —Someone seems to have been making a picnic party here lately, Mr. Power said. (89)

The coupling of food and sex (quite a picnic party) occurs repeatedly in *Ulysses*: most memorably, on Howth Hill when Molly passes seedcake into Bloom's mouth and the two avow, and consummate, their engagement—a memory itself triggered by Bloom's drinking burgundy (175-6); or, as a counterpoint, the Plumtree's potted meat which Molly and Boylan share. Similar to this coupling, Joyce's choice of the word "Consumed" signifies both consummation and, perhaps more directly even, consuming. Characterizing "Siopold!" in terms of sex and eating works on a purely graphical level.

"Siopold" devours the names "Simon" and "Leopold," just as earlier we saw the process of conjoining names in terms of sex. Simon and Leopold might be said to be devouring one another—or, less cannibalistically, that they have been consumed by, or absorbed into, the music, the "endlessnessnessness" of Si's note.

Sex and eating are repeatedly linked in *Ulysses* because they are both directly related to the verbal phenomenon of metaphor; they are the experiential, naturalistic expression of metaphor's implications. In "Aeolus," Bloom, thinking humorously about symbols of justice, arrives at a simple yet profound conclusion: "… it's everybody eating everyone else. That's what life is after all." Henry Staten believes that Bloom's thinking indicates that: "Bloom understands the passage as signifying the pure transitivity of the eater-eaten relation, a phenomenon that would manifest itself at the grammatical level as the reversibility of subject and object." Staten's "reversibility of subject and object" recalls our original definition of metaphor from Frye: "a state of things in which there is no sharp or consistent distinction between subject and object." Thus, the state of things in *Ulysses*, what Bloom calls "life," is a state not simply of reciprocal consuming, but of metaphor. Bloom's characterization of the world of *Ulysses* as one where everybody's eating everyone else is presumably oriented scientifically towards the interconnectedness of all matter through natural cycles. The implications shown above, however, of this scientifically acceptable, rational statement reveal that Bloom's world is one of latent metaphor, similar to what Frye calls the "apocalyptic realm."

The achievement of *Ulysses* resides partly in its ability to present the apocalyptic realm within the naturalistic realm; only in *Ulysses* does the protagonist close one chapter by taking his seat in an outhouse and another by taking his seat on a chariot of divine

ascension. Frye defines the apocalyptic realm as a "world of total metaphor, in which everything is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body" (Anatomy 136). Acknowledging that *Ulysses* takes place, at some kind of latent level, in the apocalyptic realm, helps makes sense of certain comments. For instance, Stephen argues in his concluding comments upon Shakespeare that: "He found in the world without as actual what was in his world within as possible... Every life is many days, day after day. *We walk through ourselves*, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But *always meeting ourselves*" (210, my italics). In his examination of the philosophical underpinnings of *Ulysses*, Theoharris discusses a very similar ontological-epistemological view, which he argues stems from Aristotle's *De Anima*. In this work of philosophy, Aristotle put forth the ideas that: "everything existing is either sensible or knowable by the soul, and second, that the soul is identical, in a manner, to everything it senses and knows" (10). Furthermore, writes Theoharris, "Stephen variously cherishes, depends on, and chafes against [these ideas] in the narrative" (10). Stephen's mixed reaction to this concept of essential selfhood, of the soul, makes perfect sense considering his contrary impulses towards other characters. Earlier we examined two such contrary impulses of Stephen: when he imagines himself having the option of saving a drowning man (chafing against identification) and when he helps Sargent with his sum (desirous of unity). In his discussion of Shakespeare quoted above, Stephen "cherishes" the idea because he is talking about the great bard, the exemplar artist *par excellence*. The further one pursues the idea of metaphor in *Ulysses* the clearer it seems to become that, in some crucial way, to the artist, the world is metaphor.

Three episodes later, Bloom echoes Stephen's statements on Shakespeare when he thinks: "Think you're escaping and run into yourself" (377). The crucial difference between Bloom's statement and Stephen's is that Bloom is not describing some historical figure, but expressing his own ontological-epistemological view of life. In describing Shakespeare, that domineering shadow over all English literature, as maintaining such a view on life, Stephen suggests that, as kind of general rule or principle, the artist (subject) identifies with all he encounters (object). Yet, unlike Bloom, Stephen fears such a view of life, and can only *describe* or acknowledge the philosophy of the artist, while Bloom continually seems to enact it. Thus, Bloom does not describe Shakespeare but speaks of his personal experience—to recall the passage on justice and eating discussed above, his personal experience of a world of reciprocal, all-inclusive, and continual consuming. Such a distinction between Bloom and Stephen might lead us to conclude that the touch of the artist about Bloom is his ready ability of assimilation, the latent metaphorical identification witnessed in so many of his encounters. If it is his persistent capacity for sympathy that makes Poldy the most lovable character in Western literature for Harold Bloom, it may be his related capacity for metaphorical identification which makes him an artist—and, as Molly Bloom and Fritz Senn point out, characteristically histrionic.

If the world is metaphor to the artist, then the artist lives not simply in the realm of naturalistic reality, but also in Frye's apocalyptic realm, a world of total metaphor. Modifying Frye slightly, since we are focusing on a particular kind of metaphor (between persons), shows that *Ulysses,* as far as Bloom is concerned (and Stephen at times, as Theoharris notes), presents not simply an, at times, scrupulously naturalistic and detailed world, but a world in which everyone is potentially identical with everyone else—a world

in which meeting other people is essentially meeting oneself, one in which, moreover, Stephen suggests, everything that we pass through, the very medium of existence, is, somehow, also us. Thus, Anthony Cronin's lament over the emphasis his contemporaries were placing on allegorical and symbolic interpretation—that it "has only the effect of reducing the world of *Ulysses* to some monstrous enchanted fairyland where everything turns out to be masquerading as something else" (60)—in actuality may not pejoratively "reduce" the world of *Ulysses* but highlight part of its fundamental nature. Surely not monstrous, but perhaps somewhat enchanted, the world of *Ulysses* is an interconnected world, a world of latent metaphor. That metaphor is, furthermore, aligned with sex and consuming, the two sustentative processes of the physical cycle, suggests that metaphorical identification is essential to what Bloom would defend as "that that is really life" (333).

IV. Realizing Metaphors: "Not Verbally. Substantially." (*Ithaca*)

Earlier in the day, Stephen thinks about the Trinity and the doctrine of consubstantiality, pondering "the divine substance wherein Father and Son are consubstantial" (38). Stephen's theological musing centers on paternity but more broadly on the concept of consubstantiality, which is directly equivalent to the concept of realized metaphor. How can two entities, a "Father" or a "Son," be simultaneously individual and indistinguishable—both separate and unified? This is the problem of metaphor, the problem Joyce faced as he aimed to somehow unite his Odyssean father and son. As such, rather than referencing Stephen's rumination on Trinitarian theology, we might just

as well ask the meaning of Joyce's note for the "Eumaeus" episode which states, "Ul and Tel exchange unity": what does it mean to "exchange unity"? Walton Litz clarifies the meaning of this note and offers his interpretation: "The note is crossed in blue pencil, a sign that Joyce found an adequate expression for this interchange. The catechism of Ithaca opens with a closely related question-and-answer: 'What parallel courses did Bloom and Stephen follow returning? Starting united both at normal walking pace...'" (42). There are other moments, of course, towards which one might gesture. For instance, towards the end of "Eumaeus," Bloom is said to be "the other's senior or *like his father*," and though Bloom and Stephen "didn't see eye to eye in everything, a certain analogy there somehow was, as if both their minds were travelling, so to speak, in the one train of thought" (656, my italics). Another likely possibility, particularly after analyzing "Siopold," would be the melding of Stephen's and Bloom's names: "Substituting Stephen for Bloom Stoom... Substituting Bloom for Stephen Blephen..." (682).

"Stoom" and "Blephen" resonate as more than just an exercise in substitution; the neologisms signify consubstantiation. In the pseudo-mathematical logic of "Ithaca," the ability to logically substitute two values indicates that these two values are equivalent; thus, this nominal substitution and melding implies that the values "Stephen" and "Bloom" are somehow equivalent. Yet, as Bloom judges in "Sirens," this kind of arithmetical reduction tends to "Fall quite flat," (278), and what really strikes us in this textual moment in "Ithaca" is "what's behind" (274). Ultimately, how do Stephen and Bloom connect (if we grant that they, in fact, do connect)? This is an extremely complex question and answer, but in the limits of this essay we might point out that Joyce seems to utilize the versions of metaphorical identification examined so far, particularly eating and

sex, to connect these two. We see in "Eumaeus" that it is Stephen—the character who battles against assimilating the other into himself—who has not eaten all day, and Bloom—Stephen's dietary opposite, Poldy is called in "Circe" an "Anythingarian" (490)—who practically force-feeds the poor aspiring artist. As noted earlier, Mulligan points out the pseudo-sexual bond that Bloom wishes to create between himself and Stephen—and we might add that the accusation against Bloom that he is an "Anythingarian" occurs with sexual connotations. If we continue to pursue "what's behind" Stephen and Bloom's nominal equivalence, we might arrive at the concluding vision of "Circe," where Bloom's lost son, Rudy, appears as if in place of (that is, in the diction of "Ithaca," substituting for) a semi-conscious Stephen. Counterpointing "Siopold," where two fathers appear conjoined, the final vision of "Circe" conjoins two sons. The image of Rudy strikes one as a divine vision, an epiphany, and concludes the process of transmutations that so brusquely began to be realized in "Sirens."

Through these indirect means, "Blephen" and "Stoom" recall "Siopold," as well as in their shared technique of name-blending. Furthermore, Bloom's union with Simon, a man described in "Hades" as "Full of his son," clearly contributes to his union with Stephen (89). Bloom's uniting with Simon, though, is a union between two individuals, who, in "Hades," have been shown to be not particularly compatible. As discussed above, language and identity in "Sirens" enter a new degree of mutability, fragmentation, and multiplicity. The manipulation of names functions as a repeated linguistic device achieving various effects throughout the episode, including musical co-sequentiality. Yet co-sequentiality does not explain the consubstantiality of Si and Poldy. Their shared role of deserted lover equates their identities to some extent, but their ecstatic union seems

substantiated only through the involvement of the divine—comparable to the divine

vision of Rudy that seems to substantiate Stephen and Rudy's equivalence, and thereby

Bloom's paternal union with Stephen—but perhaps different in that, in "Sirens," Si and

Poldy connect through a divinely aesthetic experience.[15]

Stephen wonders what kind of "divine substance" allows for consubstantiality or

interpersonal metaphor and in "Sirens" it appears, appropriately, as a kind of divine

music. Simon's perpetually rising cry reaches "the high vast irradiation everywhere all

soaring all around about the all." The vertical motion, the infinite effusion of light, the

allusion to St. Paul's concept of the divine as the "all in all" (which Stephen uses thrice

earlier in the day when he thinks of "The all in all in all of us," and which appears again

in "Nausicaa"), surely indicate an epiphany, a showing forth of the divine. If we were in

any doubt, the final word of the description removes it: the "endlessnessnessness." The

energy and inspiration of the passage come from its aiming to convey what Joseph

Campbell, in his study in comparative myth, calls a manifestation "of the joy of eternity

in time" (168). In this divine, epiphanic moment, the manipulation of names loses any

arbitrariness and reflects instead a transubstantiation— or more properly, in this case, a

consubstantiation.

The divine aspects of this moment are impossible to separate from its aesthetic

aspects; epiphany, for Joyce, was a term applied in his aesthetic theory, and though in his

mature life he would never enter a Church, Joyce would stand outside church doors to

hear the music. As "Sirens" is about the experience of music, it is also, more generally,

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[15] I say that they are only *perhaps* different because the image of Rudy is one where the
lost son is reading and kissing a book, which may itself be a kind of divine aesthetic
experience that contributes to an explanation of what has occurred.

about the experience of art.[16] The experience of music, of art, serves as the medium through which Si and Poldy experience ecstatic connection. As readers of *Ulysses*, this ekphrastic episode should certainly draw our attention. Particularly curious about the line following this consummation is its apparent incorporation of the text's reader into this communion: "Come. Well sung. All Clapped. She ought to. Come. To me, to him, to her, you too, me, us" (276). The inclusion of, "you too," while expressing the profusion of generosity taking place, also seems to call out to the reader of these words. Determining whether these are Bloom's thoughts, the Arranger's playing, or Joyce's writing does not significantly, in this instance at least, change their effect; the critic, similar to the man of science, must face printed words on the page and try to explain them as best he can. In this case, part of the effect is an invitation to the reader to take part in the ecstatic union, not simply of love or sex (the beloved coming to the lover), but of art. The sequence enacts a progression towards union: "you…, me, us," not only echoing the union experienced between Si and Poldy, between lovers, between consumer and consumed, but also between reader and fiction. Thus, the epiphanic music may be Si's vocals, or it may, after all, be Joyce's language describing it; in fact, it could be both. If we assume that it is, at least, Joyce's language, then two "real" people, the reader and the author, have again been joined in an ecstatic metaphor through art—directly comparable to the one Simon and Bloom experience (note that Bloom cannot see Simon, the *deus abscondus* artist, but only hear his words). From this viewpoint, something beyond

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[16] Analysis of this musical moment as an aesthetic moment is not restricted to this explicitly musical episode or this explicitly musical moment. As Ellman records: "Having denominated the type of his hero, Joyce proceeded to instruct Budgen in the book's rationale and technique. Writing a novel, he said, was like composing music, with the same elements involved" (436). By extrapolation, as readers, we might say that reading the novel is like listening to music.

linguistic construction and deconstruction is certainly taking place: there is ample ground

for Cheryl Herr's experience that *Ulysses* "interacts alchemically with life" (56).[17]

Conclusion: "Deeply Deep"

Any analysis of *Ulysses* focusing on mystical union and ecstatic connections runs the

risk of becoming, in Stephen's self-deprecating words, "deeply deep" (40). *Ulysses*

continually mocks itself, and the moment of ecstatic union between Simon and Leopold

is no exception; their names appear in different combinations throughout the remainder of

the episode, playing with and subverting a moment we have been treating as sincerely

significant in *Ulysses*. Perhaps this self-mocking comes about most obviously in that,

after the epiphanic music we have been analyzing, the episode ultimately closes with a

tune from an unseemly windpipe, Bloom's "arks." Joyce never seems to raise us to

apotheosis without knocking us down. Bowen sees Joyce's dialectic between proposition

and parody occuring throughout "Sirens":

> Throughout the chapter Joyce uses musical as well as narrative analogies
>
> to create an image of pathos approaching sentimentality, only to destroy it
>
> again in a single stroke. Boylan's musical send-off with "Goodbye,
>
> Sweetheart, Goodbye" as the timorous Leopold sees the lover [Boylan] off

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[17] Such a notion of reading, in which reader enters into a kind of ecstatic union with the characters and with the author, adds an interesting gloss to Roland Barthes's idea of reading as sex. Perhaps we can say that we are reading, hearing music, making love, or consuming words—so long as we acknowledge the pleasure of the text and the notion of ecstatic union involved in it. Even puritanical Milton could relish the idea that "books are not entirely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them" (*Aeropagitica*).

to his rendezvous [with Molly]; the despondent strains of "All Is Lost Now" and "*M'appari*" falling on the ears of their Elvino-Lionel counterpart, Leopold, who is sawing away on liver and bacon; and the irony of "The Croppy Boy" being sung to a bunch of unheroic Ormond barflies—all are a part of the debunking process characteristic of Joyce's naturalism. (75)

The naturalistic technique does not allow a severance between the transcendent and the mundane, the spiritual and the bodily; the final musical note, Bloom's fart, forces a reconsideration of Si's flaming, crowned, resplendent cry. Kenner captures this tension in "Siopold" perfectly by dubbing it "a rite of enraptured slosh" (92).

Joyce intended *Ulysses* to be the epic of the human body, and it does not allow us to take the heights of human experience without recognizing the bodily reality of this experience. It is a celebration of the humorous human condition, where "Yes" can be the affirmation of all human life, the assent to marriage, to sexual intercourse, and lastly (only in order, and certainly not in importance), to making breakfast in the morning. Critics do well to remember that Joyce, after all, was funny. Only a single sibilant separates the cosmic from the comic; or as Virag says in "Circe": "From the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step" (515). Yet the laughter evoked by *Ulysses* is not the despairing, hysterical laughter of the priest in "The Sisters," a story in which the idleness of words is solemnly considered, but the laughter of comedy. At stake in the parodic method of *Ulysses*, however, is the danger that everything in the novel ultimately means nothing—the response to *Ulysses* evoked from Jung ("nothingness"), so contrary to the response of Coilin Owens, who thought *Ulysses* was made of words that redeem. The

danger of parody is perhaps less dramatic in *Ulysses* than in *Finnegans Wake*, a book

which, judging from my brief exposure, seems endlessly playful, self-referential and self-

parodying, and which some people thought was some extravagant, perverted practical

joke, having no real sense or meaning.

If this brief and inadequate discussion of parody were more comprehensive, we

might come to see that Joyce rarely did much of *anything* without parodying it shortly

thereafter. His epic novel, *Ulysses*, opens with a parody of transubstantiation— an

instance of epiphany and, essentially, a realized metaphor (as such, comparable to

"Siopold"). After "Sirens" the dialectic between transcendence and parody, inflated

sentimentalism and blunt naturalism, becomes the paradigm of "Cyclops." After

completing *Ulysses*, Joyce deemed it, in *Finnegans Wake*, his "usylessly unreadable Blue

Book of Eccles" (179). Ellman writes that Joyce "was fond of disparaging himself," and

deals tolerantly of those, "who, missing his irony, have sometimes followed suit" (JJ 3).

Not a denigration of meaning or holiness or significance, Joyce's parody expands

meaning rather than diminishing it. After writing "Sirens," Joyce told Georges Borach

that he sees "through all the tricks and can't enjoy [music] any more" (Ellman, JJ 459).

Joyce's parodying, on the other hand, seems to allow an endless number of tricks to his

music in "Sirens." It makes us hesitate over ever reaching a conclusion, of knowing what

the work of art really means to say. In such an environment, the only proper attitude to

any conclusive interpretation seems to be, as Fritz Senn suggests, Bloom's response to

the myopic Citizen: an equivocal, thoughtful, resiliently humble "Yes, but." When we do

find a real moment of epiphany (such moments, of course, may vary by reader), its

consummation ideally strikes with exclamatory force (the exclamation point of

"Siopold!"), bringing us to what Nabokov called "aesthetic bliss," a state of ecstasy, of realized metaphorical connection—and it may be that Joyce's final trick, the lurking stratagem of wily *Ulysses*, is to have us step outside ourselves.

Rooting Myth in Experience: Yeats's "Among School Children"

> It is arguable that the true humanist concern of the twentieth century must
> be to liberate man from an obsessive preoccupation with himself, so that
> he may regain what is more valuable than knowledge, even than self-
> knowledge, and that is the power to experience the other, whether in word
> or in nature – the power of encounter.
> —Joseph T. Swann

Prefatory Remarks

To turn from Joyce's *Ulysses* to Yeats's "Among School Children," is in many
ways a drastic change in direction, and it is appropriate to take a moment to consider this
new work and our approach towards it. First of all, "Among School Children" is one of
Yeats's most famous and most complex poems, but perhaps even more famous than the
poem itself are its final two questions concerning the tree and the dancer. Terence Brown
calls them a moment "of transcendent authority in *The Tower*" (321), and David Lynch
notes that their "aesthetic effect is almost universally admired by Yeats's readers" (52).
Furthermore, the questions offer certain suggestions that have practical consequences for
a critique of the poem:

> O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
>
> Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
>
> O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
>
> How can we know the dancer from the dance? (CP 217, ll. 61-64)[18]

Many critics view the questions as basically rhetorical, asking a question while offering

the answer in its form. Joseph Swann derives from the questions this answer:

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[18] All further citations to "Among School Children" include only line numbers.

the chestnut-tree is neither leaf nor blossom nor bole, nor all of these

together; it is something else which subsumes all these, and yet its parts

are all we ever see – if, in fact, we see even those… The dancer, too, is no

more than the abstract image of a dancing shape, itself an image, as it

moves before us. Only by abstraction can we know the dancer from the

dance: but this again is a partial and imperfect knowledge. (238-9)

As seen in this interpretation, one compelling way to view the concluding questions of

"Among School Children," is as a commentary on the way we attain knowledge. Indeed,

Donald Pearce sees this as a theme of the whole poem: "The tyranny of human thought,

precisely, that 'condition of life in generation' with its questioning, ciphering, studying,

its reverie, dialectic, or mystical vision—one could almost say the problem of human

thought—is one of the chief thematic concerns of 'Among School Children'" (53). Thus,

the first difficulty of Yeats's "Among School Children" that a critic should address is this

inherent commentary on logical abstraction and critical thinking, on being "neat in

everything / In the best modern way" (5-6).

As seen in this pointedly ironic comment on the compartmentalization of modern

life that Yeats witnesses in the school's pedagogical goals, the very foundational

concepts of criticism and schematized argumentation are being thrown into question in

this poem and made the objects of the artist's ridicule.[19] Yeats's challenge to traditional

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[19] This seems anticipated in "The Tower": "It seems I must bid the Muse go pack, / Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend / Until imagination, ear and eye, / Can be content with argument and deal / In abstract things" (CP 194, ll. 11-15).
Then later: "And I declare my faith: / I mock Plotinus' thought / And cry in Plato's teeth, / Death and life were not / Till man made up the whole, / Made lock, stock, and barrel / Out of his bitter soul, / Aye, sun and moon and star, all, / And further add to that / That, being dead, we rise, / Dream and so create Transunlar Paradise." (CP 198, ll. 145-156).

ways of making meaning help explain some of the poem's basic features: its feeling of free association, of things floating into awareness (25); the abrupt dismissal of Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, the foundations of Western philosophy (48). The first line of the poem describes the narrator as walking "through the long schoolroom questioning" (1). Since the school Yeats seems to question in the poem is that belonging to Plato and Aristotle, those emblems of philosophy and argument (among other things, to be sure), it extends far into history: a "long schoolroom," indeed. As one of the major themes of the poem is the acquiring of knowledge, the making of meaning, it subsumes the critic into its web of questioning—not simply through its at times mysterious, arcane, dense, complex structure and content—but because that seems to be what the poem, when a basic level of its proper understanding has been reached, means to do.

Accordingly, after recognizing a bit of the explanatory potential that comes from the poem's challenge to hermeneutics, some practical issues soon arise for the critic. As the final lines of the poem question which parts of a chestnut tree – "the leaf, the blossom or the bole?" (63) – are the tree, we might wonder which parts of the poem - the stanza, the verse, or the word – are the poem (we might also add meter, rhythm, tone, rhyme; beyond formal elements: biographical sources, historical contexts, literary precursors, etc). In a poem that rejects the compartmentalization implied in a linear and rational progression of logical thought, where should the critic begin his or her analysis, and what methodology should guide the investigation?

It may be that there are as many valid ways to approach the poem as there are readers of it. Yeats might agree; it seems his father surely would, the same man who, instead of having his son write the prescribed class homework assignment, had him write

an essay on Polonius's advice to his son, Laertes, in *Hamlet*: "To thyne own self be true." Yet the critic's approach need not be completely subjective or arbitrary; reason still obtains. Even Yeats himself, despite the poem's apparent critique of systemic, compartmentalizing thought, still writes in formal verse, organizing his polemic against cutting and sewing (5) into eight numbered stanzas of eight lines a piece, in which almost every line consists of ten beats;[20] in "Adam's Curse," Yeats even refers to the act of writing condensed, formal lyric as "stitching and unstitching" (CP 80, l. 6). The poem's very existence seems to create a fundamental tension in its message, a tension between form and content, or, to cast this dichotomy within a major theme of the poem, between body and soul. Despite what the poem almost misleads us to believe, I will argue later on, Yeats never abandons the bodily realm in this work just as he never abandons poetic form.

A final note on method: the poem's critique of compartmentalizing suggests the appropriateness of a more holistic analytical approach to artistic production. For instance, those famous concluding images in "Among School Children" of the dancer and the tree seem to expand beyond this individual poem into the collection of *The Tower*, beyond that into Yeats's collected poems, then to his complete *oeuvre*, or into his reading, and so on.[21] The poem itself suggests that the only end to this extension, this search for the encompassing explanation of these images, would be to conclude at Yeats's mind, or maybe his soul, and all with which it came in contact. The impossibility of this task of expansion might lead one to reject it altogether, but such resignation would

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[20] There are nine irregular lines in the poem's sixty-four: six with eleven beats, and three with twelve beats.

[21] For an interesting discussion of other tree images in Yeats, see Pearce; for dancers, see Kermode (also has a comparison to Mallarme).

not do the poem justice. While we may never solve the hermeneutic circle, there is certainly the sense in Yeats's poetry that much of its force comes from the process of accretion and revision, of self-commentary. Moreover, the scope of analysis need not be all of Yeats's poetry, but accretion, revision and self-commentary take place within each volume—namely, in the case of "Among School Children," the seminal volume of modernist lyric poetry, *The Tower*.

Hugh Kenner remarks on how many readers may be tripped up by, "Yeats's most radical, most casual, and most characteristic maneuver: he was an architect, not a decorator; he didn't accumulate poems, he wrote books" (13). Like guests at an ancient Greek symposium (Plato's is referred to in "Among School Children"), the poems in *The Tower* address, complement, and contradict one another. Or perhaps Yeats, a poet who achieved a fairly high rank in the mystical Order of the Golden Dawn, might be satisfied with the metaphor of initiation: the first-time reader of a Yeatsian poem unlocks, or sees, only a fraction of its meanings, while the wizened initiate encounters a plethora of meanings and significant resonances within a single word, be it "tree," "dancer," "stone," or "moon," to name a few of the poet's heavily burdened, life-laden, life-long symbols. Yeats also fittingly supplies us with his own metaphor in *Wheels and Butterflies*: "Everything thought is like a bell with many echoes" (qtd in Ellman 257). This essay will attempt to give a sense of some of the resonances, echoes, and presences[22] within "Among School Children," drawing almost exclusively from *The Tower*[23] and a few,

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[22] "O Presences… mocker's of man's enterprise." They mock the critic's enterprise.
[23] Terence Brown remarks on "how complicatedly intertextual [*The Tower*] in fact is" (322). Kenner: " 'Among School Children'… is as centrifugal a major poem as exists in the language. Whoever encounters it out of the context Yeats carefully provided for it, for instance in an Anthology… will find himself after twenty minutes seeking out who Leda

considerably more wizened than myself, Yeats scholars. It will fall short of placing the poem within Yeats's operating imaginative faculty, or whatever the whole context, the whole being, of the poem might be. But, as Yeats would concede when judging one of his imperfect poetic symbols (the "solitary soul" as swan), "I am satisfied with that" (CP 208, ll. 59-61).

* * *

With a reasonable degree of modesty, then, this essay considers and critiques the view of the poem as simply a "curse upon old age" and death that Yeats offers in an often-cited letter and in his notes for the poem. "Among School Children" is fundamentally about an encounter. In the first stanza, the narrator is paraphrasing the speech of the guiding nun who tells how the children learn to "cipher and to sing" (3). In the sixth line, the encounter occurs, graphically represented by the poet's abrupt use of the dash that seemingly cuts off the nun's speech, or perhaps suddenly jerks the narrator's attention away from it:

> [...] In the best modern way – the children's eyes
>
> In momentary wonder stare upon
>
> A sixty year-old smiling public man. (6-8)

This starkly rendered encounter between youth and age, male and female is repeatedly pushed towards a kind of union, though not without serious doubts and considerations by the poet, when placed in the context of *The Tower* as a whole. Ultimately, however, the

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was and what Yeats made of her, and identifying the daughter of the swan with Maud Gonne (excursus on her biography, with anecdotes) and determining in what official capacity, through what accidents of a destiny sought and ironically accepted, the poet found himself doubling as school inspector" (12). Kenner uses the poem to demonstrate and introduce the accretionary and self-referential aesthetic, as I have here defined it, in Yeats's poetry.

poem is far less escapist than it may at first seem; it does not forego experience for image but rather presents a very complex, if not at times contradictory or simply confusing, relation between image and experience, soul and body, spirit and matter, art and the world. At its conclusion, the poem seems less an escape than a very considered celebration of the (re)generative capacity of human sexuality and artistic creativity, of both literal and allegorical mothers.

I. Old Men

I would like to begin my analysis with one of the most resonant themes in Yeats's mature poetry: old age. It is the theme of "Among School Children" that Yeats himself, in the biographical kernels left of the poem's gestation, emphasizes. This theme's persistence in Yeats's poetry and the artist's emphasis of it combine to make it a readily accessible "meaning" of the poem. The poem has its roots in an actual event in the poet's life. Its development through extensive alterations and revisions would originate from a February 1926 visit Yeats and his wife made to St. Otteran's School, a Montessori School in Waterford (Finneran xxxvi). At the time, Yeats was a Senator, fulfilling part of his civic duty by looking into children's education "in an official tour of inspection of the primary schools" (Lynch 42). Hence, the poet describes himself as a "smiling public man" (8). The content of the poem begins, as did the biographical origin of the piece, as part of the public realm.

Finneran notes that "within days" of Yeats's visit, the poet recorded the subject for a new work that would eventually become "Among School Children": "'Topic for

poem – School Children & the thought that life will waste them perhaps that no possible can fulfill their own dreams or even their teacher[']s hope. Bring in the old thought that life prepares for what never happens" (xxxviii). Yeats's sojourn into the world of youth conjured an impression of despair and hopelessness, of wasted life. Such despair over the wasting of life can be seen often in Yeats's later poetry, in the form of laments over old age. Yeats would assign "Among School Children" to that genre of his poetry in a letter to Olivia Shakspear that included a draft of the seventh stanza and the explanation: "Here is a fragment of my last [that is, latest] curse upon old age. It means that even the greatest men are owls, scarecrows, by the time their fame has come. Aristotle, remember, was Alexander's tutor, hence the taws (form of birch)… It is a poem of seven or eight similar verses" (qtd in Finneran xxxix).

Yeats's designation of the "meaning" of his poem as a "curse upon old age" comes through at several points in the work, not just the sixth stanza of the completed poem on Aristotle and company. First of all, the poet's age is specifically addressed, and contrasted against his youthful company, when the narrator assigns himself the role of "A sixty year-old smiling public man" (8). At the end of section four, the narrator recalls with a poignant sense of loss, how he

> Had pretty plumage once – enough of that,
>
> Better to smile on all that smile, and show
>
> There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow. (30-32)

This "comfort" is, however, rather uncomfortable; it is feigned, a façade, a mask, and a notably forced and unpleasant one. The "smiling public man" is a pose adopted by the speaker of the poem, exposing a kind of hierarchy of self-awareness within this poem, in

which the narrator views himself as if from an outside perspective, the perspective of momentarily awe-struck school girls (6-8). The smiling is, furthermore, an act of deception, an attempt to hide the grim reality of life, of age and bodily decrepitude, of passion's and desire's slow diminishment, from those still reveling in the careless smiles of youth. He aims to hide the futility of human life and love that almost strips the poet of his speech. In "Among School Children," Yeats goes on to question if a "youthful mother," not kept ignorant of the pain and confusion of living and aging, would still deem it worthwhile to give birth (Section V). These are hardly smiling thoughts. Yeats, in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," would ask:

> But is there any comfort to be found?
>
> Man is in love and loves what vanishes,
>
> What more is there to say? (41-43, CP 208)

In "Among School Children," Yeats puts on the mask of comfort in his public setting but the pain felt from those things that are vanishing (his "pretty plumage"), his lover (the "Ledaean body") and his passion, almost rob him of speech. At the end of stanza IV, the poem has reached a climax of futility in which the very act of poetic speech or creation is silenced ("enough of that") in favor of the appearance of satisfaction, of "comfort." Yet, as in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," where in response to potential silence ("What more is there to say?"), Yeats writes over ninety lines of verse, in "Among School Children," Yeats continues on for another four extremely complex verses.

One way to understand the structure of the poem is to view this as a turning-point, naturally dividing it into equal halves. The first half is personal and reacting to the experience at hand; it sets the scene of the poem in the schoolroom, delves into the poet's

dreaming memory, and then applies it to the current context. The second half deals with more abstract questions which the first half raises, and that constitute the heart of the poem. I would argue, however, that this is a partial (in multiple senses) view of the poem, contrary to a more holistic approach. The first four verses of the poem are intricately tied to the following four. To get a better sense of the way in which the poem begins and then ends, it helps to consider the genre of old age lament, to which Yeats assigns his poem, in the broader context of *The Tower*.

Many of *The Tower*'s most memorable verses are curses upon old age. The first poem of the collection, "Sailing to Byzantium," begins with the resolute, declarative statement that Ireland, with all its "sensual music," "is no country for old men," and goes on to envision an escape into "the artifice of eternity" as embodied in "the holy city of Byzantium" (CP 193, ll. 7, 1, 24, 16). The title poem of *The Tower* similarly begins with a forceful and explicit addressal of the dilemmas of old age, where the fragmentation of form in the last two verses reflects the body's decrepitude, the unnaturalness felt by those struggling against physical decline. The fourth verse of only five beats feels appropriately tied on:

> What shall I do with this absurdity –
>
> O heart, O troubled heart – this caricature,
>
> Decrepit age that has been tied to me
>
> As to a dog's tail?

In "Among School Children," Yeats suppresses his rage in the public setting, allowing it to appear in his inner reflections. In "The Tower," Yeats wonders if all men and women "Whether in public or in secret rage / As I do now against old age?" (CP 197, ll. 97-100).

Yeats's question in "The Tower" points to something interesting that results from this universal suffering of old age: a shared destination and end that serves a kind of unifying effect among mankind. Thus, Plato, Aristotle, and Pythagoras, are all "Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird" (48) just as Yeats, at sixty, is an "old scarecrow" (32). Or as Yeats wrote to Shakspear: "even the greatest men are owls, scarecrows." While this may have been encouraging sentiment for a figure like that of the young James Joyce whom Yeats met for lunch and a rather hostile conversation,[24] it would not seem so for the sixty-year old Nobel Laureate and Irish Senator. The short four-verse lyric, "Youth and Age," sums it up:

> Much did I rage when young,
>
> Being by the world oppressed,
>
> But now with flattering tongue
>
> It speeds the parting guest. (CP 211)

There is a double movement, in this straightforward lyric, of arrogance, having made his place in the world and achieved many considerable feats, and humility, being subject to the ineluctability of time and age. In an astute summary of *The Tower*, Terence Brown notes that "power celebrated and exercised in this self-consciously masterful book is in no way immune to an ironic vision. Rather the emotional force of the collection is dependent on a drama in which power is humiliated by decline, decay, disintegration and catastrophe" (316). This ironic tension resides in Yeats's expression of a commonality or unity with all men: the arrogant and abrupt dismissal of the great foundational thinkers of

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[24] According to Yeats, Joyce followed his defensive posturing with the statement: "I am not as you see treating you with deference, for after all both you and I will be forgotten" (qtd. in Ellman, ED 39).

Western life, and the humble, pained admission of his own complicitness in what he is dismissing (as Yeats is belittling philosophers, we might remember that he had just in the past year published his own work of philosophy, the first edition of *A Vision*). The ineluctable sameness of all men is unappealing to the aristocratic mind of Yeats. The shared lot of mankind, inevitable bodily decline, in these aspects of the poem, leads ultimately to despair and bitterness.

This understanding of the poem helps makes sense of how it begins in a recognizable external world but ends in a metaphysical world—similar to "Sailing to Byzantium," it ends in the artifice of eternity because Ireland, or the world, is no country for old men. "Among School Children" is essentially escapist, from the world and from the body. I would like to qualify this easily held view of the poem. The poem's encounters between youth and age, between body and soul, ultimately do not become one-sided, solipsistic, or escapist. Donard Pearce argues, in pointing out what distinguishes "Among School Children" from other old age laments in the Yeats *oeuvre*, that in the other poems, such as the opening of "The Tower,"

> However desperate, however eloquent the language, the theme plainly remains constricted, locked in itself … In "Among School Children," however…it is matched by a counter theme of comparable thrust and significance – that of the school children themselves – with which it is immediately engaged and made to remain engaged for the duration of the poem. That is to say, it ceases to be a theme of narcissist lamentation…" (55).

To recount one point from earlier, the poet restrains his despair and smiles for the sake of *others*. What follows will demonstrate how the poem moves beyond narcissistic rumination in a very complex way; how it engages the other, in particular the feminine and the maternal, and changes through it.

II. Youthful Mothers

As a natural complement to themes of old age, sterility and death discussed first, the themes of union and birth pervade "Among School Children" as well. From this broader viewpoint, the "Ledaean body" in stanza II is part of an extended theme in the poem of mothers in various guises; in turn, this is a life-affirming theme contrasted against the life-denying themes and images of the poem, the "scarecrows" and "Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird."[25] In contrast to this theme of old age and death, of straw-men scarecrows, the Ledaean body is sensual and fluid, "bent," (9) rather than rigidly crossed.[26] This maternal image appears in a scene with a sinking fire: not an apocalyptic conflagration with a "burning roof and tower," ("Leda and the Swan", CP 214-15, l. 10) but a gentle and timid hearth, a domestic evocation. Mothers are foregrounded in the pivotal fifth stanza of the poem, and issues of birth appear in stanzas VII and VIII. In fact, the maternal theme pervades *The Tower* as a whole, and examining some of its appearances in the volume provides a fuller understanding of its application in "Among School Children."

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[25] See Pearce for a careful, if at times slightly extreme, exegesis of this contrast.
[26] Pearce sees overtones of crucifixion in the image of the scarecrow.

In section III of "The Tower," Yeats promptly states that he will now compose his will. In the midst of his bequeathing—essentially a rhetorical device intimating that Yeats is already dead—there appears an unexpected stanza imagining nature's maternal and protective instinct on the scale of birds. It describes chattering daws building up their nest "layer upon layer" (a rather tower-like structure itself) until:

> The mother bird will rest
>
> On their hollow top
>
> And so warm her wild nest. (CP 199, ll. 170-173)

A similar maternal image which offers "hints of natural beneficence" (Brown 319) appears in "Meditations in Time of Civil War":

> The bees build in the crevices
>
> Of loosening masonry, and there
>
> The mother birds bring grubs and flies. (CP 204, ll. 1-3)

In the contemporary political and cultural landscape of tumult and chaos, where structural masonry loosens and "the centre cannot hold," ("The Second Coming", CP 187, l. 3) mother figures provide sustenance for new growth amid the wreck of civilization. Hence the injunction to the "honey-bees," following the above lines, to "Come build" (5). Mothers are the source of vitality, new life, and a new civilization (the last to be exemplified in Leda's "annunciation," discussed further on). That mothers in *The Tower* often take the form of birds—as they do once again in "The Road at my Door" ("those feathered balls of soot / The moor-hen guides upon the stream" (CP 204, ll. 11-12)— further contrasts, in "Among School Children," the associations of mothers (life,

nurturing, sustenance, birth, growth) with the associations of the scare-crow (decay, death, decrepitude, futility, stasis), an opposer of birds.

Mothers fill "Among School Children" just as old age does. The "kind old nun" in the first line of the poem is a mother of a sort (as the head of an order is called), and maternal in her role as caretaker of children. Leda, another mother occupies stanza II, and something intriguing, I will argue later, takes place in stanza III with motherhood. Mothers appear directly in stanza five, initiating the second-half of the poem. In this stanza, the two thematic poles we have been examining come together:

> What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap
>
> Honey of generation had betrayed,
>
> And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape
>
> As recollection or the drug decide,
>
> Would think her son, did she but see that shape
>
> With sixty or more winters on its head,
>
> A compensation for the pang of his birth,
>
> Or the uncertainty of his setting forth? (33-40)

The question directly opposes the associative fields of youth, motherhood, and creativity with age, decay, and death. It is useful to recall that the idea which prompted the poem is one of life being wasted; this stanza essentially asks if, in the final tally, life is worth living? Birth is a painful process, and once achieved the newly born reside in ignorance and "uncertainty." The next stanza on Plato, Aristotle, and Pythagoras shows that age wastes all men, even those who climb the highest from their initial ignorance, pain, and vulnerability. In such a view, birth essentially determines decay and death; yet we will

examine the way in which poem breaks apart from such a deterministic and closed view of the individual, ultimately allowing for *re*-birth.

There is another kind of motherhood in the poem and in Yeats's poetry as a whole, that relates to the "self-born mockers" that close stanza VII and to "beauty" being born in the final stanza; this kind of motherhood involves giving birth to images and beauty, to works of art. Poems, in as much as they come from the self—or as Yeats would say elsewhere, from the quarrel with one's self—are "self-born," just like the images in stanza VII of "Among School Children." In *The Tower* Yeats uses images of mothers and stones to repeatedly question—parallel to the question of stanza V in "Among School Children"—if, in the final tally, art is worth its creation. Both art and life are viewed repeatedly in *The Tower* with a cynical, mocking, bitter eye.

The generation of art finds its expression in the images of stone as child in *The Tower*, seen, for example, in two pasages in "A Man Young and Old." The first describes a vision in "The Friends of His Youth" of a now aged mother with "child":

…that old Madge comes down the lane,

A stone upon her breast,

And a cloak wrapped about the stone,

And she can get no rest

With singing hush and hush-a-bye;

She that has been wild

And barren as a breaking wave

Thinks that the stone's a child. (CP 224, ll. 5-12)

Here a sterile and elderly mother engages in seemingly willful self-deception about her ability to generate. Towards the conclusion of "A Man Young and Old," Yeats puts himself, in "His Wildness," into the same situation: "Being all alone I'd nurse a stone / And sing it lullaby" (CP 226, ll. 11-12). The exchange of stones for children occurs once again in "My Descendants," a poem which concludes not with the poet's generation of heirs but of stones: "And know whatever flourish and decline / These stones remain their monument and mine" (CP 204, ll. 23-24). In a volume entitled *The Tower*, the stones are presumably as much metaphors for poems as they are an actual reference to the edifice of Thoor Ballylee (still standing and visited today). For the old Madge, the substitution of stone for child appears tragic and pathetic, while for the narrator of "His Wildness," it offers solace in solitude—perhaps the solitude of a tower—thought it is debatable if this solace may not be equally tragic. For, as Brown astutely remarks on *The Tower* as a whole:

> *The Tower* is…[an] act of withdrawal…a deliberate series of acts of self-isolation, which can still permit a rhetoric of command but in a context that implies its increasing impotence. For who can be the implied audience of such a sequence uttered *in extremis* from the tower of the volume's title poem. Hence the bitterness, the sense of failure for a poet who iteratively employs the first person pronoun as egotistical sublime through the title poem as a last ditch stand in face of all that threatens… the poet's vision…
> (318)

A part of this bitterness and isolation is an inherent ambivalence in this volume towards the idea of giving birth to poems. As "Among School Children" asks if a mother's giving

birth to children is worthwhile, so *The Tower* repeatedly considers if the poet's labor offers just compensation. In the concluding poem of the volume, Yeats solemnly states that "meditations upon unknown thought / Make human intercourse grow less and less; / They are neither paid nor praised" ("All Soul's Night", CP 229, ll. 74-76). He famously offers the aphoristic phrase that man must "choose perfection of the life, or of the work," echoing, in a different context, one of his most famous poems, "Easter 1916," where he states quite fittingly that "Too long a sacrifice / Can make a stone of the heart" (CP 181, ll. 57-58). For Yeats, producing poetry meant the creation of a stone in its enduring, fixed, eternal aspect (as in, for example, "My Descendants"), as well as in its coldness and isolation.

When his treatments of natural mothers or of metaphorical, artistic mothers are examined separately by themselves, Yeats seems dissatisfies with either fleshly creation or with artistic creation; the former is fleeting and ephemeral, by age sixty it repels, and the latter, while enduring, has the heart of a stone. The struggle to be seen, here, with these two types of motherhood—one creating humans, the other creating poems—is to somehow unite these two, somehow unite fleshly human life and artistic creations. Put in much broader terms, it seems that Yeats struggles with his ability to unite mythic artistry with his world of bodily experience. From this struggle, this conflict, comes the best of Yeats's poetry; the bitter conflict between the artistic imagination and the reality of bodily experience seems to be the one that gives *The Tower* not only its bitterness, but its boldness and beauty. "Among School Children" stands out in this volume because of the way it intermingles art, or myth, and actual experience (its biographical origins are well known, as discussed earlier). This intermingling occurs particularly with the way that the

"Ledaean body" interacts with the children—a maternal figure interacting with particular children—and offers some insightful conclusions on how we should read the final stanza of the poem.

III. Leda and the Children

In "Among School Children," Yeats does not encounter only symbols or metaphors of children, but children themselves. This is part of what makes the poem unique in *The Tower*, as Swann insinuates; it is a personal, biographical encounter between Yeats and other persons. It is an encounter between youth and age, but these abstractions are shown to be not fixed but fluid in the poem. The concept of being "self-born" has within it the potential to be reborn when the self is re-made; this aspect of the poem appears in stanza II and also in stanza III. Stanza II begins with an act of isolation and turning away from the outer world, concluding in an image of ecstatic union:

> I dream of a Ledaean body, bent
>
> Above a sinking fire, a tale that she
>
> Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event
>
> That changed some childish day to tragedy –
>
> Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent
>
> Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,
>
> Or else, to alter Plato's parable,
>
> Into the yolk and white of the one shell. (9-16)

In this stanza, the poem moves from the objective, external world of the schoolroom to the subjective, internal realm of the poet's dreams, thoughts, and memories. The encounter with the children seems to provoke the poet to recall a memory, an image, from his youth. "The image that the poet dwells on most," Lynch writes, "as he walks in the schoolroom is, as we might expect, the image of the 'woman lost'" (45).[27] This centrally important image or "dream" of the "Ledaean body" is complex from the start, especially one of its cruxes: what does the modifier "Ledaean" signify?

If this "dream" does, in fact, go into the poet's memory, then "Ledaean body" gestures towards the figure of Maud Gonne from Yeats's past.[28] In various poems, most famously in "No Second Troy," Yeats compares Gonne to Helen, traditionally the daughter of Leda and Zeus in Greek mythology. Yet why choose the mother of Helen, Leda, rather than Helen herself, to describe this body? There are several possible answers to this question. Perhaps, judging from his proposals to Gonne's daughter, Yeats did not care much for nice distinctions between mother and daughter. More compelling, however, is the idea of textual context. Yeats chose to use "Ledaean" because his poem "Leda and the Swan" precedes "Among School Children" by only a single poem, making Yeats's choice of modifier a direct reference to the preceding poem.

Because of this reference, stanza II in "Among School Children" resonates with the ambivalent, fierce, immediate energy of "Leda and the Swan." This poem recounts the mythological tale in which Zeus turns into a swan and mates with Leda, giving birth

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[27] Lynch is quoting from "The Tower": "Does the imagination dwell the most / Upon a woman won or woman lost?" (CP 197, ll. 113-114)

[28] Is the event that Yeats recalls perhaps the same that inspired these lines from "Summer and Spring" in "A Man Young and Old"?; "And when we talked of growing up / Knew that we'd halved a soul / And fell the one in t'other's arms / That we might make it whole" (225).

to Helen, Clytemnestra, Castor, and Pollux.[29] The elements of mastery and struggle cast

the poem in the form of a rape, with the swan as an overpowering attacker: Leda is

"mastered by the brute blood of the air" (CP 214, l. 13).[30] Sensuality and the body are

directly addressed: "her thighs caressed / By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill, /

He holds her helpless breast upon his breast" (2-3). Yeats does not shy away from telling

of "A shudder in the loins" (9). These unromanticized elements of a sometimes-brutal

sensuality contribute to the poem's ironic realism. At such moments in the poem, Yeats

renders the idealized story of myth into the harsh physicality of the empirical world; in a

way we might say that he brings the myth to life, and in this case the process of entering

life—"the pang of...birth" as it is called in "Among School Children"—is immediate and

violent: "A sudden blow" (1).[31] Or, as Yeats himself would describe his method in his

instructions for Sturge Moore, who designed the Tower's cover: "the Tower should not

be too unlike the real object or rather...it should suggest the real object. I like to think of

that building as a permanent symbol of my work plainly visible to the passer-by. As you

know, all my art theories depend upon just this – rooting of mythology in the earth" (qtd.

in Brown 314).

As we might suppose from the tantalizing suggestion of Yeats above, there

appears, in certain moments, to be an intended allegorical reading of the poem. In

"Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" Yeats states that he is satisfied that, "Some moralist or

mythological poet / Compares the solitary soul to a swan" (CP 208, ll. 59-60). In an

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[29] There are alternate versions of the myth; this is the one which Yeats used in the 1925
edition of *A Vision*, written about a year before "Among School Children."
[30] Further citations of "Leda and the Swan" in this section are given in line numbers only.
[31] Yeats went through several versions of the poem's opening until settling on its final,
wonderfully effective construction. See Finneran's manuscript edition for extant copies
of the drafts.

allegorical reading, the swan is a symbol of "the solitary soul," as well as being, in the mythological backdrop, Zeus, the most powerful and transcendent of Greek deities. The swan, as an incarnation of Zeus, or as an image of the soul, seems to either way, for Yeats, be a representation of the divine. By contrast, Leda would seem to represent the human (counter to the Zeus-swan's divinity) and the bodily (counter to the soul-swan). As Priscilla Washburn Shaw notes in her reading of "Leda and the Swan," the seventh verse suggestively drops the article before describing Leda's body: "And how can body, laid in that white rush, / But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?" (7-8). Leda is not "a body" or "the body," but simply and significantly, "body." While moments in the poem, even its dramatic beginning *in medias res* ("A sudden blow"), express the violent conflict between a mastering sexual aggressor and a "staggering," "helpless" girl, other moments point to the conflict as allegorical: one between the body and the soul, between the human and the divine. Moreover, the event does not simply have the air of conflict and struggle, but is in fact a union—whether or not a fully consensual or "natural" one.

The union in "Leda and the Swan," as a conjoining of the human and the divine, points towards apocalypse: what Brown calls "an epochal image of historical change" (317). The following lines put such a change forward with a feeling of deterministic instantaneity:

> A shudder of the loins engenders there
>
> The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
>
> And Agamemnon dead. (9-11)

In this precipitous moment, the poem's imagery foresees the destruction of an old era, the Trojan, and the dawning of the new, the Greek; its original title, evidently intended to

infuriate and scandalize in conservative, Catholic Ireland (which it did), was "Annunciation."   This vision of apocalypse, furthermore, is not relegated to the past. As the graphic portrayal of a rape and the poem's beginning *in medias res* grant it a present immediacy, so the image of "the burning roof and tower" resonates with the present abode of the artist, perhaps the very place where these lines were written. "Leda and the Swan" is, from one viewpoint, a summoning of sorts: it calls forth the body in an image of tactile struggle and union while subsuming myth, divinity, and spirit into this physical reality, as well as summoning the apocalyptic event of the past into the immediate present.

This is the image or symbol of "Leda," and in "Among School Children," the adjective "Ledaean" calls forth all these associations in its poetic movement. Perhaps what is most striking and memorable of the technique and content of "Leda and the Swan" is its refusal, perhaps its inability, to separate the blunt facts of human experience from a mythological story about divine incarnation and seduction. That Yeats dreams of a "Ledaean body" in "Among School Children" makes sense due to the poem's inability to exactly distinguish myth and experience; in the poem, we are unsure whether the summoning and reincarnation of stanzas II and III occur within the artistic imagination, (the realm of myth and possibility) or within the world of experience. Critics may be inclined to reject the possibility that Yeats believed this rebirth occurred, in some way, in the world of experience; such a view would make Yeats out to be a madman. Perhaps it would, and perhaps Yeats would feel vindicated. In "The Tower," he writes:

> O may the moon and sunlight seem
>
> One inextricable beam,

For if I triumph I must make men mad. (CP 196, ll. 54-56)

Yeats's art may lead us to consider things that seem slightly "mad"—such as the actual

transformation of objective experience—but that is not reason to ignore this component

of his thought.

In describing the union with the Ledean body, Yeats's imagery of "sphere," or an

egg, that primordial organic unit, implies that in this union both he and the "Ledaean

body" have been reborn, an amazingly remarkable event—surely a memorable one—

considering the rage of old age witnessed in "Among School Children" and Yeats's

mature poetry more generally. In the language of "The Fool by the Roadside," it is a

moment when rather than growing old and dying, the poet is able, "From grave to cradle

run instead" (CP 219, l. 3). The act of remembering involves such a movement backward

in time, and culminates with the image of this ecstatic egg, the ultimate source of all life,

the first of all cradles. George Lensing writes of the blending of natures:

> Overcoming the theme of frustrated images, this is one of the poem's
>
> triumphant moments. As parts here blend into a whole, the tree and dancer
>
> are unmistakably anticipated. Life's "reproof" is overcome in sphere,
>
> shell, and the blending of opposing sexes and natures. The medium is
>
> 'tale,' narrative, imaginative recollection. (5)

Lensing astutely identifies this stanza with the poem's final lines, as will be done later in

the essay. His other comment about the process of this union through art reveals that it is

incredibly layered. From the Montessori schoolroom, the poem then travels into the

recesses of his memory where he is effectively reborn through a form of art ("tale").

Considering our earlier discussion of motherhood and its two forms, this appears to be an artistic rebirth, a moment when Yeats is able to re-make himself.

There is also a concept of spiritual union involved in this blending due to its close connection to the union in "Leda and the Swan," a poem where the human unites with the divine, body with soul.[32] A passage from one of Yeats's later essays offers an appropriate supplement:

> There are married people who, though they do not forbid the passage of the seed, practise, not necessarily at the moment of union, a meditation, wherein the man seeks the divine Self as present in his wife, the wife the divine Self as present in the man. There may be trance, and the presence of one with another though a great distance separates. (E&I 484).

This is a technique which allows for erotic union despite bodily decline and insufficiency. In such a way, it parallels the elderly poet's delving into memory—though, in the latter, it is time rather than "distance" which "separates." In this "dream" or, as in the essay, "trance," the poet conjures a scene that suggests sexual fertility through the action of blending, and through the image of the egg, intimating birth or more accurately here, rebirth. Again, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate ideas of physical union and rebirth with those of artistic, allegorical, or spiritual union and rebirth; these two realms never seem clearly separated in Yeats's thought.

This mixing occurs again, in an even more radical form of rebirth than the one just examined, in stanza III:

> And thinking of that fit of grief or rage

---

[32] See also the lines on Horton in "All Soul's Night": "Two thoughts were so mixed up I could not tell / Whether of her or God he thought the most" (CP 228, ll. 31-2).

> I look upon one child or t'other there
>
> And wonder if she stood so at that age –
>
> For even daughters of the swan can share
>
> Something of every paddler's heritage –
>
> And had that colour upon cheek or hair,
>
> And thereupon my heart is driven wild:
>
> She stands before me as a living child. (17-24)

In most critical treatments of the poem, this moment seems unfortunately glossed over, when in fact it offers fascinating insights. The image of the beloved from stanza II has traversed time, moved from the past to the present, as well as traversed from the subjective consciousness of Yeats to objective experience, so that "She stands… as a living child." It seems that what allows this to occur is some kind of inherent bond between all mankind ("even daughters of the swan can share / Something of every paddler's heritage"). While the bond linking humanity discussed earlier was one of naturalistic decline that leads ultimately to death and bitterness, in this moment what humanity shares allows for rebirth, a veritable reincarnation.

This idea of some kind of trans-human commonality points to another kind of motherhood in the poem, as an abstract shared human source (in Christianity, for instance, the common source takes anthropomorphic form as mother, Eve, who bred innate trans-human corruption). Here, it appears that despite whether we are "daughters of the swan" or daughters of some paddler, humanity shares some fundamental likeness that can allow one identity to be swapped for another. Other moments of the poem reinforce the poem's focus on origins, on the source of life as well as the source of art.

For instance, certain lines seem to echo the Edenic story: "the pang of... birth" and "the uncertainty... of setting forth," recall the punishment and exile from Eden, as does the final stanzas vision of a tree and "Labour" that does not involve, to paraphrase Genesis, the sweat of one's brow ("body is not bruised," in the poem). It is not as if Yeats was referencing Judeo-Christian scripture in any orthodox fashion, but merely that the echoes seem to reiterate the importance of mankind's origin. Birth leads to an inescapable death, but if we all share some kind of origin, some source, or some mother, then we can be reborn in other individuals; such unions and rebirths are the focus of stanzas II and III.

It is difficult to say whether stanza III should be read as an imaginative rebirth or if Yeats wanted the moment to appear almost like a medium's conjuring spirits, with which Yeats believed he had experiential contact. The relationship between the presence of the *image* of the "Ledaean body" and its *experiential* presence is very complex. Swann offers the following evaluation of this relationship in Yeats's later poetry: "What Yeats does... is to present the movement of language from affective experience to the image of that experience, from heart to theme, and to present it so vividly that the very content of the vision – the image itself – is experienced by the heart as new" (236 Swann). This is a nice observation, for it deals with what we have been discussing all along: the inability of Yeats to separate image, myth, art, the subjective, from experience, reality, the objective. "Among School Children" seems to deal with this inseparability, offering in its final stanza a vision of harmony between these dichotomies. Yet such harmony is not come by easily, if ever at all, and the inapplicability of images or art to experience is also considered in the poem, as it is throughout Yeats's mature poetry.

IV. "For we traffic in mockery"

While in stanza III Yeats shows the ability of the subjective to nearly transform experience, of the past to join the present, in stanza IV the present and the body's inevitable decline reassert themselves: "Her present image floats into the mind... Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind / And took a mess of shadows for its meat." This image of the present beloved paradoxically lacks the substance of the reincarnated beloved of stanza II—it is hollow of cheek as if subsisting on vapors—yet may in actuality have a greater claim to real existence, since it exists in the present, in the objective. The relation of stanza III to stanza IV—between an image so powerful that it ennobles reality and the indefatigability of mundane, decaying experience (so seemingly indefatigable that the images then appear simply to mock)—sets up the fundamental dilemma of the poem that is taken up again in the final two sections.

In the penultimate stanza, Yeats begins by linking nuns and mothers in their worship of images, while at the same time distinguishing between the kinds of images they worship (49-51). Despite their differences, these images both break hearts (53), just as earlier the poet, after thinking of the image of himself and his beloved rapt in ecstatic union, feels his heart "driven wild" (23). This prompts the poet to cry out:

> ... O Presences
>
> That passion, piety, or affection knows,
>
> And that all heavenly glory symbolize –
>
> O self-born mockers of man's enterprise. (53-56)

Part of what makes this part of the poem so difficult is that it involves several unclear referents. "Presences" is essentially synonymous with images, yet it takes on a grander, more abstract form with its capitalization, and the change in diction lends it a more experiential connotation (Yeats did believe that he was in contact with spirits). These presences are then reached or known through three different means: "passion" (Yeats and the Presence of the "Ledaean body" among the children), "piety" (nuns and the images that "keep a marble or a bronze repose") or "affection" (mothers and the idealized image of her son – something other than the son's image "With sixty or more winters on its head"). Despite these differences of kind, all these images, or presences, are symbols of "all heavenly glory"; rather remarkably, Yeats lumps together the ideals of nuns, mothers, and lovers as all directed towards, all reflecting, divine glory. Yet *The Tower*'s bitterness comes through in the final line of the stanza. While these are symbols, they are not substance; they mock human existence just as Yeats's reverie in stanzas II and III is mocked by the "present image" of his now decrepit lover. Mere symbols do not compensate for the "pang of…birth," for life's uncertainty, and the futility of all human achievement.

V. Dancing and Blossoming

The poem could end at stanza seven, yet instead it responds to this attack on symbols by providing, paradoxically, two powerful symbols. Yet what do these symbols mean, and how do they change the poem as a whole? The final stanza begins with considering an ideal place (earlier we made a comparison to Eden):

> Labour is blossoming or dancing where
>
> The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
>
> Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
>
> Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil. (57-60)

The un-named "where" that these lines describe is a place of harmony and unity. It unites body and soul in a grand harmony with beauty and wisdom. Kenner suggests that this ideal place is to be found on the next page of *The Tower*, in "Colonus' Praise," where "Immortal ladies tread the ground / Dizzy with harmonious sound" and a "self-sown, self-begotten shape"—that is, the images of divine glory that mock man's pathetic existence—thrives in a nearby garden. The final place harkens back, then, to both Christian and pagan myth in its utopian vision. It is also a place that involves actions and movement; it is not static as, say, a scare-crow, but consists of "blossoming or dancing," which leads to the final questions of the poem:

> O chestnut tree, great-rooted blossomer,
>
> Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
>
> O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
>
> How can we know the dancer from the dance? (61-64)

Pearce offers a summary of the poem concluding that its entirety is "suddenly confronted – or rather, reproved – by the two powerful images of integration and harmony, the chestnut tree and the dancer, in the final lines" (61). Yet how exactly do these final questions relate back to the whole of the poem? To take the image of the tree first, the feature Yeats emphasizes is the roots, and we might recall the importance of origins and mothers in the poem and in *The Tower* as a whole. Yeats conjures the origins

of our "modern way" with the stanza on Plato and Aristotle, he looks back into his own memory, and also questions the very source of human life – the mother – using mothers also as symbols for the origins of poems, of art. These themes run throughout the poem and coalesce into the tree. Furthermore, the rooting of the tree recalls what Yeats, at the publication of *The Tower*, assigned to be his fundamental aesthetic principle: "all my art theories depend upon just this – rooting of mythology in the earth." Thus, the tree can be seen as another version of the tower, or the winding stair of the volume of poetry that followed *The Tower* in the *Collected Poems*, or of the ladder in "Circus Animals' Desertion"—in its idea of vertical ascent *rooted* in, still connected to, the earth. The emphasis on the tree's roots furthermore relates that it is not exactly as Pearce takes it and its counterpart, the dancer, to be: "As for the tree and the dancer, the protagonists we could say of the poem's affirmation, their joy, their unity, is so complete that they hardly seem concerned with human life at all, as if existing almost apart from it, or beyond it altogether, as dream forms seem in daylight" (53). The tree remains connected with the earth; indeed that seems to be the virtue which Yeats singles out for praise. It is comparable to the way that Yeats's reveries become implanted onto the children in stanza III, rooting his memory in experience and thereby transforming that experience. "Among School Children" does not end in the "artifice of eternity," or pure "mythology," but transforms the world of experience through its integration of ideals into experience.

The dancer of the final lines similarly remains rooted to the earth. First of all, it begins with "O body," recalling the sensual "Ledaean body" as well as recalling the description of Leda as "body" in "Leda and the Swan." While the dancer is often interpreted as being a sole dancer, perhaps like the one in "Ego Dominus Tuus," this echo

suggests that it would be a pair of dancers. George Lensing supplies textual evidence for

such a reading from an earlier, substantially inferior draft of the last stanza. It has

hawthorne tree rather than a chestnut tree and a dancing couple:

> O hawthorne tree, in all that gaudy gear
>
> Are you it all or did you make it all;
>
> O dancing couple, glance that mirrors glance
>
> How can we know the dancer from the dance. (in Lensing 6)

Comparing this version to the final one, Lensing notes that: "the couple survives in the

final version only in the phrase 'O brightening glance'" (6). This earlier version of the

final stanza further strengthens the tree's link to motherhood and generation; it considers

the relation between being and creating, as stanza V did in its question to youthful

mothers, and which can also be seen as considering the relation between experience, life,

and art.

The sexual overtones of a dancing couple seem difficult to ignore. Sex for Yeats,

as revealed in part of the Automatic Transcript, took on similar notions of creative unity

as combining mythology and earth, the self with the anti-self, or as in this passage from

the Automatic Script, sun and moon. In the following excerpt, Yeats uses the terms "sun

in moon" to signify sexual intercourse while he questions Ameritus, one of the spirits that

his wife was channeling, who in turn responds:

> 7. What is that other element sun in moon gives which is not defined as
>
> emotion or instinct? That element whose absence causes a lack in medium.
>
> 7. Mediumship in this case arises because of certain sexual emotions –
>
> When those lack there is no mediumship. (qtd. in Brown 260).

The ecstatic unity generally recognized in the image of the dancer results from its ability to not simply mockingly symbolize "all heavenly glory," but to act as a vertical connection – a medium – between earth and heaven, and the presence of sexual connection in this union seems hard to deny; it appears, of course, more explicit in "Leda and the Swan." Adding to this view, the Automatic Script which seemed to unlock the spiritual world, unite body and soul, was a result of Yeats's earthly marriage to his wife, and a wife who had given him a six-year old daughter and four-year old boy at the time of his writing "Among School Children." As in "A Prayer for my Son," where Yeats speaks of his son in terms of Christian myth, he concludes with homage to the tenderness and protection of "human love" (212). In his poems about myths, Yeats reverts back to the human, while in this poem we have been examining about schoolchildren, Yeats reverts back to myth; the two never appear easily separated or even conceptually distinct. That Yeats relates sex to artistic creativity and finds physicality and humanity even in his mythological backdrops accords with our earlier examination of mothers as those who create human life and mothers as symbols of the artist. In both cases of motherhood, Yeats seems to celebrate the ability of distinct individuals to engage in generative unions.

Conclusion

Yeats's critique of knowledge—the critical implications of which began this essay—appears rather complex. It deals not simply with knowing, but also with being; it combines epistemology and ontology—which may not be particularly remarkable—but it does so always with a consciousness of the role of the artist and of art. "Among School

Children" then might be understood best in these terms. Yeats's rage against old age finds its expression in the poem, his inability to accept what he felt to be an unjust or flawed natural order; at the very least, he never found complacency in it. Yet this does not necessarily mean that "Among School Children" abandons the natural world for a metaphysical one. After considering the generation of life and of art through mothers, the poem first despairs over the inability of man to ever reach "all heavenly glory." Yet it then concludes with a celebration of roots, of origins and mothers, as well as of the generative unions of mankind, as seen in the symbol of the dancers. The final two symbols emphasize the commonality of all individuals—whether they are old, rooted men or blossoming mothers—in their ability to generate, to be reborn.

Ultimately, "Among School Children" may be proven to never abandon the human and the material world through its very existence as a poem, as human product. As it exists in this world, it confronts readers and critics into a web of questioning; we might even say that, as such, it self-consciously mocks us. It forces the reader into a consciousness that the poem mocks itself and mocks its readers, yet it nonetheless exists and we must struggle with its meanings. In a way, the poem acts as an image entering the reader's experience. As the poem moves from its first word, the egotistical "I," to the inclusive "we," of its last line, readers understand that in this incredibly self-referential and inter-textual poem, the reader himself has become a kind of referent. "We" literally and more figuratively enter the poem by its end; even if we are sons or daughters of some paddler, the poem includes us in its themes, its bitterness, its ecstatic joys. It emphasizes the commonality and interchangeability of human creatures, and their ability to create not only images, but also experiences, of union and ecstasy. It never forsakes body in favor

of soul, but rather emphasizes the body as the pathway to the divine—in part why

physical age was so unacceptably tragic for Yeats—just as it never forsakes the world of

experience for dreams or images. At the same time, Yeats also seems to emphasize the

divine as pathway to the body; spirit and matter constantly oscillate back and forth in the

poetry and Yeats's relation to these two is not easily classified as, say, Platonic or

Aristotelian—indeed these classifications themselves are difficult to explicate with great

precision. Yeats's art is a kind of knowledge, a kind of philosophy, because it presents a

way of understanding the world, a way of encountering the world and others. Continually

in his poetry, Yeats is ostensibly engaging and fleeing from the world—at his best,

perhaps he changes it by transforming readers, transforming others.

Conclusion

Conclusions seem best when tentative, and it is with that frame of mind that I now try to "wrap up" this project. These two essays on Joyce and Yeats do not overlap perfectly, but there are some areas of reasonable concord. In a broad perspective, both essays have to do with the way that artists portray encounters between individuals in their art. The way they show the self, the artist, interacting with the world of experience I have found to be paramount in interest and perhaps in importance. Perhaps approaching both Yeats and Joyce from this perspective is appropriate, as both seemed to hold similar views about the composition of the individual self. Yeats's theory of the mask is fairly famous, and developed partly form his involvement with the theatre. As Yeats was led towards a view of the self as performance, so Joyce, when depicting in "Circe" the inner-workings of the conscious and subconscious self would choose the form of drama, and the topic of role-playing is touched upon in the Joyce essay. The two essays are in some ways just an examination of how these artists show their players interacting.

Considering these encounters seemed to naturally lead to consideration of another encounter: that between author, or text, and reader. In both essays, I tried to derive lessons on how to read each work of art from the work of art itself. I am not exactly sure what kind of literary methodology such a technique might be classified as, but perhaps it could be described as a kind of meta-formalism. One does not simply critique the artwork from a formalist approach, but attempts to derive the proper, or suggested, approach through an analysis of the artwork. This, of course, does not exactly stipulate what methodology guides one's deriving an approach—which, to be sure, is something to

consider—but perhaps an almost inevitable pitfall when considering these meta-ideas of theory.[33]

To return to our two authors, the way that Joyce and Yeats address the self and its relation to others is, however, different and rather characteristic. Ellman writes that , "Yeats was aristocratic and demanded distinctions between men; Joyce was all for removing them" (5 JJ). We can see this distinction at work in the respective metempsychoses of *Ulysses* and "Among School Children." In Yeats's poem, he allows for the rebirth of the imaginative vision of his lover within his present experience of school girls almost grudgingly, it seems: "For even daughters of the swan can share / Something of every paddler's heritage" (20-21). There is a kind of tension in the transformation within this poem that is part of why, as an artist and as a man, Yeats continues to elude simple or conventional classification. On the other hand, Joyce suggests that perhaps any paddler is, in actuality, as noble and richly complex as a Hamlet or a Lear—or for comparison to Yeats, an Oisin or a Cuchulain.. There is a touch of the artist in everyone, and seemingly in everything; after *Ulysses*, Joyce would say that the people around him were writing *Finnegans Wake*. When reading *Ulysses*, one has the suspicious feeling that nobility is encroaching upon the drivel of common life—what Adrienne Rich termed with disdain, "the what not every day of life." Yeats wanted nothing of *that* sort of engagement with experience, and his desire for pure nobility and beauty reveals a kind of earnestness that I find strikes me, at times, as astonishingly refreshing, bold, and direct, and, at other times, as remarkably tiresome and vain.

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[33] The problem is one of circular logic: what philosophy should guide one's adoption of a philosophy?

Due to this divergence between Joyce and Yeats, the lyric poet struggled to come to terms with *Ulysses*. Ellman records that, in a motion of generosity, Yeats invited Joyce to come stay with him; "'If he comes,' Yeats wrote to a friend, 'I shall have to use the utmost ingenuity to hide the fact that I have never finished *Ulysses*'" (50). As usual, there is a hidden depth of meaning to Yeats's statement. *Ulysses* stands, even with all its accumulated historical data, as something outside of history. Stephen thinks that life is many days, and this will pass—but Bloomsday never really does. Rather, Joyce demonstrates the superabundance of interpretative and imaginative possibilities within a single day, amid its minutia and trivia and drivel: all Godpossibled possibilities and that we daily impossibilize, or ignore, in our movement from the possible to the actual. Pausing in that intermediary realm, *Ulysses* suggests, lies the source of all hope and all creation. Thus, I have read sections of *Ulysses* many times, and from cover to cover twice, but, like Yeats, have never finished it.

After meeting Yeats, Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary that: "Wherever one cut him, with a little question, he poured, spurted fountains of ideas" (336). Yeats possessed an abundantly creative mind. In a way, I think the image of Yeats has become his own myth, and, as reader or critic, combining this myth with our own experience is perhaps the proper legacy he leaves to us. This encounter with Yeats often seems to be a conflict and a struggle, as it probably ought to be, and I have found that it is nearly as impossible to finish Yeats as it is to finish *Ulysses*. And perhaps this is not all due to personal ineptitude, but is really the final praise owed to an artist; Northop Frye provides good reason for this conclusion being tentative, and it seems best to conclude with that:

We hear a joke, but as soon as we "see" the joke we do not want to hear it again. We read a detective story to reach the identification of the murderer, but as soon as we reach it we do not normally want to continue studying the story, at least not until we have forgotten how, as we say so significantly, it "turned out." But in something like a play of Shakespeare there is an indefinite sequence of these final apprehensions: as soon as we have reached one, we become dissatisfied with it and try to regroup our forces for a new and, we hope, better understanding. The kind of literary work we describe as a "classic" could perhaps be defined as one in which the process goes on through the whole of one's life, assuming that one keeps reading ("Koine" 6).

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