

THE SPECTER OF DEATH

IN JAMES JOYCE'S

*ULYSSES*

THESIS

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by

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**ABSTRACT**  
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Before Sigmund Freud incorporated the death drive into his theories of the unconscious in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and Martin Heidegger emphasized the individuating power of facing death as our “ownmost-potentiality-for-Being” in *Being and Time*, Joyce was deeply familiar with the effect of the conflicting forces of life and death on consciousness. A comparison between the personae of *Ulysses* and these thinkers’ theories reveals a recursive principle at work in Joyce’s construction of character and identity. With technical virtuosity, Joyce employs a detailed account of

life's resistance to the destructive power of death when rendering the characters Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom. By locating vivid death imagery within the separate narrative space of Stephen's and Bloom's interiority, and presenting the manner in which they deal with its presence, he distinguishes these two characters from every other persona in the novel. When Buck Mulligan, Simon Dedalus, or C.P. M'Coy speak of death or the deceased, we hear rote and superficial phrases, projected toward an impersonal externality; for Stephen and Bloom, dealing with death and dying is a powerful and personal experience. Considering that our highest esteem is often reserved for those who are willing to face the destructive finality of death, we might also see that the "anti-heroes" Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom emerge as surprisingly courageous.

## CHAPTER I

### A SPECTER OVER THE TEXT

#### Haunted by Ghosts

Shortly before their departure from Ireland, James Joyce wrote to his new companion, Nora Barnacle: “What a lovely morning! That skull, I am glad to say, didn’t come to torment me last night. How I hate God and death! How I like Nora!” (Ellmann 178). With his mother’s death recently behind him, and a new relationship in hand, the excitement of the young Joyce, eager to begin a new life on the continent, cannot be missed. Though his mood was bright as he penned these words, it is impossible to overlook the struggle that infuses the joy of his sentiments. In these lines, the conflicting forces of life and death are at the forefront of his expression. We see his rebellion against God, the creator of life and the keeper of death. A skull torments him. Yet the mysterious force that he is unwilling to identify properly as “love” has invigorated him, and his spirit is lifted, if only for the moment, above the pain and suffering of his young life.

Years later, Joyce weaves the constituent elements of this same struggle through the pages of *Ulysses*. In what Jean Kimball calls a “textual pattern that insistently juxtaposes love and death,” this conflict is presented with such power and frequency in the stories of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom that it becomes part of the “overall



patterning of *Ulysses*” as a whole (144). Just as Odysseus navigates his way through a strange and dangerous world, constantly facing the possibility of death, Stephen and Bloom are never far from its unremitting threat. In *Ulysses*, obstacles and dangers are at every turn – Buck Mulligan, Deasy’s world, the Citizen, Blazes Boylan, the grinding poverty of Dublin, the insensitivity of Irish masculine culture, and the oppressiveness of religion – all threaten Stephen and Bloom. In addition to these, the destructive power of death is also a constant presence. June 16, 1904, is the day of Paddy Dignam’s funeral, Stephen’s mother has recently died, a body floats somewhere in the bay, and Dublin is the “Kingdom of the Dead.”

By setting the novel on the day of a funeral and placing the death of Stephen’s mother at the forefront of the narrative, Joyce has ensured that the subject of death is never far from Stephen’s and Bloom’s thoughts. For Stephen, facing the power of death is an ongoing affair that can erupt at almost any moment in emotively charged, hallucinatory exchanges with the ghost of his mother. In Bloom’s case, Paddy Dignam’s sudden death and the event of his funeral lead only naturally to thoughts about his father’s suicide and the death of his infant son, Rudy. So it would seem, then, that the reader should be overwhelmed by a presence of darkness and melancholy when encountering the text. While we might be right to expect as much, our experience is quite different.

It is true that watching Stephen struggle with his mother’s death is heart wrenching, and Bloom’s contemplation of death while attending the funeral in the “Hades” episode is unflinchingly macabre, but to assert that these elements dominate the tone of the novel would be only partly correct. For in the midst of their struggles, a

strength and honesty in their character is revealed that lends the novel a definite sense of hope and resilience. Few things in life could be more heartbreaking for a young man than to watch his mother die a gruesome death and then have to bear the guilt of denying her final wish. And, I doubt there is much that could crush one more thoroughly than the suicide of a father and the death of a son. But in the end, by the time the final appearance of Stephen and Bloom is recorded, there is the distinct impression that both men will continue on in their journey, embattled by life, but resolutely unconquered.

### Moving Away the Pall

As resilient as they are, it still seems difficult to imagine why Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom should be considered heroic enough to leave us with the impression of hope and strength after all we see to the contrary. Stephen owes money to most of associates and squanders what little he makes on drink and prostitutes. All the while, his sisters are starving. Bloom has no qualms about pursuing the possibility of an affair, and for reasons that are not immediately clear, he does not seem to be making any serious attempts to mend his relationship with Molly. At no time does he do anything that resembles an Odyssean effort to fend off his wife's suitors. In fact, he goes out of his way to avoid confronting her impending adultery with Blazes Boylan. If Stephen and Bloom are indeed heroic, then we are in need of an explanation as to how they merit such a status. It is often the case that heroes of classical works come to some profound moment of insight concerning their own flaws, overcoming impossible odds along the way. However, in *Ulysses*, great revelations do not come forth in a traditional manner. Bloom nods off to sleep, knowing that his wife has shared their bed with another man that same afternoon. Stephen has confronted his mother's ghost, but the last time we see

him, the ringing bells outside of Bloom's house remind him of the prayers offered during the administration of last rites. The final "yes" of the novel affirms life, brightening the resolving chord, but how is this sufficient to offset every agonizing moment that precedes it? Because of difficulties such as these, I believe we are in need of an explanation that accounts for the impression that Stephen and Bloom have, in some way, conquered the many obstacles that stood in their paths throughout the day.

In the opening lines of *Endymion*, Keats writes that beauty has the power to withstand all of the forces that make life ignoble. Although there is "despondence," "gloomy days," and "o'er darkened ways / Made for our searching," the poet would have us believe that "yes, in spite of all, / Some shape of beauty moves away the pall / From our dark spirits" (Keats 830). Perhaps for this reason the power of death and the moral failings of Stephen and Bloom do not overcome the air of magnanimity that runs throughout the text. The beauty of the language and the artistry with which we are dealing is surely an antidote to the often base and crude subject matter. This is truly impressive by itself, for only the most gifted writers can convert such things as defecation, urination, and masturbation into high art.

Gifted though he is, is Joyce's ability to render beauty enough to confer a sense of ennoblement onto the two protagonists? The answer to that question is probably "no," for villains can be beautiful. Iago, as Keats might say, is also "a thing of beauty," (830), but this does not make him noble. Thus, if the specters of death, loss, and failure are to be exorcised from Stephen and Bloom, and if their failures are to be redeemed, it still seems necessary that some ennobling quality be evident in their characters.

To this end, I will explore the moral elements in the principal characters'

narratives that seem contradictory or ambiguous. Perhaps therein the necessary conditions for a heroism strong enough to “move away the pall” from the spirit of the text will emerge. On Bloomsday, Stephen and Bloom are revealed in all their contradictions. At times, they demonstrate profound courage – only to neglect later opportunities to do the same. Both are capable of complete honesty and sly deception. Thus, it is impossible to reduce their story to any single philosophical statement. However, if within the consistent interplay of opposing forces a coherent voice emerges, in spite of all contradictions, affirming virtues such as courage or love as the dominant forces in their characters, it should be possible to give an account for the heroic impression their stories evoke.

Serious readers have always been impressed by Joyce’s technical mastery in writing contradictions into his characters. And because of the intricacies and complexities of the text, scholars are drawn, as Joyce predicted they would be, to the challenge that is *Ulysses*. He defies us to understand its secrets and we are enticed by his invitation. Stephen and Bloom seem to have something to tell us, but what is it? We want to know why they leave us feeling as though we have encountered an image of ourselves, in spite of their bizarre behavior.

With all of its contradictions laid out side-by-side, Joyce’s rendering of the human experience is magnificently distorted and strange, but infinitely familiar. Stephen, the seeker of transcendence, is ambivalent toward God. Bloom, the “hero,” is a cuckold. But they embody contradictions only because we do. Their struggles are not uncommon. In the completeness of his presentation, Joyce has peeled back the veneer that covers our inconsistencies and rendered an image of our humanity that is true to life – terribly

complicated, at times even hideous, but beautiful, maybe even heroic, nonetheless.

In our own experiences we seek resolution, finality, and closure. But in *Ulysses* these ambiguities and contradictions seem to hold us suspended in time, waiting for a traditional form of narrative resolution that never comes. It is as though the artist is intentionally denying us the very thing we seek. Still, after each reading we walk away with a sense of closure and finality. There is always the “yes” that puts its stamp on all that comes before, dispelling the unsettling darkness with the light of its affirming power. By bringing clarity out of chaos, creating beauty from baseness, and revealing life in the midst of death, Joyce has built a transcendent reconstruction of life on a foundation of contradictions.

In this, he is at once thoroughly modern and terribly ancient, and though no one would doubt the originality of his creation, he is not without a heritage. We could discuss the history of literary figures from Homer to the present day, but the point is simple enough – the most captivating images are often the most complicated. Joyce’s progenitors are the geniuses of the past who avoided reductions in their compositions, and, finding the secret power of contradiction, endeavored to reproduce it. Without courage and fear, resolve and hesitation carved into his face, Michelangelo’s David would be unrecognizably heroic. As he is, with his worried brow set close above the blazing fury of his eyes, he is a magnificent embodiment of the contradictions that make us human. His overly large hands are his power *and* his youth, and like *Ulysses*, he is perfect in his distortions.

## CHAPTER II

### THE UNIVERSAL CONNECTION

#### Embracing the Contradictions

With all this in mind, the focus of this thesis will be an exploration of a phenomenon that is responsible for so many of our own contradictions, while at the same time providing one of the greatest possible opportunities for demonstrating virtue – facing death. The specter of death haunts the narrative, but in Stephen and Bloom’s struggles against it, life is affirmed and their best qualities are revealed. Although only an artifice, it is useful to think of Joyce as having located life and death at the extreme ends of our everyday existence before setting out to capture all that lies in between. Seeing death as a horizon crossed only by Stephen and Bloom, this paper will be an explication of this theme as it pertains to Joyce’s use of it in rendering character. In so doing, it will be possible to understand more clearly the dynamic at work in the moments when Stephen and Bloom encounter their lost loved ones. Death is a powerful image to evoke, and by showing some of the implications of doing so, as explained by several prominent thinkers, we can better understand Joyce’s decision to locate death imagery prominently in the interiority of his characters. I will argue that by surrounding all of his characters with the issue of death, Joyce creates opportunities for Stephen and Bloom to distinguish themselves, in thought and action, above their contemporaries. At the same time, these moments provide a way to connect with these two characters. Through a

shared understanding of the pain of loss, we are forced to recognize their courage and humanity.

### *A Danse Macabre*

Although the world of *Ulysses* is at times so strange we cannot navigate by its landmarks, the experience of facing death is a point of universal familiarity, and by recognizing it within ourselves, our empathy is called to the fore with images and sensations that are common to all. Whatever coherence is forfeited in the lack of traditional narration is more than recaptured through the clarifying power of repeating images and the themes they evoke. Whatever sense of utter foreignness is created in the unflinching presentation of thoughts, attitudes, and actions that are usually suppressed is nullified by seeing ourselves in the reflection of Stephen and Bloom as they stare into the faces of the loved ones who have died. When Stephen confronts his mother or Bloom sees his dead son, Rudy, we connect with their humanity at the deepest level. Whatever sins they have committed, the depth of their conflict and pain demands a response of mercy. In effect, the law that would condemn these two characters as being unworthy of heroic status is rendered null and void. In these moments, the love they possess for their dead is their redemption, and in our empathy for their condition, we are willing to relinquish any inclination toward condemnation.

It is just here that we see the power of juxtaposing love and death. If not for the appearance of two apparitions, The Mother and Rudy, it would be difficult to grasp the full measure of pain these losses have inflicted upon Stephen and Bloom. These encounters reveal a kind of courage and love that is not presented anywhere else in the

text. Stephen's courageous defiance of the religious guilt imposed on him by the appearance of The Mother is equaled only by his love for her. As evidenced by his contemplation of a mother's love in "Nestor," it does not seem to be the case that Stephen has a need to reject the image of his mother out of hatred. There is a need to reject her, but I will argue that this need is, once again, related to the issue of death. There are specific overt and symbolic messages associated with The Mother that cannot be overlooked. Once these are considered, it can be argued that Stephen's rejection is the result of a deep existential and psychological conflict that has at its most primal level a need to shatter the fear of death.

In Bloom's case, the moment that the depth of love is revealed is much less problematic. At the end of the intense journey through the dreamscape of "Circe," Rudy's appearance is a powerful revelation of the undying love that Bloom still has for his son. Later, I will argue that by working retrospectively from this moment, it is possible to gain valuable insight into some of the more complicated features of the Bloom narrative. Many facets of Bloom's character become clear when we posit the idea that Rudy's death is an unresolved psychological conflict that has struck Bloom in the worst possible way – death and sex have become fused in his unconscious, creating havoc within his soul.

In the nightmare world of "Circe" we see the latent content of Bloom's unconscious rise to the surface, where that content is played out as a grand drama for all to see. The whole episode is an evacuation of the unconscious into the conscious life of the text, and at the end of this event, we see the son who died in infancy years earlier. We know that since that time, Bloom's sexual relationship with Molly has been non-



existent, and that at some level, he has been held responsible for the child being born too weak to live. In the chapter dedicated to Bloom, I will argue that Bloom's lucid contemplation of death in "Hades" is a direct response to his perceived loss of transcendence. I will also attempt to show that Bloom's willingness to hold to his beliefs about death is a result of the same courage that allows him to continue loving his son, even though eleven years have passed since the boy died. Rudy's appearance at the end of an intense psychological journey is evidence of an unresolved conflict that emerges and subsides over the course of Bloom's day, and existential psychological theories have much to offer on the subject of mortality awareness and the effects of that awareness on the human psyche. Therefore, I will explain how an existential psychological reading of *Ulysses* can be used to illuminate the ways in which facing death participates in creating parallels between Stephen and Bloom while building dramatic narrative energy toward the resolution of the attenuating conflicts.

We know that Joyce intended to create parallels and connections between Stephen and Bloom. When we consider the radical differences between their personalities, the issue of death becomes even more important. Because Joyce has abandoned the traditional form of narrative, where characters are moved about in rationally connected sequences, other forms of connection are necessary. For Joyce, who is trying to capture as much complexity as possible, the problem is how he can establish connections without simplifying the reality he hopes to represent.

Naturally, it would be much easier if Stephen and Bloom were *supposed* to be connected in some way. Stephen's father is socially associated with Bloom through the circle of musical acquaintances they hold in common, and perhaps that could make for a

nice story about a chance meeting and a series of coincidences, but this is hardly what Joyce is attempting to do. There is no real reason why Stephen and Bloom should be connected in any meaningful way, but in the world of everyday affairs, it is often the case that odd connections and parallels exist that can reveal the universality of the human experience. These connections may not appear to make sense in a traditional understanding of how stories work, but if an artist is inclined to do so, they can be woven together to illuminate that universality in fascinating ways. With two aims of going beyond the traditional form of narrative and recreating the complexity of the world, it appears that Joyce is relying on just such coincidences to construct the framework of his story. At times, however, these parallels and coincidences tend to obscure the more important correspondences being established. But these relationships become clear enough when, after leaving a whole series of seemingly unconnected images and themes unconnected for vast parts of the book, Joyce brings them succinctly together in powerful, epiphanic moments, that are impossible to miss. In “Circe,” where both Stephen and Bloom encounter ghostly appearances of their cherished dead, previously unconnected parallels emerge from the subsurface of the text to create the parallax quality that defines Joyce’s method of character association. In facing the power of death, and harboring the dead within themselves, Stephen and Bloom are genuinely related. Although they operate on different planes of intellectual, social, and aesthetic understanding, their level of humanity is, essentially, the same.

#### “Word Known to All Men”

Without some point of universal connection, men would be eternally separate from one another, if only by degrees. At some level, a common denominator must exist

if words such as “empathy” and “understanding” are to have any practical meaning. One of the great mysteries for Stephen, the one he hopes his mother will reveal, is the “word known to all men” (*Ulysses* 161). A possible clue as to why this should be so important may lie in Joyce’s depiction of a world where people must live among radically different personalities and conflicting perspectives. The ways in which men are divided is one of the most prominent features of *Ulysses*. Stephen is at odds with Buck Mulligan. He is unquestionably distant from Haines. During his discourse in the National Library, among his intellectual and artistic associates, he is a master fencer backed into a corner, taking on all comers. And sadly, there is no real connection between him and his family, except with the one whom he has no possibility of facing in reality – his mother. As well, Bloom’s relationship with Molly is strained and he is estranged from his contemporaries by differences in religious beliefs, social ability, and racial heritage. What is more, the interior world of the mind is represented as utterly separated from the outside world, but always trying to break through to engage it. Stephen’s thoughts as he walks along the beach about the “ineluctable modality of the visible” being “thought through [his] eyes,” is a perfect example of this kind of solipsistic vision that runs throughout the novel (31).

In such a world, a shared experience, even a single “word known to all men,” would be enough to push against the isolation and alienation of a partitioned existence. Richard Ellmann held that this word is “love,” while others, such as Hugh Kenner, believed it was “death” (Kimball 143). Without entering that argument, it is safe to say that if there are two experiences that bind humanity together across every culture, they are the capacities to love and mourn.

At first, it seems that true love and deep mourning do not exist in the world that

Joyce has created. Certainly, there is little more than a socially correct, affected form of sympathy on display during Paddy Dignam's funeral, and it goes without saying that Mulligan's behavior with regard to Stephen's mother's death is callous. We might expect that the opposite qualities would be overtly displayed in the two protagonists, but this too is problematic, for when we consider the way Stephen relates to his family and others, or the way Bloom avoids interfering in Molly's adultery, it would seem that they have little capacity for love as well. Stephen is certainly in the deep stages of mourning, but Bloom is not overly affected by Dignam's death, and, at times, his thoughts indicate that he has put the deaths of his father and son at an emotionally healthy distance.

When Bloom encounters Rudy, and when we consider that Stephen's last thoughts in the novel are the prayers offered at his mother's deathbed, a singular impression emerges that dispels any ambiguity and charges us to see these two through the eyes of our own sympathy. When we do, it is possible to relate to these horribly conflicted, confusing, and often-unlikable characters. In this, our own humanity becomes the means by which the solipsistic spell of isolation and separation is broken. While we cannot relate to either character on many levels, in their brokenness and loss, and the love they retain for their dead, we have found the point of entry through which may enter into Stephen's and Bloom's private worlds.

This, I believe, was Joyce's project. He understood our contradictions, flaws, fears, and longings. In *Ulysses* he has captured the complex interplay between the powerful and conflicting forces that shape and drive our humanity. Through the stories of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom we are brought face to face with ourselves, and we cannot overlook the fact this reflection emerges with great clarity when we focus on

their confrontations with death and dying. I will argue that by focusing on this element of the text, we can see that Stephen and Bloom truly are heroic – not because of any super-human quality, but simply because they retain something of their humanity. In Joyce’s vision, this world is enough. Stephen’s Aristotelian leanings are more than just philosophical gleanings from a Jesuit education “injected the wrong way” (*Ulysses* 7). They are the indication of a nascent idea about how the sum of truth is to be found within the substance and forces that make up the world around us.

Of all the characters in the novel, Stephen and Bloom are the only two who exhibit with absolute fullness the complexity, contradiction, and ambiguity of a living person. This is not to say that others are particularly flat – not by any means. One does not need to look any further than the exchange between Simon Dedalus and his daughter to see that this is true. This is only to say that in Stephen and Bloom, we are given the opportunity to see ourselves in our deepest struggles. Of those, facing death is the most painful. By revealing the depth of their struggle amidst the callousness of the world, Joyce reveals in both characters virtues capable of transcending obstacles that others cannot. In this, they become heroes who speak for all mankind.

#### Separating the Wheat from the Chaff

It is simple enough to speak of the universality of the experiences Joyce presents. Not that we all hallucinate or see ghosts, but the emotional content these images evoke is a testament to their efficacy as artistic devices. If the event of facing mortality is a truly serious conflict common to the human psyche, it should go without saying that the field of psychology would offer an expansive treatment of the issue. Before Sigmund Freud incorporated the death drive into his theories of the unconscious in *Beyond the Pleasure*

*Principle* and Martin Heidegger emphasized the individuating power of facing death as our “ownmost potentiality-for-Being” (294) in *Being and Time*, Joyce was deeply familiar with the effect of the conflicting forces of life and death on consciousness. Perhaps, it is not surprising that we should find points of correspondence between the way Joyce renders the event of facing death in *Ulysses* and these thinkers’ observations. In the process of explicating their theories, it is possible to illuminate a recursive principle at work in Joyce’s construction of character that, in many respects, prefigures their observations. This principle can be found by taking a close look at Joyce’s detailed account of life’s resistance to the destructive power of death when rendering the characters Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom. In his break with traditional literary forms, Joyce has reworked the classical model of confronting the threat of death, reconstituting it as an internal conflict. By positing vivid death imagery within the separate narrative space of Stephen’s and Bloom’s interiority, and presenting a detailed rendering of the existentially honest manner in which they deal with it, Joyce sets apart Stephen and Bloom from every other persona in the novel, lending them a sense of Heideggerian authenticity not found in the likes of Buck Mulligan, The Citizen, or Simon Dedalus. In effect, it can be said that the psychological and existential conflicts infusing Stephen’s and Bloom’s narratives work in the same way as Davis, Becker, Heidegger, and Sartre suggest.

In light of this, understanding the unique place of death in the human experience is critical to recognizing the many ways in which the dynamics of this conflict are presented. Although Joyce was an early critic of psychoanalysis, parallels between the narrative content of *Ulysses* and Freud’s theories of consciousness are many and obvious.

Consequently, many scholars have applied psychoanalytic theories as a means of interpreting the source and meaning of this content. However, most Freudian readings of texts focus on the earlier theories that give precedence to the erotic forces in the unconscious. So, by drawing on Freud's later work, which incorporates the concept of a death drive, on Ernest Becker's and Walter A. Davis' insights concerning death and consciousness, on Martin Heidegger's theory of authentic Being-toward-death, and on Jean-Paul Sartre's view that we must choose an attitude toward the dead, it will be possible to see more clearly the ways in which Joyce has permeated the narrative with resistance to the images that stimulate the destructive impulses within the unconscious, the awareness of mortality that attenuates their activation, and the courage it takes to face the effects of this activation.

In so doing, it should be possible to gain important insights into Joyce's bold artistic decision to situate death and dying at the forefront of his remarkable presentation of life. As Sigmund Freud and Martin Heidegger have distinct conceptions of the role of death in our interiority, the preponderance of my work will consist in exploring the conceptual relationship between their respective theories on death's relationship to being and consciousness and Joyce's use of death in constructing the remarkably human quality of his characters. When Buck Mulligan, Simon Dedalus, or C.P. M'Coy speak of death or the deceased, we hear rote and superficial phrases, projected toward an impersonal externality; whereas, for Stephen and Bloom, dealing with death and dying is a powerful personal experience, and the theories of Freud and Heidegger speak specifically as to why this difference is critical when identity is involved.

### Unraveling the Image

By borrowing Freud's method of unraveling the symbolic elements of a dream image, it will be possible to reveal the psychological importance of the two images mentioned earlier – The Mother and Rudy. Semon Strobos contends that there are many symbols in *Ulysses* that function in the same manner as *Knotenpunkten*. In Freudian terminology a *Knotenpunkt*, or knot-point, is an important symbolic dream image that reveals the entire character of the one to whom the image appears (Strobos 37). He suggests that recurring motifs, such as the bird imagery associated with the name Daedalus/Dedalus, create “nexi of associations” which can be considered the framework of the novel (37). Strobos also reminds us of Erwin R. Steinberg's observation that, when constructing a stream-of-consciousness narrative, an author uses “trigger mechanisms: which bring to the reader's mind a whole crowd of images and meanings” (Steinberg 34). These meanings need not be logically or causally connected, for *Knotenpunkten* act as linguistic and imagistic portals that connect with the other associated elements of the image. Paying careful attention to these portals allows one to see what lies beneath the material imagery of the text, making it possible to explain Stephen's and Bloom's motivations in psychological terms.

If The Mother and Rudy are suitable candidates for this kind of analysis, then they should share the same qualities as a Freudian *Knotenpunkt*. Undoubtedly, The Mother can be treated as such, for Joyce constructed her as a highly compressed, multi-faceted icon whose first appearance in the novel is delivered through Stephen's recollection of her appearing to him in a dream. In “Telemachus,” two descriptions of her appearance are given, and in both places we are informed that she appeared to him in a dream after



her death. Although her final appearance in “Circe” is not a dream, the dreamlike quality of the entire chapter only reinforces her status as such. The entire episode of “Circe” operates with the same kind of freedom and associative logic found in dreams.

Characters morph into alternate personalities at will and impossible scenarios are acted out that have only the slightest rational ties to reality. Here, The Mother becomes more than a memory that haunts Stephen; she becomes an active character whom he confronts face to face.

Concerning Bloom, the events of “Circe” appear to be a venue where the fantasies and qualities only hinted during the day are intensified and reenacted without restraint. For example, Bloom plays the part of the submissive in his everyday life. At home, he prepares Molly’s breakfast while she waits in bed, attending to her with the decorum of a servant. Toward other men, he is never a dominating presence, but is always on the receiving end of aggression. In “Circe,” these qualities are exaggerated in fantastic ways that include him being ridden like an animal by the dominatrix Bella/o Cohen.

Dreams are the venue where the latent content of the unconscious is acted out, free from the repressive functions of the ego. In the world of dreams, the active forces of consciousness do not mitigate the expression of qualities and desires – instead, they are manifested fully and are acted out in ways that would never occur in the public sphere of everyday life. We cannot forget that the setting for “Circe” is Bella Cohen’s brothel. Brothels have always been private spheres of existence where the secret fantasies of men can be acted out, apart from the critical eye of society. All laws and social mores are suspended upon entering, and, as in the world of dreams, anything is possible. Taken together, the unlimited scope of possibility and the unlimited extent to which scenarios

can be acted make the world of “Circe” a genuine dreamscape.

Because of the similarities between “Circe” and the dreamscape, it should also be possible to treat Rudy as a dream image. If this method is valid, The Mother and Rudy can be understood as symbolic icons that, when employed in the service of artistic construction, strategically evoke the fundamentally important themes of their associated narratives. We do not doubt the importance of Stephen’s struggle with the death of his mother. The prominence of her place in his thoughts is obvious enough. With his frequent thoughts about Rudy, we also do not fail to consider that Bloom is a man who has lost a son. What is here being raised is the extent to which Rudy’s death is important to understanding Bloom. Given the fact that Rudy appears as the final image in an extended sequence of psychologically significant events, the interesting possibility emerges that it is not the obvious libidinal forces of Eros that drive Bloom. Rather, it is possible that a better explanation is to be found in Freud’s later theories of the unconscious, where death is the preeminent issue.

### Deeper Than Eros

One important implication of this analysis is that it increases our understanding of Joyce’s insight into the workings of the mind. I am not suggesting that it lends credence to claims made by Italo Svevo (and Joyce as well) that Joyce did not rely on Freud’s theories as source material (Svevo). Many scholars, such as Jean Kimball and Semon Strobos, assert that Joyce did in fact use Freud in this way. However, in light of what I intend to argue, it is important to note that Stephen’s dream of his mother in “Telemachus” was written before the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud begins to move away from the thesis that

a child's focus on the mother is solely a project of pleasure. Joyce did have a monograph of Freud's essay on Leonardo da Vinci in his Trieste library, and Jean Kimball has argued in "Freud, Leonardo, and Joyce: The Dimensions of a Childhood Memory" that this work directly influenced *Ulysses* (Kimball 57-8). This may be so, but Kimball focuses on the Erotic elements of the son/mother relationship, whereas I intend to focus on the Thanatotic. As it concerns the fullness of Joyce's understanding of human consciousness, his anticipation of the importance of death and the ways we deal with it is a clear indication that he is a remarkable student of the human psyche in his own right.

Until the horrors of the First World War caused Freud to rethink his theories, the field of psychology was dominated by the idea that the psyche was largely the product of the interplay between the superego, ego, and the erotic, life-affirming impulses of the id. After witnessing the unspeakable carnage of that war, Freud needed of a way to explain the destructive tendencies of mankind that had now spilled over into the world of human action with unchecked abandon. In 1920, with the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud introduced the idea that the realm of the unconscious was dominated by not one, but two kinds of instincts. Before, Freud believed that consciousness is the symbolic level of thought where the life-seeking impulses of Eros are played out in various ways. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud asserts that another instinct is at work in the unconscious. Later psychologists coined the term "Thanatos" to describe this instinctive impulse, which is even more primary than the forces of Eros, and seeks a return to the most basic form of existence. The entropic aims of this impulse work against our desire for life, and as a result, the psyche is plunged into turmoil. In this interplay of instincts, the Erotic forces are only reactionary impulses against the

destructive desires created by Thanatos. Seeking pleasure is not so much an end, as it is a means of escaping the life-opposing tension produced by the death instinct. In this view, destruction of an entity is pleasurable because it reasserts control over a world that often reminds us of our own mortality and vulnerability. I will later explain these points in greater detail by using the works of two thinkers who incorporated Freud's theory of Thanatos into their respective approaches to explaining the human psyche: Ernest Becker and, more recently, Walter A. Davis.

Always controversial, Freud's new theory was the source of much debate in the psychological community at the time it was published. Some rejected the idea of a death instinct altogether and stayed within the confines of the old model of thought. Others embraced the new ideas and went on to reinterpret old paradigms such as the Oedipus complex with regard to it. In the chapters that follow, I will conduct an analysis of Joyce's rendering of Stephen and Bloom with respect to the important symbolic function of The Mother and Rudy. By treating them as *Knotenpunkten*, it is possible to unweave their images, just as Stephen might suggest, and lay bare the various threads of their construction. It will then be possible to show that Stephen and Bloom are alike in the depth of their struggle with human mortality, and in this struggle, they have their only possible opportunity to arrive at a truth not recognized by those who surround them. Their suffering is the path to their humanity, and by drawing on Freud's theories via Becker and Davis, it is possible to explain exactly why this should be so.

#### Existential-Ontological Variations on a Theme from Freud

Ernest Becker's theory of the role of death in human consciousness draws upon both Freud's later concepts and existentialist ideas of conflict as the center of being. In

*The Denial of Death*, Becker explicates the relationship between the self and others, and our consciousness of mortality. Walter A. Davis does much the same in his work *Death's Dream Kingdom: The American Psyche Since 9-11*. Although Davis' work is directed at the American psyche in particular, his theoretical framework is applicable to a study of consciousness in general. Taken together, these two approaches will provide a backdrop against which we can interpret the function of death in *Ulysses*. It will then be possible to give an account for some of the more problematic elements of Stephen's and Bloom's construction.

Before doing so, it is important to comment on the role of Martin Heidegger's philosophy in this project. Focusing on the psychological dimensions of consciousness of mortality is not only a way of explaining Stephen's and Bloom's thoughts and actions; it is a means by which it is possible to isolate the phenomenon of facing death as a dominant issue in the text. Once this is accomplished there is much to be gained by looking into the ontological implications of facing our own death as described by Heidegger in *Being and Time*.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes *Dasein* (human being) as a particular kind of being that is always projecting itself onto its possibilities. For Heidegger, the fact that we must project ourselves onto the future event of our own death is of the highest importance. Because another cannot die for us, death is our "ownmost-potentiality-for-Being" (Heidegger 308). By relating to our own death as a genuine possibility, we gain access to a possibility that belongs to us and no one else. Because we have this possibility that is uniquely our own, it is possible to reach the understanding that we have an existence that is distinct from that of any other person. Furthermore, death is the limit

of our possibilities; it is the possibility of no possibilities, and because of its power to end all of our projects, it makes every present project a serious enterprise. Heidegger asserts that the mindset of the undifferentiated mass of others, “the they” (298), is characterized by fleeing from any serious contemplation of this possibility (297). In effect, the world is largely inhabited by beings who have no real conception of themselves as distinct individuals.

Living without a serious contemplation of one’s own death is one element of several that contributes to an “inauthentic” mode of being. In this state, it is impossible to comport oneself toward any possibility with true self-awareness. The point is too protracted to describe here in detail, but the idea is that two modes of existence are possible: in one mode we comport ourselves in an “authentic” manner towards a possibility; while, in the other mode, we do not. Authentic being towards death requires a willingness to accept its possibility as certain and personal. Once we have done this it becomes possible to see that all our possibilities are individual.

This is of serious interest here because we are given privileged access to Stephen’s and Bloom’s interior discourses. They are distinct characters, and are often contemplating death. If it can be demonstrated that both characters have an intimate awareness of the power of death, while for others death is a phenomenon that is relegated to the Heideggerian “they,” it may be possible to say that Joyce uses this issue to distinguish Stephen and Bloom from others.

When we consider Buck Mulligan’s flippant attitude about death compared to Stephen’s, it may be possible to discern two different Heideggerian modes of being at work. Using Heidegger’s ideas about facing death, it will be possible to compare the

ways in which Stephen, Bloom, and the other characters of the novel relate to death, and whether their respective manner of relating corresponds to Heidegger's description of authentic or inauthentic being.

Sigmund Freud's concept of a death drive, as described in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and Martin Heidegger's phenomenological ontology of our "Being-towards-death" (295) in *Being and Time* provide two distinct theories wherein death is a prominent presence in consciousness. Both thinkers make much of the issue of death, and their theories will allow for two different ways of interpreting the role of death in the novel. If these thinkers are correct, we can interpret Stephen's hallucinatory confrontations with the ghostly image of The Mother and Bloom's encounter with his dead son, Rudy, as manifestations of the psycho-existential conflict that is a function of the human capacity for mortality awareness.

Each of these thinkers asserts that the phenomenon of death is responsible for an inherent tension in the human condition. As Joyce creates scenarios in which Stephen and Bloom must face symbolic images of the destructive power of death at important and climactic points, explicating the content of these symbols and the context in which they operate should yield critical insight into their contribution to the "overall patterning" of *Ulysses*. Furthermore, these insights should lend credence to the previous assertion that their confrontations with death are acts of heroism.

## CHAPTER III

### STEPHEN AND THE MOTHER

#### A Son's Loss

In light of the framework discussed in the preceding chapter, it is possible to see that the image of The Mother has two important functions. First, her presence sets an indelible mark on the character Stephen. After her appearance, it is impossible to contemplate his actions apart from their initial encounter. She appears as though she were bodily present, powerful and threatening, strong enough to “shake and bend” his soul. Whether Stephen is pondering the nature of existence or drinking in a brothel, it is impossible to read his story without contemplating his loss. Had her death only been mentioned, or spoken of in the past, our reading of him might be different. As it is, we do not see Stephen as one who is mourning the loss of his mother; we see him as one who is in the throes of a deep emotional conflict because of it. Religious, intellectual, social, and familial issues are all involved when she appears. When she does, these themes are not just implied; they are actually embodied and acted out through her various roles in “Circe” as life-giving mother, judge of Stephen’s soul, icon of death, and even Christ the intercessor who pleads with God on Stephen’s behalf. Here, her second function becomes apparent. Because her appearance explicitly references other primary themes in the Stephen narrative, such as God, motherhood, and love, her presence is an iconic



representation of the major themes of the novel. As she changes into the various manifestations of Stephen's conflict, she reflects all that he has faced during the day, and her body becomes the confluence where individual themes meet and are explicitly expressed. Hence, The Mother is more than just a means by which we come to understand that Stephen is wrestling with intense guilt. Functioning as an expression of these themes, she becomes a distorted mirror, reflecting these issues in such a way that they are associated with death. Although Stephen's characterization and the major themes of the novel can certainly be treated as distinct issues, they are bound together with death in Joyce's rendering of The Mother.

In this light, we can see that Joyce has associated all the major themes with death from the opening pages. Bloomsday begins with Stephen dressed in mourning clothes, observing the spectacle of Buck Mulligan's mock mass. After a few passing comments between them, the conversation turns to Mulligan's insulting remark about Stephen's mother being "beastly dead." Embarrassed at being called to answer for his insult, Mulligan tries to evade the seriousness of the situation with a diatribe on the meaninglessness of death:

And what is death, he asked, your mother's or yours or my own? You saw only your mother die. I see them pop off every day in the Mater and Richmond and cut up into tripes in the dissectingroom. It's a beastly thing and nothing else. It simply doesn't matter. [. . .] To me it's all a mockery and beastly. (*Ulysses* 7)

Stephen replies to Mulligan's comments by saying that he was "not thinking of the offense to [his] mother," but he is only able to do so after "shielding the gaping

wounds which the words had left in his heart” (8). Memories of her last days then cross his mind, such as the song he sang for her of “love’s bitter mystery,” and the blood on her fingernails from squashing lice plucked from her children’s shirts. Suddenly, he recalls how she appeared to him in a dream, “her glazing eyes, staring out of death, to shake and bend [his] soul” (9). His response is sharp and powerful: “No, mother! Let me be and let me live” (9).

### Love and Death

In this exchange we are introduced to the close interplay between love and death that runs throughout the narrative. The encounter and the preceding movement that leads to it is at once hideously macabre and painfully poignant. Mulligan’s description of the dead being “cut up in tripes” is as gruesome as the wasted body of The Mother. However, Mulligan’s callousness causes “gaping wounds” that reveal the true depth of Stephen’s pain. Although Stephen reacts violently to the image, calling her a “Ghoul” and a “chewer of corpses,” the ferocity of his language is still not enough to hide his love and brokenness (*Ulysses* 9).

If this latter trait is not so obvious, Stephen’s thoughts about a mother’s love in “Nestor” reshape our understanding of the previous encounter, preemptively circumscribing the violence of those that follow. As he tutors Cyril Sargent, the isomorphic stand-in for a young Stephen Dedalus, Stephen thinks to himself, “Ugly and futile: lean neck and thick hair and a stain of ink, a snail’s bed. Yet someone had loved him, borne him in her arms and in her heart. But for her the race of the world would have trampled him underfoot, a squashed boneless snail” (23). The violence of Stephen’s reaction to the ghastly image of The Mother and the touching description of a mother’s

love, which may be “[t]he only true thing in life,” are sharply contrasted to one another. This juxtaposition is arranged in such a way that, even though the power of the language during the confrontation is fixed upon death and violence, love is not hidden. Images of her “wasted body” and the odor of “wetted ashes” carry the scene toward the moment when her eyes are fixed on Stephen “to strike [him] down” (9). Love is present for Stephen in these exchanges, but he must overcome the terrifying power of death before it can dominate his being.

In “Love and Death in *Ulysses*: ‘Word known to all men,’” Jean Kimball presents a thorough discussion of these themes, illuminating the internal logic of this association. She asserts that Joyce has woven these themes together as an expression of Stephen’s dilemma. He must reject all that binds him to the temporal world and, “establish a loving tie to the flesh so that he can become capable of immortalizing that flesh in art” (Kimball 153). Furthermore, Kimball suggests that becoming an artist is, for Stephen, likened to becoming God, wherein he feels empowered to transform word into flesh. If this is so, then both God and death are impediments to becoming the creator of a permanent life through art, as both are capable of effectively threatening the project – God by ontological superiority and death by its destructive power. As Stephen’s mother pleads with him to submit to God, she represents a return to the defeated status of being created and opposes his destiny as a creator. She also reminds him of his mortality, saying, “All must go through it, Stephen . . . You too. Time will come” (473). In this moment, Stephen is choked “with fright, remorse and horror” (474). The opportunity for heroic action has come, for he must overcome the suffocating attachment of his sonship, both biologically and spiritually, if he is to successfully establish himself as the author of

his own destiny. “He must have a life before he can create it from the immortal artwork, the only escape he believes in from the death that is otherwise the inescapable end of life,” (153) says Kimball. He must overcome the weight of history, family, and the culture that surrounds him if he is ever going to be free. But, even more than this, says Kimball, “[h]is ‘*Non Serviam!*’ is to death itself, as well as to his attachment to the dead mother, and his ‘all or not at all’ [. . .] here goes much farther, rejecting as his own end the death of the flesh, which is the edict of God for all men” (155).

### Transcending the Flesh

Understanding that Stephen must reject anything that opposes his quest for the God-like status of artistic immortality explains the pattern of rejection that characterizes Stephen’s decisions on Bloomsday. God, Buck Mulligan, The Mother, and even the natural “dogsbody” existence of the flesh threaten this endeavor. If Stephen is to become an artist, he must become like God, under whose feet all things must come. If he remains bound to a past that holds him in a place of vulnerability, weakness, and mortality, he will not be able to transcend into the omnipotent position of creator.

An existential psychological reading that incorporates Freud’s theory of Thanatos has much to offer in the way of explaining Stephen’s simultaneous attachment to and violent rejection of The Mother. In his execution of the juxtaposition between love and death, and the quest to transcend the tensions of this dynamic, Joyce has rendered a picture that corresponds with the theories of later existential psychologists. In the years following the writing of *Ulysses*, the phenomenon of death came to the forefront of psychological and philosophical deliberations. By the time the “Telemachiad” was completed in 1917, Joyce had already decided that death would play a crucial role in the

fashioning of his characters and that this issue would be inexorably bound together with love, God, and motherhood. And as his letter of 1904 indicates, these themes were connected much earlier than that, thus giving Joyce many years to work out the implications of their interconnectivity before locating them at the heart of Stephen's construction. What we find at work in *Ulysses* perfectly parallels the later works of Freud, Becker, and Davis, whose theories provide important insights into why love and death are so inextricably bound together and why Stephen must reject The Mother and all that she represents in order to live.

In 1920, Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* was first published in German. In this work, Freud asserts that the inexorable march toward entropy at the cellular level has a profound impact on consciousness. Decay and entropy give rise to destructive impulses and desires that are contrary to those spawned by the libidinal forces of Eros (Freud 82). While Eros seeks harmony, structure, and a "renewal of life" (82), Thanatotic impulses are grounded in the instinct to return to the most basic form of existence. In effect, the unconscious is divided by two primary instincts: one seeks life, while the other has destructive and self-destructive aims that oppose the self-preserving tendencies of Eros. While Eros seeks harmony and unification, Thanatos seeks repetition, dissolution, and destruction.

"Our consciousness," Freud says, "communicates to us feelings from within not only pleasure and unpleasure but of a peculiar tension which in its turn can be either pleasurable or unpleasurable" (109). In this way the competing impulses make their way into the level of symbolic thought. Asserting the primacy of a destructive instinct over the libidinal forces of Eros he states that:

the life instincts have so much more contact with our internal perception – emerging as breakers of the peace and constantly producing tensions whose release is felt as pleasure – while the death instincts seem to do their work unobtrusively. The pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts. (109)

The importance of Freud's observation is that it posits the existence of a tendency toward destruction and death at the most primordial level of thought. The pleasure principle is only a mitigating response to the tensions produced by the underlying working of Thanatos. Stephen's simultaneous acknowledgment of the protective power of a mother's love and the inescapable necessity of rejecting that love can be understood within this context. He is caught between two powerful desires. While Eros seeks attachment and harmony, Thanatos has the dissolution of the relationship as its aim. As Joyce has inverted the normal experience, wherein the destructive death instinct is normally suppressed, it is important to pay careful attention to this decision to bring this tension to the forefront of the narrative.

Freud recounts an example of this tension in a scenario he witnessed while developing his theory of a destructive tendency within the unconscious. While watching a child routinely play a game in his mother's absence, wherein the child threw his toys away with the joyful expression of "gone," Freud discerned that the game as a means by which the child regained an active role in the face of powerlessness: "[t]hrowing away the object so that it was 'gone' might satisfy the child's impulse, which was suppressed in his actual life, to revenge himself on his mother for going away from him" (35).

Whereas, before, the child was powerless in the midst of an "unpleasurable" situation, by

mastering the game of destroying an object, he regained a position from which he could act in defiance as if to say, “All right, then, go away! I don’t need you. I’m sending you away myself” (35). By repeating the unpleasant experience, and yielding to the impulse to revisit the source of his discomfort, the child was able to gain mastery over his psychological pain (36).

Bringing this point more fully into our context, it is important to note that Freud held that when adults conduct artistic imitation, particularly in tragedy, they do not withhold even the most painful aspects of an experience from the spectator’s view. Unlike children, who perform only for themselves, adults tend to publicize their unpleasant experiences as a means of mastering their own thoughts.

At this point it is possible to explain the connection of love and death. Returning to *Ulysses*, one finds that this connection is bound within Stephen’s psychological strategy to gain mastery over the painful experience of losing his mother. Because confronting these issues through artistic imitation is common in adulthood, with some extrapolation one could go further and describe how Stephen’s rejection of The Mother is relevant to his project of becoming the immortal and omnipotent artist. Before doing so, it is important to bring in one other relevant implication of the death drive that more clearly explains why motherhood, death, and God are all at the epicenter of this conflict: the tendency toward narcissism that has at its most extreme end the need for an omnipotent identity.

In *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker posits the existence of a psychological need for an omnipotent identity. The conflict between the unlimited planes of the mind and the finitude of the body gives rise to an interaction that profoundly impacts the way

we relate to people, possibilities, and even ourselves. In childhood, body consciousness is transformed into consciousness of vulnerability and mortality. An awareness of these two aspects of our being causes an acute awareness of the dependence upon the nurturer of the natural life of the body.

For Becker, the Oedipus complex (the primary motivation for removing the father) is not a love for the mother as much as it is a desire for mastery over one's own body. The primary challenge of a child is "whether he will be a passive object of fate, an appendage of others, a plaything of the world or whether he will be an active center within himself—whether he will control his own destiny with his own powers or not" (35-6). Illustrating the point further, Becker quotes from Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*: the "essence of the Oedipal complex is the project of becoming God – in Spinoza's formula, *causa sui*. . . . [sic] By the same token, it plainly exhibits infantile narcissism perverted by flight from death" (Brown 118).

In the "flight from death," the body-nurturing, flesh-reminding presence of the mother becomes a "fundamental threat" to the narcissistic project of creating a death conquering omnipotent identity. "On the one hand the mother is a pure source of pleasure . . ." says Becker, "but on the other hand the child has to strain against this very dependency, or he loses the feeling that he has aegis over his own powers" (38). For the child, the Oedipus complex becomes a twofold project of trying to conquer the power of death by gaining mastery over the mortal part of his being (the body) and mastery over those that either control or connect him to that body. In "Circe," Joyce combines the primary threats to an omnipotent identity in the image of The Mother. We see her as the



giver and nurturer of his natural life when she says, “Years and years I loved you, O, my son, my firstborn, when you lay in my womb” (*Ulysses* 474). In her edict “Repent! O, the fire of hell!” (474) she holds the power of death. She is even Christ interceding for him: “Have mercy on Stephen, Lord, for my sake! Inexpressible was my anguish when expiring with love, grief, and agony on Mount Calvary” (475). Here, the manifold expression of all that Stephen must overcome is presented in its fullness. Only now can he complete his break from the confines of the natural world with one fatal strike. In order to become an artist, Stephen must become his own god, a creator of worlds using only words. He cannot serve the god of his mother or the ghost of her memory. His flesh, or its source, cannot bind him if he is to transcend the decay of temporality where death and imperfection reign. Raising his ashplant, which has now become *Nothing* (Siegfried’s dragon-slaying sword) he smashes the chandelier, “[t]ime’s livid final flame leaps and, in the following darkness, ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry “ (475). The entire temporal realm is destroyed through the rejection of his mother’s ghost. In this moment he is “fiery Columbanus,” who in “holy zeal bestrode” the “prostrate body of his mother” (23) to find transcendence through conquering the lusts of his flesh. Unlike St. Columbanus, Stephen has no intention of subduing the flesh by escaping to a monastery. For him, the only escape is to sunder the ties that bind him to the earth that he might become an artist, transcending time, space, and even death.

### Transcending the Self

However, rejecting and conquering the external threats to his project is, for Stephen, only the part of the quest. In fashioning an omnipotent identity, “[h]e even names himself the maker of the immortal word: ‘I, Bous Stephanoumenos . . . am lord

and giver of . . . life” (Kimball 153). But this claim is problematic in light of the Thanatotic project. The inherent tension of the self-created lie of omnipotence, and the destructive means employed to create it, demands remediation if Stephen is to become more than just a destroyer. Not only must Stephen reject his mother and all that she represents if he is to have a life of his own, he must master the narcissistic tendencies of the Oedipus complex as well. Ernest Becker so perfectly captures the essence of this point in *The Denial of Death* that he is worth quoting at length:

How does one transcend himself; how does he open himself to new possibility? By realizing the truth of his situation, by dispelling the lie of his character, by breaking his spirit out of its conditioned prison. The enemy, for Kierkegaard as for Freud, is the Oedipus complex. The child has built up strategies and techniques for keeping his self-esteem in the terror of his situation. These techniques become an armor that hold the person prisoner. [ . . . ] In order to transcend himself he must break down that which he needs in order to live. Like Lear he must throw off all his “cultural lendings” and stand naked in the storm of life. (Becker 86)

Bearing this in mind, we can see that Stephen is faced with a dilemma that goes beyond psychological conflict. The very nature of his being is at stake in the pattern of behavior that requires him to banish everything that opposes his quest for freedom and individuality. Stephen’s intellectual prowess is the “lancet of [his] art” (*Ulysses* 6), the weapon of his omnipotent identity, and supports his project of breaking with everything supporting him. Using his rapier mind is his offensive and defensive strategy and is his “emotional guarantee” (Davis 48). As I will explain later, to live in this manner has

ontological consequences for our being. But first, it is important to comment on Stephen's awareness that something very important is at stake concerning this issue.

As he conducts his discourse in the library, sparring with the other artists and intellectuals, it becomes apparent that Stephen knows this is not the path to transcendence when he asks himself, "Are you condemned to do this?" (170). Like Shakespeare, "[h]is unremitting intellect is the hornmad Iago ceaselessly willing that the moor in him shall suffer" (170). For unless he establishes that "loving tie to the flesh" (his mother's as well as his own), and becomes like Socrates, who learned "from his mother how to bring thoughts into the world," (156) he will remain a disembodied spirit, imprisoned in the destructive tendencies of his most basic instincts. Unless he learns to love as his mother loved him, he will be nothing more than a destructive intellectual, a "hornmad Iago," spinning ideas and suppressing the passionate man within: "he must have love, which, to quote Bloom, 'everybody knows . . . is really life'" (Kimball 153).

The importance of Stephen's willingness to face this very real dilemma and his refusal to hide behind mere intellectualism are signs of what Walter A. Davis says is advancement "toward an existential ethic" (235). According to Davis, the defining characteristics of an existential ethic include deepening the conflict within oneself over guilt or doubt, for therein lies the "primary source for knowledge and inner transformation" (5). Thinking itself can be ethical "insofar as it engages one thing: the battle of a subject with itself over the meaning of its being" (236). Further "[r]efusing and exposing all Symbolic supports, [an existential ethic] seeks in the struggle of the psyche with its disorders the source of value" (237).

Stephen's heroism is evident because he has the courage to become "a subject

[that] trembles before [his] responsibility to create new values in a situation that reduces received values to rubble” (Davis 236). In the early hours of Bloomsday, we find him actively wrestling with the need to escape the grasp of his mother’s memory, but holding firm to his own guilt through mourning. All the while, he harbors a pain “that was not yet the pain of love” (*Ulysses* 5). Stephen is waiting for his turn to love, but at present he must “free his mind from his mind’s bondage,” (174) and “hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past” (153). Thus, we see him in his unwavering decision to remain in mourning for the mother he refused in life, wrestling with his own intellect, the world around him, and even the elemental qualities of his own nature so that he can reconcile his life to the future. He cannot wear Mulligan’s grey trousers. He is, as Davis might say, “deepening his wound.” Because of his willingness to grieve, we have the “not yet” of that expression and the hope that sometime in the narrative future this pain has become the pain of love, the “new value” of which Davis speaks. If Stephen bears any similarity to an epic hero, it must be in this context. Flawed as he is, his courage is strong. Refusing all comforts and facing the destructive finality of death while acknowledging his own vulnerability are acts that are not to be found among those around him.

### Ontological Considerations

Until now I have given an existential psychological account of the role of death in Stephen’s project. But, if his conflict is also existential in the ontological sense, then it is necessary to see what implications for Stephen’s being have arisen from the phenomenon of death and how these implications relate to Joyce’s connection of love and death. That it is necessary that the quest for love and transcendence should begin in a confrontation

with death is answerable in light of Martin Heidegger's phenomenological ontology of Being in his work, *Being and Time*.

Heidegger asserts that the essential characteristic of self-awareness belonging to *Dasein* (our being) is always an understanding of "Being-there" (214). As we navigate the world, we are always seeing ourselves with respect to the possibilities that are presented to our understanding. *Dasein* is a "Being-in-the-world" that relates to entities "in the sense of the genuine appropriation of those entities towards which *Dasein* [sic] can comport itself in accordance with its essential possibilities of Being" (214).

Essentially, Heidegger is saying that *Dasein* maintains itself as a "Being-in-the-world" and has "relationships-of-Being towards the world" (214). In this "ontologically constitutive state," *Dasein*, at least in part, "is its 'there'" (214). The important point is that we are not just a being that *possesses* the concept of how we are "there" with some other entity, our understanding is constitutive *of* our being. As it relates to self-awareness and self-discovery, "Being is that which shows itself in the pure perception which belongs to beholding, and only by such seeing does Being get discovered" (215). Because we have the remarkable capacity to behold ourselves, we not only *have* self-awareness, we *are* that same self-awareness.

When we comport ourselves toward ourselves in self-reflection or toward other entities, we come to see that "understanding must be conceived primarily as *Dasein*'s [sic] potentiality-for-Being" (210). This is to say that it is possible to have understanding insofar as we "see" our potentiality-for-Being in the possibilities that entities have disclosed to us. When we stand in relationship to an entity, we see ourselves in the mirror of possibilities that the entity presents. We are faced with the fact that we must

exist in relationship to the possibilities presented to us by the Other. But this can be existentially problematic if the possibilities that the Other presents are not grounded in a genuine apprehension of our true or real possibilities. Unfortunately, *Dasein* is routinely absorbed into the false reality of this “everydayness” where “[t]he ‘they’ prescribes one’s state-of-mind, and determines what and how one ‘sees’” (213).

At the beginning of *Ulysses*, we can see this principle at work when Stephen peers into Buck Mulligan’s mirror and thinks, “Hair on end. As he and others see me. Who chose this face for me? This dogsbody to rid of vermin. It asks me too” (6). Contemplating himself as the disclosed possibilities of the image, he sees himself in the lice-bitten potentiality of his “dogsbody.” It is a “dogsbody to rid of vermin,” a body that will later be associated with the dead dog on the beach.

Candidly seeing one’s possibilities, especially the possibility of vulnerability that later becomes associated with death, is a profoundly important project from a Heideggerian perspective. This is not to say that Stephen is fixated on death, or that Heidegger is saying that such morbidity is the means to living in existential authenticity. Heidegger’s interest in facing death is only due to the fact that it has a unique phenomenological status in the life of the human. “With death,” Heidegger contends, “Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being” (251). From this, two considerations emerge: in our own death, unlike in any other possibility, we are irreplaceable, and in relating to that possibility we relate only to ourselves. Therefore, if we do not comport ourselves toward the possibility of our own death in an authentic manner, we miss the opportunity to participate in the only possibility that could cause us to relate to ourselves as a truly individuated being. When we apprehend death as “that

*possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped*" (294), we have taken the only opportunity to live in an authentic manner as an individuated being, separated from a self-conception that has failed to apprehend itself as utterly unique. Until this occurs, we conceive of ourselves primarily as a replaceable entity, interchangeable with any other member of the "they" (*das Man*).

In the case of *das Man*, "death is known as a 'mishap' . . . and is encountered as a well-known event occurring within-the-world" (Heidegger 297). However, *das Man* "has already stowed away [gesichert] an interpretation for this event. It talks of it in a fugitive manner . . . as if to say 'One of these days one will die too, in the end; but right now it has nothing to do with us'" (297, brackets original). Failing to avail itself of its "ownmost-potentiality-for-Being," *das Man* never makes the transition from understanding that "one dies" to the knowledge that "I will die." Consequently, *das Man* is forever cut-off from the possibility of being separated from the undifferentiated mass of the "they."

The everyday world of *das Man* is the world Stephen must reject if he is to live authentically. Because of its "fugitive manner" of dealing with death, the "they" lives in a world where what is real does not matter, and what matters least counts most of all. In the "idle talk" that characterizes the mode of discourse of everyday *das Man* "there is nothing that is not understood," there is only the delusion of omnipotence, and a pretense toward genuine understanding (Heidegger 217). Its curiosity is of a kind that "concerns itself with a kind of knowing, but just in order to have known . . . [and] controls even the ways in which one may be curious" (217). Idle talk is not interested in confronting the painful reality of death. It is more concerned with controlling true curiosity toward the

world – “It says what one ‘must’ have read and seen” (217). As death is one of the foremost aspects of our existence and is inevitable, to live apart from a true and personal apprehension of its facticity is to live in a delusion. For Heidegger, to live without facing it as a real possibility is to live in the world as one who has primordially and existentially fallen “alongside” of it (214).

It is important to note that the irreconcilable difference between Stephen and Buck Mulligan arises over the issue of the way each comports himself toward the event of death. Both have rejected the Catholic conception of God, and neither seems to be sure what love is, but Joyce has chosen the way each comports himself toward death as the means by which their fundamental differences are revealed. For Stephen, a person is not “beastly dead.” There is an existence to be contended with, even if that existence is not materially present. In his awareness of what it means to live, it was he who “wept alone” at his mother’s deathbed (156). Buck Mulligan makes nothing of the issue whatsoever, or at least he pretends to. His stated position on death is that “it simply doesn’t matter.” He would like to think that he doesn’t “whinge” about it because he is unafraid. However, a Heideggerian reading of this scene reveals that Buck Mulligan can only treat death as he does because he is still absorbed in the everydayness of *das Man*, thus separated from the powerful reality of standing in relationship to death as his “ownmost-potentiality-for-Being.”

#### The Island Prison of “Idle Talk”

In his flight from the seriousness of death, Mulligan is enmeshed in the discourse of his classical education. “Ah, Dedalus, the Greeks! I must teach you. You must read them in the original,” (*Ulysses* 4-5) he tells Stephen, before cruelly chastising him about



his mother's death. Trapped in his self-absorbed idle talk, speaking authoritatively about "what one 'must' have read and seen," he can only be what is prescribed for him by the *en vogue* set of intellectuals and artists of which he is a part. As "idle talk has been uprooted existentially," Mulligan's absorption in it means that his Being-in-the-world has been "cut off from its primary and primordially genuine relationships-of-being towards the world, towards Dasein-with, and towards its very Being-in" (Heidegger 214). In this state, he is nothing more than a solipsistic embodiment of the fashionable chatter of his artist friends and those "brave medicals." In Heideggerian terms, he is merely drifting "along towards an ever-increasing groundlessness" (214).

On the contrary, Stephen's project is to face the reality of the world as it is, rejecting anything that would attempt to define him by anything other than his own presentation of himself. When Stephen tells Mulligan that the mirror is a symbol of Irish art, the "cracked lookingglass of a servant," (6) he is making a statement about all that he intends to reject, preparing the way for his renunciatory "*Non Serviam*." The art that the cracked mirror represents and the image it contains are both to be transcended in Stephen's artistic endeavor. As a representation of Stephen's mortality, his status as a servant, or the kind of art he will produce, the mirror truly does not contain *his* face. In an acknowledgment that the image is separate from himself, Stephen thinks, "Who chose this face for me? [...] It asks me too" (6).

Breaking away from the ontologically groundless world of *das Man's* idle talk is only possible if one becomes an individuated entity. According to Heidegger, the way this occurs is by facing the finality, certainty, and singularly unique possibility of one's own death. No one could be farther from this possibility than Mulligan. Just as

Heidegger's authentic and individuated man must escape the false reality of *das Man*, Stephen must transcend the world where Buck Mulligan is the life of the conversation. In that world, there is no real apprehension of oneself in relationship to the painful or the beautiful – only mockery and pretense. Stephen can escape by actively facing and evacuating anything that would otherwise be subsumed or repressed in the sickness of everydayness' cheap version of discourse. By leaving the tower and the idle talk contained therein, he can find that "intense instant of imagination" and create, becoming the artist "that which in possibility [he] may come to be" (*Ulysses* 160). Facing reality as it is, not shrinking from even the most painful of realities, Stephen must endeavor to present in art the sum of "thought through [his] eyes" (31). Whether it is the sublime "seaspawn and seawrack" on "the nearing tide," or the commonplace "rusty boot," (31) Stephen's project is to transcend temporal reality by recreating its essences in art, destroying every lie that stands in the way.

## CHAPTER IV

### LEOPOLD BLOOM AND THE MEANING OF DEATH

#### A Shared Experience

So far, I have discussed the theme of facing death in the Stephen narrative and how our perspective on his characterization can be affected by foregrounding this aspect of his story. It goes without saying that when we approach texts from different angles, a plurality of readings emerges that enriches our understanding of the complexity in any masterpiece. To read and reread a text over the course of one's life should invariably yield new insights as the perspective from which it is read grows and changes with the reader.

Accordingly, when we study great thinkers who have focused on the role of death and consciousness, we should expect to find that a new reading does emerge. Naturally, it is hoped that a perspective on one narrative in the text will work for the text as a whole. In this case, it is necessary to discover if the change in perspective that accompanied foregrounding death in Stephen's story will work for Bloom. If Stephen's confrontations with The Mother are symbolic of a deeper struggle with the issue of mortality, then it is also important to discover if the same can be said of Bloom's encounter with Rudy. Of all the characters in the novel, Stephen and Bloom are the only two who have encounters

with ghostlike apparitions of deceased loved ones. And so, we have a point of correspondence that offers unique possibilities for uncovering connections that might otherwise remain hidden. Their encounters differ in important ways – a point I will soon address – but in terms of dramatic impact they are coequal in their ability to shape our understanding of both narratives. But first, a few thoughts may be in order about why facing death should have such an impact on our reading.

### Reconsidering the Obvious

When we direct our attention toward the painful experience of facing death, perhaps it should be especially true that our perspective changes. If Freud, Heidegger, Becker, and Davis are correct (and our own experience ought to be sufficient to tell us whether they are), actively concentrating on mortality is a project upon which we spend very little time. We have been told that to do otherwise is not healthy. Perhaps it is not; nevertheless, being mortal is one of the most astonishing features of our existence. In this realm of temporality we have become jaded to the profundity of the concept that something could be and then not be.

From the beginning of Western thought it was held as a metaphysical axiom that “Truth” is both unified and singular. This is to say that, whatever Truth is, it cannot be one thing and its own negation in the same moment. Thus thought Thales, Parmenides, Socrates, Plato, and so on. If we hold to the old view about the metaphysical status of Truth, then it is supposed that temporality has solved the problem for us concerning the possible end of our existence and consequent change in being. That we are decidedly one thing in one moment and something else in the next is no problem, so long as we understand that singularity and uniformity is only a synchronic requirement. Only in

abstraction is it essential that these necessary conditions apply eternally – if in that realm such a thing as “time” exists.

As beings conscious of the nature of the realm in which we live, we cannot escape the observation that this is a realm of beginnings and endings. From this, it is impossible to escape the knowledge that our lives will also one day end. When reflecting upon the concept of mortality, we enter into the contemplation of these very things. What does it mean for us to exist now, and then at some point in the future cease to exist? Is there any part of reality that is not material? We may ask, as Stephen does, “What is a ghost?” (154). When contemplating the end of existence, it is natural to consider whether there is any way to escape an end that is a nothingness. Such are the questions that arise from the rational contemplation of a life spent in a temporal realm where we can be here in one moment, and then not here at some later point in time.

#### A Philosophical Escape from Materialism

Previously, I argued alongside Kimball that Stephen believes he has found a way to escape this end. As Kimball says, he needs love in order to create, and through his act of creation he can create an enduring life in the immortal form of art (153). Stephen’s Aristotelian leanings reveal that he has abandoned the idea that Truth is suspended above us in remote eternal detachment. Likewise, his rejection of Catholicism and subsequent quest for love and art is the evidence that he is searching within the confines of this world for the immortal. His quest is a contemplation of this venue of existence, for there is no other.

However, this in no way means that reality, in Stephen’s view, is reducible to matter. While making his case that *Hamlet* is a recounting of an undocumented case of

Ann Hathaway's infidelity, Stephen calls Hamlet "the son of [Shakespeare's] soul" while Hamnet is "the son of [Shakespeare's] body" (155). Hamnet "has died in Stratford that his namesake may live forever," and when Shakespeare, playing the ghost of Hamlet's father, speaks to Hamlet, Stephen holds that Shakespeare is also speaking to Hamnet. Convoluted though this may seem, the point is actually very simple. The artist immortalizes "the world without" (*Ulysses* 175) by rendering it in art, where it lives forever.

It would seem that this vision of existence is problematic when we consider, for Bloom, the grave is the end of being. There is nothing else afterward, except the ruin and decay that he so vividly imagines in "Hades" (McGee 318). But for all of his quasi-scientific musings on the subject of death and the unflinching perspective from which he contemplates it in that chapter, there is another element in Bloom that cannot be overlooked. This element ties Bloom to Stephen's project of immortality and provides a connection between Stephen's metaphysical epistemology and Rudy's appearance.

When replying to the bombastic rhetoric of The Citizen, Bloom comes out with his position that love is the proper way to respond to the world. With full self-awareness, he then qualifies his statement by saying, "I mean the opposite of hatred" (*Ulysses* 273). But the word has already been spoken for all to hear, and he makes a hasty retreat out of the pub, under the pretense of needing to find Martin Cunningham, in order to avoid the kind of response he knows would be forthcoming. It is obvious that Bloom knows that to assert the primacy of love in such a crowd could only invite ridicule, and that staying in the conversation would be of no value. In this moment, one could focus on Bloom's Odyssean maneuvers to escape confrontation. But another

important quality is also revealed that is vital to the scene: even when he is pushed beyond what most men would be willing to endure, Bloom is true to his word that he believes that hatred and force are “of no use.” Later, in his anger, Bloom does not retaliate in kind. He only reminds the anti-Semitic Citizen of the truth that his god is a Jew. In effect, we see that, even when the placating veneer of Bloom’s personality is stripped away, there remains a sensitive man who values love.

Here, we may ask of what importance is Bloom’s capacity for love in relation to the previously raised questions about the nature of existence? And why is it so important that Bloom be true to his word about love? The answer to these questions will require some extended elucidation, which may begin with this important observation: any possible attitude toward life, including love, is only a momentary event that fades into oblivion with the next change of passion. Of course, any moment in the present will be affected by whatever attitude we adopt, and by that, our personal story will be affected as such, but how is love relevant to the philosophical problem of being and not-being? Neither loving nor hating does anything to change the fact that we will eventually die. Temporality is defined by the ever-present possibility that our existence may end at any time, irrespective of anything else we may do.

These points are so obvious that they are not worth mentioning except for the contrasts they reveal with respect to another form of “life”: the “dead life” (Sartre 541). Jean-Paul Sartre says that “[t]he unique characteristic of a dead life is that it is a life of which the Other makes himself the guardian” (541). In “Scylla and Charybdis,” Stephen thinks to himself that, for “Dane and Dubliner, sorrow for the dead is the only husband from whom they refuse to be divorced” (175). In his own case, the previously outlined

psychology of his relationship with his mother may provide the answer as to why this is so. Rather than discard her memory, he must learn the word known to all men first. If that word is indeed “love” then this position is perfect – his love for her will aid him in his quest for artistic immortality. If it is not, then it is still important that she not be forgotten, or else he will never be able to resolve his own guilt over refusing her vision for his life. Either way, he must not forget her, or else she will disappear without any hope of resolution.

With Rudy’s appearance in “Circe,” the place where so many unconnected events come together, Stephen’s statement about divorcing the dead becomes a prophetic utterance about Bloom. It is obvious that love has no bearing on the outcome as to whether or not one will die. Love cannot change existence in the metaphysical sense, and in Bloom’s case it is not necessary that it should: “[i]n the gospel according to Bloom, death is death. A man not without feeling for loved ones who have died, Bloom nevertheless tends not to inflate death or to capitalize it” (McGee 318). This is true enough. Bloom never does glorify death or speak of the phenomenon itself in anything other than scientific language. However, when it comes to thoughts about specific persons who have died, a different man emerges who is anything but scientific. If the person in question is Bloom’s father, Dignam, or especially, Rudy, his thoughts are alive with a sympathy normally reserved for the living. “Poor Dignam” rings through the opening sequences of his narrative. And how often do we hear “poor Papa” and “poor Rudy” as his reflections turn to them? In these specific utterances, he speaks of them as though they are still alive, in need of his compassion.

For Bloom, his own dead are treated differently from the dead in general. In this,



we see that, although love cannot change certain facts about life, it has everything to do with what becomes of the dead. The dead require adoption by the living. If they are forgotten, it is because the living have made an “implicit decision” to do so: “[t]o be forgotten is, in fact, to be resolutely apprehended forever as one element dissolved into a mass . . . it is in no way to be *annihilated*, but it is to lose one’s personal existence in order to be constituted with others in a collective existence” (Sartre 542).

In this case, what if we were to ask, “is Rudy still Bloom’s son?” Factually, this is impossible, for Rudy’s kind of being is a “Being-no-longer-in-the-world” (Heidegger 281). He has been cut off from participating as a “Being with Others” (281). This is the painful reality Bloom is willing to confront in his belief system, as well as in his scientific awareness of what happens to the body after death. But this attitude toward death in general does nothing for his relationship to his own dead, and therefore, in Sartre’s view, it does not have any impact on Rudy: “[i]ndifference with respect to the dead is a perfectly possible attitude . . . But this indifference – which consists of making the dead ‘die again’ – is one conduct among others with respect to them” (Sartre 542). Bloom is anything but indifferent toward Rudy, and if Sartre is correct, then he has *chosen* this attitude, for “it is not possible for us not to choose an attitude” (542). More than just a sentimental affection for the son he lost, Bloom has adopted a particular way of relating to the life that was, and therefore, Rudy has not been annihilated.

When Rudy appears, fully constituted as the boy of eleven he would have been had he lived, we realize that Bloom has kept the boy alive in ways we have not realized. Holding a lambkin that evokes the lamb’s wool sweater in which he was buried, and dressed as Bloom has imagined him, in an Eton Suit, the boy is definitely an

amalgamation of Bloom's memory and imagination. John Z. Bennett has made note of an observation by R.M. Adams concerning the nature of Bloom's memory in the decade since the death of Rudy. The year 1894 marks the year of Rudy's death. Beginning with that date, Bloom's memory "is very hazy, notably lacking in detail, while his recollections of the years through 1894 are remarkably clear and rich in events" (Bennett 94). Here, we have another example of Joyce's remarkable attention to detail. To create within the consciousness of his character such a subtle demarcation is truly a masterpiece. Rudy's death is a traumatic event that marks a turning point in Bloom's life. From this time onward, his sexual relationship with Molly is dead, and his economic fortunes seem to take a turn for the worse (Bennett 94). By the time we meet him on June 16, 1904, it appears that Bloom is a man who has walked about Dublin in a different state from the one before his son's death. Lucid though he is, his weakened memory of more recent events is an indication that his connection with the world is not what it once was.

The contrast between Bloom's lucidity about death in "Hades" and the clarity of his vision of Rudy in "Circe" might seem contradictory to a project of active repression. If Bloom has been so diligent in repressing the memory of his son's death, what accounts for his willingness to face the results of death with such morbid honesty, holding all the while a belief in death as an end? Lawrence Langer offers an insight from Albert Camus that has implications for both Stephen and Bloom. As Camus "works through to a theory of 'conscious death,' which permits the imagination to anticipate the body's fate," says Langer, "he challenges each man to be his own artist, correcting creation and in a limited sense *defeating death* by the power of lucidity" (Langer 117, emphasis mine).

Furthermore, Langer asserts that “lucidity” is one of Camus’ most frequently used words, “denoting a thoroughly human pride in living that justifies those men who urgently feel the loss of transcendence” (117).

Stephen is indeed an artist, or soon will be. For all his scientific musing, Bloom has some aesthetic sensibility as well. In their lucidity, they are students of Aristotle looking for the sum of truth by searching out the hidden recesses of this world. Although Aristotle rejects Plato’s notion of a separate, non-material realm, he is not a materialist. Aristotle holds that the sum of Truth concerning any object is the sum of the four causes by which that object exists. Only one element of an object (the material from which it is made) must be made of matter. It is possible that the remaining elements are not material at all. If Truth does not exist in the eternal and separate world of Plato’s forms, but can be found in this world as the sum of causes that are not necessarily material, Aristotle’s non-materialistic view of reality allows for the dead live again as a part of Truth through an artist’s act of creation. This is only possible in a view of reality that is not solely materialistic, and Aristotle’s view of Truth provides a solution to death if an afterlife, as Stephen and Bloom believe, does not exist. In the same way that Stephen and Bloom are artists creating a self that is more than matter, their dead can also be given life through an act of creation.

In essence, we have identified a metaphysic within the novel by seeing the way Stephen and Bloom relate to their dead. The absence of faith in *Ulysses* does not require one to relinquish a belief in an eternal existence. Through the creative act, eternal existence is possible. Stephen believes that Shakespeare “found in the world without as actual what was in his world within as possible” (175). He also claims that the “church is

founded and founded *irremovably* because founded, like the world, macro and microcosm, upon the void” (170, emphasis mine). Because the whole “world without” is only the actualization of that which was once only a possibility within, the dead, like the church, can live “irremovably” in art. In Stephen’s view, all things are founded on a void. At any moment, existence contains within it the potential of the future. Potentiality is not material, and like the potentiality within existence from which all things become actualized, it is possible for the dead to live again so long as they can exist as potentiality within a creator. The artist can establish a being for the dead “upon the void” of his own reasons.

If something exists in possibility because of the choice of the artist to harbor it within, what else is needed for the thing to have being other than the fulfillment of the remaining causes? Even before the dead are immortalized in “the world without” as art, they are alive inside of the artist. It seems in Joyce’s view that for Shakespeare, Stephen, or Bloom (all artists in varying degrees), the dead can through art as the sum of Aristotle’s four causes: the material cause is the words on the page that create the character, the base substance from which a persona is created; the work of rendering the idea or memory into an artistic representation in language is the efficient cause; the formal cause is the actual form or pattern the dead take as imagined by the artist, whether it is Hamlet, The Mother, or Rudy; and the love of the artist to keep his dead alive is the final cause, for love is the reason the dead are called back to life. With these in hand, the necessary and sufficient conditions for creating a being in an Aristotelian metaphysic have been met. The artist can call forth the ghosts of his past at any time. His dead never have to fall into nothingness.

### A Psychoanalytic Approach to Leopold Hero

Heretofore, it has been implied that The Mother and Rudy are manifestations of Stephen's and Bloom's unconscious. Joyce would never have thought of it in this manner, preferring instead to focus on what a man can experience within consciousness (Bruns 11). Whether the images are buried beyond the line of conscious thought, somewhere in the unconscious, is not all that important. In Stephen's case, it is clear that images of his mother appear quite distinctly in dreams and while he is awake. As for Bloom, "Rudy is always just at the fringes of his consciousness" (Bennett 95) anyway, so in the unlimited planes of possibility in "Circe" his appearance is not surprising (96).

If treating The Mother as though she were a symbolic dream image is valid, and has yielded an accurate exposition of an important implicit theme within the Stephen narrative, uncovering the same theme within Bloom's story would be significant for several reasons. Such a discovery would connect the two most significant characters of the novel in a way that goes beyond all surface-level similarities – such as the wearing of mourning clothes, experiences of religious and social alienation, and the shared tendency to value love. Even encountering images of their beloved dead is only one of many surface-level associations, unless a similar thematic underpinning exists that would allow these events to be more than superficially related. If they are indeed thematically connected, it can be said that this is a major thematic statement of the novel, and therefore likely that its inclusion would have been the result of a calculated effort on Joyce's part.

However, it should not be taken for granted that Stephen's mother and Rudy can be treated in the same manner. Because it is important to discover if the approach used to

recover the latent content of the Stephen narrative reveals any correspondences when applied to Bloom, any differences must be explained and accounted for before the method can be considered valid. As important differences do exist between Stephen's confrontation with The Mother and Bloom's encounter with Rudy, it is best to begin with them.

The first key difference is that it is explicitly stated that The Mother has appeared to Stephen in a dream, whereas we know Bloom is not dreaming when he sees Rudy. Since this is so, it is necessary to explain how one is justified in treating Rudy's apparition as a dream image. First, it has often been observed that, like dreams, the events of "Circe" act like effervescent uprisings where the deepest recesses of Stephen's and Bloom's unconscious are evacuated. Jean Kimball and many others have treated it as such. As but one example, Kimball points out the moment in "Circe" when Stephen refers to the time "sixteen years ago" when he broke his glasses at Clongowes (Kimball 64). Kimball also asserts that the juxtaposition of this recollection with a "complicated allusion to Oedipus" is evidence of a Freudian influence in Joyce's work (64). The relevance of this observation to the point being made here has nothing to do with its association of Freud with Joyce *per se*. Rather, its importance lies in the identification of a moment where a memory resurfaces from a time before the narrative beginning of *Ulysses*. As this is only one of countless examples in the chapter, there is no need to belabor the point that the events of "Circe" are infused with eruptions from the past. Virtually all of Bloomsday is summoned, in some way, during the course of this chapter. Some memories are only recalled, while others are given dramatic personae through which to speak. Even previously unmentioned sins of Bloom's past become active

characters, reminding him of some of his more bizarre transgressions.

Furthermore, the entire episode of “Circe” is played out in a setting that bears a closer kinship with the world of dreams than waking reality. With the “withdrawal of the rational element” (Blamires 159) from the narration, characters can instantly appear, disappear, or undergo metamorphosis in sequential episodes that are connected to each other (and the rest of the novel) by the most tenuous of rational relationships. Bloom’s servant status at home is reconstituted as an exaggerated display of submissiveness when Bella Cohen changes from a female dominatrix to a male dominator, and Bloom is transformed into a female pig. In effect, the “nightmare quality” (159) of the episode is established in moments such as these where there is an absolute abandonment of the logical limitations that normally accompany waking thought.

The associative logic of these connections gives rise to a fluid continuity in “Circe” that more closely resembles the features of highly detached daytime reveries and nighttime dreamscapes than rational thought (Gordon 1). In this context, it is not unreasonable to consider the appearance of Rudy a symbolic manifestation of multiple repressed memories and emotions. More than just a strange encounter at the end of a sequence of strange events, Rudy’s ghost is a symbolic icon that, like a Freudian *Knotenpunkt*, evokes a host of issues from Bloom’s past. Once unraveled, the revealed issues connect with other elements within his narrative, delivering the possibility of profound insight into the depths of his character.

By treating the image in this manner, it is possible to explain its psychological significance, and in the process shed light on the other unconscious manifestations occurring in this episode. If each scenario is like an evacuation of repressed fears and

desires within Bloom's unconscious, a connective link between them might exist. If an explanation is available that can tie Bloom's outrageous persona, His Most Catholic Majesty, to his appearing as the submissive slave of Bello Cohen, the exposition of that connection would be truly significant. To assert that Rudy's appearance at the end of the episode can provide that tie will obviously require explanation, but by drawing on the works of the previously cited thinkers, such an explanation may be possible.

This explanation will enable us to make a second critical distinction between the ghost of Stephen's mother and Rudy. Stephen encounters the symbolic image of his psychological struggles right from the beginning of his narrative, while the Bloom has only one, which is near the end of the novel. The most logical explanation is that the death of Stephen's mother is a recent occurrence, whereas it has been eleven years since Rudy died. Bloom has had time to heal, and as mentioned before, there is evidence that Joyce has written into Bloom's construction a subtle but certain change in his ability to recall events in the decade since Rudy's death. As a repressed image, Rudy lies buried beneath all of Bloom's tactics of evasion. His appearance at the end of "Circe" can occur only after every other layer has been exposed and lifted. The work conducted by Freud, Becker, Davis, Heidegger, and Sartre should provide a quick way to understand why the issue at the bottom of Bloom's psyche is death, and why there should be such a meticulous evacuation of everything from an omnipotent identity to a subservient sex-slave. Camus would have us believe that Bloom's lucid and contemplative manner is a means of "defeating death" by "correcting creation" (Langer 117). By doing so, he can justify his own life in the face of losing the time-transcending sense that comes with having a son.



Although the boy is dead, and in many ways it would be altogether easier never to contemplate specific details, Sartre's assertion that we must choose an attitude is important in that it suggests that, not only has Bloom adopted an attitude, he has adopted one that still contains love, hope, and compassion strong enough to keep the boy from dying a second death. Bloom knows Rudy is dead, and does not believe in the resurrection, but he does not treat him as a clinical case of death. If Heidegger is correct, then Bloom's willingness to face the destructive finality of death is one of the reasons he has broken free from the world of insensitive men such as Blazes Boylan and The Citizen, and is able to hold Rudy as particular, unique, and beloved. In Bloom's mind, Rudy is not in heaven with the rest of the saints. He is not one of the countless angels, or as Sartre would say, he has not been "dissolved into a mass" (542). He is still Bloom's son and nothing else.

However, the courage to see this reality as it is, without the anesthetic of religion, separates him from *das Man*. Accordingly, he must use all of his Odyssean wiles to avoid the abuse of being an outsider. This abuse inevitably creates the need for a protective omnipotent identity to shield the sensitive and loving ego underneath his public face. But even when this omnipotent identity is installed in all its power, His Most Catholic Majesty decrees that there be "[f]ree money, free rent, free love and a free lay church in a free lay state" (399). This ridiculous but beautiful image of Bloom is an unconscious instantiation of an omnipotent identity that has been tempered by advancement toward Davis' version of an existential ethic by a willingness to suffer, even in the face of violence. The omnipotent identity is not the sum of Leopold Bloom; it is only a piece, and even that small portion is benevolent. He does indeed seek to flee from

the painful thoughts and memories of Molly's infidelity and Rudy's death, but who would not? Suppressing pain is only natural; what one does in spite of that is what counts. Bloom does not respond with hate or violence, in spite of having every reason to do so, and in this, he does not participate in the evil of the soul Davis warns us about. Bloom does not identify with his aggressors, he is not given to self-hatred or cruelty, and, triumphantly, he avoids what Davis calls the final outcome of the descent into evil: despair (Davis 170-2).

In spite of being unable to have sex with Molly because the tragedy of death has been welded to that part of their relationship, Bloom is not given over to resentment. This kind of trauma is especially cruel, for if Freud is correct in asserting that the pleasure principle is a reaction against the anxiety produced by the death drive, then fusing sex and death together is an almost impossible wound to overcome. If sex with Molly evokes the fear of death because of its association with Rudy, Bloom has no way to release the tension in his marriage via the pleasure principle without also stirring in him the fear of death. This fear, it would seem, is activated only when it concerns sex with Molly, for we often see Bloom engaging in thoughts about sex. However, this is to be expected because of the specifics of the trauma. Bennett has pointed out that Bloom feels a sense of personal failure as a man because of Rudy's birth defects (Bennett 95-6). Thus, sex with Molly in particular, and the possibility of having another child triggers Bloom's anxiety in such a way that he cannot escape his dilemma. In every way, Bloom has been stripped bare of all that lends man respectability. Internally and externally, he has faced the kind of rejection that drove Lear insane. Yet Bloom goes on, loving to the best of his ability. At the end of the novel, he has not given in to hatred or despair, and

we expect that he will continue to live, hustling through the streets of Dublin, canvassing for ads, and doing good turns for his fellow man. In spite of all, he will remain standing, as Becker would say, without “ ‘cultural lendings’ . . . naked in the storm of life” (86).

## CHAPTER V

### “A MAN OF TIMID COURAGE”

I do not wish to insist that Joyce had a precise schema in mind that preordained the inclusion of every detail used in this thesis. A fully developed formal logic would not have been necessary, for, like dreams, the logic of literary images is often purely associative. All that can be safely concluded is that Joyce's keen awareness of the content that passes through the psyche at the level of symbolic thought allowed him to render a remarkably complete picture of the human experience – an experience that invariably includes facing death. To assert that he included these images for the purpose of leading us to this conclusion is not necessary to make the point I am making. It is only necessary to establish that the evidence of Joyce's inclusion of mortality awareness in both narratives is a sign of his understanding that facing death is a uniquely powerful affair and that it should be treated as such in a thoroughgoing treatment of life. His inclusion of the events that are used to establish this conclusion would only be natural for one with Joyce's perspicacity and aims. It is for psychologists and philosophers of consciousness to work out the formal relationship between these images in the way I have described.

However, it cannot be denied that of all the possibilities in Joyce's repertoire, these images were the ones that were included. The creative process is one of careful

selection, in which writers often fashion images based on the ability of those images to illuminate important themes and ideas. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine another reason why these images would have been chosen, if not for their capacity to effectively and coherently reinforce the themes Joyce had in mind when he wrote.

Gerald Bruns reminds us that in Joyce's own conception of the inner life, there is no need to theorize about the unconscious – the mysteries of consciousness are enough (11). For Joyce, it seems as though the world of the repressed is perfectly accessible, and he presents it with as much complexity and clarity as anyone has ever done. In this context it should come as no surprise that the subtle workings of the conscious, pre-conscious, and unconscious life have such a prominent place in the novel. Pulling it forward into our presence, Joyce causes us to see face to face what is normally suppressed, and facing the destructive power of death becomes one of the great themes that is rendered in this epic treatment of the human experience.

Although his almost prophetic anticipation of the significance of death in consciousness and its connection to love is truly remarkable, it may be that Joyce's seemingly supernatural ability to present simultaneously the beauty and horror of our own mortality is the more impressive feat. Sparing nothing, he renders death as it is – powerful, painful, and destructive – yet he is able to leave us with the intense impression that we have been rejuvenated and invigorated by an encounter with life itself. Capturing with perfect eloquence the power of such art, perhaps Joyce heralded his own coming in his oration on Mangan:

As often as human fear and cruelty, that wicked monster begotten by  
luxury, are in league to make life ignoble and sullen and to speak evil of

death the time is come wherein a man of timid courage seizes the keys of hell and of death, and flings them far out into the abyss, proclaiming the praise of life, which the abiding splendour of truth may sanctify, and of death, the most beautiful form of life. (Ellmann 95)

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## **VITA**

Clay Stevens was born in Abilene, Texas, on February 18, 1978, the son of Cathy Dawn Stevens and Danny Merle Stevens. He is also the stepson of Beverly Terry Stevens. He has two brothers, Danny Shane Stevens and Hunter Cole Stevens. After completing his work at O.H. Cooper High School, Abilene, Texas, in 1996, he attended Texas A&M University – College Station. He received the Bachelor of Science from there in August 2000. During the following years, he was employed by a member of the Texas House of Representatives in Austin, Texas, before fleeing to Prague, Czech Republic, where many valid complaints from the neighbors dwelling below led to his and his friends' eviction. After holding various positions in different parts of the country, he entered the Graduate College of Texas State University-San Marcos in August 2005.

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