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Toward a Redefinition of Modernism

William A. Johnsen

Deux dangers ne cessent
de menacer le monde:
l'ordre et le desordre.

P. Valéry

Students of modern literature of whatever period have always justly admired the emerging artist's compulsion to be modern, to make it new. Western civilization's obsessive use of the adjectives "modern" and "new" to describe its current cultural artifacts has never been more prevalent than in what we call, appropriately, the Modern Century. Yet these adjectives also create a climate of relentless avantgardism that makes heavy demands on both emerging and pre-existing art. If our task as modern scholars is to do more than merchandize the newest sensibilities, we must investigate that compulsion to be modern as well as its latest manifestation. In fact, we cannot adequately define our period style until we understand the dynamics of modernism, for every attempt to finish off Modernism becomes another Modernism.

With few exceptions, discussions of the Modern period of Yeats, Eliot, and Joyce are based on Eliot's formulation of the "mythical method." The Moderns faced a world devoid of order; fearing entropy, they intuited, primarily through the potentialities of metaphor and myth, an order behind, within, or above the chaos of modern experience. Yeats' gyres, Eliot's Classicism, Joyce's system of allusion and cyclical history are descriptions of this order released through assuming masks, personae, or other modes of impersonality.

The general movement to define, even circumscribe, the sensibility of the Modern period is complex—generated at times by the feeling that we cannot sustain the special intensity of Modernism, at times by a sense that we have fashioned or must fashion for ourselves a new sensibility different from or in opposition to the canonical Moderns, perhaps, in some cases, by a resigned admission that if we are to get on with the business of describing historical periods we must somewhat regretfully close the door on further specimens.

Harry Levin's 1960 essay "What Was Modernism"¹ is a representative attempt to distinguish Modernism from a postmodern sensibility. Levin feels a kinship with Dryden looking back from the Restoration to the Elizabethans, contrasting earlier strength with later refinement. Levin's gentle farewell to Modernism allows for the new sensibility only the task of consolidating and assimilating the fruits of Modernism, but his intuition that it is time to distinguish the modern from the new sensibility is shared by other students of Modernism with a more energetic sense of what the new sensibility must do.

Charles Olson sought to extend the musical quality of verse reclaimed by Pound and the Imagists to include the breath making the music. At first glance, Olson's 1950 essay "Projective Verse" merely consolidates and assimilates Imagist principles and, in particular, Pound's later conception of the poem as a high energy construct but, in fact, Olson's extension of Modernism subtly but effectively alters the Modernist relation of poet to audience. "What we have suffered from, is manuscript, press, the removal of verse from its producer and its reproducer, the voice, a removal by one, by two removes from its place of origin *and* its destination. For the breath has a double meaning which latin had not yet lost."² Olson extends Imagist esthetics to suggest what the reader is to do with that energy Pound would transfer via the poem. In Modernist esthetics, a poem contains a quantum of energy gotten from somewhere, transferred by an impersonalized or masked poet to an unseen audience. Olson's poet uses the typewriter to program an oral performance of the poem that reproduces, reincarnates his *spiritus* through the reader's own voice. Robert Duncan's "An Owl Is An Only Bird Of Poetry" provides a nearly perfect example of Projectivist esthetics. Next to Figure 2, a drawing of the interlocking fingergrasp necessary to reproduce the hoot of an owl, *mouthpiece pointed towards the reader*, are the lines

The consonants are a church of
hands interlocking, stops
and measures of fingerings
that confine the spirit to
articulations of space and time.³

The hands, like the poem, urge the spirit to a sacrament of immanence: articulations of space and time. The reader is invited to put his mouth to the poem, take a deep breath necessary to play the poet's fingering, thus drawing in the poet's spirit that he will reproduce with his own breath. The implications of this revisioning must be left for another time, but we can note at least how far we have moved from Stephen Dedalus' notion of dramatic art—projectivist esthetics is closer to Longinian ecstasis than Aristotelian catharsis. Contemporary poetry as a whole, in so far as it can be described as more personal than dramatic, attempts to achieve that Longinian relation of poet to audience which Northrop Frye describes as an "ideal union in which poet, poem, and reader participate."

William Spanos has distinguished the modern from the postmodern imagination by their attitude towards time. For Spanos, the moving spirit behind Imagism, Stephen Dedalus' esthetics, Yeats' artifice of eternity, and New Criticism has its

specific source in the obsessive effort of the modern literary imagination to escape the destructive impact of time and change, of which a disintegrating cosmic order has made it acutely and painfully conscious, by way of achieving the timeless eternity of the esthetic moment or, rather, of "spatial form."⁴

Thus, argues Spanos, the Moderns' interest in Worringer's theory of abstraction and empathy: man, at home in the world, imitates its natural forms; at odds with a dreadful world, he prefers a geometric art. The choice between empathy with a hospitable world and transcendence of a hostile world avoids the third possibility of encountering a dreadful world that the postmodern imagination is now and should continue to explore through an art that confronts rather than flees from time.

Iris Murdoch, in "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited,"⁵ diagnoses Modern literature as suffering from the pervasive influence of Symbolists like Eliot, Hulme, and Richards who believed that art had been erroneously conceived in human terms. What they wanted, she argues, were small, clean, resonant, self-contained things of which the image or the symbol was the type: art, including literature, should be the creation of such unique self-contained things. The motive for this purity is a fear of contingency, a yearning to pierce through the messy phenomenal world to

some perfect and necessary form and order. The self-contained art work is an analogon for the good man, the self-contained individual. Modern literature presents us with the triumph of myth as a solipsistic form. Modern Man is Totalitarian Man, alone, intolerant toward the messiness of experience and complex, contingent other selves. For the Modern novel, a tightly wrought Symbolist pseudo-poem which extends the author's thinly disguised fantasies and obsessions for private contemplation, Murdoch would substitute a novel open to the undramatic messiness of existence, and complex, contingent other selves that are not mere reflections of the author's troubled psyche. Jake Donaghue, the first person narrator (conventionalized author) of *Under the Net*, Miss Murdoch's first novel, discovers that his compulsion to see himself as the center of a vast symbolic drama has obscured his perception of others. He learns that he must stop projecting his own plot onto other lives if he is to see them at all. He gives up self-definition for vulnerability, sensitivity, and a sense of wonder towards others.

Richard Wasson has used Murdoch, Robbe-Grillet, John Barth, and Thomas Pynchon to characterize the new sensibility of the late fifties and early sixties as "antimyth and antimetaphor."

Contemporary literature reacts against the literature we call modern, the literature represented in English by Yeats, Eliot, and Joyce, in French by Proust, in German by Hesse. Contemporary writers are skeptical of modernist notions of metaphor as a species of supra-rational truth that unifies paradoxical opposites and modernist conceptions of myth which makes it a principle of order for art and of discipline for the subjective self.⁶

Unification, order, discipline, keep the self isolated from an alien world. The Contemporaries would exchange the totalitarian esthetic of the Moderns for an openness to the undramatic relationships between the subjective self, and the world of other men and things. The new sensibility represents an epistemological break with the canonical Moderns, but on a deeper level it is another symptom of our compulsion to be new: postmodernism, out-moderning the moderns.

The Contemporary strategies of antimyth, antimetaphor, being against interpretation, and postmodernism, have a deceptively obvious theoretical similarity; all define themselves by rejecting earlier modes of thought, especially modes peculiar to the Moderns of the early twentieth century. The negative prefix often defines the newest sensibility; Beckett emphasizes that his work is not Joycean, Murdoch calls for a novel opposed to the Modernist delight in order and myth, Robbe-Grillet calls

metaphor into question, Susan Sontag is against interpretation, William Hamilton says that the new optimism was born the day T.S. Eliot died.⁷

The new sensibility consistently defines itself by characterizing pre-existing works as old, repressive, and neurotic, then rejecting these works for new works which will provide or make possible what the pre-existing works repressed. A classic Oedipal drama: the tyrannical father and rebellious son fight to save culture from outrage.

The work of anthropologists, literary critics, and linguists, within the structuralist movement, suggests that the opposition of postmoderns to Moderns contains one of the most typical gestures of the human mind. Many structuralists theorize that man compulsively orders his world by means of differentiation and binary opposition. Edmund Leach has suggested the color spectrum as a useful pedagogical model for explaining these two terms.⁸ Man differentiates seven primary colors by ignoring the way each color blends insensibly into the next color. These differentiated colors are further opposed for the sake of further order: red/green, black/white. Structuralists who see this technique as the primary strategy of the human mind have sought the binary opposites common to most cultures, such as hot and cold, raw and cooked. The presence of common underlying structures reveals that opposites such as black and white are inverted mirror images of each other, mutually dependent, ordered by a common point of view (the absence or presence of light).

Contemporaries reject Modernist use of metaphor, history, and myth to support a totalitarian obsession with order, by embracing the freedom of disorder. Their interest in contingency and disorder reveals their attempt to become truly new, to escape what the structuralists see as the common element of all thought: structure, order, and myth. Edward Said, reviewing Lévi-Strauss' *The Savage Mind*, calls this compulsion for order that structuralism formulates and perpetuates "totalitarianism of mind":

the structure's impulse to totalization derives from the logical observation of the rule of the excluded middle: if there is order and meaning, it must be everywhere. Conversely, if there is *no* order, there can be no order at all. There is no third possibility. The mind elects the first alternative, perhaps because it cannot tolerate "the blank stare" of a "virgin landscape . . . so monotonous as to deprive [even] its wildness of all meaning."⁹

Said's description of Lévi-Strauss' system helps us to recognize the underlying principles of the compulsion to be modern. The postmodern sensibility defines itself by differentiating itself from its immediate ancestors, and placing itself in opposition to them.¹⁰ The postmodern

conception of Modernism parallels the first alternative Said describes; the order and meaning created or perceived by the poet is expanded over the world. The new sensibility sees itself as exploring the second possibility mentioned above; the lack of personal order is expanded to suggest there is no order at all. Structuralism reveals that these two choices of order or disorder are binary opposites. The Contemporaries are still participating in the closed systems of structure, order, and myth. Their definitions of the new sensibility depend on the old sensibility the way a prefix depends on a noun or verb: disorder, antimetaphor, antimyth. The new is incomprehensible without the old; the new is the old turned upside down or profaned.

A more rewarding approach for modern scholars, especially those with new sensibilities, is not to reject Modernism, but to reread the canonical Moderns through the sensibilities of the Contemporaries. A Contemporary reader, distrustful of the uses of history, metaphor, and myth, finds that same mistrust in Modern writers—finds, in fact, the image of man in Modern Literature confronted by the same polarized alternatives of order or disorder, knowledge or experience, Aristotle or Longinus, Classicism or Romanticism, art or life, speech or silence, faced by the Contemporaries before they choose the second of these opposed terms.

By studying the compulsion to be modern, as well as the latest manifestation of Modernism, we begin to perceive some underlying connections between Moderns and Contemporaries necessary to start writing the literary history of the Modern Century. If one avowed purpose of a modern work is to escape its predecessors, another effect of Modernism is to liberate unperceived insights into pre-existing works: the Contemporaries' aversion to the totalitarian esthetic, sharpened by the insights of structuralism, gives us a new look at the Modern period itself. Newly sensitized to the Moderns' own mistrust of myth and metaphor, we find, allowing for individual permutations, Moderns such as James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, and D.H. Lawrence articulating a common, three-fold pattern of experience: (1) Man suffers the frustrating disparity between a fallen outer world of disorder and a more perfect inner world; he exchanges the soft, wet outer world of disorder, contingency and chaos for the hard, dry inner world of metaphor, myth, and history. This is the process that Ortega y Gasset called dehumanization, and Worringer the urge to abstraction, the withdrawal from the natural world towards geometric form. This is the movement in Yeats towards Byzantium, Stephen Dedalus' flight into the world of myth in Joyce, the quest for nonhuman order in Eliot, and the impulse to theorize in Lawrence: 'you are Gothic,' Paul Morel tells Miriam, 'but I am Norman.' (2) Man realizes both the falsification of reality that order irrevocably produces, and his loss of immediate contact with humans and things; confronted with a world becoming ethereal and narcissistic, he returns to re-examine the real, the natural, the unordered. These two movements are represented in Joyce

by Stephen's flight from and return to Ireland in *Ulysses* ("Dublin I have much to learn"). In Yeats, by the waxing and the waning of the moon in "The Phases of the Moon" ("Before the full/It sought itself and afterwards the world"). In Eliot, by the recognition of narcissistic withdrawal in "Ash Wednesday" ("And I pray that I may forget/These matters that with myself I too much discuss") that activates a return to the world. In Lawrence, by a return to sensuality after a surfeit of self-indulgent theory: Paul with Clara, Birkin with Ursula, Kate with Don Cipriano. (3) Facing again two polarized choices, man tries to envision an excluded middle when he comes to understand what the structuralists understand: opposed choices are inverted mirror images of each other, mutually dependent, ordered by a common point of view. Existing between polarities, the excluded middle or third possibility cannot be grasped with the same sureness as the first two stages, but it is glimpsed in Yeats' ability to view the polarities of Nature and Byzantium from some middle ground; in Joyce, the excluded middle is coincidence, the third possibility between order and disorder; in Eliot, sitting still at the still point of the turning world; in Lawrence, the impulse of some protagonists like Paul Morel and Birkin to move beyond the tyranny of polarities set at the end of the novel, of others, like Kate, a vague dissatisfaction with a set of polarized or closed possibilities.

Thus a Contemporary rereading of the Moderns suggests the coherency of the early Modern period and, better still, the Moderns offer to both the Contemporaries and pre-Moderns a glimpse of a third possibility won from their own confrontation with the totalitarian esthetic of differentiation and binary opposition. Now I shall suggest a Contemporary rereading of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus that reveals more completely the three-fold experiential pattern of Modernism and suggest, in concluding, how the reread Moderns return the favor, making possible new perceptions of Contemporary art.

Clongowes Wood College clearly represents for Stephen the soft, wet outer world of disorder, contingency, and chaos. While Stephen stands apart from the football game, watching the flight of the "greasy leather orb," his senses still register yesterday's dunking in the square ditch. Wells has caused Stephen to experience what Norman O. Brown would call an excremental vision; Stephen sees Clongowes, as he will later see Ireland, through the turfcoloured bogwater of the square ditch. He feverishly dreams of escaping this world of queer, unreasoning aggression.

Sitting in the study hall he opened the lid of his desk and changed the number pasted up inside from seventyseven to seventysix. But the Christmas vacation was very far away: but one time it would come because the earth moved round always.¹¹

Stephen is consoled when he remembers the world inevitably turns, days pass. He finds relief from a sordid, disordered world by imaginatively removing himself beyond the world until earth, not the cosmos, appears to be rotating.

Imaginatively still in outer space, Stephen continues to experiment with a cosmic view. He looks down at the picture of earth on the first page of his geography book, "a big ball in the middle of clouds." Down the flyleaf he reads his cosmic address, "Stephen Dedalus/Class of Elements/Clongowes Wood College/Sallins/County Kildare/Ireland/Europe/The World/The Universe." Fleming, for a cod, had written a matching entry on the facing page:

Stephen Dedalus is my name,
Ireland is my nation.
Clongowes is my dwellingplace
And heaven my expectation.

Fleming has shrewdly noted the significance of Stephen's entry and parodied his aspirations. Stephen's heavenward flight is mocked by his earthly companions throughout *Portrait*.

Stephen's extended musings on his own flyleaf entry become his characteristic attitude towards earth. Stephen reads the list downward, voyaging from the Class of Elements to The Universe, trying to imagine what was after the universe. Attempting to understand the space that encloses all space, Stephen arrives logically at the being that comprehends all space—God, the first entelechy, form of forms. Although there are different names for God, God is the same God and his real name is God. "It made him very tired to think that way. It made him feel his head very big. He turned over the flyleaf and looked wearily at the green round earth in the middle of the maroon clouds" (256). Stephen looks down upon the earth he has left, weary from thinking like God while still inextricably fixed in his earthly position. This weary contemplative pose compromised by earthly existence grows into a scrupulous disdain for commonness and is perfected in a Flaubertian esthetic.

The trip to Cork with his father further aggravates Stephen's hypersensitivity to the commonplace sordidness about him by documenting the decay of the Dedalus fortunes. Stephen's imagination desublimates the idealized forms of Catholic Ireland to reveal their sordid excremental base. Yet Stephen is also frightened by the interstellar spaces that separate him from his own father.

He heard the sob pass loudly down his father's throat
and opened his eyes with a nervous impulse. The
sunlight breaking suddenly on his sight turned the sky
and clouds into a fantastic world of sombre masses with

lakelike spaces of dark rosy light. His very brain was sick and powerless. He could scarcely interpret the letters of the signboards of the shops. By his monstrous way of life he seemed to have put himself beyond the limits of reality. Nothing moved him or spoke to him from the real world unless he heard in it an echo of the infuriated cries within him. He could respond to no earthly or human appeal, dumb and insensible to the call of summer and gladness and companionship, wearied and dejected by his father's voice. (342-343)

We have already seen how a cosmic view wearies Stephen, but detachment is now felt as a terrifying separation from human contact. Stephen now feels beyond humanity, beyond earth – an outcast from life's feast.

How strange to think of him passing out of existence in such a way, not by death, but by fading out in the sun or by being lost and forgotten somewhere in the universe! It was strange to see his small body appear again for a moment: a little boy in a grey belted suit. His hands were in his side pockets and his trousers were tucked in at the knees by elastic bands. (343-344)

The dunking made Stephen allergic to the mold of Irish decay; the resulting fever burnt out his capacity to live on earth. Stephen envisions this process as myth. The effect of the sunlight breaking suddenly on Stephen's sight recalls the fate of Icarus: Daedalus, trying to save his son (here: "when you kick out for yourself, Stephen," p. 341), unwittingly prepares his destruction. But the image of the boy that fades in the sun is Stephen's creation; Stephen has assumed the role of Daedalus, father and creator, as well as Icarus. Stephen becomes his own father; by creating, extending, then contemplating an image of himself he recreates the father-son relationship in his imagination. He purifies an earthly existence made troublesome by an incapacity to love and accept love from his father, then recreates a more vivid past self by regarding himself in the third person: an impalpable, imperishable, impersonalized portrait of himself. Earlier in Chapter II, Stephen resolved his distance from Emma by purging their nocturnal encounter of its commonness, transforming it into a poem, and rewriting, strengthening their parts. Stephen replaces erotic and familial relations unfulfilled in the real world with more perfect relations conceived, consummated, and contemplated in his imagination.

Finally, Stephen's cosmic perspective is raised to the level of esthetics.

The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak. The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination. The mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished. The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails. (483)

Once again, Stephen has removed himself to a God-like position by refining himself out of earthly existence. The reasons for the rewriting of Stephen Daedalus into Stephen Dedalus must be left for another time and place, but the distinction between the formulation of the artist's role in *Stephen Hero* and *Portrait* represents a more critical understanding of the totalitarian mind. In *Stephen Hero*, the artist must adjust his spiritual eye to the exact focus to perceive an object or human situation reveal its *quidditas*. Life reveals itself to the scrupulous observer; the artist records these epiphanies for the enlightenment and moral elevation of the public. But in *Portrait* the esthetic image is life *purified in and reprojected from* the imagination. The artist confronts not imitations of reality, but extensions of his own imagination that have replaced the world of humans and things.

Ireland does not willingly submit to this purification; Stephen's God-like role is still compromised by earthly existence. An esthetic grounded in Flaubertian scrupulousness and clerical severity ends with "Lady" Boyle's idiosyncrasy of nail paring; a fervent, ritualistic villanelle is interrupted by the memory of the physics hall gibe about ellipsoidal balls; the identification of Cranly as St. John the Precursor is blocked by the memory of Cranly's dark womanish eyes. Stephen can preserve the private world of cosmic significance created by esthetics from the perverting effect of the earthly world of humans and things only by leaving Ireland.

Stephen's return to Dublin in *Ulysses*, on the strength of his father's request ("Mother dying come home father") acknowledges family ties. Stephen is fulfilling his mother's wish in *Portrait* that he learn "away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels" (526) initially in Paris, but more completely at home. Stephen's remorse of conscience over his failure to be a better son to his mother is "pain, that was not *yet* the pain of love" (p. 7, *Italics mine*). In *Ulysses*, Stephen has given up exile to renew contact with men and things: he patiently exposes himself to the law of matter in the Proteus episode, the social graces of urban camaraderie in the Aeolus episode ("Dublin, I have much to learn"), even the treachery of Mulligan and the brutality of Private Carr in the Circe episode as deliberately as he once rejected the material world, trivial

conversation, and another's will to shape their relationship. Stephen now dismisses history as a nightmare, a purifying of human experience to generate a few cryptic sentences: the corpsestrewn plain of Tarentum epiphanized into "another victory like that and we are done for" (25). Stephen now argues for the presence, not the absence of the artist's humanity in his work, in the Scylla and Charybdis episode, and persistently mocks the orders made possible by esthetics, myth, and history.

Stephen is the incarnation of the figure of man in the literature of the Modern period I sketched earlier: (1) He first removed himself from earthly existence because he found it chaotic and obscene; his imagination created a better world by inverting the world he rejected. If earthly existence is soft, moist, and chaotic, Stephen will retreat to a hard, dry, orderly world in his imagination populated with appropriate symbolic companions. (2) He returned to earthly life when he found himself separated from men and things; in *Ulysses* he submits himself indiscriminately to dear dirty Dublin. *Ulysses* develops towards the revelation of Stephen's initial withdrawal from reality in *Portrait* (stage 1), and his subsequent immersion in reality in *Ulysses* (stage 2), as binary opposites in a closed system. Stephen can't escape reality, yet he can't seem to get any closer to it either. The task of *Ulysses* is to suggest a third alternative to these two opposed choices.

Stephen expresses his commitment to earthly existence and disaffection for myth, history, and transcendental esthetics in the Library and, such are the ironies of *Ulysses*, the Brothel. His theory of the artist's relation to his work is the binary opposite of A.E. Russell's position, which has similarities to Stephen's earlier theory in *Portrait*. A.E. stirs the whirlpool of narcissistic, purifying contemplation of formless spiritual essences. Stephen bases the artist's creations on the rock of experiential knowledge. Yet his philosophical dialogue on the primacy of earthly experience does not, as he had hoped, bring him closer to the humanity before him: "What have I learned? Of them? Of me?" (212/215). He is still in a closed system, where opposed positions are interchangeable. When Mulligan enters the Library, Stephen's position, apparently the opposite of Russell's, is now identified with it. Stephen now represents the whirlpool of all esthetic and philosophical speculation, whether transcendental or experiential, while Mulligan is the rock of sense experience itself. The only constant is his isolation: "My will: his will that confronts me. Seas between" (214/217). Significantly, if ambiguously, Bloom, like Odysseus, marks out a middle course between Stephen and Mulligan at the end of the chapter, passing out of the Library between them.

The underlying similarity of Stephen's new commitment to and earlier disdain for earthly existence is re-emphasized in the Circe episode. As in *Portrait*, Stephen must pour his ideas into the skeptical ears of

Lynch. On the surface, Stephen is renouncing his earlier belief in esthetics and myth for interpreting the world; Stephen now claims that interpretation is particular and limited, not universal. The psalms that Stephen chants to Lynch are "susceptible of notes or modes as far apart as hypophrygian and mixolydian and of texts so divergent as priests haihooping round David's that is Circe's or what am I saying Cere's altar and David's tip from the stable to his chief bassoonist about his almightiness" (493/504). Stephen's miscue substantiates his theory; the drunken interpolation of Circe's name is quite appropriate to his situation thus changing, for a while, the meaning of the psalm. This is the rationale behind the dialectics of the Library. Each reader creates his own Shakespeare: Jew, Irishman, homosexual, shrewridden.

But Stephen's whetstone (Lynch's cap) perceives the underlying principles of binary opposition below his promiscuous theorizing. "*(With saturnine spleen.)* Bah. It is because it is. Woman's reason. Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet. Death is the highest form of life. Bah!" (493/504). Challenged, Stephen loses another dagger definition – his theory of the relation of experience to selfhood.

What went forth to the ends of the world to traverse not
itself. God, the sun, Shakespeare, a commercial traveller,
having itself traversed in reality itself, becomes that self.
Wait a moment. Damn that fellow's noise in the street.
Self which itself was ineluctably preconditioned to
become. *Ecco!* (494/505)

Indiscriminate submission to experience will confirm the self potentially present in the imagination: "If Socrates leave his house today he will find the sage seated on his doorsteps. If Judas go forth tonight it is to Judas his steps will tend" (210/213). Stephen will encounter the world like Mallarmé's Hamlet, "lisant au livre de lui-meme." Stephen has divided the world of human experience into self (Stephen's) and not-self. In a closed system of binary opposition, opposed terms are inversions of each other, and interchangeable: notself can become self, God can become dog.

The special character of the totalitarian imagination is to expand its own private experience and perception into an assumed general condition. In *Portrait*, Stephen's totalitarian imagination expanded his personal sense of violation until all Ireland played a part in his drama of heroic rebellion, betrayal, and exile. In *Ulysses*, Stephen apparently gives up perceiving order in or imposing his own order upon the world for the sake of encountering it, but he is still totalizing his own experience of the intractability of the world to interpretation as a general condition. Further, Stephen isolates himself once more by dramatizing the perceived separateness of self and other as an agon of the self intuiting itself by encountering the notself.

Stephen's failure to encounter reality leaves him as weary and oversensitive as his failure to escape reality left him, at the beginning of *Ulysses*. In the Cabman shelter, Stephen turns aside Bloom's symbolic victory over the Citizen: "*Ex quibus*, Stephen mumbled in a noncommittal accent, their two or four eyes conversing, *Christus* or Bloom his name is, or after all, any other, *secundem carnem*" (627/643). Tolerance for the particularity and perceptions of others has slackened to a feeling that earthly existence makes any symbolic identification gratuitous. Stephen is still unhappy, alone, unable to live apart from or in the world. Yet by the end of *Ulysses*, Stephen's illtemper and weariness have been assuaged by that good Samaritan, Leopold Bloom.

If Bloom and Stephen first speak at cross purposes, they eventually establish a mode of conversation that allows easy commerce of their differing opinions. "Was the guest conscious of and did he acknowledge these marks of hospitality? His attention was directed to them by his host jocosely and he accepted them seriously as they drank in jocoserious silence Epp's massproduct the creature cocoa" (661/677). Bloom and Stephen establish an ambience that makes gestures of affection and graceful acceptance of those gestures possible. By mocking the seriousness of his gesture to disarm it, Bloom makes it possible for Stephen to accept it seriously; together, jocoseriously, they drink their cocoa. Whatever its importance in an elaborate symbolic pattern, Stephen's quiet conversation with Bloom in the kitchen tells us something about Stephen's development as a human being. Molly draws the correct conclusion: "I hope hes not that stuck up university student sort no otherwise he wouldn't go sitting down in the kitchen with him taking Eppss cocoa" (760/775).

Yet if Stephen can find companionship with Bloom, he also recognizes that Bloom, like Myles Crawford, Mulligan, Haines, and his mother, have asked him to play a prescribed role in a plot designed to order or reorder their lives. Bloom's plot, perceptively unravelled by Stanley Sultan in *The Argument of Ulysses*,¹² is to get Molly interested in Stephen so that she will drop Boylan, and to catch Stephen for Milly by letting Molly seduce him.

Stephen does not accept Bloom's entire proposal. He considers teaching Molly Italian in return for singing lessons, and participating in intellectual dialogues with Bloom. But the offer of a room in the Bloom household was "promptly, inexplicably, with amicality, gratefully . . . declined" (680/695). Stephen does not give himself up indiscriminately to Bloom precisely because he recognizes Bloom as a human being with his own aspirations and problems. Bloom can never be only a symbol of paternal affection, raw experience, or Hebraism in Stephen's plot because he himself is generating symbols and plots.

Stephen shrewdly decides to live elsewhere; to avoid being tyrannized by Bloom's imagination, Stephen must find new forms for their

discourse. The counterproposals to Bloom's offer of sanctuary "were alternately advanced, accepted, modified, declined, restated in other terms, reaccepted, ratified, reconfirmed" (680/695). Stephen accepts Bloom provisionally, but he will create new forms of companionship as the human situation requires. It is Stephen's decision to negotiate, rather than control or be controlled by Bloom, that offers a way out of binary opposition.

Stephen has achieved the state of mind necessary for liberation from the totalitarian frame: disintegration of obsession. Stephen now has the freedom to move among pockets of order and disorder, companionship and betrayal, without obsessively totalizing these experiences. Bloom offers companionship, advice, shelter, and enslavement; Stephen must recognize these various and conflicting possibilities, separate in Bloom what he wants from what he doesn't want, redeem whatever is worth redeeming, and let the rest go. Similarly, Stephen's growing awareness of his mother's love for him leads him to accept, after much agony, the tyranny of her influence. When Stephen leaves Bloom, they hear the bells of St. George's Church. For Stephen, the bells assume a special significance. "Liliata rutilantium. Turma circumdet./lubilantium te virginum. Chorus excipiat" (688/704). By making the association of bells, death agony, and the special prayer for the dying, Stephen is at least considering, and perhaps belatedly fulfilling, his mother's last wish that he pray for her. Stephen has resigned himself to the form in which his mother's affection can assert itself. Remorse is the only way Stephen can begin to feel his love for his mother. This tyranny may be painful, but it is the pain of love.

If each character in *Ulysses* takes part in an elaborate plot based on *The Odyssey*, as Stuart Gilbert, following Joyce's lead, first showed us, if much of the book seems unordered, as many sceptics since Carl Jung have suggested, another mode of human possibilities in *Ulysses* is coincidence — the hundreds of parallels in dreams, idle thoughts, gestures, encounters, and acquaintances that, once recognized, proliferate the novel. Coincidence is the excluded middle between order and chaos. Coincidence allows one to recognize a partial, temporary order without totalizing or tyrannizing human experience as orderly or, when the order disappears, chaotic. Coincidence prepares many of the significant human encounters in *Ulysses*.

This line of reasoning would suggest an adjustment of critical opinion on *Ulysses*. Much criticism on Joyce has been totalitarian: in *Ulysses*, jewgreek meets greekjew. The novel is chaotic or orderly, the Homeric parallels ennoble or mock the characters, incidents of plot, character, and narration are primarily surface or symbol. *Ulysses* must now be approached with a third alternative that recognizes the three modes of human possibility: order, disorder, and coincidence — the partial orders with ragged edges, achieved through juxtaposition, whose spirit defies

totalization. Richard Ellmann, in *James Joyce*, repeatedly emphasizes Joyce's own delight in coincidence. When we accept the possibilities of coincidence we need no longer identify James A. Jackson (Robert M. Adams' nutshell example of surface mistakenly read as symbol)¹³ as either surface or symbol, not even as at once surface and symbol, but as another quality of significance that passes beyond surface and symbol. James A. Jackson as a cryptic reference to Joyce (Jack Joyce's son), or a Dublin bicycle racer who lived circa 1904, is less interesting than the name as a fortunate coincidence. When we argue that Stephen is reconciled to the Father in Bloom as Shakespeare, Odysseus, Noah, or that Stephen (or Bloom) is ignorant of the real significance of their encounter, we lose the resonance *Ulysses* achieves by moving beyond these two opposed choices. Bloom can, and can't be Stephen's Father, but this is paradoxical only for someone who believes Bloom can be only one or the other, or, even, only both.

It is here that I would, belatedly, recognize the fine rereadings of early Modernism suggested by postmodern critics¹⁴ as I try to clarify by contrast the redefinition of modernism I am suggesting. Richard Poirier has established continuities between Modernism and postmodern attitudes by distinguishing Modernism from the interpretative criticism it usually receives.

The literary organizations they adumbrate only to mimic, the schematizations they propose only to show the irrelevance of them to the actualities of experience — these have been extracted by commentators from the contexts that erode them and have been imposed back on the material in the form of designs or meanings.¹⁵

The climate of compulsive avantgardism that encourages new artists to set themselves in binary opposition to their antecedents generates, in critics sensitive to their own times, a sympathetic rereading of the literature the avante garde would supersede. The best postmodern critics stand in polar opposition to earlier criticism of and during the Modern period, not the Moderns themselves. However grateful we are to critics like Poirier, Spanos, and Wasson, for rescuing Moderns like T.S. Eliot from the charge of Fascist esthetics, and making apparent the value of Modernism for a postmodern sensibility, our rereadings of Modernism must ultimately come to terms with the original contexts of these works to keep from subsuming Modernism under our own postmodern mythology. The attitude of "self parody" (Poirier's term) towards totalitarian esthetic and philosophical structures in the monuments of Modernism must be squared with the undeniable compulsion for order exhibited by Joyce and other moderns and perceived by New Criticism.

I have suggested that we can see both the quest for order and an attempt to escape order in Modernism because the Moderns, intuiting the insidious relationship between two apparently opposed choices, were feeling their way towards an understanding of, and escape from, the techniques of binary opposition which characterize the totalitarian mind. It is clear that criticism must now escape the tyranny of binary opposition. Postmodern critics, released from merely contemplating extensions of themselves by seeing their preoccupations within the context of Modernism, can return to their Contemporaries with new eyes and, possessed of a fuller conception of the Modern Century, they can go back to Milton and Homer, find and then lose themselves once again.

Let me sketch quickly what a reentry into postmodernism from a rereading of Modernism might look like. Newly educated in the possibility of the excluded middle between order and chaos in Joyce, the sign of postmodern esthetics is no longer contingency, antimyth, and antimetaphor, but coincidence. Here Carl Jung's essay "On Synchronicity" and Borges' whole corpus inherit the center of a redefined postmodernism, ranging from a metaphysical attitude towards coincidence in Kesey and Burroughs, towards urbane acceptance in Burgess and Barth.¹⁶ Then, our understanding of and potential liberation from the techniques of binary opposition that characterize the totalitarian mind (gained from a study of the literature of the Modern Century) might discover Milton threading his way between the narcissistic contemplation of one's own creations inherent in both Metaphysical wit and Spenserian copiousness, or Odysseus escaping Achilles' enslavement to the opposed choices of a short glorious life and a long uneventful life, by steering a middle course, being both father and son, patrician and warrior, and much else besides, *polutropos*. Again, we must not give up the worthy task of retrieving, as best we can, the galaxy of conditions that allows Homer to happen only once, for an indiscriminant modernism. Only when we recognize the Greek's Homer is fulfilled, but not completed, in our Homer, just as the Greek's Homer keeps our Homer from becoming a narcissistic extension of ourselves, do we move beyond the binary opposition of synchrony and diachrony – works frozen in a timeless presence, or condemned to die because they once lived.

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NOTES

- 1 *Varieties of Literary Experience*, ed. Stanley Burnshaw (New York, 1962), pp. 307-319.
- 2 *Poetry New York*, 3, 1950, rpt. in *The New American Poetry*, ed. Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), pp. 392-393.
- 3 *The New American Poetry*, p. 43.
- 4 *JAAC*, (Fall, 1970), p. 91.
- 5 *Yale Review*, XLIX (1959), pp. 247-271.
- 6 "Notes on a New Sensibility," *Partisan Review*, XXXVI (1969), 460-77.
- 7 *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1966), pp. 157-169.
- 8 *Claude Lévi-Strauss* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971).
- 9 "The Totalitarianism of Mind," *Kenyon Review*, XXIX (March 1967), pp. 256-68.
- 10 "This means that the conventions of avant-garde art, in a conscious or unconscious way, are directly and rigidly determined by an inverse relation to traditional conventions. Thanks to this relation, a paradoxical one, the conventions of avant-garde art are often as easily deduced as those of the academy: their deviation from the norm is so regular and normal a fact that it is transformed into a canon no less exceptional than predictable. Disorder becomes a rule when it is opposed in a deliberate and symmetrical manner to a pre-established order." Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, tr. Gerald Fitzgerald (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 56.
- 11 *The Portable James Joyce*, ed. Harry Levin (New York: The Viking Press, 1969), p. 254. Further references to *Portrait* are to this edition; page numbers in parentheses appear after the reference. Page numbers after quotes from *Ulysses* are to the 1934 Modern Library edition.
- 12 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964).
- 13 *Surface and Symbol* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. xv-xviii.
- 14 See, for example, the following articles on T.S. Eliot: William V. Spanos, " 'Wanna Go Home, Baby?': *Sweeney Agonistes* As Drama Of The Absurd," *PMLA*, vol. 85, no. 1 (January 1970), pp. 8-20; Richard Wasson, " 'Like a burnished throne': T.S. Eliot and the Demonism of Technology," *The Centennial Review*, XVII, No. 3 (Summer 1969), pp. 302-316; "The Rhetoric of Theatre: The contemporaneity of T.S. Eliot," *Drama Survey*, 6, (1968), pp. 231-243.
- 15 "The Literature of Waste: Eliot, Joyce, and Others," *The Performing Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 45.

- 16.1 "And then they [Kesey and Merry Pranksters] play a tape against a television show. That is, they turn on the picture on the T.V., the *Ed Sullivan Show*, say, but they turn off the sound and play a tape of, say, Babbs and somebody rapping off each other's words. The picture of the *Ed Sullivan Show* and the words on the tape suddenly force your mind to reach for connections between two vastly different orders of experience." Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, Inc., 1968), p. 125.
- 16.2 "I was sitting in a lunchroom in New York having my doughnuts and coffee. I was thinking that one *does* feel a little boxed in New York, like living in a series of boxes. I looked out the window and there was a great big Yale truck. That's cut-up — a juxtaposition of what's happening outside and what you're thinking of.

 For example, a friend of mine has a loft apartment in New York. He said, 'every time we go out of the house and come back, if we leave the bathroom door open, there's a rat in the house.' I look out the window, there's Able Pest Control." William Burroughs, "The Art of Fiction XXXVI," *Paris Review*, XXXV (Fall 1965), pp. 26-27.
- 16.3 Miles Farber watches TV at the Algonquin Hotel, changing channels. "Then another channel, and a red Indian in a smart suit and hexagonal glasses was a guest on a Show, and he was talking about the Weskerini and Nipissing tribes that now, alas, lived on only in the names of certain pseudo-Indian curios manufactured in Wisconsin. Those were, I remembered, members of the Algonquin family: exquisite coincidence. West 44th Street was Indian territory; a few doors away stood the Iriquois, named for the traditional enemies of the Algonquin nation." Anthony Burgess, *M/F* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), pp. 10-11.
- 16.4 "I smiled and walked on. Nature, coincidence, can often be a heavy-handed symbolizer. She seems at times fairly to club one over the head with significance such as this clumsy "life-in-the-face-of-death" scenario, so obvious even in its details that it was embarrassing. One is constantly being confronted with a sun that bursts from behind the clouds just as the home team takes the ball; ominous rumblings of thunder when one is brooding desultorily at home; magnificent sunrises on days when one has resolved to mend one's ways; hurricanes that demolish a bad man's house and leave his good neighbor's untouched, or vice-versa; Race Streets marked SLOW; Cemetary Avenues marked ONE WAY. The man whose perceptions are not so rudimentary, whose palate is attuned to subtler dishes, can only smile uncomfortably and walk away, reminding himself, if he is wise, that good taste is, after all, only a human invention." John Barth, *The Floating Opera* (New York: Avon Books 1956), pp. 116-117.