

"Am I a father? If I were?":

Stephen Dedalus' Mixed Efforts to Redefine Fatherhood in "Scylla and Charybdis"

by

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*For my parents, who have helped me through everything.*



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## Abstract

Stephen Dedalus, in his journey to become an artist and mature young man in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, grapples significantly with the will of his father, Simon Dedalus. As the novels progress, this important struggle quickly becomes a symbolic and abstract one, evolving beyond the dictations of Simon Dedalus and becoming a broader struggle against a powerful and abstract father figure who dictates to a reluctant son. In this thesis, I examine how Stephen's frustrations take root in imaginative threats in Cork, how he attempts to overcome them by redefining time and relegating Shakespeare to a new hybrid role, and the results that bring him to a complicated sort of peace.

In Chapter 1, I examine *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to observe how Stephen's frustrations with an overpowering abstract father are presented to the reader through interactions with his father Simon Dedalus. I discover that Simon Dedalus is often presented in artistic terms, as a storyteller, writer, and inscriber of his son. Joyce presents the "Foetus" scene in Cork as an early moment when Stephen apprehends the oppressive will of his father, and thus it functions as the opening site of that conflict.

In Chapter 2, I argue that "Scylla and Charybdis" is the battleground where Stephen attempts to conquer the oppressive will of an abstract fatherhood with a sequence of arguments that redefine fatherhood. Stephen first reflects on the effects of time, which make fathers into ghostlike figures. He then considers how that new definition changes the relationship between the past and the future, and finally the resulting inversion of time which makes fathers into hybrids of fathers and son. The resulting effect is seen in Stephen's presentation of Shakespeare, as Stephen reduces this symbolic father into a hybrid of father and son while simultaneously aligning himself with the playwright. In these ways, Stephen is able to make himself partially a father, while not fully transcending the status of son.

In Chapter 3, I examine Stephen's new position at the end of "Scylla and Charybdis" that results from his efforts in the episode. Stephen is able to undo his status as strictly a son, but joins with Shakespeare in being a son and father, but not wholly the artistic father as he wishes to be. Stephen concludes in light of this progress, among other things, that he will "[c]ease to strive." This conclusion, though it represents a new, more healthy outlook for Stephen, is also accompanied by complex costs of its own, including the entrance of a problematic new father in Bloom, and his ultimate rejection of his Shakespeare theory.

As a whole, Stephen's crusade against being defined as a son takes "Scylla and Charybdis" as its crucial moment, and I argue, in light of its terms and results, that the hopeful reader can view it as a sort of success, if even a notably limited one.

Keywords: father-son relationship, *bildungsroman*, modernism, stream-of-consciousness



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Short Titles

*P*: Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2000.

*U*: Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. Edited by Jeri Johnson. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2008.



## Introduction

In the novels *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, James Joyce presents us one of the most complex protagonists in English literature: Stephen Dedalus. With so much material on Stephen, the naive reader might assume that after a few hundred pages Stephen would be easy to understand. He or she would be surprised to find that the opposite is true. Stephen is constantly surprising readers by dealing with his problems in unexpected ways. In his creation of Stephen, Joyce does not create a simple character who handles his problems in a straightforward fashion, but rather a character who dodges, convolutes, and questions the sources of his anxiety. His handling of fatherhood is one example. At a moment of climax in the “Scylla and Charybdis” episode of *Ulysses*, James Joyce presents Stephen Dedalus as exhibiting just such a convoluted handling of fatherhood. Stephen remembers a tender moment with his father, but then abruptly begins to rail *against* fatherhood to his listeners:

Hurrying to her squalid deathlair from gay Paris on the quayside I touched his hand. The voice, new warmth, speaking. Dr Bob Kenny is attending her. The eyes that wish me well. But do not know me.

—A father, Stephen said, battling against hopelessness, is a necessary evil.

(*U*, 198)

This is one of so many moments where our access to Stephen’s thoughts betrays him. His railing against fatherhood is in line with his argument elsewhere but, based on our knowledge of his tender memory just moments before, the reader can intuit there is something greater at stake. And, as if that contrast was not enough, we later observe Stephen violently question himself, asking “What the hell are you driving at?” (*U*, 199).

Clearly something complex is happening here, as Stephen reacts emotionally to the intrusion of his father into his thoughts. That reaction hints at the heightened stakes at play in this episode based on his relationship with his father. There are many critics who focus on Stephen's argumentative method in this episode, or his relation to his audience, rather than the underlying dialogue on fatherhood. For example, Margot Norris in her essay "The Stakes of Stephen's Gambit," presents the central conflict that Stephen faces in this episode as impressing his literary audience: "The stakes of his maneuver are high because his discourse is designed to display his intellectual merit and earn him admiration and support from a group of well-respected Irish editors, authors, and intellectuals" (Norris, 43). There is certainly a great deal to be said about Stephen's argument and performance in this episode, and much about his demeanor suggests that he does indeed care about what these literary figures think of him, as when he acts "superpolitely" (*U*, 177) and considers his method when he "unsheath[s] your dagger definitions" (*U*, 178). Norris' focus is on Stephen's interaction with these men, saying that the greatest stakes of this episode have to deal with impressing them. That is, they are the gateway to Stephen's maturing as an artist: "Stephen's soul is no longer young and requires graduation to a more mature and serious plane of consciousness, as it were, although the question of whether Eglinton and A.E. will fill in as new sympathetic ears and supporters remains a challenge" (Norris, 45). But instead of covering the well-trod ground of Stephen's argumentative method, I will in this thesis examine the interior dialogue that occurs over the course of this episode: Stephen's handling of his problems with the father.

The presence of fatherhood in "Scylla and Charybdis" and indeed throughout Stephen's narrative is obvious, and there has certainly been quite a critical conversation surrounding it,

especially in “Scylla and Charybdis.” Though several scholars arrive at a similar sense of Stephen becoming both father and son, they often fail to acknowledge the particulars of this process: how does Stephen arrive at his frustrations with his father? Why does he deal so often with complicated forms of fatherhood, like ghosts or an emasculated Shakespeare? And finally, what do Stephen muted reflections at the end of ‘Scylla and Charybdis’ ultimately say about those efforts and the complicated situation he has arrived at?

James Maddox sees Stephen in the “Scylla and Charybdis” episode as navigating between paradoxes like Odysseus through the titular perils:

[W]hile the account of Shakespeare’s life would seem to argue for the persistence of the past, the comments on fatherhood would seem to deny that persistence. Actually, Stephen is aware of the opposed ideas and is steering between them. (Maddox, 105)

Maddox concludes that the contradictions are solved by Stephen’s considerations of time, summed up neatly by the phrase “I,I and I.I.” (*U*, 182), and by a realization that father and son might represent “phases of the self,” which might both be found in Stephen (Maddox, 106-107). I find Maddox’s claim here convincing, but find his arrival to it to be a bit muddled. What I hope to accomplish here is a more in-depth analysis of how Stephen achieves this sense, and whether it can actually be viewed as a resolution.

Ann Kimble Loux points to something similar regarding Stephen’s handling of fatherhood in her essay, “‘Am I a father? If I were?’: A Trinitarian Analysis of the Growth of Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses*.” She argues that the development of Stephen can be marked by his passage through several different trinities of characters as the novel progresses (Loux, 281). Though some of Loux’s trinities are a little heavy handed, this method of tracking Stephen

growth is basically sound. Loux identifies Stephen as progressing from a Trinity of himself as the son under his mother and father to, by the end of “Scylla and Charybdis,” a Trinity of Stephen, Shakespeare, and Bloom (Loux, 289). Loux’s most valuable observation is that Stephen’s shifted position at the end of “Scylla and Charybdis” might be with individuals of complexly mixed father and sonhood like Shakespeare and Bloom. Though I build significantly on the conclusions of Maddox and Loux, I find they fall short of fully explaining the changes that occur in that episode. They correctly sense that something interesting is going on, but I think there is still more to be said, holes to be filled in the specific dynamics of this episode. How does Stephen accomplish these moves? And is he satisfied with them by the end of the episode? Can we be satisfied?

My mission in this thesis is to uncover what is the specific nature of Stephen’s relationship to fatherhood, how is it dealt with in “Scylla and Charybdis,” and the position in which Stephen ends these efforts. It seems clear from several different places that something significant occurs here, both in the apparent contradiction described above, and from the fact that Joyce once regarded this episode as the conclusion to his book’s first half (R. Ellmann, 456). John Gordon, in his essay, notes that “Joyce would not willingly have wasted his reader's time like that, especially in an episode that he considered the final curtain of his book's first half” (Gordon 2007, 501). I will build on Gordon’s claims of progress later in this thesis, but this basic suggestion seems to ring true. I find that Stephen places himself in a new position by the end of this episode, despite failing to impress his audience in the National Library. In this thesis, I study Stephen’s Dedalus’ handling of fatherhood, in order to evaluate his character’s arc of progress

and see whether Joyce's character might be seen as a lost but hopeful youth or dejected young man paralyzed by his own failure as he exits the National Library.

The thesis will proceed in this way. In Chapter I, I will examine the beginnings of Stephen's difficulties with the father, looking explicitly to Simon Dedalus in the places where his presence is most obvious. I will briefly introduce this section by examining the opening pages of *Portrait*, where Simon Dedalus' role as a father dictating to his son is seen as he acts a storyteller and reference point for young Stephen. Then I will spend a great deal of time working through Simon Dedalus' most important scene: the visit he makes to Cork and Queen's College with Stephen. In this scene, Stephen must contend with several indicators of his father's oppressive influence: his father's overbearing advice, the threat of similar initials, and the rude engraving of "Foetus" in the desk. The combination of these factors results in a violent dissociative reaction by Stephen, the most physical and threatening manifestation of the threat of fatherhood Stephen has yet experienced. I argue in this chapter that Stephen's apprehension of and active defense against the threat of fatherhood begins in this scene, and foreshadows the efforts he will later make.

In Chapter II, I examine Stephen's efforts in "Scylla and Charybdis" to combat the abstract notion of fatherhood, which was begun by Simon Dedalus and now follows Stephen even though Simon Dedalus has all but exited his narrative. As indicated by Simon's relative departure, Stephen no longer grapples with the specific will of his real-life father, but rather with a more abstract sense of the father as an older force that dictates to the son who and how he ought to be. Stephen's argument against fatherhood is built in several stages. First, Stephen revisits his constant thoughts on time. Then he considers what effect the passing of time has, and

how those figures of the past, those “ghosts,” might not function the same way as present forces do. Based on his reflection on ghosts, he links the past and the future together, in that he can distort and consider them both in ways that he cannot with a single determinative past. And finally, because the future and past are linked, the linearity of time is broken, and the hierarchy that privileges the father as preceding the son is no longer as effective. With the combination of all these moves, what Stephen seems to have accomplished is a sort of corrupted transcendence. That is, he has moved past being only a son (“only begotten”) but in his efforts he has reduced his metaphorical father, Shakespeare, into a failed father and partial son; so his efforts to find similarity between Shakespeare and himself make Stephen into a failed father/rising son as well.

In Chapter III, given the mixed results accomplished by Stephen’s method in “Scylla and Charybdis,” I turn to the end of the episode, and examine whether Stephen has placed himself into a new position by his efforts, and the costs and benefits of what that new position is. A new and arguably better father enters in Bloom, but that father has failed just as Shakespeare has, and for this reason is not someone whom Stephen can properly identify with or accept as a new father. Stephen finds there to be “seas between” his father’s will and his own, but that distance may be akin to the false distance he gained and lost in leaving and returning from Paris. The concluding note of “Scylla and Charybdis” is not one of victory but troubled peace. Whether that peace is more troubled or peaceful is left to the reader, but the tonal shift seems to indicate that indeed something has been changed for Stephen, his efforts were not all in vain.

## Chapter 1: The Root of Stephen's Problems

Stephen problems with his father and an abstract sense of fatherhood are present through all Stephen narrative, but their source can be tracked to a few key moments in *Portrait*. His paternal issues begin immediately, but are most fully developed in the scenes with Simon Dedalus in Cork. Stephen is frustrated with his father because of his formative influence, and is struggling against his father to be the writer of his own story. While Simon Dedalus perhaps does not realize the reluctant power he holds over his son, Stephen feels it more and more. In the experiences at Cork, the full power of his father's influence is realized and becomes a terrifying force for Stephen.

### **“He was baby tuckoo”**

When the reader first meets Stephen, Joyce places him as secondary to a controlling narrator and immediately sets forth some of the terms with which he will relate to his father.

*Portrait* begins:

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo. . . .

His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face.

He was baby tuckoo. (*P*, 5)

For a novel presumably focused on the title “artist,” *Portrait* is notable in its delaying of an introduction for that artist. Though Joyce is clearly experimenting here by narrating the beginning of his novel in the way a child like Stephen might, the particulars of this technique

reveal a great deal about the relationship between Stephen and his father. As the novel begins, we first meet Stephen only through his relation to “his father.” That is, we do not immediately know to connect “baby tuckoo” with Stephen, but in the mention of “his father,” we can only assume that pronoun “his,” in its lacking of a more obvious antecedent, must be our protagonist. And that unclear pronoun stands as the first indication of whom this novel might be about. The sense of delaying the introduction to the novel’s protagonist is further confirmed by the fact that we do not receive his name until a few pages later (*P*, 6). As telling as that delay is the role that his father plays in this prologue: “His father told him that story.” His father, Simon Dedalus, functions as the storyteller at the beginning of this novel, and more importantly, as a storyteller in whose story Stephen finds himself as a character: “He was baby tuckoo.” At the novel’s outset, Simon Dedalus is presented as a figure dictating Stephen’s story. Though Stephen’s role as the novel’s protagonist is always clear, the narrator telling his story seems to be his father initially. That is, Joyce could have very well attributed with quotation marks<sup>1</sup> that entire first paragraph to Simon. As the novel opens, Simon tells Stephen story; though his direct narration ends there, the underlying problem that is implied by a narrating other telling Stephen’s story will persist in Stephen’s relationship with his father.

Later, when Nasty Roche asks Stephen questions at Clongowes, we can see again how Simon Dedalus is related to Stephen’s identity.

—What is your name?

Stephen had answered:

—Stephen Dedalus.

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<sup>1</sup> Or more likely the Joycean dash.

—What kind of a name is that?

And when Stephen had not been able to answer Nasty had asked:

—What is your father? (*P*, 6)

When Stephen is unable to answer for his own identity, the interlocutor Nasty seeks to define him by his father. The pattern of father telling the story of son repeats itself here. When asked about his name, Stephen is only able to give his name and nothing more, and in his inability to explain it, his father re-enters the story to define him, even though Simon is not physically present. Though he does not make mention of this interaction,<sup>2</sup> the argument in Kent Baxter's essay "Making a Name for Himself" is based almost entirely upon the dynamic established in this encounter: "One way of conceptualizing the adolescent author in the work of Joyce . . . is in reference to the age-old axiom of the adolescent attempting to 'make a name for himself' . . . . For an adolescent character to make a name for himself means for him to attempt to renounce the name of the father" (Baxter, 204). In this interaction, Stephen's inability to explain his own name results in Nasty shifting the focus to his father, as though understanding his father will explain more about Stephen. Or more precisely as though understanding the status of his father will tell more about Stephen. Though Simon does not directly dictate who Stephen is here, the way Nasty Roche views Stephen is connected to his father's lower economic position. But his father should not be a valid route to understanding Stephen: Baxter says, "One of the pronounced horrors of adolescence is that society assumes the adolescent shares the same views or same likes and dislikes as his parents just because he shares the same name" (Baxter, 204). Stephen, despite

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<sup>2</sup> As the quoted selections suggest, Baxter's focus is on the range of adolescence, so perhaps that is why he does not choose to examine this scene. Though Stephen's struggles are especially adolescent in nature while he is an adolescent, those struggles are inherent to his character rather than specific age, so the resonance of this interaction of pre-adolescent Stephen should be obvious.

possessing his own good qualities, is judged exclusively by his father's success. This unfair characterization, as Stephen sees it, might be used by other figures than just Nasty Roche, and for this reason represents a more general problem that Stephen encounters with fatherhood early in the novel.

These two details within the first pages of *Portrait* hint at the recurring conflict that Stephen strives against throughout the two novels. We see a simple but telling dynamic develop: Simon Dedalus telling the story of Stephen, followed by Stephen asserting his own control. And once Simon is established as the teller of Stephen, Stephen is immediately viewed only in reference to Simon Dedalus, when Nasty asks "Who is your father?" Though Simon will never quite exert the same control he displays as the novel opens, Stephen remains cognizant of the threat of his father telling his story. Stephen's struggle to "write" himself independently, ignoring his father's ideas of him, will be theme that he turns to again and again, and is prefigured in these earlier moments.

### **Simon's Presentation of Stephen**

The sense of fatherly narration of the son is developed in a more threatening way in Stephen's visit with his father to Cork. This seems an obvious place to examine the influence of Simon Dedalus, for he is physically present here more so than anywhere else. Though we see Simon in several odd scenes prior to this point, this is the longest significant glimpse we get into Simon and his relationship to his son. Like the opening narration, it will say much about Stephen's relationship with his father. Firstly, Simon's speech towards Stephen explains quite a bit about how he sees his son, and reaffirms the theme introduced at *Portrait's* outset. Simon

Dedalus is constantly offering his son nostalgic advice to live as he did. Stephen receives this advice at best with annoyance and at worst with a psychological breakdown.

Initially, Simon Dedalus encourages his son to behave as he did, forgetting the differences that set his son apart from him and instead indulging in his own youthful nostalgia. Most notably he tells Stephen spend time with the “right fellows” and recalls how the company he kept met that standard (*P*, 76-77). In this move, Simon Dedalus narrows the space between his son and himself, as is seen when he informs Stephen,

I’m talking to you as a friend, Stephen. I don’t believe in playing the stern father. I don’t believe a son should be afraid of his father. No, I treat you as your grandfather treated me when I was a young chap. We were more like brothers than father and son. (*P*, 77)

Simon appeals to his own father in trying to construct kinship with his son, making Stephen out to be someone so like him their age is irrelevant: they could be brothers. But one cannot help but feel this wish ring hollow. This relationship is far from equal, and Simon Dedalus’s constant advice and domination of conversation proves that this is not an equal relationship. Simon Dedalus clearly benefits from being the older of the two, quite unlike a brother.

Though Simon tries to portray Stephen as a copy of himself, he also attempts to reduce Stephen and ensure himself as the superior Dedalus. Once an interlocutor joins the conversation, in this case the Cork native Johnny Cashman, Simon proceeds to diminish his son, saying “There’s that son of mine there not half my age and I’m a better man than he is any day of the week” (*P*, 80). He proceeds to explain how he could best his son in every way, and when Cashman points out that his son might in fact be more intelligent than him, Simon brushes it off

saying, “Well, I hope he’ll be as good a man as his father” (*P*, 80). The underlying assumption is, of course, that he is not currently and that this outcome is not certain.

We see a certain dynamic that Simon Dedalus presents to his son develop here: you ought to be like me, and, even if you succeed, you will never be better. This is hardly a friendly recommendation, and is made far more complex by the comment made by Simon that follows. After Simon further diminishes his son, saying he cannot flirt like his father, Cashman states, “Then he’s not his father’s son.” To which Simon mysteriously replies, “I don’t know, I’m sure” (*P*, 79). Though this might be a simple joke by Simon, one has to question the threatening implications of such an answer. What reasoning might Simon have to dismiss his son in this way, even in jest? The most logical answer seems to be that this is an extension of Simon’s tactics of diminishment, saying in effect that Simon the father is so far superior to his son that Stephen might not be his son at all. It is a claim that Stephen has clearly not inherited his father’s bravado, and though it is similar in nature to Simon’s other statements, it also cuts much deeper. His father disavowal of him is in poor taste, and the cruel joke surely is not lost on Stephen.

Stephen seemingly dismisses a large portion of his father’s comments to him, but he does not dismiss them completely. Stephen says at one point that his father’s words are “powerless to evoke” any sense of the past (*P*, 75), and also that he “heard but felt no pity. The images of the dead were all strange to him” (*P*, 73). These might indicate that he is unaffected by the recommendations of his father. But even a few sentences later, after Stephen wakes up on the train, we are told, “The neighborhood of unseen sleepers filled him with a strange dread as though they could harm him” (*P*, 73). So even though Stephen is initially not frightened by the

nostalgic visions of his father, in his recognition of fear for those “sleepers” he reveals that perhaps there is a sort of real fear towards his father’s visions.

### **The “Foetus” in the Anatomy Theatre**

The trend that Stephen’s recognition of the sleepers suggests manifests itself in Stephen’s experiences after he arrives in Cork. Stephen becomes powerfully aware of not just an annoyance at his father’s recommendations, but of a real fear of the precedence of the father. These more powerful connections occur in the events that take place in the university anatomy theatre. After touring Queen’s College, Stephen and his father visit the old anatomy theatre, where as Simon Dedalus looks for the initials he carved years ago, Stephen, upon seeing the word “Foetus” carved into a nearby desk, imagines a ghostly vision of the vandals responsible. These proceedings are much stranger and more unusual than nostalgic Simon’s remarks, and we can find Stephen’s complex attitude to fatherhood in them.

Kent Baxter, in the essay mentioned above, identifies this scene as the site where Stephen steps from childhood into adolescence, the difference being that in adolescence “the individual is given the freedom to become his own person” (Baxter, 209). As the analysis of his remarks earlier indicates, Simon is attempting to influence his son to become a model of his younger self, or as Baxter terms it, “what appears to be freedom in the loss of childhood here turns out to be a carefully scripted choice: Stephen, in this scene, is given the option to become his father” (Baxter, 209). Rather than the incident with the inscribed “Foetus,” Baxter, in light of his focus on naming, centers the focus of the scene on the initials Simon Dedalus is searching for: “At Queens College, Stephen discovers one meaning of his “queer name”: in this case, Stephen Dedalus means Simon Dedalus, S.D. means S.D.” (Baxter, 209). Additionally, Baxter notes the

reaction Stephen has toward said initials, that Stephen must hide “his flushed face” (*P*, 75). So, in the mention of the initials, we see reflected abstractly the concrete influence that Simon verbally directs at his son, to become someone like him. And more notably, in this symbolic abstraction Stephen registers more significantly the threat of such a prospect.

However, the focal point of fear in this episode seems to not be on the initials, but rather on the carved word “Foetus.” After seeing the word, we see Stephen react:

The sudden legend startled his blood: he seemed to feel the absent students of the college about him and to shrink from their company. A vision of their life, which his father’s words had been powerless to evoke, sprang up before him out of the word cut in the desk.  
(*P*, 75)

At this moment, Stephen feels a familiar fear with a new intensity. Though he has recognized his father’s nostalgic words and their vaguely threatening implications, here suddenly they become terrifying, even supernaturally frightening. The sudden appearance of these ghostly students indicates that Stephen’s perspective on the past has changed radically: no longer is the past an idle threat, but it can potentially become very real and very threatening. If his father represents an oppressive force with which Stephen must compete for control of his story, then these ghostly students, in the imagined act of writing, represent a similar threat. It does not seem to far-fetched to connect these students with Simon Dedalus, for Simon himself is guilty of just this sort of vandalism. Though the specific words written differ, the action is the same. So why does Stephen imagine these students writing “Foetus” instead of imagining his young father writing *S.D.* into the desk? Perhaps because Stephen’s realization is that his father is one of many writers who are trying to control Stephen’s story. Not only must Stephen deal with his father’s specific wishes for

him, but also a more abstract sense of fatherhood, where many figures of the past write various things on the desks in the anatomy theatre. The implication is that many potential figures may dictate to Stephen as his father does. In this imagined act of writing, the students join into a newly amorphous, abstract fatherhood that is much more frightening for Stephen.

This realization marks a significant change in Stephen's attitude toward the influence of his father. While once Simon's talk was idle, Stephen now realizes his father's attempts to mold his son in his image might constitute something similar to the act that has left this word on a desk in Cork. The fear stirred by this word comes about because it is the manifestation of a fear already beginning to brew in Stephen's mind. In his imagination, seemingly out of his control here, betrays him, as he finds that "it shocked him to find in the outer world a trace of what he had deemed till then a brutish and individual malady of his mind" (*P*, 75). Stephen was beginning to fear his father's influence over him even before these events, and the appearance of ghostly father-type figures is his fear made manifest in the world.

Maud Ellmann, in her essay "The Name and the Scar," examines various scars and orifices throughout *Portrait*, particularly the "Foetus" on the desk and the scar it represents. She highlights the violence of the cutting that placed the word in the desk: "What is emphasized is not the meaning of the word *Foetus* but the murderous activity of cutting it: one can almost hear the scraping of the knives" (M. Ellmann, 146). Ellmann also argues that the word "Foetus" "challenges the father's authority" in several ways: by replacing Simon's initials, evoking more powerfully than his words, exciting the idea of writing in Stephen's mind, and finally questioning "singular paternity" in the act of cutting "several times" (*P*, 75) (M. Ellmann, 147). Ellmann is certainly right that this sequence complicates fatherhood, but not in ways that wholly question or

banish it. In focusing on the contradiction between the singular vandalizing figure whom Stephen imagines and the act of cutting “several times,” Ellmann identifies the carver or writer as a symbolic type of father. While the notion of several cuts does complicate things, this can be explained by the notion that, though several people may participate in the act of dictation to the son, they are all symbolically unified in the singular symbol of the father. That is, Stephen’s predicament with his father encompasses all his fears of external dictation of itself, by virtue of his father being the original and most influential form of such a fear. The father figure comes to symbolize any other figure that dictates to Stephen what he ought to be, or what he is allowed to be.

Here Ellmann gives the logical correspondence between the absent carver and the father dictating identity to the son. This reveals why this carving might be such a provocative sight for Stephen. If the imagined carver is analogous to the father, then the word written is the son. What is frightening about this is that, unlike his father’s words prior to the scene, which fail evoke the past, this carved word is powerful in its permanency: it reveals the real threat of the father writing the son because it still remains. That act of writing has permanency that the threat of Simon’s words did not have.

Additionally, though Stephen reflects little on the meaning of the word, there is something in that meaning that is frightening as well. If Stephen fears being written permanently by the father, then he might also fear being written as the word “Foetus,” that is, a form yet unborn, and undeveloped. “Foetus” being such a unique word, it seems a strange choice for the ghostly vandals. Their choice of this word, which so closely ties into Stephen’s fears and frustrations with being a son, suggests that these students are meant to be connected to the

monstrous abstract form of the father. Stephen is written, by his father or by an abstract form of fatherhood, as the undeveloped, inferior son. These are the terms in which Stephen's fears are presented: the father as capable of writing the son, not just with idle words but with lasting effect.

### **The Effect of Fear of the Father**

Stephen's reactions against this vision reveal the severity of the fatherly threat and its direct results: Stephen as beginning to lose himself. "The letters cut in the stained wood of the desk stared upon him, mocking his bodily weakness and futile enthusiasms and making him loathe himself for own mad and filthy orgies" (*P*, 76). But despite being consumed by thoughts of weakness and shame, Stephen can "still hear his father's voice" (*P*, 76). Then, Stephen's symptoms intensify, his shame pushing him "beyond the limits of reality," and he is "wearied and dejected by his father's voice" (*P*, 77). He then begins to lose himself: "he could scarcely recognise as his his own thoughts," so that he must defensively repeat his own name and separate it from his father's (*P*, 77). And finally, just as he loses his thoughts, he also loses his memories of his childhood, so that finally he "recalled only names" (*P*, 78). This brief summary reveals a few key things. First, there is the presence of his father throughout this dissociative episode. Either Simon Dedalus simply acts as a distraction as Stephen fades out into oblivion, or perhaps he can be directly related to the cause of that fading. The latter seems more likely, when this sequence is compared to Stephen's earlier observation, when he "heard but could feel no pity" to his father's words (*P*, 73). Now, Stephen's dissociation is interrupted with a long monologue by Simon Dedalus, which begins, "When you kick out for yourself..." (*P*, 76-77). That long monologue in the middle of Stephen dissociative descent, as well as the two reminders above,

indicate that perhaps Simon's words are not idle distractions, but contributors to the shame and inadequacy that is causing Stephen to dissociate.

Kent Baxter, after his examinations of this episode, states that, "Stephen's intense feelings of repulsion arise from the impending possibility that he will become his father" (Baxter, 209). From my own analysis of this scene, that seems to be true. The fears that are foreshadowed at the beginning of the novel, that of the father writing and controlling the son, seem here to be newly apprehended by Stephen in the events at Cork. In being so affected by the carved word "Foetus" in the desk, Stephen is reflecting on the similar fear of being written by the external force of his father, an act that might permanently render him the undeveloped, unborn son. There at least seems to be a link in the two main features of this episode, the words of his father and the fear at the word "Foetus."

### **The Disappearance of Simon Dedalus**

The effect of this sequence of events can be further demonstrated in the distance Stephen creates between himself and his father following this encounter. We see very little of Simon Dedalus through the rest of *Portrait*. Prior to the trip to Cork, Simon Dedalus is present where it makes sense, as for example during Stephen's Christmas holiday, or the performance of the play at Belvedere. But afterwards, it seems Stephen and the narrator collaborate to keep Simon Dedalus out of the story. It seems fair to forgive his absence in Ch 4 when Stephen wanders to the Bull: he is simply getting drunk at the local pub, an action in line with Simon's role as the alcoholic father. But the artificial absence when Stephen is at his home in Chapter 5 cannot be explained so easily. Though Simon is right upstairs, he shouts down to Stephen's siblings deriding his son: "Is your lazy bitch of a brother gone out yet?" (*P*, 147). There is a seeming rift

between father and son here, and though Stephen's rejection of the priesthood might be a possible cause, it is also possible that the events at Cork have created distance in the two, both in Stephen's resentment to his father's influence and his father's annoyance at Stephen's rejection of said influence. Or, perhaps, the events at Cork present a dynamic occurring throughout Stephen and Simon's relationship, and the gradual falling out that they imply is seen in Simon's reduced presence through the remainder of *Portrait*.

Simon's lack of presence in Stephen's narrative throughout *Ulysses* follows that trend. He does not interact anywhere with his son in the novel,<sup>3</sup> and there is little love in his reaction upon seeing him from the carriage in "Hades": he displays far more contempt for Mulligan than any sort of affection for his son. He rails about how his son is being ruined by Buck: "I won't have her bastard of a nephew ruin my son" (*U*, 86). While there might be something endearing in his concern for Mulligan's corruptive influence, Simon has little to actually say about his son. His reaction here hardly seems like that of a caring, intimate father.

Simon's reduced role after the ordeal in Cork suggests that there has been a rift created between father and son, and it seems logical that this rift is due to Stephen's new awareness of the threat of fatherly influence. From Cork on, Stephen will continue to be mindful of that influence, more so as he becomes an artist and realizes all the constraining influences, the "nets" of his life. In the events at Cork, Joyce demonstrates the root of Stephen's issues, which he develops in Stephen's struggle against them in "Scylla and Charybdis."

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<sup>3</sup> Though he is present in Stephen's memory, and as a vision in the "Circe" episode.

## Chapter 2: Stephen's Arguments Against the Father

After the events depicted in *Portrait*, Joyce returns to Stephen's issues with fatherhood in the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode of *Ulysses*. Stephen's general argumentative formula is to use his developed thoughts on the passing of time to untangle the hierarchy that places the father before the son. Though the following moves do not occur in necessarily chronological order, I arrange them in the following strains to follow the hidden argument that Stephen makes. This is because he is overtly discussing Shakespeare and not explicitly presenting the argument against fatherhood; the order of the Shakespeare theory takes precedence over this other argument, even though the logical steps that are taken to combat fatherhood are more important to Stephen's personal development and potentially more interesting to the reader. Stephen's audience at this moment cares far more about Shakespeare than about any of Stephen's personal issues, so the flow of that argument is prioritized over the important argument against fatherhood.

### The Nature of Time

Stephen has had the complex topic of time on his mind for most of his literary existence. Even as early as his time at Clongowes, Stephen has been thinking about how time passes and affects the world: whether it is opening and closing his ear flaps (*P*, 10) or counting the days until he returns home for vacation (*P*, 12), Stephen demonstrates an early regard for the passage of time. In the first example, he finds he can observe the passage of time without actively participating in it: "It made a roar like a train at night...He closed his eyes and the train went on, roaring and then stopping; roaring again, stopping. It was nice to hear it roar and stop and then roar out of the tunnel again and then stop" (*P*, 10). In the next, young Stephen realizes the inevitability of time that is always moving: "But the Christmas vacation was very far away: but

one time it would come because the earth moved round always” (*P*, 12). These early thoughts of young Stephen evolve over the course of *Portrait* and into *Ulysses*, gaining depth and sophistication.

Stephen revisits the current state of his thoughts on time while in the National library, which we can examine to see how he uses them within his argument against fatherhood. After John Eglinton claims to be “prepared for paradoxes,” (*U*, 186) Stephen jumps right into the paradox of time:

As we, or mother Dana, weave and unweave our bodies, Stephen said, from day to day, their molecules shuttled to and fro, so does the artist weave and unweave his image. And as the mole on my right breast is where it was when I was born, though all my body has been woven of new stuff time after time so through the ghost of the unquiet father the image of the unliving son looks forth. (*U*, 186)

The first point that Stephen rehashes here is that the self is constantly changing through time. He says something similar in his interior monologue earlier in the episode when he thinks: “Wait five months. Molecules all change. I am other I now. Other I got pound” (*U*, 182). Stephen takes the scientific fact of the death and birth of the new “molecules” that compose the body to argue that our sense of self also changes profoundly over time. The I that “got pound” is, accounting for the changes that subject has undergone, a different person than the new speaking subject. The body and the “image” of the self operate in similar ways in regards to change over time. Stephen then establishes an exception to that rule of change, “the mole on my right breast.” Even though the body is “woven of new stuff over time,” as is the “image” of the artist, some particulars remain. Or rather, certain particulars are woven repeatedly in the same way, thus representing

quasi-fixed points of selfhood. Stephen restates this sort of paradox in the simplest terms in the interior reflection mentioned above, where he thinks “I,I and I.I” (*U*, 182). That is, there are ways in which the current subject is completely separate from the subject of the past (I.I), which exist along with those ways in which the subject is lightly linked to the past (I,I). This isn’t a radical concept, but Stephen in Aristotelian fashion begins by defining those terms that he will use. The paradox of changing and unchanging through time is the first of these terms.

Shortly after introducing this paradox Stephen will bring up the notion of the father, but it is worthwhile to consider, before he introduces new complexities, how fatherhood factors into this conception of time. Though many things about the subject will change with time, the son’s status as son is more properly categorized with the unchanging “moles.” Like that mole, sonhood is fixed at birth, and will stay as it is at birth. As already examined in the previous chapter, this means for Stephen that by the simple fact of his birth, he will always be the son of Simon Dedalus, and must deal with the oppressive influence and inferiority that an abstract sense of fatherhood places on the son.

### **Ghosts of the Past**

Of course, at the heart of Stephen’s theory is Shakespeare’s ghost story *Hamlet*, and Stephen in his next move considers the nature of ghosts and how they reflect the subtleties of the passage of time. Stephen properly begins his performance in the National Library by turning to ghosts:

What is a ghost? Stephen said with tingling energy. One who has faded into impalpability through death, through absence, through change of manners. Elizabethan London lay as far from Stratford as corrupt Paris lies from virgin Dublin. Who is the

ghost from *limbo patrum*, returning to the world that has forgotten him? Who is king Hamlet? (*U*, 180)

The ghost in *Hamlet* is interesting to Stephen not just because Shakespeare may have played him, but also because ghosts occupy a liminal space between the past and the present. In one sense, a ghost in Stephen's terms is one who has irretrievably changed as time has passed, "One who has faded into impalpability through death, through absence, through change of manners." Stephen's own father can be said to match this description, in all those terms except death.<sup>4</sup> But more importantly, a father, especially for the son who is no longer a youth, has been plunged into the past in a way which makes his influence drastically different. He has "faded into impalpability," that is, his presence has become impalpable. But really, in some limited sense, a ghost is *still* palpable even after it has faded. The ghost "return[s] to the world that has forgotten him." Though the ghost is gone, its influence is still felt, still palpable. The ghost to whom Stephen particularly refers proves this: King Hamlet provides the primary motivation for the play's protagonist, to avenge the father's death. So a ghost, and thus conceivably any character including Simon Dedalus or anyone resembling an abstract father figure, still has an effect on the living, but their nature is changed by being a figure from the past. A figure of the past (a ghost) can still operate on the living, but not in the same way as characters of the living operate on each other. The father figure lurks in the margins, his presence felt despite seeming absent. This may be a threatening prospect, given the domination of the father over the son, but the father who is not quite palpable poses less of threat in absence than presence. That is, Stephen reduces the status of that abstract father by realizing that the abstract threat of fatherhood is less palpable

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<sup>4</sup> Though one could argue that Simon Dedalus has faded from Stephen's due to a death, just not his own. One wonders how much Stephen has interacted with his father since May Dedalus' death.

than he once thought. He is absent, and thus less palpable than a present figure might be. And by realizing his absence, his near impalpability, the past in the father gains new definition, which Stephen will use in his argument.

Thus we return to the completion of Stephen's earlier thoughts on time, where he develops those thoughts into this new sense of the past's effect on the present.

And as the mole on my right breast is where it was when I was born, though all my body has been woven of new stuff time after time, so through the ghost of the unquiet father the image of the unliving son looks forth. (*U*, 186)

The influence of the father is felt as the "unliving son" looks through him, but not as fully palpable but as an unquiet ghost. The nature of the past that remains as "the mole on my right breast" is not quite as simple as the way a physical part of the body remains. Though what precedes may remain, it will not function as actively as the present does.

### **"the future , the sister of the past"**

After the above passage regarding the unliving son, Stephen moves to his most significant rhetorical move: pairing the past with the future. He does this when he says:

In the intense instant of the imagination, when the mind, Shelley say, is a fading coal that which I was is that which I am and that which in possibility I may come to be. So in the future, the sister of the past, I may see myself as I sit here now but by reflection from that which then I shall be. (*U*, 186-87)

Borrowing from Shelley and "Drummond of Hawthornden" (*U*, 187), Stephen links the impalpability of the past with the potential of the future. Both may affect the present but not in the direct way that present forces do. By this move the present is elevated, and the present and

future are coupled as equal forces. “In the intense moment of the imagination,” the artist is all that they are, were, and will be. That is, in these rare moments, time collapses into the present. But that present still reigns supreme, as the next line suggests: in the future, the artist will see themselves “by reflection from that which I then shall be.” In this way, the future may be viewed as “the sister of the past,” twin forces acting as secondary to the present action.

If this were the only instance of the equalizing of past and future, we might be able to attribute this to a confounding move by Stephen rather than any other sort of logic. But that is not the case, as Stephen brings the future and past together in several other places. This is seen first when Stephen

ponders things that were not : what Caesar would have lived to do had he believed the soothsayer : what might have been : possibilities of the possible as possible : things not known : what name Achilles bore when he lived among women. (*U*, 186)

Again, here Stephen is not doing anything radical at first glance. But, upon closer inspection, he is actually subverting the traditional view of the past. Ordinarily in the present, one deals with many future potentials, and weighs decisions based on them: What would happen if I did this? Or this? But instead, Stephen begins imagining potentials, not of the future as is typical, but of the past. That is, he creates alternate futures out of the past. Usually the past is viewed as fixed, a record and unchanged thing, like the word “Foetus” permanently inscribed on a desk in Cork. But here Stephen loosens that view, rewriting the past by imagining different potentials. The typical way of viewing the future, as a choice between alternatives, is imaginatively used to view the past, linking the two in nature together. The past is often a fixed thing, and for Stephen a threateningly fixed thing, because it determines who Stephen is and where he comes from. Like

the abstract father, it dictates who Stephen is or ought to be. But in this reflection on the past, Stephen undoes the fixed, determinative past by examining it instead as one alternative among many. In considering the past as composed of different potentials, it becomes like the future, in that it is subject to the imagination and free of its determinative qualities. Stephen, in imagining these different potential pasts, frees himself from determination by past figures, by that abstract fatherhood.

### **Time Subverting the Father-Son Hierarchy**

Finally, with the past linked with the future in its diminishment compared to the present, Stephen is able to return to the the problem of the father, and diminish fatherhood as he has the past more generally. He states, “Fatherhood, in the sense of conscious begetting, is unknown to man. It is a mythic estate, an apostolic succession, from only begetter to only begotten” (*U*, 199). That is, fatherhood in the traditional sense, is nonexistent. The abstract force of fatherhood need not necessarily dominate the son by his precedence, because really that precedence is based on a cultural fiction. There is no “conscious begetting,” a sense of fatherhood that embraces a kind of biological cause-and-effect relationship is actually a symbolic relation, like “an apostolic succession.” The sense of “only begetter to only begotten” is a cultural fiction that is found only in our minds and nowhere else. Just as the past can be subdued against the present as is detailed above, a father can be subdued because the relationship upon which his power derives is false. Stephen continues to tug at this relation as the passages continues, eventually arriving to the essential question: “What links them in nature? An instant of a blind rut. Am I a father? If I were?” (*U*, 199). A father and son are not linked together in nature by anything so grand as “conscious begetting,” but only by the insignificance of “a blind rut.” The following line signals

a sudden change and maturation for Stephen. In loosening and tugging at the precedence of the father, he has suddenly realized that he himself may cause and well as be caused, be both father and son. With the present elevated, Stephen can imagine alternate pasts as well as alternate futures, and because of that, though he can feel the effect of the past, he also can distort it as one does the future. In realizing the almost entirely symbolic nature of the father-son relationship, and the fiction of the overwhelming influence of the past, Stephen can ask the question “Am I a father?” and become a sort of father. In the simplest terms, Stephen might only be reflecting on his sexual history, which could have led to a child he does not know about. But given a long interior dialogue about fatherhood, and the influence that his father still has on him, it does not seem to far-fetched to read deeper into this question.

In considering his own potential fatherhood, Stephen has inverted time and precedence in such a way that he can operate as father and son. He does not dwell on the implications of this for himself, but we can see the effect of this change on the way he considers and describes Shakespeare. Speaking on Shakespeare, Stephen says, “He was not the father of his own son merely but, being no more a son, he was and felt himself the father of all his race, the father of his own grandfather, the father of his unborn grandson” (*U*, 199). Not only is Shakespeare “father of his own son” but he can now invert the hierarchy of father/son to be “father of his own grandfather.” Like Stephen imagining and creating potential pasts, Shakespeare is able to invert sonhood and become father of even those who precede him chronologically. But also Shakespeare is kept as the son, and dictated to by some sense of father and the past. Shakespeare is mentioned earlier by Best as “*reading the book of himself*” (*U*, 178) and then by Stephen as “the player...who has studied *Hamlet* all the years of his life” (*U*, 181). That is, Shakespeare is

reading and studying a part already written, something that has preceded and dictates his life, as a father might to a son. Though Stephen might be referring to the notion of an inherent soul, this appeal still points to the domination of a creating figure, in this case a God, which dominates the commanded son. That is, the “*book of himself*” that Shakespeare reads must have been written by someone, whether it be a God or perhaps a more abstract type of father figure. Ultimately Shakespeare becomes father and son, “a king and no king” (*U*, 181) and the paradox seen in Shakespeare is a solution, albeit not a very satisfying one, to Stephen’s preoccupations with his sonhood.

### Chapter 3: Stephen's Filial Reorientation

After looking at the moves Stephen makes in the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode, next we must look at how the chapter concludes, to see whether Stephen's efforts have made a difference. The dismissal of John Eglinton, who tells Stephen that he is a "delusion" and Stephen's own disavowal of his theory (*U*, 205), might indicate that this episode is a utter failure for Stephen. If Stephen's main goal is to gain the favor of Dublin's literati, then this might be said to be the case. But if we regard with more importance his desire to realign the fatherly relationship, then a more mixed result emerges. In the last pages of this episode, Stephen's inner thoughts reveal that he has arrived at a new position in regard to his own sonhood, and reached a new complex stage of agency.

#### "Seas between"

The most convincing indication that Stephen has reached any sort of new position is in his reflection. "My will : his will that fronts me. Seas between." (*U*, 209) Gifford interprets these two opposing wills as that of Stephen and Mulligan, the Scylla and Charybdis that Bloom passes through at the end of the chapter (Gifford, 255). But it seems more appropriate to imagine those wills as that of Stephen and the controlling father. Joyce must have intended the correspondence between using the word "will" here and the Will which so much of this episode has focused on, William Shakespeare. Shakespeare, in his role as the symbolic father with which Stephen has grappled throughout this episode, indicates that "his will" might address the will of the father, rather than of Mulligan.

If the problem of fatherhood is that the abstract father's will for the son overpowers the son's own will for himself, then this apprehension of distance might indicate that Stephen has

indeed separated his own will from that of his father. But the multitude of associations that Stephen has with the sea complicate this. It is often a source of fear, as when Stephen imagines the corpse floating up in the water (*U*, 49). But also those “seas” might be viewed as a separation since passed. When Stephen left for Paris, there were “seas between” the will of himself and that of his father or more generally his fatherland. But those seas no longer protect him, as he has now returned to Ireland. But, significantly, Stephen’s most important victory in *Portrait* occurs while on the coast of Bull Island (*U*, 142-143). So when Stephen’s feels that there are “seas between” his father’s will and his own, is that separation a good or distressing thing?

Joyce also complicates this statement by Stephen’s choice of that word, “front” when he says “His will that fronts me” (*U*, 209). The most logical definition is the sense of “front” as synonymous with “oppose,” defined as “to face with defiance or hostility” (Oxford English Dictionary, “front”). Additionally, there is an obsolete but hardly irrelevant meaning of front that defines it as “to preface,” or similarly, a meaning that defines “front” as “to be or stand in front of” (Oxford English Dictionary, “front”). In light of these last meanings and based on the syntax, Stephen is saying “his will” that stands in front of “me.” This sort of reflection mitigates the hopefulness of the following clause, “seas between.” That is, even though there is a great amount of separation between Stephen’s will and his fathers, that will still may stand “in front of” his own.

## **Bloom**

The appearance of Bloom is another strong indication that something has changed at the conclusion of this scene. Throughout this episode Stephen has been finding similarities between himself and Shakespeare, while also reducing Shakespeare into a father/son figure. With

appearance of Bloom, a new member joins into a trio of figures who rest between father and son. The ways in which Bloom functions as a father become obvious later in the novel, but even here we can see a father/son relationship forming between Stephen and Bloom. Stephen defers to Bloom as he passes by, and the hierarchy of father and son is affirmed spatially when Stephen senses him, “feeling one behind” (*U*, 209). That is, Bloom is a figure who precedes Stephen, who lurks behind him. In fact, Bloom has been lurking throughout this episode, as he attempts to get the Keyes ad for copying: he is described as “a patient silhouette waited, listening” (*U*, 192). In this way, Bloom recalls the ghostly father described earlier, “One who has faded into impalpability through death, through absence, through change of manners” (*U*, 180). So, even if Bloom has emerged as a new sort of father, he acts less palpably than the abstract father that Stephen first approaches in this episode.

We can see the ways that Bloom is a failed father, diminished into partial sonhood. The strongest indication of this is in Stephen’s earlier wonderings: “Well : if the father who has not a son be not a father can the son who has not a father be a son?” (*U*, 199). Of course, Stephen is speaking more directly of Shakespeare’s own loss of his son and father, but the line echoes with what we have learned elsewhere: Bloom had also lost his own son, and his father as well. Stephen rhetorically aligns himself with Shakespeare earlier in this episode; if in this instance Bloom might be related to that pair, then the sense of failed, infantilized father-made-son is reaffirmed in Bloom.

### **Cymbeline**

Another small indication of Stephen’s new position here is in his transition from identification with Hamlet, the depressed proto-son, to a new identification when he quotes from

*Cymbeline*. The many reasons for Stephen's correspondence with Hamlet are obvious, especially here in a chapter so focused on Shakespeare. Stephen's melancholy, his depressed ramblings across Dublin, make him a spiritual successor to the brooding prince. But this episode, and indeed the "first half of Ulysses" (see introduction) ends not with a depressed soliloquy inspired by Hamlet, but instead turns to a much different play written by an older Shakespeare. What does this transition between plays reflect of Stephen's efforts in this episode?

Stephen mentions the "Peace of the druid priests of Cymbeline, hierophantic," which Gifford points to as the prophetic peace for Britain that is declared in the final scene of *Cymbeline* (Gifford, 256):

'Whenas a lion's whelp shall, to himself unknown, without seeking find, and be embraced by a piece of tender air; and when from a stately cedar shall be lopped branches which, being dead many years, shall after revive, be joined to the old stock, and freshly grow: then shall Posthumus end his miseries, Britain be fortunate and flourish in peace and plenty' (*Cymbeline*, V.5.434-440)

The correspondences of the prophecy are then described as Posthumus Leonatus being the "lion's whelp," Imogen his bride as "a piece of tender air," and King Cymbeline as "a stately cedar" (*Cymbeline*, V.5.441-456). Even as this chapter ends, Stephen still reflects on a work that centers on a relationship between father and son. By *Cymbeline*'s end, there are two sorts of sons: the sons of King Cymbeline, stolen by Belarius and recently united with their father, and Posthumus himself, the son-in-law of the King and the "lion's whelp." Stephen might see the connotations of both of these sons as highly relevant to his own position. *Cymbeline*'s sons are described as being "jointed to the old stock, and freshly grow." Stephen may have found in this

new triad of failed fathers and aspiring sons that has been “jointed to the old stock.” That is, he is both reunited with father figures he does not wholly resent, and himself becomes something akin to a father, able to “freshly grow.” Stephen, in his apprehension of stagnation at the hands of his return to Dublin, might especially find the notion of freshly growing to be reassuring.

The other “son,” Posthumus, is described as being “to himself unknown” and as having “without seeking, [found].” Stephen might find something uplifting in this prophecy, that Posthumus represents the son victorious, who despite failing as Stephen has in some regard, still achieves peace and “without seeking, find[s].” His new attention to *Cymbeline* suggests that perhaps he has now become more like those more mature sons than like the frustrated Hamlet.

Thinking in light of Posthumus brings new and more complex meaning to Stephen’s thought that he must “Cease to strive.” There are essentially two ways to interpret this: either Stephen, in his rejection by Eglinton and company, has decided to give up on his literary aspirations and essentially his life, or he is abandoning the pressures he has put on himself to banish the ghost of fatherhood. Given the context of *Cymbeline*, the latter is a much more convincing conclusion, that peace will come when it has been prophesied to come, that Stephen might be able to “without seeking, find.” Why else end this episode with the turn to *Cymbeline*? The only other alternative is that Stephen is mocking the “peace of the druid priests of *Cymbeline*.” There are a variety of reasons to reject this. There has been a tonal shift in Stephen’s thoughts through the end of this episode, which represents much more of the peace than mockery or melancholy. Stephen in these closing passages speaks and thinks differently compared to earlier, when he interrogates himself, saying “What the hell are you driving at?” (*U*,

199). Stephen might certainly be dejected and melancholy as he exits the National Library with Buck, but there is also a hint of hope and progress.

**“Do you believe your own theory?”**

The most confusing piece at the end of “Scylla and Charybdis” is Stephen’s perplexing “no” to John Eglinton’s question: “Do you believe your own theory?” If Stephen had replied differently, we might take this response as an affirmation that Stephen has succeeded here. The Stephen who says “yes” would be the more mature Stephen who is so successful in his creation, in his role as creating father, that he can confidently affirm his own theory. But, of course, such an ending would be far too simple for Joyce. Though if we were given this alternative, it might be a quite positive sign that Stephen would affirm his theory, to make sense of the reality of his “no” does not necessarily mean to take it as an outright declaration of his failure.

John Gordon, in his essay “Getting Past the No in ‘Scylla and Charybdis,’” reasons out Stephen’s “no” in this way:

Stephen's "[n]o" is really more of a "not yet." As such, it distinguishes him from the Scyllan dogmatists, Bleibtreu and the rest, who have made up, and closed, their minds for good. But it also distinguishes him from the whirlpool opposite. Stephen is trying to get somewhere. A whirlpool just goes around and around. (Gordon , 502)

Gordon views Stephen as victorious and progressive, precisely because of his ability to not commit to his own theory. Is Stephen being perfectly candid with himself, whereas Eglinton and company are making grandiose claims that they also should not believe? Gordon throughout his essay refers to Stephen’s argumentative method, saying that like Joyce and like the Shakespeare who is “always turned elsewhere, backwards” (*U*, 189), Stephen is constantly recycling his past

experiences. Gordon's general claim is that Stephen is a revisionist, who is always re-writing and redefining. Gordon's basic argument is that Stephen does not *need* to acknowledge his theory to realize that he has achieved some degree of progress. His progress is never done and is not tied to any sense of conclusion or satisfaction.

Gordon seems to be at least partially right here, and his hopeful idea of Stephen's rejection is further confirmed if we consider with whom Stephen is speaking. John Eglinton has proven himself to be a bit of a hostile audience. Though he at times has shown remarkable patience toward Stephen, in the posing of his question he proves that he cares little for Stephen's thoughts. Eglinton approaches the conversation with the eye of a publisher, as the real-life William Kirkpatrick Magee was, and tells Stephen quite simply that, "I don't see why you should expect any payment for it since you don't believe it yourself" (*U*, 205). Eglinton sees Stephen's own confidence in his theory as a mark of its quality, which might make it suitable for press. We cannot fault Stephen for not feeling the same way; Stephen has far less reason to affirm his theory to Eglinton than Eglinton does to expect affirmation. In fact, is it perhaps possible that Stephen realizes Eglinton's expectations in the question, and intentionally subverts them? Perhaps we see here a more concrete attempt to rebel against a person that resembles a father? Stephen, in occupying a new role between father and son no longer needs to appeal to his patrons in the same way. Stephen in his refusal is surprisingly rude compared to his earlier efforts to be "superpolite." This refusal, instead of being a sign of Stephen's continued lack of growth, can be seen as another signal that Stephen has achieved a new sense of independence in a new role as son and father.

The signals that we receive at the conclusion of “Scylla and Charybdis” are obviously complex and tell us almost nothing concrete. The “will” of the father and that of Stephen might now be “seas between,” but there are many ways in which Stephen seems to have failed at the end of this episode. He has still not banished his father’s ghost, for Simon Dedalus will reappear briefly in Circe, telling Stephen to “think of your mother’s people!” (U, 538). But there seem to be enough signs of change that we cannot dismiss completely the idea that Stephen has succeeded somewhat in this scene. As has already been acknowledged, this episode concludes the novel’s first half, and it seems bizarre to say that nothing of progress has been accomplished for Stephen. His efforts are not wholly successful, but they do reveal a certain amount of growth. Stephen is no longer the brooding Hamlet, but rather any of the more successful sons of Cymbeline. He gains a better father Bloom, who is less threatening and more of a companion in his failures. And lastly, though he rejects his own theory, there is something to be said of Stephen’s continual revisions of himself and his strong, if negative, answer to a sort of commanding father in Eglinton. So, though we never get to see a Stephen satisfied or transcendent, it seems that Stephen has moved into a new, more mature position by the end of this episode.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to find any concrete narrative conclusions in Joyce's work. His short stories and novels end, at least in my opinion, so often in a way that seems unresolved. The reader is often left with more questions than answers. This does not detract from the stories; in fact, the mysteries and questions that Joyce leaves us are part of the intrigue of his writing. In this thesis, I have attempted to investigate one of those mysteries, and while there is a great deal left unexplained even in this singular topic, I hope I have arrived at an increased awareness of the subtleties of these books in the few conclusions I make here.

Stephen's problems with abstract fatherhood begin obviously in his interactions with his father Simon Dedalus. In the opening scenes of the book, Joyce presents Simon as a storyteller of Stephen's narrative, and then as a gateway to understanding Stephen's status. At Cork, Simon's recommendations to his son accompany Stephen's violent reaction to this vision at the anatomy theatre and his dissociation that follows. Joyce develops those problems further as he depicts Stephen's interaction with them in "Scylla and Charybdis." Stephen uses time to invert and redefine fatherhood, and uses Shakespeare as a rhetorical tool as he reduces this symbolic father and joins him in partial fatherhood. Due to these efforts, he arrives at a new position, which we can observe as he exits the episode. Stephen rejects his theory, encounters Bloom, and resolves to "[c]ease to strive."

This thesis has chosen "Scylla and Charybdis" as the most important site of Stephen's handling of the abstract fatherhood, but of course, Stephen's story regarding this topic never really ends. Despite any new position he has arrived at, Stephen continues to grapple with this and other topics that threaten to limit him. The appearance of Simon in the "Circe" episode

demonstrates this sort of continuity in Stephen's narrative, but also suggests that perhaps the problem of abstract fatherhood has become secondary. A vision of Simon Dedalus appears, saying, "Think of your mother's people!" (*U*, 538). The fact that it is Simon that appears is telling. As noted earlier, Simon's interactions with his son are limited through the end of *Portrait* and throughout *Ulysses*. So this appearance stands as an outlier in Stephen's physical interactions with his father. Of course, Simon is not actually present in Bella Cohen's with Stephen, but his appearance, even as a spectre haunting his son, says a great deal about his continued presence in Stephen's consciousness. Though his appearance is secondary to what he does in this scene: remind Stephen of his origins from "his mother's people." Stephen is told to think of, not his people, nor his father's people, but "his mother's people." Though Simon Dedalus has not gone away, he now acts more as an agent of maternal guilt than as any sort of abstract fatherly influence. So, as the reader moves closer to *Ulysses*' conclusion, Stephen's priorities have seemingly shifted. Simon's ghost still moves through Stephen's life, but his threat is secondary to the motherhood that Stephen now faces in this episode. A thesis twice as long or perhaps longer could be written on the combined topic of father and mother, for it would seem, with the information of this thesis and the maternal anxiety suggested here, that Stephen's interactions with the force of his parents, those who raised him and acted as formative agents, remain a central conflict for Stephen's maturing sense of self.

Despite Simon's reappearance and the acknowledged threat of motherhood accompanying it, Stephen's interaction with Bloom as the novel closes suggest that perhaps not all is lost for Stephen Dedalus. Though he declines Bloom's offer to stay at his home at Eccles Street, and departs *Ulysses* destitute and homeless, we find in Bloom's recounting of him to

Molly a vision of potential hope: “Which event or person emerged as the salient point of his narration? Stephen Dedalus, professor and author” (*U*, 687). Bloom encounters Stephen as a failed surrogate father at the end of “Scylla and Charybdis,” and here we see such a role fulfilled. At the end of Stephen’s narrative, Bloom does exactly what Simon did to begin it. Bloom narrates Stephen, just as Simon narrated him as “little baby tuckoo” (*P*, 5). But, instead of infantilizing Stephen as his father does in that earlier telling, Bloom raises Stephen up as an adult with agency in roles like “professor and author.” Stephen cannot escape being told by others, but he has changed as well, in that in Bloom’s telling of him, he becomes someone who can also tell the stories of others. That is, the clearest sign of Stephen’s success can never be given to us by Stephen himself. He might forever be doubtful of his escape from the force of an abstract father, but when a figure of that abstract fatherhood tells us it is so, we might believe it more readily. However, should we take Bloom’s optimistic observation at face value? Though of course we can be skeptical, the novel is more hopeful and bearable when we indulge Bloom’s view occasionally.

How does acknowledging Stephen’s new position at the end of “Scylla and Charybdis” improve a reading of *Ulysses*? It perhaps gives a little hope to Stephen’s character, who we might ordinarily view rather bleakly. Stephen as he exits *Ulysses* has little going his way, and his journey throughout the novel has been from seeming failure to failure. It is not far-fetched to view him this way, to see him end as a character permanently stuck, his work unwritten and his life spiraling downward. But if Stephen can be taken as a proto-Joyce, then the hope that is confirmed by the progress of “Scylla and Charybdis” seems real enough. Stephen in this fictional universe will go on to write something of substance, and be successful as Joyce is. We need not

finish *Ulysses* pitying the dejected Stephen, but rather say farewell knowing that all is not lost for this frustrated young artist.

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