

## The “Nightmare of History” in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

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**The majority of readers of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* tend to associate its most famous line, “History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake,” with Stephen Dedalus’s intention in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to overcome his past of rigid national and religious tradition. While this meaning is immediately present in the quote, a closer reading of the text suggests a far more ambitious—and perhaps even vain—impetus behind the identification of history as a nightmare. Additionally, just as the most popular reading has an autobiographical dimension—in which Joyce himself seeks to transcend his own tutelage—so does the alternate reading I present in this essay have implications for both Dedalus and Joyce.**

Even one who has not read James Joyce’s *Ulysses* may have at some point heard its most famous quotation, spoken by its protagonist Stephen Dedalus: “History...is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake<sup>1</sup>”. A rather cursory examination of Stephen across *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* would most likely default to interpreting this quote as a desire for liberation from the “nets” of “nationality, language, [and] religion” he mentions in *Portrait*<sup>2</sup>. In fact, such a view would interpret the most famous quote in *Ulysses* in terms of the most famous quote in *Portrait*. Closer readings by critics and fanatics alike have confirmed this interpretation, yet they also reveal both subjective and metaphysical dimensions to the nightmare of history. These dimensions include Stephen’s personal history, the literary canon, and even the myth of eternal return. For as disparate as these interpretations sound beyond their loose categorization under “history,” they all share another common denominator. Stephen may awaken from each of these nightmares of history by means of creation. The aesthetic theory he espouses toward the conclusion of *Portrait* finds solace in the capability of art to arrest the consciousness both from stale tradition and from the accelerating cycle of creation and consumption.

Nevertheless, I intend to argue in this essay that to relegate Stephen’s conception of history to any of the above components is to misdiagnose the cause of Stephen’s—and, as I will further argue, Joyce’s—obsessive aversion. While the nightmare of history does imply all of those elements to a certain degree, for both Stephen and Joyce it is rooted more fundamentally in an existential conception of history, the universal fact that death is inevitable from the outset of one’s life. However, it is not so much this

observation itself as the consequences it yields—in this case, its metatextual implications—that are crucial to a lucid understanding of the conceit’s intention, and more importantly to a true “awakening” from the nightmare of history. Accordingly, I will first expose the failures of the common interpretations above, along with one further interpretation, to fully explain the “nightmare of history” conceit. I will then show that the interpretation my thesis posits most adequately fits the intentions of the conceit. Though the majority of the essay will consider Stephen’s intentions behind the quotation, only periodically incorporating Joyce’s, I have withheld most of the quotation’s implications for Joyce until the conclusion for the purpose of organization.

Applying the common interpretations to the motif of the drowning man most efficiently illustrates their hermeneutic shortcomings in terms of the “nightmare of history.” This image is among the earliest to appear in the novel, when Stephen concedes his lack of social imperviousness to his roommate Buck Mulligan: “You saved men from drowning. I’m not a hero, however<sup>3</sup>.” At first a semi-sardonic declaration of his disdain for his other roommate Haines, the image takes on a jarringly melancholy tone the second time it appears in the “Proteus” episode in Stephen’s interior monologue. “A drowning man. His human eyes scream out to me out of horror of his death. I...With him together down...I could not save her. Waters: bitter death: lost<sup>4</sup>.” The failure to save the drowned man involuntarily evokes Stephen’s failure to absolve his mother at death through prayer, and the abrupt intrusion of this memory is only further emphasized by the sudden shift in the gender of the pronoun. Though this repeated image, along with the other recurring textual fragments in the narrative,

begins to reify Stephen's nightmare of history—uttered to the school headmaster Mr. Deasy only in the previous episode—they are not performing the task of awakening the reader from the nightmare of history as Stephen's aesthetic theory demands of the ideal work of art. Rather, these fragments are only brutally awakening the reader to the nightmare itself, i.e. constantly reminding the reader of the nightmare of history through the sudden and inescapable infiltration of a resurrected phrase or image.

For that matter, the repeated fragments are also reminding the characters of their flaws through an often painfully explicit rehashing. Take, for instance, the next occurrence of the “drowned man” image, in which the novel's other protagonist Leopold Bloom is attempting to recount the story of a near drowning in the Liffey but is repeatedly “drowned out,” one might say, by the others in the funeral carriage<sup>5</sup>. Just as the image has already exposed Stephen's failure to “save” his mother, it now exposes one of the most poignant aspects of Bloom's social incompetence: his failure to engage an audience with a story. And just as before, the intrusive nature of this passage (for example, “Martin Cunningham thwarted his speech rudely”) parallels the intrusive nature of the nightmare, to which the reader is again rudely awakened<sup>6</sup>. However, what one may not realize is that the first occurrence of the image of the drowning man already itself seems to embody this sense of the nightmare conceit: “You saved men from drowning. I'm not a *hero*, however<sup>7</sup>.” The fact that Stephen says this—and at the beginning of the novel—seems to recall Joyce's own shortcomings as an author, the renunciation of the title of “hero” directly evoking the failure to complete his autobiographical novel *Stephen Hero*. This notion would seem to be only further confirmed by the theory Stephen devises in the “Scylla and Charybdis” episode that Shakespeare's works are autobiographical<sup>8</sup>. Likewise, Joyce's *Ulysses*, even if not as autobiographical as *Stephen Hero*, may retain aspects of autobiography, even if only reflecting his botched attempt to write one. Thus, the incessant circulation of textual fragments effectively possesses a nightmarish quality not only for the observer of Joyce's art, but for Joyce himself, without offering any means of solace for either the author or his audience.

One of the most apparent counterexamples to this rather defeatist interpretation of the conceit is the nostalgic invocation of history. Joyce certainly employs this mode of recollection, yet, as an example will show,

not with the conventionally positive associations of nostalgia. In the “Ithaca” episode, Bloom encourages Stephen to “chant in a modulated voice a strange legend on an allied theme” in the course of their conversation<sup>9</sup>. Though one of many juvenile ballads that Stephen would have most likely learned as a child, the content of the song he chooses is not so innocent. The lyrics reference not only an actual case of blood libel from the 13th century, but one pertaining to antisemitism, which is a recurrent problem for Bloom as a Jew dwelling amongst Irish society<sup>10</sup>. Yet the antagonism of the song toward Bloom is actually multilayered. On one level, it is evoking the antisemitic repression he has already experienced even in the course of a single day. On another, it is evoking the historical antisemitism of British culture in general (the child's ballad derives from the “Prioress' Tale” in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*)<sup>11</sup>. However, the ballad is also reifying other predatory conceptions of Bloom beyond the image that it conveys. Joyce's schema for the episode—intended to parallel the “Ithaca” episode in the *Odyssey*—implies that Bloom is Odysseus himself, with Stephen already established as Odysseus' son Telemachus. Just as Odysseus slaughters the suitors who are living off of Telemachus' resources, Bloom “slaughters” the “suitors” Buck Mulligan and Haines who are living off of Stephen's rent<sup>12</sup>. Though for both texts the role of slaughterer is intended as heroic, it momentarily dons a perverted mask in Stephen's song, which portrays the Jew as slaughtering an innocent child for sacrifice. In addition to the parallels with the *Odyssey*, the narrative of this specific episode unfolds in question-answer format as a parody of a Catholic catechism. However, the “question” preceding Stephen's song, “Recite the first (major) part of this chanted legend?” is actually an imperative juxtaposed with a question mark<sup>13</sup>. Beyond burlesquing the format of the episode, this contrast seems to cast the blood libel's status as a mere legend into question. Indeed, no sooner does the song end than Bloom himself begins to “[weigh] the possible evidences for and against ritual murder,” finding that he is, in fact, “not totally immune” from all of the incriminating evidence he conjures<sup>14</sup>. “From which (if any) of these mental or physical disorders was he not totally immune?,” asks the text, to which it answers itself: “From hypnotic suggestion” and “from somnambulism<sup>15</sup>”. The recitation of the legend has awoken Bloom to the nightmare, either recalling a time when he directly dwells in it or conflates the real world

with a nightmare.

However, there remains yet another dimension to Bloom’s torment. The demise of little Harry Hughes in the ballad results from losing his ball to a Jew’s property and attempting to retrieve it, which recalls the scene in the “Nausicaa” episode when Bloom intercepts a ball from young Jacky and Tommy<sup>16</sup>. Though this scene is among the most poignant demonstrations of Bloom’s benevolence toward others, Jacky’s mother Cissy Caffrey prefers that Bloom throw the ball to her “to avoid trouble<sup>17</sup>”. The “trouble” she intends to avoid could easily be further conflict between the boys over the ball, but the narrative does not fully exclude the possibility that the trouble could also imply her perception of Bloom as a threat to their safety. Regardless of the degree of this possibility, Bloom’s interception and subsequent throwing of the ball ultimately leads to his auto-erotic encounter with Gerty: the ball “rolled down the slope and stopped right under Gerty’s skirt near the little pool by the rock<sup>18</sup>”. With this flashback in mind, it comes as no surprise that the narrator of “Ithaca” parenthetically refers to Bloom as “secret infidel” as he is contemplating the evidence for and against the historicity of the legend<sup>19</sup>. The predatory nature of the Jew in the legend has led to Bloom’s perception of himself as a potential predator (and, moreover, an adulterer), an overwhelming guilt that perhaps partially accounts for his timidity and complete evasion of imposing or intrusive gesture.

On the other hand, as with the image of the drowning man, everything about the chanting of the legend embodies the intrusive nature of the nightmare. The sudden break into song is a complete *non sequitur* to the preceding conversation, though the narrator would like to claim that it is “on an allied theme<sup>20</sup>”. The innocent recitation of a childhood ballad soon morphs into antisemitic propaganda, just as the innocent game of little Harry Hughes leads to his grisly murder, just as the innocent game of Jacky and Tommy indirectly leads to Bloom’s public masturbation. Even the tonality of the song from its sheet music reproduced in the text substantiates the sudden relapse into nightmare. The first part of the song is in D major (Dedalus), and the second part of the song is in B minor (Bloom). This detail would seem otherwise coincidental, except for the fact that the narrator goes out of his or her way to parenthetically denote each part of the song as “major” and “minor,” though the particular root of each key is omitted in the text<sup>21</sup>. A nostalgic reminiscence for

Stephen turns upon itself and becomes a nightmare for Bloom, effectively corroborating University of Tulsa professor Robert Spoo’s general observation of Stephen in *James Joyce and the Language of History: Dedalus’s Nightmare*: “[Stephen] therefore learns a lesson that by the time of *Ulysses* he knows by heart, that the notion of a surmounted past is indeed a dream, a dream that quickly passes into a nightmare as each effort to shed one’s antecedents reinscribes them ever more deceptively in the present<sup>22</sup>”. Joyce appears to reinforce Stephen’s unfortunate insight, as every aspect of the text’s organization that carries the weight of Joyce’s antecedents—from its historical and literary allusions, to its catechismal format—is suddenly twisted into an inescapable nightmare.

Considering now that both Dedalus and Joyce seem to be aware that their attempts to escape personal history, heritage, and the notion of self-repeating history are futile, it follows that we reject these elements as insufficient explanations for the “nightmare of history” conceit. As to the nightmare for which they do believe there is a hope of awakening, several predominant interpretations remain. An initially salient candidate is the conception of history as a spurious social construction, commonly denoted as the “*Rashomon* effect.” As critic David G. Wright observes in *Ironies of ‘Ulysses’*, “Joyce exploits this phenomenon for ironic effect in the ‘Nestor’ episode, where Deasy relies on questionable and sometimes erroneous narratives... to vindicate his view of history<sup>23</sup>”. Indeed, this irony could not be better placed, considering that Stephen has just stated the quote that is the subject of this essay. Both *Ulysses* and *Portrait* lend at least some implication that Stephen is on a sort of epistemological quest for absolute truth, which would explain his aversion to any fabricated view of history. In *Portrait*, Stephen’s aforementioned aesthetic theory attempts to prove its conclusion on the ground that “the first step in the direction of beauty is to understand the frame and scope of the imagination, to comprehend the act itself of esthetic apprehension,” just as Aristotle’s ideal of the contemplative virtue requires comprehending the act of contemplation itself<sup>24</sup>. Both Aristotle’s and Stephen’s theories lend the pretense that there is some absolute idea, whether of truth or beauty, that one may eventually attain through intense contemplation.

*Ulysses* amplifies this notion of an absolute idea into parody even while suggesting Stephen’s perseverance in discovering this idea. The three parts

of the text (The Telemachiad, The Odyssey, The Nostos) begin respectively with the full-page letters S, M, and P<sup>25</sup>. These letters are common metavariables in formal logic used to designate the subject, middle, and predicate terms in a deductive syllogism, and thus they lend an apodictic aura to the narrative<sup>26</sup>. Of course, the narrative turns out to be quite the opposite, maddeningly chaotic and ambiguous. The opening of the “Proteus” episode finds Stephen in the solipsistic uncertainty of philosopher George Berkeley’s subjective idealism: “Open your eyes now. I will. One moment. Has all vanished since? If I open and am for ever in the black adiabane. *Basta!*”<sup>27</sup>. Considering Stephen’s desire for certainty that this passage implies, it would seem to follow that history, as an infinitely exploitable object of memory, is a nightmare from which Stephen intends to awake. University of Alabama professor Dwight Eddins initially confirms this conjecture in his essay “Ulysses: The Search for the Logos,” finding that “Stephen rejects [the] utterly autonomous logos as Blakean ‘excess,’” but also that “[Stephen’s] subsequent question—‘What’s left us then?’—is immediately answered in the form of the alternate nightmare<sup>28</sup>.” As Eddins goes on to explain, “this alternate nightmare” that Stephen rejects is the vicious *logos* of Thomas Hardy’s “Hap” that seems to be the only form of historiographic certainty, in which nature and whatever god may have created it are cruel and indifferent to one’s suffering. Stephen will express his disdain for this grueling order several times throughout the text, mockingly invoking “*dio boia*” (Italian for “hangman god”) and “old Nobodaddy” (William Blake’s expression for a god of wrath)<sup>29,30</sup>. Accordingly, identifying the artificial aspect of history with Stephen’s nightmare already seems dubious, considering that Stephen knows rejecting this revisionism will only leave him with an equally undesirable option.

However, one might also find a loophole to this otherwise impregnable dilemma, an escape quite similar to that posed by Stephen’s above aesthetic theory. If Stephen is unwilling to submit to either the contingency of someone else’s history or the malevolence of “actual” history, he can always take matters into his own hands and create his *own* subjective conception of history. Stephen’s heroic task could be to reconcile the naïveté of Mr. Deasy’s theory that “all history moves towards one great goal” with the protean chaos of a world in which there is always the possibility that “I [am] suddenly naked here as I sit” (which, one might add,

is a common motif of nightmares, and thus parallels Bloom’s aforementioned reflection on the conflation of the real world with nightmare)<sup>31</sup>. Spoo substantiates this conception of Stephen’s objective in *James Joyce and the Language of History* with an analysis of his “Parable of the Plums” in the “Aeolus” episode:

In his “Parable of the Plums” Stephen also draws together the “pellets” and “snippets” of his erudition and experience, and replies to providentialist history by asserting, as Pound did, that there are no indisputable “cords” tying one detail to the next, that the artist’s vision, his or her “underlying conviction-plus-passion,” can sever received connections and build up “our concept of wrong, of right, of history,” just as Joyce had done in *Dubliners*, that “chapter of the moral history of my country<sup>32</sup>.”

Because Stephen overcomes the fatalistic impressions of history, one might then declare that Stephen has finally understood how to overcome the nightmare of history. However, if Stephen is as astute as the text portrays him, would he not be at least somewhat aware of the fact that his logos—however more dialogic than Deasy’s Judaeo-Christian eschatology—is yet just as arbitrary? In fact, he does seem to at least concede to this principle, although in a somewhat circumventing fashion, as he walks along the beach in the “Proteus” episode: “Saint Ambrose heard it, sigh of leaves and waves, waiting, awaiting the fullness of their times, *diebus ac noctibus iniurias patiens ingemiscit*. To no end gathered: vainly then released, forth flowing, wending back: loom of the moon<sup>33</sup>.” Though Stephen attributes transience only to insentient nature in this passage (leaves collecting and dispersing for no apparent purpose), the principle is the same for any sentient being’s conception of history: fragments to no permanent or transcendent end gathered from a Heraclitean stream, as fleeting as the accumulation of leaves, vainly then released in the death of the creator and of those who attempt to immortalize the creator. The “loom of the moon” neatly bookends Stephen’s observation here by embodying the aforementioned historiographic tension he intends to overcome between the sinister and the chaotic. The moon is both an icon of Lucifer and an archetype of the transitory (need one be reminded of Juliet’s refusal to swear by the moon?). Thus, it would seem that not only does Stephen *not* view the artifice of history as the nightmare from which he

is trying to awake (considering that he himself intends to become an artificer of history), but even if he did, he would again realize the futility of his endeavor.

It is the root of this absolute futility that finally leads one to the most probable explanation of the “nightmare of history” conceit: the inevitability of death. St. John’s University professor Stephen Sicari broaches this notion in his work *Joyce’s Modernist Allegory: Ulysses and the History of the Novel*: “Joyce’s naturalism is this radical kind of naturalism: the only shape the naturalistic novelist can find is paralysis, which I understand as the repetition of attempts to escape the human condition that fail, and death. The only telos in the naturalist’s worldview is decay and death<sup>34</sup>”. Martin Heidegger aptly articulates this concept’s relation with history in his treatise *Being and Time*: “Thrownness into death reveals itself to Dasein [being] in a more primordial and impressive manner in that state-of-mind which we have called ‘anxiety.’ Anxiety in the face of death...amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown Being towards its end<sup>35</sup>”. One’s history has already dictated that they are to die at some point, which can absolutely stifle one’s sense of efficacy in intentional endeavor, considering that one’s stake in the history of the universe can never be permanent. Both Stephen and Bloom struggle with this realization, though Stephen is primarily fixated on death’s implications and Bloom is primarily fixated on death itself. Consider, for instance, another passage from the opening dialogue between Stephen and Mulligan, in which the former is confronting the latter for his lack of reverence toward Stephen’s deceased mother: “—And what is death, he asked, your mothers or yours or my own? [...] —I am not thinking of the offence to my mother. —Of what, then? Buck Mulligan asked. —Of the offence to me, Stephen answered<sup>36</sup>”. Stephen is concerned here with the implications of his apparent insignificance (“O, it’s *only* Dedalus”), though even this feeling of insignificance undermines his hopes for immortality.

However, this overly conceited reaction to Mulligan’s statement also signals Stephen’s concern with his own death, which his mother’s death evokes. The recurring prayer he refuses to recite at his mother’s deathbed, “*Liliata rutilantium...*” is just as much a mourning for his mother as for himself, considering the contexts that precede its sudden appearance: “Her eyes on *me* to strike *me* down,” “Who brought *me* into this world lies there, bronzelidded, under few cheap

flowers<sup>37</sup>”. The textual manifestations of the prayer throughout the text further emphasize the imminence of death for Stephen, decaying from an initial verbatim appearance to simply the first two words, in the manner of a William Basinski composition<sup>38</sup>. Author Anthony Burgess further corroborates this notion with his analysis of the aforementioned “drowning man” motif: “it has its obvious Homeric parallel in the many drowned companions of Odysseus, but it has another function as well — it calls up an aspect of that world of the dead which, like history itself, oppresses the world of the living<sup>39</sup>.” The recurrence of the prayer actually surpasses the “drowned man” motif in this respect, though, for it oppresses the world of the living with the imminence of decay in both its content and its form (which decays over time). Stephen’s ego, which distinguishes him as above this common fate of humanity, is thus bruised by Mulligan’s above comment. One then perceives the expression of this bruised ego later in his Protean musings: “See now. There all the time without you: and ever shall be, world without end<sup>40</sup>”. While also setting the precedent for the motif of eternal return (“world without end”), Stephen is also discovering a world that will carry on all the same without him once he has ceased to exist, leaving him inextricably isolated in the grand scheme of the cosmos.

Bloom, though the pragmatic foil to Stephen’s abstract philosophizing, drifts off into equally morbid musings, particularly in the nocturnal hour of “Ithaca.” His speculations as to the whereabouts of the people with which he interacted that day, marked one by one as “in bed,” culminate suddenly in the appearance of “Paddy Dignam (in the grave)<sup>41</sup>”. The combination of noises at that moment (“bellchime and handtouch and footstep and lonechill”) perpetuates this rumination on the macabre, and so both the ambience and the apparition of the late Paddy Dignam already recall the intrusive nature of the nightmare. Bloom proceeds to reflect upon the “various manners” in which his companions have died (again concluding with Patrick Dignam’s death), almost echoing the passage at the end of “The Dead” in *Dubliners* when Gabriel observes that “one by one, they [are] all becoming shades<sup>42</sup>.” Of course, unlike Gabriel’s statement, Bloom’s would be merely one among many of the banal, line-item thoughts he conjures throughout the day, if not for the passages that follow. Among his justifications for “meditat[ion] on schemes so difficult of realisation,” for instance, is the fact that “as a philosopher he knew that at the termination

of any allotted life only an infinitesimal part of any person's desires has been realised<sup>43</sup>". In a sense, Bloom actually extends the morbidity of Stephen's above observation. Not only are the ends to which history is oriented arbitrary and transient, but they are more often than not left unfulfilled. He continues to ruminate on human limitations even as he is falling asleep: "Going to a dark bed there was a square round Sinbad the Sailor roc's auk egg in the night of the bed of all the auks of the rocs of Darkinbad the Brightdayler<sup>44</sup>". The passage superimposes two literary renderings of the square circle, one the roc's egg in the *Arabian Nights* and the other the beatific vision in Dante's *Paradiso*, both of which emphasize the boundaries of human thought that prohibit one from conceiving such a paradoxical object<sup>45</sup>. It would follow, then, that Bloom's cognition is literally reduced to an infinitesimal point upon such a poignant realization of its finitude<sup>46</sup>. Alternately, if one is to view the concluding dot of the "Ithaca" episode as the orthographic depiction of the last fleck of Bloom's waking life for that day (in any case, it can be inferred that he has fallen asleep by the end of the episode), it would follow then that Bloom has not awoken from, but, in fact, descended into, the nightmare of history as the inevitability of death upon this realization of human finitude.

Of course, at this point one might question the significance of Bloom's thoughts on death, considering that death is (at least, this essay intends to show that it is) *Stephen's* nightmare—or, to counter Mulligan's above retort, death is Stephen's and no one else's. In fact, Bloom holds the key to Stephen's awakening from this nightmare, as one of his particular musings on death in "Ithaca" suggests:

With what meditations did Bloom accompany his demonstration to his companion of various constellations? Meditations...of the parallax or parallactic drift of so-called fixed stars, in reality evermoving wanderers from immeasurably remote eons to infinitely remote futures in comparison with which the years, threescore and ten, of allotted human life formed a parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity<sup>47</sup>.

Initially, this passage sets the precedent for Bloom's aforementioned cogitations of death. The seventy years that comprise the average human life expectancy—and the world in which those seventy years are spent—are

reduced to naught before the aggregate space-time continuum. However, this meditation also evokes a particular fixation of Bloom's broached at several points during the narrative, the concept of "parallax," which is "the apparent displacement or the difference in apparent direction of an object as seen from two different points of view<sup>48</sup>." This motif first appears in the "Lestrygonians" episode as Bloom is strolling across Dublin on his lunch break: "Parallax. I never exactly understood. There's a priest. Could ask him. Par it's Greek: parallel, parallax. Met him pikehoses she called it till I told her about the transmigration. O rocks!<sup>49</sup>". The image of the parallax for Bloom serves as a contrast to solipsism, a means of affirmation of one's self and one's environment by means of relativism—i.e. that knowledge, much less the assured existence, of a particular object can only be acquired in terms of its relation to a point outside of it. In the case of astronomy, it is the displacement of a celestial body in terms of two points on earth; in Bloom's case, it is Molly's knowledge of the term "metempsychosis," acquired by her relation to and communication with Bloom. Relation to the world outside of oneself not only keeps one informed, but validates one as "alive" to the world, in a sense beyond one's solitary *cogito ergo sum*, uniting otherwise alienated and "evermoving wanderers." In the spirit of the parallax, the pragmatic-minded Bloom also validates the existence of the otherwise solipsistic Stephen by grounding him in the physical world. Just as Bloom's father Virag in the "Circe" episode teaches Bloom to "observe the attention to details of dustspecks," Bloom as the father-figure to Stephen is now teaching him to observe the details of both the earth and the universe beyond, from "the myriad minute entomological organic existences concealed in cavities of the earth" to "the infinite lattiginous scintillating uncondensed milky way<sup>50</sup>". This particular connection can also explain Virag's sudden, unprecedented exclamation of "parallax" in the former passage. Stephen even appears to momentarily acknowledge Bloom's parallactic extension toward him. The final corruption of the above Latin prayer, resounding at his and Bloom's parting of ways, ends with "*Chorus excipiat*" ["Chorus rescues"] as its own sentence, and indeed, it is by means of the chorus (i.e. relation to others) that Stephen can finally awaken from the nightmare of history.

However, even with Bloom's parallactic role established, there may still remain some confusion as

to why Bloom himself takes on Stephen’s nightmare at the end of “Ithaca” when it is he that holds the key to awaking from it. For as effectively as Bloom may initially convince himself that he has created a parallax—i.e. established an intimate relationship—between Molly and himself, or between Stephen and himself, he is ultimately quite alone. Stephen rejects his offer of hospitality, and upon his exit Bloom feels “the cold of interstellar space, thousands of degrees below freezing point or the absolute zero of Fahrenheit, Centigrade or Réaumur,” as if he were a celestial body left to drift into oblivion (or, in any case, into the cogitations of death mentioned above)<sup>51</sup>. Then, as he recounts his day to Molly, the catechism asks “what limitations of activity and inhibitions of conjugal rights were perceived by listener and narrator concerning themselves during the course of his intermittent and increasingly more laconic narration,” to which it answers, “a limitation of activity, mental and corporal, inasmuch as complete mental intercourse between himself and the listener had not taken place since the consummation of puberty<sup>52</sup>”. Bloom’s withholding of particular details from his day (Molly, while less secretive, still commits the same basic vice by never mentioning her infidelity explicitly to Bloom) keeps them from sharing complete intimacy with each other, with the historical nightmare of guilt taking secondary prominence to the isolation resulting from this lack of intimacy. One might even argue that the conclusion to Arthur Schnitzler’s novella *Dream Story* published four years later takes its cues from this final scene in “Ithaca,” in that the only means by which the protagonist Fridolin can finally awaken from the pursuing nightmare of his debauchery is not by a covenant of future fidelity but simply by a confession in the moment to his wife Albertine that unites them in collective survival. Such an analysis also provides another explanation for the dot that concludes “Ithaca.” As an answer to the simple question, “Where,” the dot dislocates Bloom from the world as merely a solitary point, devoid of surrounding space and thus absolutely alone, destined to be eventually forgotten<sup>53</sup>. A new development has consequently emerged in the conception of the nightmare, until now only a nightmare of death in a rather general sense. To again consult Thomas Hardy, it is not the first, physical death, but the “second death...when, with the living, memory of us numbs / And blank oblivion comes,” that is the true nightmare<sup>54</sup>.

From this final elaboration on the conceit in

question, it is now apparent why this nightmare is also the very nightmare of Joyce himself, from which he intends to awaken by means of composing *Ulysses*. “I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that’s the only way of insuring one’s immortality,” Joyce once infamously declared of his work<sup>55</sup>. In one sense, he is echoing Oscar Wilde’s preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (which is, in fact, also quoted by Mulligan in the “Telemachus” episode): “Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex and vital. When critics disagree, the artist is in accord with himself”<sup>56</sup>. More specifically, from a parallaxic standpoint, Joyce is aware that the only assurance of his immortality is by means of relation to others, who are constantly interacting with his work and thus keeping him “alive” even after he has ceased to exist physically. While this principle may be true, it is also rather parasitic and deceptive in its intention. Joyce remains immortal provided that his readers remain bound to the nightmare of history—both of tradition and of insignificance—ceaselessly wandering Dedalus’s labyrinth and attempting to decipher the meaning of the text, rather than creating an immortalizing *logos* of their own as Stephen does. In effect, the otherwise solicitous parallax collapses into egotism, and it is only once “the old order yields place most grudgingly to the new,” as Queens College professor Edmund Epstein describes Joyce’s conception of the apocalypse, that Joyce will have finally died his second death<sup>57</sup>. Then again, once Joyce has been forgotten, we will have also forgotten the nightmare of history from which we were supposed to escape in the first place.

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ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, (New York: Random House, 1961): 34.
- <sup>2</sup> James Joyce, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," *The Portable James Joyce*, ed. Harry Levin (New York: Viking, 1947): 243-526, 469.
- <sup>3</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, 4.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-5, quoted excerpt not from text.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, emphasis added.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 690.
- <sup>10</sup> Don Gifford, and Robert Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988): 579.
- <sup>11</sup> Helen Cooper, "Chaucer and Joyce," *The Chaucer Review*, 21, no. 2 (1986): 142-54, 151.
- <sup>12</sup> Gifford and Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, 579.
- <sup>13</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 690.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 692.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 692.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 355-6.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 692.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 690.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 690-1.
- <sup>22</sup> Robert Spoor, *James Joyce and the Language of History: Dedalus's Nightmare*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 99.
- <sup>23</sup> David Wright, *Ironies of 'Ulysses'*, (Savage: Barnes & Noble Books, 1992): 128.
- <sup>24</sup> Joyce, *Portrait*, 475.
- <sup>25</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 2, 54, 612.
- <sup>26</sup> Gifford and Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, 12.
- <sup>27</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 37.
- <sup>28</sup> Dwight Eddins, "Ulysses: The Search for Logos," *ELH*, 47, no. 4 (1980): 804-19, 808.
- <sup>29</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 205, 213.
- <sup>30</sup> Gifford and Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, 238, 250.
- <sup>31</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 34, 37.
- <sup>32</sup> Spoor, *James Joyce and the Language of History*, 128.
- <sup>33</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 49-50.
- <sup>34</sup> Stephen Sicari, *Joyce's Modernist Allegory: Ulysses and the History of the Novel*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001): 33.
- <sup>35</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008): 295.
- <sup>36</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 8-9.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 190.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.
- <sup>39</sup> Anthony Burgess, *Rejoyce*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1965).
- <sup>40</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 37.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 704.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 704-5.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 720.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 737.
- <sup>45</sup> Gifford and Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, 606.
- <sup>46</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 737.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 698.
- <sup>48</sup> Gifford and Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, 160.
- <sup>49</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 154.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 698-9.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 704.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 736.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 737.
- <sup>54</sup> Thomas Hardy, "The To-Be-Forgotten," *Thomas Hardy: The Complete Poems*, ed. James Gibson (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001): 144, lines 2-4.
- <sup>55</sup> Gifford and Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, v, emphasis added.



<sup>56</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1992): 3-4.

<sup>57</sup> Edmund Epstein, *The Ordeal of Stephen Dedalus: The Conflict of the Generations in James Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971): 167.