I

[1 · TELEMACHUS]

Time: 8 a.m. Thursday 16 June 1904
Location: Martello Tower, Sandycove, Co. Dublin;
Forty-Foot Bathing Place

Summary

Malachi Mulligan, a medical student, appears at the top of the martello tower in Sandycove, Co. Dublin, holding a shaving bowl, and launches into a parody of the consecration of the Mass (the turning of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ), using the shaving bowl as a mock chalice for the consecration of the wine. Stephen Dedalus, a would-be writer and currently a teacher, who also lives in the tower, soon joins him. Stephen watches as Mulligan completes the parody. It is clear that there is friction between them: the first thing we learn about Dedalus is that he is 'displeased and sleepy'. Almost immediately we find out why: another young man is staying as a guest in the tower, an Englishman, known only as Haines, a friend of Mulligan's. Stephen quietly objects to the presence in the tower of Haines, who was raving in his sleep all the previous night in a manner that Stephen finds disturbing. There is a strong contrast between the manners of the two young men: Mulligan is all bluster and bravado; Stephen is reticent to the point of rudeness, refusing any sociability. It is as if as the exaggerated exuberance of Mulligan's manner is an equal and opposite reaction to the exaggerated reticence of Stephen's. Mulligan more or less ignores Stephen's complaint, turning to the sea and praising it with mock-Homeric epithets: 'snotgreen'; 'scrotumtightening'. Mulligan mockingly holds up his shaving mirror to Stephen's gaze. Stephen, pointing to it, bitterly declares it to be a symbol of Irish art: 'The cracked lookingglass of a servant'.

The problem with Haines (later in the conversation Stephen, quite characteristically, says "let him stay") is only the ostensible cause of their disaffection. As the ensuing difficult conversation between them makes clear, it has its roots in events prior to the novel's opening: the death of Stephen's mother and what Stephen takes to be Mulligan's disrespectful attitude to him over that death. As they discuss this issue (Stephen has relaxed his guard at least to the point of telling Mulligan what the matter is), Mulligan again comments on Stephen's mother's death in a way that worsens still further the 'gaping wounds' in Stephen's heart.

Nothing is resolved by the quarrel; Mulligan goes down to the living room and Stephen is left alone on the roof of the tower. Here he has an intense imaginary encounter with his mother's spirit, and tries to shake off the burden of guilt he feels over her death (he apparently refused to kneel and pray for her as she lay on her deathbed). Descending, he joins Mulligan and Haines for breakfast, a meal at which the two Irishmen take pleasure in baffling and teasing their guest (an ardent Hibernophile) with their almost impenetrable and highly oblique conversational exchanges. An old woman comes to deliver the milk; she is duly mocked by Mulligan and silently scorned by Stephen, who sees her as a figure of subjected Ireland. (He sees everything as a figure of something else.) She is ardently admired

by Haines, however, who is pleased to see her as a type of the Irish peasantry and talks in Irish to her. After her departure, Mulligan and Stephen engage in further repartee. In the course of this it emerges that Stephen rarely washes, having a phobia about water; however, he consoles himself with the observation that 'All Ireland is washed by the gulfstream'. This remark greatly tickles Haines, but when Stephen inquires if he might make money by it, Haines is instantly on his guard. Mulligan sees Haines as a potential source of funds (both he and Stephen are chronically short of money) and he is annoyed that Stephen has ruined a chance to extract some cash from their English visitor.

After breakfast, Mulligan, accompanied by Stephen and Haines, goes down to the Forty Foot Bathing Place for his morning swim, singing a self-composed ditty, 'The ballad of joking Jesus', en route. As they go along, Haines attempts to engage Stephen in some philosophical conversation. In response to Haines's remark that Stephen seems to be free to make his own choices, the would-be poet declares that he is 'a servant of two masters', the British Empire and the Roman Catholic church. A third master, probably his own muse, wants him for odd jobs. Haines reacts calmly to the remark about the British Empire, opining that 'history is to blame' for Britain's oppression of Ireland. Stephen, meanwhile, probably in reaction to Haines's comment and to his own mention of the Roman Catholic church, has drifted off into an elaborate fantasy glorifying the power of the church and associating Mulligan with some of the routed heresiarchs. Stephen appears to identify himself with the church in this instance.

At the bathing place, he hears two men discussing the man who had drowned nine days previously: they expect his body to be found today when the tide comes in at about 1 p.m.

Stephen has locked the door of the tower behind them and takes the key with him. Before he leaves for his teaching job, however, Mulligan asks him for the key, ostensibly to keep his clothes flat while he swims. Stephen has foreseen this request: he believes the key is his, that he paid the rent, but he nonetheless hands it over without complaint and departs with bitterness in his heart, expressed in a single unspoken word: 'Usurper'.

Correspondences

The odyssey begins on the Greek island of Ithaca, the home of Odysseus (Ulysses). He has been missing since the end of the Trojan War, many years previously, and in his absence, a gang of arrogant suitors for the hand of Penelope, his wife, has taken over the royal palace. The boldest of the suitors is Antinous. Odysseus's son, Telemachus, is displaced, usurped, and ignored, able only to watch helplessly as his father's goods are laid waste. The goddess Pallas Athena, the constant supporter of Odysseus, visits Telemachus, disguised at first as Mentes, an old friend of the family,

and then as old Mentor, the rather ineffectual guardian of Odysseus's houses and stables. She advises Telemachus to leave Ithaca and go in quest of his father on the Greek mainland. In the Gilbert schema, Stephen is Telemachus, Mulligan is Antinous and the milkwoman is Mentor (although Stephen's response to her is much more ambiguous than is Telemachus's to Mentor).

Another system of correspondences is already in play, and this is specifically alluded to, unlike the Homeric parallels. Haines at one point remarks that the tower and its setting remind him of Elsinore, the setting of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and this is a clue to the analogy between Stephen and Prince Hamlet, the heir displaced by his usurping uncle, Claudius, who has murdered Hamlet's father and married his mother. Haines foreshadows this important motif with his remarks about the father/son relationship in *Hamlet*: he links it explicitly to the theological father and son. The *Hamlet* parallel will run through the book in tandem with the Homeric one.

Style

The episode is written in what Joyce himself called 'the initial style', a style that, with variants and interruptions, holds good up to about midway through the book. The technique of this episode is called in the Gilbert schema 'narrative (young)', and there is a remarkable sense of freshness and clarity to the physical descriptions. The time is early morning and the style has a corresponding sharpness of outline; the famous opening sentence: 'Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed' leaves nothing in shade or unclear; with its carefully chosen adjectives, the physical image of Mulligan is immediately present before us. The second sentence instantly reinforces this by telling us what Mulligan is wearing.

A cool, detached narrative voice seems, therefore, to be in control of the action. Very soon, however, we realize that there are complications with this scenario: the first hint comes with the insertion of the single word 'Chrysostomos' after the detached narrative description of Mulligan's 'even white teeth glistening here and there with gold points'. Once the reader has figured out that 'chrysostomos' is Greek for 'golden-mouthed' (and is thus an appropriate term to apply to Mulligan's mouth as described, as well as being a term used for particularly eloquent Greek orators), the question arises as to where this strange comment comes from.

The answer can only be that it emanates from the mind of Stephen, that it is Stephen's internal mental comment on the sight of Mulligan's teeth, rendered without any intermediary forms such as 'he thought', 'he felt', etc., and even without any distinguishing typographical device such as italics. Thus we are introduced to the aspect of *Ulysses* that probably caused the greatest stir on its

initial appearance (apart from its sexual frankness, of course): the 'interior monologue' or 'stream of consciousness'. This method whereby the feelings and thoughts of characters are conveyed with unprecedented immediacy, apparently just rendered directly on the page as they occur, is indeed one of the dominant features of the book in the first ten episodes, growing increasingly complex in its deployment as the novel goes on; even in the later episodes it persists, although overlaid with many other techniques.

This episode also introduces a stylistic aspect of Stephen's consciousness that is pervasive: his extraordinary powers of visualisation. We first encounter this in the scene he summons up after Mulligan speaks of giving Haines 'a ragging worse than they gave Clive Kempthorpe'. Stephen instantly conjures up this event, which occurred in Oxford and which he could not have attended; so vivid is his depiction, however, that it is exactly as if Stephen had been a witness, if not a participant. The addition of the passage about the deaf gardener, oblivious to what is going on in Kempthorpe's room, is a typical Dedalus flourish and converts the little scene into a strange epiphany. Stephen has entirely annexed the event, made it his own in his imagination. It is significant that his next remark shows a relenting in his anger with Haines; it is as if the imaginary evocation has sufficed to dissipate a real problem (which has not thereby gone away). Stephen's imaginative powers have worked again, as they do throughout the book.

Commentary

In addition to the formal correspondences noted above, a more immediately obvious symbolism is operative throughout this first episode. It is clear, as Jeri Johnson points out in her notes to the Oxford University Press edition, even in the opening sentence: Mulligan emerges *bearing* a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay *crossed*: the words 'bearing' and 'crossed' suggest a more lofty and dignified action than that ostensibly being described. Mulligan proceeds in this first page to parody explicitly the actions of the priest in the Mass, from the opening *introit* to the consecration of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, the central moment of the Mass. But this explicit parody is merely the outward form and visible substance of an implicit parallel with the Mass that operates throughout the episode: the description of the breakfast which Mulligan serves up to Stephen and Haines is heavy with sacramental overtones, down to the two rays of light from the slit windows of the tower, doubling as candles on an altar. Mulligan's shedding of his dressing-gown is given a similarly sacerdotal, indeed Christ-like emphasis — and the appearance of an actual priest at the end of the episode merely serves to underscore a motif that has been operative throughout.

The Mass that Mulligan celebrates for Haines and at which Stephen is server

(he fetches the breakfast items from the locker at Mulligan's bidding, and he explicitly links Mulligan's bowl of lather to the boat of incense he carried as an altar server at Clongowes) is just one aspect of the episode's overall burden: servility. The dominant, privileged consciousness throughout is that of Stephen, although he is not the main actor: his is the only consciousness to which we are given direct access. This consciousness is acutely aware of its oppression. Although Haines is mocked, he is also being entertained, because he has money. Mulligan is putting on a show for his benefit (the Mass as spectacle); Stephen is encouraged to join in the entertainment and to some extent he does so, while occasionally kicking over the traces ('Would I make money by it?').

The symbolic, historical and mythic resonances of the episode come to a head in the scene with the milkwoman. We have already noted the Homeric parallel: the old milkwoman as the mortal form of the goddess Athena. In the Irish tradition of visionary poetry called the aisling, Ireland often appears to the poet as an old woman only to reveal herself at the end as the young, beautiful, ideal Erin. This tradition is highly relevant to the scene being enacted here: Haines is the English conqueror, Mulligan is, as Stephen reflects, Ireland's 'gay betrayer', the traitor figure who is a constant presence in Irish history and legend; Stephen is the dispossessed, usurped poet, the server of a servant, abandoned by his muse and by his country.

So at the very outset, *Ulysses* inscribes itself in a long Irish literary tradition: the positions being taken up carry an enormous cultural and historical baggage with them. Stephen's parting mental shot at Mulligan as he leaves for his teaching job, 'Usurper', condenses into one word the entire burden of a history and the symbolic structures it has generated (as well, of course, as referring to both *The odyssey* and *Hamlet* scenarios).

Importantly, none of this historical symbolism has to be forced on to the text. The characters themselves are well aware of their historical and cultural situation and enunciate it clearly. Stephen turns everything into allegory; Mulligan turns everything into parody. With such temperaments, there is no need for the reader to look for overtones; they do the interpreting for us, over and over again.

Biographical/historical

Line 1. *Buck Mulligan*: based on Oliver St John Gogarty (1878–1957), who had become friendly with Joyce in 1903. Gogarty later became a surgeon and a notable writer in his own right. The portrait of him as a young man presented in *Ulysses*, although later much resented by Gogarty, appears to have been largely accurate. Gogarty seems to have thought of the tower as a centre for the Hellenisation (and hence civilisation) of Ireland, just as Mulligan does in *Ulysses*, and wanted to enlist Joyce in the