

# The heroics of mind and space



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...His mother said:-O, Stephen will apologise. Dante said:-O, if not, the eagles will come and pull out his eyes. This capsule of utterance, which comes at the climax of the short first passage (or first independent “ poem” of the book, as Fisher might assert) that Joyce presents to us, defines the heroic quest that “ Stephen Hero” (and/or his latent identity as mythic Daedalus) must undertake. He is, in this instance, bound by a strict commandment from “ above” (from the towering grown-ups above him, from the air-borne, attacking eagles), from the poets of the past , and – most superficially from his elders, to perform an act of “ apology”. Stephen seals this cosmic agreement with his little song: Pull out his eyes, Apologise, Apologise, Pull out his eyes. Apologise, Pull out his eyes, Pull out his eyes, Apologise. Stephen internalizes his predicament or legacy – by chanting the words that descend to him from layers of higher authority. He shapes the received words with his own voice (whether it be “ out loud” or only inside his head), compresses /extractions phrases from the longer syntax, and utilizes rhyme in a patterned repetition. (In short, he has applied a “ craft”.) If his mother, a temporal and merely parental figure, initiates young Stephen’s artistic covenant in a mundane way, “ Dante” (whose “ real” identity in Stephen’s world is sparsely revealed in this passage) is the accidental and incidental avatar of an old poet, or the “ poetic tradition”, or the artist-creator that Stephen (or Joyce, if we treat this work as autobiographical) must become. The implied historic Dante serves as a representative, for Stephen and Joyce, of the poetic craft (Daedalus is a craftsman in myth), and a link across time with the Classical world; the latter being a world that the grown and almost fully adult Stephen in Ulysses and his compatriots would feign inhabit. ( His comrade, dissatisfied with Ireland, instructs to Stephen, “ Hellenise it.” (p

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6) ). Eagles are the sacred birds of Zeus (and not indigenous to Ireland). As the voice of “ Dante” speaks from another time (14th century Italy), so he also speaks of a far away land and kosmos in which this foreign bird exists, and on another level, where Zeus is the most powerful god of an ancient pantheon. (It cannot be coincidental that “ Thunder” the natural phenomenon associated with the Zeus deity – is the last name of a little boy in the following “ section” of part I (p 21), presented as an ironic [as this is a tussle between school boys] but over-powering, unbeatable foe.) These two “ shots from the blue” (flashes of dialogue from mother and Dante on the page before Stephen rains out his song), both introduced by an archaic, inspired, and elevated “ O” (or, a mere interjective, colloquial “ O”, if we read these lines mundanely, as in common speech; both levels, mundane and elated, are surely implied by Joyce) warn Stephen and guide him. He must achieve a special vision like the eagles of Zeus, like the king of the Greek pantheon (the master of the universe in which Daedalus lives). Or, Stephen is warned by polyphonic sources (governess Dante, the specter of the poet Dante, and by his own self as he chants his rhyme), he will lose his “ eyes” and “ sight” (that is, he will lose his special artistic vision, the product of which is “ apology” [see below]) altogether. He is receiving a challenge from a mythical source that speaks to his latent Daedalic identity. If then, by this passage, we are to assume that Stephen is receiving some sort of primal message echoed from artists and artistic/inspired legacies across the ages, and we then metonymically link Stephen and his eyes to the clawing eagles, we may ask what sort of sight might be associated with “ eagles”. From lore (and science) we know that eagles possess an ability to see over great distances (eight times that of humans, in fact) and an ability to navigate (as winged

creatures) through and across this distance. They soar and to see the to the full parameters of a vast (by human standards) spatial realm. This trope of control over/placement within a great spatial realm (universe, globe, nation, world, etc.), here implied by the symbol of the eagle, recurs throughout *Portrait of the Artist*(3). To illustrate Stephen's grapplings with a spatially-defined world we could begin with his careful scrolling of his exact and outward-extending location in " Clongowes, Sallins, County Kildare, Ireland..." and, ultimately, " The Universe" (p 27) in his notebook. But Joyce begins to play with Stephen and his relationship to a defined and significant spatial universe sooner than this. At the end of the first section in part I, Stephen is hiding under a desk (p 20), cowering in a small space. At the outset of the second section of part I Stephen is in the midst of " The wide playgrounds...his body small and weak" (p 20), cowering in a large space. Twin and seemingly contradictory phobias, claustro- and agora-, are paired in the frightened, struggling, and evasive, i. e., crafty (" He kept on the fringe of his line, out of sight of his prefect..." p 20) person of Stephen Dedalus. His affliction, that is, his artistic affliction/curse, is principally one of the mind and psyche. Phobias are a sickness of the mind and therefore, can only be transcended through use of the psyche, and by the cultivation of the mind.(2) Stephen's flickering and resistant wit is present both when he is under the table (composing a ditty out of his elders' speech) and when he is strategically negotiating the space of the football field. Note that Stephen writes in his school notebook the clearest rendition of his location and identity, and that this memoir as a whole is saturated with the issues, settings, and fruits of scholarly and monkish learning. Stephen's head is a globe, congruent to the " shells" or " rings" of placement (County Kildare, <https://assignbuster.com/the-heroics-of-mind-and-space/>

Ireland, etc. or family, school/church, Ireland, etc., more philosophically) that surround him. Take one example of an instance where it is obvious that Stephen is grappling with the mind-in-universe/mind-is-universe phenomenon: The formula which he wrote obediently on the sheet of paper, the coiling and uncoiling calculations of the professor, the spectrelike symbols of force and velocity fascinated and jaded Stephen's mind. He had heard some say that the old professor was an atheist freemason. O the grey dull day! It seemed a limbo of painless patient consciousness through which souls of mathematicians might wander, projecting long slender fabrics from plane to plane of ever rarer and paler twilight, radiating swift eddies to the last verges of a universe ever vaster, farther and more palpable. (p 167)

Here, Joyce repeats the components of the introductory sequences almost exactly: Stephen is receiving instructions from his elders which he obeys apparently "obediently", but which he must subtly resist (he complains poetically "O the grey dull day!"), ponder and transform into a stylized rumination. We see his thoughts and the learning of ages (via the souls of presumably dead mathematicians) passing through Stephen's mind and imagination out into even the farther reaches of the universe. His thoughts in this micro-portion of the text, as in the text of the "macro" narrative of Stephen's growth, spiral up through rings of intellectual affiliation. In this passage the intellectual affiliation is represented by an ephemeral reference to the professor being an "atheist freemason" (and, of course, a professor of mathematics). In the course of Stephen's larger intellectual and spiritual growth he passes through most significantly – atmospheres of Irish Nationalism, Catholicism, Jesuit thought, and, finally, in part v of the book, the university-scholarly atmosphere which is itself a collection and co-

mingling of various intellectual spheres and disciplines. (And he clearly sees his presence at University in Dublin egoistically: "...Stephen's, that is, my green" (p 215), he remarks as he walks towards the college library. The mind-ego of " Stephen," the innermost concentric ring in the spatial pattern lunges out to embrace a larger portion of the universe.) It is not until this fifth, summarizing chapter at the University that we hear a full range of languages and cultures from all over the world from Gaelic to German and Buddhism, (p 196), smatterings of Italian (p 215) and references to Coptic and Swedenborgian thought (p 194). It is as though all of Stephen's spatial landscape is now filled with inspired learning. His interaction with his environment produces nothing but references and reminders of this learning (a state of affairs preordained by Dante's contract): as he passes " Talbot's Place", the spirit of Ibsen blows through him; a shop on the Liffey incites him to sing a line by Ben Jonson (p 155). But for Stephen's mind and " soul" (as he keeps referring to it) to reach this final " sphere" of identity and development (where he reaches a intellectual identity/cohesion that fully identifies him with Daedalus (" O Father, O artificer..." p 218), Stephen must pass through the rings of thought and transformation that are described in each book part. He must suffer through series of discrete, harrowing metamorphoses (it is probably not incidental that Joyce begins his book with a quotation from Ovid...). He grows from a tiny, abused, flickering soul- flame alone in the cold and dank (part I), to a position of hopeful and then disappointed newcomer to a feasting, adult family table (sandwiched in part I), to a state of burning bodily lust and self-degradation (part ii), to the searing heat of conscious damnation and redemption (part iii), to the joining of these in the image of a bird/woman at the peaceful moment of synthesis

(final pages of part iv). These roughly chronologically-represented stages of his maturation are the outward and inward rings of his hell (or, purgatory, more correctly, especially because we Joyce is already working with allusions to Dante) with which he must struggle. Stephen's discussion of purgatory becomes conscious only in part v. He is deeply and personally moved by the fires of hell in part iv, but by the fifth and final chapter of the novel, we see Stephen coolly and detachedly observing his schoolmates discuss "purgatory", "hell" and "limbo", (p 210). It is directly after his observation that he takes Cranly aside to confess his knowledge of (and his belief in the potency of) the "chemistry" and symbology linked with guilt and sin, and voices a firm decision to abstain from participation in this sinning and redeeming cycle. He has mastered a knowledge of this process, and understands the power of a symbol in a repeated, socio-religious environment: "I fear more than that the chemical action which would be set up in my soul by a false homage to a symbol behind which are massed twenty centuries of authority and veneration." (p 210) In short, he has become an artist, who profoundly understands the language of symbols, but will "use" them under the guidance of his own authority only. Stephen's quest is thus achieved by mapping and finding a place within all the worlds he inhabits (and more succinctly/importantly, an intellectual mapping of the worlds which inhabit him), by establishing himself as firm, durable beacon. That is, he establishes within himself the image and psychic reality of a "tower." The tower symbol is first vaguely introduced by the "Tower or Ivory" musings (p 49), then sublimated into Stephen's ideal feminine image, the feminine corollary to his masculine-based soul (p 151-152), and then finally presented outright as the place where Stephen lives in the First Chapter of <https://assignbuster.com/the-heroics-of-mind-and-space/>

Ulysses. The tower is a symbol of psychic reconciliation with his spatial environment. It is a hardened atom that ascends into heights; a representative of independent human intellect and spirit that may interact with yet see through/over these spaces/worlds, real (i. e. Dublin, the island of Ireland) and intellectual (i. e. Catholic dogma/Jesuit casuistry/Irish nationalism, etc.). It is the psychic-symbolic manifestation of the eagle's sight. So, Stephen can finally write his "apology", that is, his memoir of development, his Bildungsroman, that charts his growth into an artist. The reference circles back to the meta-frame of Joyce's "Portrait": in Stephen Hero and A Portrait of the Artist, Joyce achieves just such an "apology". It is both a confession and a tour de force of literary ability, and turns on the crux of an irony that is explicit in the very first use of the word. He is forced by temporal powers (his mother and Dante, the Catholic Church- he was to apologize for saying he wanted to marry a Protestant -) into a compromising contract to which he must submit. Like the poverty-stricken and compromised material world that Stephen Dedalus inhabits, the word "apologise" carries within it resources of great (yet difficult, via a certain purgatory) potential. Just as embedded in Stephen's last name is a vast system of mythical referents into which the young man mysteriously taps, "apology" too is presented to the reader also with its latent, deeper meaning with Hellenic roots. The word is from Greek apo +logos = a speech; literally "formed from words/reason/ speech". (This writerly meaning that calls him to his craft is "wedged" up against the weight of meanings which are created by the heaviness of the world/his circumstances; between the two meanings there is a productive, "purgatorial" margin...). Stephen as scholar (an identity realized in part v) can finally tap into these archaic reserves of



meaning and inspiration. He and his school chums jog easily (if at times farcically) through the use of Latin and Classical language and allusion, and Stephen has become a conscious composer of apologies; using classical and other learned sources Stephen artfully “defends” a theory that he has himself created. (Apology begins circa p 178.) Thus, Joyce brings us to a full telos within the pages of part v that was clearly prophesized at the end of the first section of part I of the novel: his heroic quest is achieved by the novel’s end. (1) For Example, in part I he wishes that he himself was the orb of a censer, so that he might perfume the world with incense, in part ii, Joyce describes Stephen’s intellectual-spatial explorations of Dublin and his conscience when confronting his “sin” (“By day and by night he moved among distorted images of the outer world.... He returned to his wanderings...”(p 94), which lead him to the extremities of Dublin’s neighborhoods), and in part iii, there is a vast exposition describing the lower, imagined (mental) cosmic realm, Hell.(2) And, perhaps, by the negotiation/release of some quite primal urges of the body, as Stephen proves in the sexual exploits of Part ii; although these explosions of impulse are always kept under or later brought within the strict stewardship of the mind.