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Ulysses: Stephen's Parable of the Plums

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Though they didn’t see eye to eye in everything, a certain analogy there somehow was, as if both their minds were travelling, so to speak, in the one train of thought.

He gets the plums and I the plumstones.

The Parable and the Lapsarian Meeting of Stephen and Bloom

By comparing Bloom’s response to Stephen’s Parable of the Plums in “Ithaca” to the responses of the newsmen in “Æolus,” I hope to show that a momentary meeting of minds, if a “fallen,” imperfect one, occurs between “father” and “son” in the “Ithaca” chapter and that Stephen perceives this closeness in Bloom’s response to his parable. Stephen is uncomfortable with the closeness and does not seem to want to be understood, which explains why he sings the “Jew’s Daughter” ballad. His acceptance or rejection of Bloom’s hospitality is moot in my reading, since Bloom and Stephen have already been reunited as much as one can be in the fallen world (as reunited as a lapsarian Odysseus can be with Telemachos in a lapsarian Odyssey).

Stephen tells his Parable of the Plums in “Æolus,” the chapter of the lungs, rhetoric and hot air. His telling is interrupted on so many levels (external, internal, formal) that Stephen seems to be surrounded by alien minds in an uncongenial environment. His parable, essentially nonrhetorical, is lost nonetheless in currents of air. He does not get a satisfying response, even though the content of his parable is pertinent to his listeners. His tale is so uncongenial to “Æolus” that it brings the chapter, as well as the trams, to a grinding halt, even as his listeners, in the ultimate irony, are looking up at Nelson’s pillar, transmuted momentarily into the very vestals of his parable.

When Stephen tells the parable a second time to Bloom in the quiet “Ithaca” chapter, the telling of the parable is not recounted, only the shock waves in the conscious and unconscious minds of Stephen and Bloom, which tie the parable in with many of the symbolic motifs of Ulysses, connections not made in “Æolus.” Bloom is a good listener: he refrains from depicting his father’s suicide because “he preferred himself to see another’s face and listen to another’s
words.” He does not interrupt. Though on a conscious level Bloom’s first response to the parable is how to make money off it (this response is actually linked with earlier pedagogic schemes), Bloom’s responses to the parable and Stephen’s counter-responses follow a parallel course that links their very different minds. I will argue that Stephen perceives this link and is so uncomfortable with it that he deliberately breaks it.

**The Parable Itself**

I W I L L first isolate the parable, extracting it from its distracting setting in “Æolus,” to show that it is a serious attempt at art by Stephen and that he cares how people respond to it. Stephen’s seriousness in telling the parable can be gauged from the arrogance of the blasphemy: “Let there be life.” The telling of his “vision” begins with the headline: “DEAR DIRTY DUBLIN” and the word “Dubliners” in Stephen’s mind. The parable has many elements in common with the stories of Dubliners but also has elements that make it a parable of the theme of the “Æolus” chapter: frustration with the goal in sight. One could surmise that Stephen is either writing Dubliners or has written it and invents the parable because the Dubliners mode so perfectly puts the newsmen who condescend to him in their place. “The mode he chooses is naturalism—things as they objectionably are—expressed in a style graceless but also windless, without figures of speech.” The parable’s echoes of Dubliners and Ulysses, as well as the contrast of its style with what surrounds it, make the parable, if not important, at least conspicuous.

The parable is in many respects a miniature Dubliners story. It tells of two spinsters (“The Sisters,” “The Dead”) who go on an outing (“An Encounter”) prepared for rain (“Two Gallants”) but first get out their coins (“Araby,” “Two Gallants,” “A Little Cloud,” “Counterparts,” “Clay”) and buy provisions (“Clay”). They have trouble climbing the stairs of the pillar because of their stiffness (“The Sisters”). One has lumbago or rheumatism of the loins (sterility?) (“Clay”). When they get to the top, they are afraid (“Eveline”). The parable is told in the mode of the vestals: “Glory be to God. They had no idea it was that high.” They eat and drink a false sacrament (“The Sisters,” “Two Gallants,” “Counterparts,” “The Dead”), spitting out fertile seeds while consuming ephemeral flesh. But there is no epiphany for the vestals, if there is one for the reader. One could argue that the epiphany of the parable occurs in Ulysses: with the professor saying “I see” and Myles making a rude, sexual, defensive joke: “Tickled the old ones too” while looking up at Nelson just as the vestals did.

The Hebraic element of the title: “A Pisgah Sight of Palestine” and the pillar which echoes the “pillar of cloud” that led the Israelites set the parable apart from Dubliners and bring it closer to Ulysses with its pseudo-Jewish protagonist and Moses-related themes. The plums and the unpotted plumtree of the pillar echo an important leitmotif of Ulysses. The connection with Samuel Fuller’s

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1. Ellmann, p. 70.
book by that name connects the parable with various *Paradise Lost* motifs in *Ulysses.* The parable is a miniature "Æolus" in that it narrates frustration when the goal is in sight (Nanetti has never seen Italy, Bloom sees Hynes and hints about his debt but gets no money, Crawford’s story is interrupted by Bloom’s call, Lady Dudley buys a post card but finds it is not the aerial view of Dublin (!) she wanted, Bloom does not make his deal.) The parable is a mini- "Æolus" in that it ends with Nelson’s column and in that the vestals cannot agree on what is what in Dublin and end up not doing anything; they are the characters of "Æolus" who discuss politics and admire Taylor without ever accomplishing anything, without seeing the promised land of a free Ireland.

With the Parable of the Plums, Stephen refutes Taylor’s “vision” by “showing that the Irish nation can neither communicate with itself nor pay homage to her conqueror. Instead she spits out nationalist sentiments which are as worthless and incidental as plumstones.” Stephen sees the Irish leaders as victims of paralysis, but he does not refute the premise of Taylor’s enthymeme; what he objects to are Irish nationalist leaders. Stephen is placing his art above English and Irish politics.

**The First Telling of the Parable: Interruptions**

Stephen’s telling of the parable is interrupted on three levels:
1. **External:** the bustle of the street, interruptions from his listeners.
2. **Internal:** Stephen’s own thoughts.
3. **Formal:** the headlines.

1. **External Interruptions**
   
   (a) **The Street**

   As soon as Stephen announces that he has a vision, a newsboy runs by and shouts: “Racing special.” The racing tissues which earlier were blown around the office are throwaways. Is Stephen’s parable a throwaway? Stephen tells most of the parable, but the professor turns to see what is keeping Crawford, and more newsboys run by yelling, their newspapers fluttering. Myles appears with O’Molloy. Just as Stephen is about to resume, Bloom runs up to pester Crawford about the ad. More newsboys yell. Myles asks Bloom what he wants and a newsboy shouts news of a child “bit by a bellows.” Bloom was the “bite of a sheep” for the Citizen and the child bit by a bellows could be Stephen, who is a victim of the windmakers he is talking to. Bloom is present for this telling of the parable but is not invited to listen. It is only with Bloom out of the way (a victim of one of Myles’s cruder rhetorical devices: in this he is close to Stephen here) that the professor brings Crawford’s attention to Stephen’s parable. When he is

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3. Hogan, p. 61.
5. Blamires, p. 42.
6. Tomkins.
7. Tomkins.
done telling the parable, horsedrawn vehicles clatter by, the trolleys halted by a
short circuit. Discussion of the parable is simultaneous with the coming into view
of the column itself.

The street bustle has the effect of drowning out his story. The parable in this
setting seems as ephemeral as the news, to be just more “copy.” In the chaos of
the street the appearance of Nelson’s column ends up distracting from the point
of the parable more than underlining any irony.

(b) Questions

Stephen’s telling is interrupted by questions from his listeners that suggest
that they are not paying attention. Stephen barely begins when the professor asks
him where Fumbally’s lane is. Although it may be important to Stephen where
they live, the professor is not interested in the significance of the choice of that
street; his curiosity is tangential. When Stephen is done telling the parable,
Crawford has to make sure the story is ended, and the question: “Finished?”
comes out sounding like “Are you done yet?” He then asks distractedly: “But
what do you call it? Where did they get the plums?” making it clear he is not
paying attention.

(c) Low Jokes

The professor and Crawford interrupt Stephen many times to make wise-
cracks and comments. When Crawford is brought up to date on what is going on,
he comments, as if he were reviewing a news article: “That’s new . . . That’s
copy.” He then jokes: “Out for the waxies’ Dargie [a shoemakers’ picnic].” Two
old trickies what?” Myles reduces the parable to a trivial news event. When
Stephen gets to the part where the vestals raise their skirts to sit, Crawford
interrupts to make fun of Stephen’s literary pretensions by joking that Stephen
is using poetic license to tell a dirty story. At Stephen’s “onehanded adulterer”
question, the professor has to repeat the mot twice and cries out no less than fi
ve times: “I see.” He does not see, as Stephen’s rejection of his title will show below.
Crawford makes another joke in the same vein as before: “So long as they do no
worse,” pretending to be relieved that Stephen’s story is not lewd. Finally,
Crawford jokes that the “onehanded adulterer” tickled the vestals, clearing up
any doubts about whether the lewdness is perceived by Myles or intended by
Stephen. Finally, Stephen’s audience takes credit for the parable: “We gave him
that idea.”

(d) Clever but Wrongheaded Interpretations

The professor and Crawford offer interpretations of the parable that are
cleverer than their jokes, if just as wrongheaded:

—Wise and Foolish Virgins

When the professor interjects “wise virgins,” he alludes to the parable in

8. Thornton, p. 127.
Matthew of the wise and foolish virgins. This is a New Testament allusion; the analogy is complex yet in the wrong vein, as we will see later. There are parallels and differences in the two parables. In Matthew 25 the wise virgins have oil in their lamps and are ready for the arrival of the Bridegroom. The foolish virgins bring no oil and, when it is time for the bridegroom to come, they have to run off to get oil. The wise virgins get invited to the marriage feast and the door is shut to the foolish virgins. The parable is about keeping one’s soul ready for judgment at all times because “you know neither the day nor the hour.” Stephen’s vestals are prepared; they remember to bring money, umbrellas, and food. But they miss the marriage feast, even if they do consume bread, brawn, and plums: these are substitutes. Their trip is fruitless, for all its plums. They do see views of Dublin but the trip does not go as planned. The professor makes his “wise virgins” comment after Stephen mentions umbrellas, a symbol in *Ulysses* for contraceptives and sterility. The umbrellas are “for fear it may come on to rain.” But there is no “come” in the parable, only a little sterile tickling, despite the presence of the huge phallus of the column. Though clever, the analogy is off the mark; the parable deals with an Old Testament theme.

—*Antithesis*

When Stephen narrates that Anne uses Lourdes water and Florence drinks double X, the professor sees an “antithesis,” but to Stephen both of these are substitutes.

—*Antisthenes*

The professor compares Stephen to Antisthenes in that he finds Stephen to be bitter. The Greek’s nickname meant “downright dog” and the school he founded (Cynic) meant “dog-like.” Stephen is thus linked with the dog in “Proteus” that finds the “poor dogsbody” that urinates on the Strand like Stephen, and who digs for “something he buried there, his grandmother.” But the professor has no idea of this and Stephen’s mind moves academically to Penelope Rich, a possible lady of Shakespeare’s sonnets. Instead of actually being interested in Stephen’s feelings, he goes off on his comparison to elaborate details about Antisthenes. Unwittingly and ironically, the professor hits on something when he says that Antisthenes (Stephen) gave the palm of beauty to Penelope. Joyce (Stephen) gives Penelope (Molly) the palm in his *Ulysses*. But Stephen is far from appreciating this, and the professor is far from appreciating Stephen. Only the reader can appreciate the irony.

—*Virgil*

When Crawford asks Stephen what he calls his story, the professor answers, saying: “Call it: *Deus nobis haec otia fecit.*” This is an elaborate and clever, if pedantic, allusion to Virgil’s first Eclogue and the theme of exile. The line the

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professor quotes is Tityrus saying a god has made for him and his flocks the peace that Meliboeus envies. Like “Æolus” and Stephen’s parable, it is a story of frustration at a moment when satisfaction is in sight. Through the grace of Rome, Tityrus can stay on his farm with his flocks and Meliboeus envies him because he is forced by war to flee. Tityrus suggests that Meliboeus might have spent the night: “We have ripe apples, mealy chestnuts, and a wealth of pressed cheeses. Even now the house-tops yonder are smoking and longer shadows fall from the mountain heights.” Despite the view, Meliboeus moves on. In the analogy, Stephen’s vestals are Virgil’s two shepherds, Dublin is the farmland, and the vestals’ bickering corresponds to the war that forces Meliboeus to move on. The analogy goes awry in that Stephen is going for an Old Testament image, not a Classical one.

—Nelson

Myles’s joke that Nelson “tickled the old ones” has some relevance in that he picks up on the image of the vestals as Ireland prostituting herself to England, but the humor, the obscenity, and the fact that he is responding to the professor’s “that tickles me” and claims to be revealing “the God Almighty’s truth” trivialize the interpretation.

2. Internal Interruptions

Stephen has both thoughts and involuntary memories while telling the parable. Before beginning, Stephen thinks: “Dublin. I have much, much to learn.” The headline DEAR DIRTY DUBLIN may be in Stephen’s mind. He begins by telling himself: “Dubliners.” When Blackpitts is mentioned, Stephen remembers a scene he witnessed that came up in “Proteus”: “A shefieild’s whiteness under her rancid rags. Fumbally’s lane that night...”12 The memory was perhaps randomly prompted by the name of the street, but his memory is relevant to “Æolus” in that it is an example of frustration with the goal in sight.13 Then he spurs himself on: “On now. Dare it. Let there be life.” When the professor mentions Penelope, Stephen thinks: “Poor Penelope. Penelope Rich.” It is an allusion of his own to Sir Philip Sidney’s Stella, Penelope Rich; she will come up later as one of Shakespeare’s lovers (if a Pisgah one: the evidence connecting them is weak) in Stephen’s theory.14 He closes his story with an involuntary yet forced “sudden loud young laugh” which captures his alienation, discomfort, and feeling of superiority.

3. Formal Interruptions

The headlines are the most obvious interruption to Stephen’s parable. But they interrupt only the reader of Ulysses, not Stephen or his listeners. Joyce described the theme of “Æolus” as “the mockery of victory,” and one form this

takes is everyone getting interrupted. The reader is subjected to the special format to provide him with his own personal experience parallel to what the characters are experiencing.

The specific headlines that break up the parable give many different angles on Stephen, his listeners, the story, the surrounding city environment, the action, the dialogue, the dialogue of the vestals, interpretation of the parable and of "Æolus."

The headlines become more and more interpretive, less and less factual. Compare the straightforward: "RETURN OF BLOOM" to the ironic: "THOSE SLIGHTLY RAMBUNCTIOUS FEMALES" when the action moves back to Stephen. By the end they seem to be aggressively mocking Stephen's parable and his efforts to tell it seriously to his self-absorbed and pompous listeners. They echo Stephen's inability to communicate, how the images of his parable are distorted by everything around him. One headline mocks Myles's inattention: "WHAT? AND LIKewise—WHERE?" Others mock the newsmen's interpretations: "SOPHIST WALLOPS HAUGHTY HELEN SQUARE ON PROBOSCIS. SPARTANS GNASH MOLARS. ITHACANS VOW PEN IS CHAMP;" and "VIRGILIAN, SAYS PEDAGOGUE. SOPHOMORE PLUMPS FOR OLD MAN MOSES." The final headline seems mere malicious mockery of Stephen's parable: "DIMINISHED DIGITS PROVE TOO TITILLATING FOR FRISKY FRUMPS. ANNE WIMBLES. FLO WANGLES—YET CAN YOU BLAME THEM?" Someone is "out to get" Stephen. The narrator of "Æolus" does not like his style and shows this in the headlines.

The fact that the chapter ends as soon as Stephen is done telling the parable and Myles has made his joke adds bathos to its effect and is yet another indication of the narrator's hostility: Stephen is last on the bill, and the curtain falls on him while he is being heckled and before there can be any applause.

**Conclusion To First Telling**

Stephen and Bloom are both rebuffed and frustrated in this episode. Both are victimized by an environment alien and hostile to them. Stephen tries to laugh it off and Bloom is nonplussed. The respective arts of Stephen and Bloom are not appreciated, lost in gusts of hot air. Stephen could not be further from communion with his listeners. If they followed the analogy implied in the parable, they would see that the wisecracks made by Lenehan and O'Molloy after the Taylor speech was recited ("And yet he died without having entered the land of promise .... A sudden—at—the—moment—thought—from—lingering—illness—often—previously—expectorated—demise.... And with a great future behind him") could be applied to them: for all their speeches, Ireland is not free and, if they are as paralyzed as Stephen implies, they too will die from a "lingering illness" with a great future behind them.
The Second Telling

The premise for my reading of this section of "Ithaca" is that we move chronologically through the thoughts of Bloom or Stephen or Blephen and Stoom. Like the other chapters, the Homeric parallel is abstract. I take the "homecoming" of "Ithaca" to be a movement of thoughts in the mind of Stephen and Bloom towards more archetypal themes where their minds intersect, if only vaguely.

Stephen tells his parable to Bloom later that night in the "Ithaca" episode. A quick reading of Bloom's response suggests that he has various commercial ideas for exploiting Stephen's parable, a reaction to the parable if anything more offensive to Stephen than the newspapermen's clever joking. But when one looks further, one finds that Bloom's mind responds in a profound and fertile way to Stephen's parable. Where the newsmen miss the Hebraic element of the parable and persist in seeing Classical, New Testament, and lewd elements, Bloom's mind moves to more relevant themes. I will outline the movement of mental associations in the section of "Ithaca" which follows the telling of the parable to show how Bloom's mind reveals a momentary closeness to Stephen's.

I pick up when Bloom thinks of inventions for use in kindergartens, then of the infinite possibilities of advertising. He thinks of some good ads, some bad, and "such as never": the Plumtrees's Potted Meat ad that Nanetti "inserted" below the obituaries. "A Plumtree in a meatpot. . . . Beware of imitations," he thinks, underlining the sexual image associated with the potted meat eaten by Molly and Blazes in bed and the "meat" Blazes put in Molly's "pot." Before even hearing the parable, he thinks of an image that echoes the sterility of the unpotted plum pillar and realizes that imitation intercourse, such as his experience with Gertie, won't do. Then he tells Stephen of his own original, if unsuccessful, idea for a mobile stationery ad with women writing.

The archetypal image of a young woman writing strikes a chord in Stephen, and for a moment Bloom and Stephen's minds are "in synch," as Stephen describes the scene that the stationery ad suggests to him: a solitary girl writing in a "Queen's Hotel." Bloom responds to Stephen's imagined scene by remembering the scene of his father's suicide, also in a Queen's Hotel. Bloom attributes the homonymity to coincidence rather than intuition (which does not necessarily make it less significant; it could be "synchronicity" rather than ESP) and refrains from telling his Queen's Hotel scene, which would have been a Pisgah parable of sorts: his father had bought a new straw boater (which the Pisgah conqueror of Molly wears) before buying the poison.

It is important that Stephen was patient enough to listen to Bloom's advertising idea when no one today had listened to any of his sales pitches. The adman has found someone who is interested (if only politely) in his "gentle art." Bloom immediately reciprocates, sensing Stephen's desire to narrate, and Stephen tells the Parable of the Plums. We do not hear him retell it; we skip to Bloom's

reaction. Bloom ties the parable in with his earlier pedagogic ideas and envisions an educational publication that would include Stephen's parable as well as writings of his own.

Perhaps because Blazes "gets the plums" and Bloom "the plumstones," Bloom's mind moves to thoughts of what to do about Molly. The card game "twentyfive" occurs to him, ominous since he just heard a tale with 24 plums, the number of Molly's suitors. Envelope addressing also occurs to him, echoing the earlier image. He also thinks of taking her to a masculine brothel. But he leans towards education as the best solution. He thinks of a time when Molly claimed to have written Greek and Irish and Hebrew characters. This foreshadows conversation to follow. But after "laconic epistolary compositions" (echoes of his ad and Stephen's Queen's Hotel girl), she gave up. In this instance Molly resembles Stephen's vestals: at first enthusiastic, she soon tires. Bloom had also tried "open ridicule in her presence of some absent other's ignorant lapse." This is strangely similar to what Stephen did when he told his parable to the newsmen. Stephen could be said to have used the vestals to ridicule the newsmen's longwindedness and their admiration for windbags like Taylor. Molly learns as little from Bloom as the newsmen do from Stephen.

The vestals' umbrellas return to Bloom's mind. He thinks of how he got Molly to use an umbrella. There is the suggestion that Bloom and Molly disagree on the subject of contraceptives since in the "Oxen" chapter umbrellas and raingear refer to contraceptives. Molly's umbrella is as moot as the vestals' since it does not rain in the parable and Bloom and Molly don't have sex.

After these digressions Bloom, "accepting the analogy implied in his guest's parable," cites three seekers of pure truth: Moses, Moses Maimonides, and Moses Mendelssohn. Bloom, in plumping for three Moseses, is rightminded in his response since in "Æolus" Stephen "plumps for old man Moses" when giving a title to his parable. Bloom does not force his own analogies onto the parable.

Why then does the sophomore now plump for Aristotle? Perhaps, satisfied that Bloom has understood the parable on one level, he hopes to talk about the Aristotelian aspect of the parable. More likely, Stephen is attempting to raise himself above Bloom by emphasizing the aspect of the parable that Bloom missed, the aesthetic aspect that raises Stephen above Ireland and Moses. Bloom later hears in Stephen's voice the "traditional accent of the ecstasy of catastrophe." I would argue that Stephen's Aristotelian ideas which raise his art above politics will raise Stephen above other men, but painfully, on a cross. Communication in the fallen world has limits, but here Bloom's anythingarianism and ability to see both sides of everything let him understand Stephen, perhaps too well. Stephen values a superior vantage point to successful communication. If he had plumped for Aristotle in "Æolus," he might have run the risk of the professor's truly seeing. In "Ithaca" he plumps for Aristotle to try to raise himself above Bloom.

16. Blaerres.
In any case Bloom is impervious to Stephen's Aristotelian strategy. Bloom deflects it by subsuming Aristotle into his list of heroic Moseses by pointing out that Aristotle was tutored by a "rabbinical philosopher, name uncertain." Bloom could have accepted the distance Stephen wanted to create with Aristotelian ideas, but his craving for intimacy prompts him to cut Stephen off. Having understood, Bloom leaps at the opportunity to show his understanding to Stephen Dedalus, professor and author.

Bloom, undeterred, persists in the Moses vein to list other famous Jews in all fields. Bloom and Stephen recite Hebrew and ancient Irish verses which echo obliquely elements of the parable. Stephen's verse about walking with care brings to mind the vestals waddling up the stairs, checking to see if they have everything. Bloom recites a line in Hebrew from the Song of Solomon (Old Testament: Bloom still plumbs for Moses) in which Tirzah is addressed. Unwittingly, Bloom has chosen a line with profound biblical and Blakean implications for Stephen. Tirzah in the Bible is the subject of lavish praise, her forehead compared to pomegranate. Tirzah is addressed differently in Blake's "To Tirzah:" "Thou Mother of my Mortal part/ With cruelty didst mould my Heart,/ And with false self-deceiving tears,/ Didst bind my Nostrils Eyes & Ears,/ Didst close my Tongue in senseless clay/ And me to Mortal life betray." But the line does not just bring to mind Stephen's mother, but also the vestals. According to the Blake Dictionary, Tirzah withholding her lust though her soul is "seven furnaces"; Reuben, the average sensual man (Stephen? Ireland?), cannot stay in the Promised Land because "in vain he sought beautiful Tirzah" ("Jerusalem," 36:1, 7). Tirzah is always paired with Rahab (England). Together they separate the Nations. They divide the daughters of Albion between them, with Tirzah on Mount Gilead, the twelve uniting into the two to form a "Double Female" (occupied Ireland, the vestals).17

The "points of contact" between the Irish and the Jews are listed and, though some of the parallels are trivial (similarities of certain sounds, the proscription of national costumes), some are significant: "the restoration in Chanah David of Zion and the possibility of Irish political autonomy." This is the point of Stephen's parable and its title: Ireland (typically an old woman) is divided and squabbles and tires itself with petty disputes. England is tolerated (the Irish "look" at England [Nelson] so much that it paralyzes them) and the Irish settle down to satisfying their own personal needs, forgetting the homeland that could be and tired of worrying about England looming over them. Stephen has successfully communicated his parable to Bloom. Bloom fails to see the dimension of the parable in which Stephen as artist looms above his creation, but the extent of his understanding represents successful communication between two very different people and is a model of the kind of closeness that can be achieved in a fallen world: limited and flawed, yet not insignificant.

I will not delve into the theology of hypostasis and circumincession, but will

note that after Bloom draws the parallel of Ireland and Zion, Bloom and Stephen see things in each other’s appearance and hear things in each other’s voices that confirm their fallen union (Stephen as headed for “catastrophe,” Bloom with the historical Christ’s “winedark hair”). Joyce plays off the paradoxes of the trinity, not to undercut with irony the impossibility of the union of Bloom and Stephen, but to use these images to convey some of the complexity of this fallen, flawed, limited, conflicted yet not completely failed, reunion of father and son. It is beside the point to argue exactly how Bloom and Stephen’s communion is modeled on circumincession or hypostasis. Even arguing from the point of view of realism, it is exceptional enough that Stephen is sharing his art with Bloom in his kitchen at this hour, and quibbling about whether Stephen will or will not tutor Molly in the future misses the point that any future contact they will have will not be much different from the imperfect, strained moment they are now sharing.

Bloom returns to the Pisgah sight as exemplified in his own life. There is much in these musings by Bloom to threaten Stephen. Bloom is perseverating in his Hebraic perspective to the point of casting himself in Pisgah paternal roles he never achieved. The roles he picks all threaten Stephen: in the Church Bloom could have been a Conmee (Stephen pardoner) or a reverend Tinned Salmon (potted Christ), Seymour Bushe (the windbag Stephen was pressured to admire in “Æolus”) or a Shakespearean actor (in which case he could have played the ghost in Hamlet in order to speak to his immaterial son).

Stephen is uncomfortable with Bloom in these paternal roles and stops Bloom in his tracks by singing Child’s 18th ballad: “Sir Hugh or The Jew’s Daughter.” It is as if Stephen were saying: “You want Moses. I’ll give you Moses, that will teach you to understand my art.” The song he sings of a little Jewish girl dressed in green at first seems harmless. Bloom is drawn in. But the ballad ends with the little girl’s cutting the boy’s head off with a penknife which causes a change in the drift of their discussion. Bloom listens to the end of the song with mixed feelings. He vividly pictures the Jew’s daughter: it evokes an image of Milly. After Stephen’s analysis of the song, both Stephen and Bloom are sad for a moment. The feelings of the host (Bloom) who is also the victim predestined (Stephen) are expressed so as to reveal another momentary fusion of their minds: “He wished that a tale of a deed should be told of a deed not by him should by him not be told.” In other words, Bloom and Stephen both feel that Stephen should either have told a tale about something Bloom actually did or not have told a tale about something Bloom did not do. When the sentence is rearranged and read twice, the two meanings emerge:

He wished that a tale of a deed (1) not by him should (2) not be told.
He wished that a tale of a deed (1) should be told of a deed (2) by him.

But there is more to these lines. Stephen’s analysis of the bailad leaves it ambiguous whether the boy, “victim predestined,” is Stephen or Bloom. Stephen most likely sees himself as the boy. If we consider the lines above to be in

Bloom's mind rather than in Stephen's. Bloom responds as "host" and "victim predestined" with a guilty sounding confusion of deeds done/not done and tales told/not told. What is it that Bloom has done or not done that should or should not be told? Bloom could have seen Stephen as the little boy in the ballad rather than himself, but did not. There is something in the image of the little girl that excites Bloom.  

The castration image awakens feelings of guilt about his incestuous interest in Milly. Hence the garbled way of expressing deeds by him/not by him, told/not told. His mind moves to scientific excuses for ritual murder (including somnambulism) to his own sleepwalking, then to Milly's nightmare. Bloom then remembers events in Milly's childhood that echo the parable: Milly shaking her moneybox (the vestals pry their savings out of a moneybox) and the sailor doll she cast away (the vestals turn their back on Nelson). He then has memories of Milly that echo the ballad "The Jew's Daughter." The boy in the ballad "once by inadvertence, twice by design... challenges his destiny." This echoes Milly's two nightmares and two encounters with strangers: Milly once refused to let an Englishman take her picture; she was also followed by an individual of sinister aspect. In the analogy the Jew's daughter is not the sinister one, but the boy. Evil can take any form; Stephen and Bloom subconsciously think of examples that suit their subconscious agendas. Bloom's objections to the ballad are expressed in these images. If an innocent non-Jewish girl can be an "evil Jew," then so can a gentle gentile like Stephen. Bloom may also subconsciously be seeing himself as a sinister pursuer of Milly. In any case, Stephen has managed with the ballad to stop Bloom's paternal intimacy by reminding Bloom of his paternal relationship with Milly.

Bloom compares Milly to his cat, then remembers a dream she had in which she offered lemonade to a horse with which she was conversing, the horse accepting. This dream echoes Bloom's talking with Stephen and serving him cocoa. Bloom then remembers Milly's reciprocation of gifts and her enthusiasm for learning "without gradual acquisition," linking Milly with Molly. Bloom suggests Stephen spend the night. Bloom's first thought is that, if Stephen stays, he will provide rejuvenation of intelligence and vicarious satisfaction. Although what he means here is the pleasure of giving, there are undertones of Stephen's having sex with Molly or, even more sinister, with Milly, in which case it would be Bloom's incestuous desires that would be satisfied vicariously. He then hopes Stephen will distract Molly from Blazes and improve her Italian.

Bloom's way of expressing his interest in fixing Stephen up with Milly comes out very strangely. He refers to Milly ominously as "a Jew's daughter." Bloom then thinks about the consequences of "these several provisional contingencies between a guest and a hostess" and concludes that they would not interfere with Stephen's marrying Milly because "the way to daughter led through mother, the way to mother through daughter." The implication is that, if Stephen had sex with

20. Ford.
22. Ford.
Molly, it would provide him (Bloom) with vicarious satisfaction and would not prevent Stephen from eventually marrying Milly.

Bloom’s mind then makes a Freudian leap to Mrs. Sinico whom Mr. Duffy courted (disguised to the husband as a suitor for their daughter) and who committed suicide as a result of being rejected by Mr. Duffy. In the analogy with Bloom’s matchmaking plans, Molly would commit suicide when rebuffed by Stephen, leaving the coast clear for Bloom and Milly. In referring to Mrs. Sinico’s death as an accident, he reduces his guilt in the analogy. He does not want Molly to kill herself but merely die in an accident. The omission of Mrs. Sinico’s actual mode of death involuntarily brings his father to mind. Thus his guilt about Milly and wanting to be rid of Molly become connected to his guilt about his father’s suicide. His mind, not surprisingly, moves next to the vigil of the anniversary of his father’s death. The vigil excused Bloom from attending the funeral of Stephen’s mother. In the most tangential way imaginable, Bloom has touched on Stephen’s guilt about his mother’s death.

Stephen, sensing the direction of Bloom’s thoughts, is again threatened, and he rebuffs Bloom in another way. Promptly, defensively, Stephen declines Bloom’s paternal offer of hospitality.

**Conclusion: There Is a Meeting, But a Fallen One**

RICHARD KAIN lists 8 possible readings of their encounter:

1. Isolation: the meeting is fortuitous and unimportant, a demonstration of modern keylessness or of the existential position of man.

2. Creativity: Stephen becomes a discoverer of mankind through communion with Bloom.

3. Ambiguity: Joyce’s mode of contrasting symbols and his penchant toward anticlimax render any single theory suspect.

4. Trinitarian: Joyce seems to indicate a subtle relationship of himself, Stephen, and Bloom.


6. Existential: Bloom and Stephen reach a point of crisis, the outcome of which is problematic.


8. Psychological Projection: Stephen and Bloom are fictional surrogates for Joyce’s own conscious and subconscious drives.

From the perspective of the parable, no one or combination of these is fitting. I would suggest a lapsarian reading in which:

1. Bloom and Stephen are not isolated since they have come as close as one can in the fallen world.

2. In which Stephen’s “communion” with Bloom is tainted with resentment and is only half conscious.


24. Kain. p. 159.
In which their meeting is limited but not completely ambiguous.

In which the Trinity, far from being a model of the relationship of Bloom, Stephen, and Joyce to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is exploited for ambiguities to illustrate the imperfectibility of schemata for the fallen world.

In which not the wholeness and complexity of life, but its incompleteness and limitations, are evident.

In which there is nothing as dramatic and clear-cut as a crisis, rather only murky subconscious movements.

Which goes far beyond the portrayal of any simple biographical event to touch on archetypal experiences.

In which the subconscious drives of Stoom and Blephen, to say nothing of Blames and Joyphen, cannot begin to be singled out in a way clear enough to identify who is a surrogate for what.

The thoughts of Bloom and Stephen after the “Ithaca” telling of the parable suggest that some kind of lapsarian contact has taken place between them. Bloom’s “fallen-ness” takes the form of an inappropriate craving for intimacy, a problem with boundaries. His marked coin experiment and his mortification when the clown claims him as father are evidence for this. Bloom is handicapped in his relations with others by the void left in him by the death of Rudy. Stephen’s “fallen-ness” takes the form of subconscious defenses that ward off intimacy which would threaten his precarious psychological balance. These limitations do not prevent father from finding son; they merely limit the extent and duration of the meeting. Proof of a lapsarian reunion lies in Stephen’s singing of the ballad. Where there is a defensive sundering, there must have been a threatening reconciliation.

Works Cited