

**JOYCE**  
**STUDIES IN ITALY**

3

Edited by  
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A MODERN DAEDALUS

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The young James Joyce took up a very definite and provocative stance on the Irish question. In *Stephen Hero* and in *Dubliners* he refused to support what was then the fashionable literary movement of the revival of Irish traditions and Irish culture. Stephen, you will remember, did join a class in which the Irish language was taught, but the reason he gave was simply that it was a way of approaching Emma Clery, a girl whose physical attraction for him far outweighed at the time all other considerations<sup>1</sup>. It was only in his Italian lecture, "L'Irlanda: Isola dei Santi e Savi" (1907) and in the Italian pieces written for the *Piccolo della Sera* that, presenting Ireland to a foreign audience, he shows how far he had absorbed the traditions against which he rebelled.

As for Irish politics, he was even more intolerant. Both in *Stephen Hero* and in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* Stephen brushes aside political discussions as something only fit for his father — something that no longer concerns the new generation. In *A Portrait* Athy and Stephen are talking together<sup>2</sup>:

— Now it is all about politics in the paper, he said. Do your people talk about that too?

— Yes, Stephen said.

— Mine too, he said.

<sup>1</sup> *SH*, 54-5: "So it was decided that Stephen was to begin a course of lessons in Irish. He bought the O'Growney's primers published by the Gaelic League but refused either to pay a subscription to the league or to wear the badge on his buttonhole. He had found out what he had desired, namely, the class in which Miss Clery was". All references to *Stephen Hero* are to the Triad Paperback 1977 reprint of the 1944 Jonathan Cape edition, edited with an introduction by Theodore Spencer, revised with additional material and a Foreword by John J. Slocum and Herbert Cahoon (abbreviated *SH*).

<sup>2</sup> All references to *P* are to: James Joyce. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* edited by Chester G. Anderson. (New York: The Viking Press, 1968) abbreviated *P*.

After which Athy changes the subject as of being of no interest to either of them, and goes on:

— You have a queer name, Dedalus, and I have a queer name too, Athy. My name is the name of a town. Your name is like Latin. (*P*, 25)

No explanation of Stephen's surname is given and the reader is left to trace the origin for himself in the Greek myth of the first recorded attempt at human flight. The choice of this surname has always been seen as symbolic of the ambition of the young man, the artist. One of the things that most strikes a reader of the early works of Joyce is his absolute certainty that his work is good, that he is right in setting aside all the pressures of his family to obtain a post which will guarantee a safe income, and that he can and will achieve his ambition of producing great literary work.

What interests me is to look more closely at that very improbable name: Daedalus. Had Joyce met the myth and adopted it as his own during his formal schooling with the Jesuits, or may it not have been imprinted on his consciousness at an even earlier date? Both Patrick Parrinder<sup>3</sup> and Giorgio Melchiori<sup>4</sup> have noted the novel by the Irish writer Tom Greer, published in 1885 under the title *A Modern Daedalus*, pointing out that the spelling of the name with the Latin diphthong *ae* coincides with that adopted by Joyce as pseudonym when he published the first stories of *Dubliners* in *The Irish Homestead* in 1904. I would like to look more closely at this novel by Greer to see whether, if it had fallen into the hands of Joyce say at about six or eight years old (though there is no evidence that it did) it would have influenced him in the direction that he was soon to take.

Greer's novel is clearly intended for boys (there is no love interest whatsoever, something that was always kept rigorously out of children's reading in the nineteenth century). The cover represents a magnificent Batman or Superman figure [1] — probably one of the first in a very successful genre. The story is a simple one and is based on the invention of a primitive flying machine consisting of a pair of wings strapped onto the shoulders of the hero, John O'Halloran. The tale is narrated in the first person by John and is set in the immediate future, two years only ahead of the time of writing, so that the situation in Ireland can be supposed to be

<sup>3</sup> P. Parrinder, *James Joyce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 31.

<sup>4</sup> G. Melchiori, "Joyce: il banchetto dei linguaggi", *Igitur*, II, 2, luglio-dicembre 1990, 14.

that of the 1880s, with the question of Home Rule very much to the fore. The determination of the hero to exploit his invention in the interest of humanity as a whole and not of any single nation is in keeping with Joyce's own internationalism as set forth in *Stephen Hero*.

— I care nothing for these principles of nationalism, said Stephen. I have enough bodily liberty.

— But do you feel no duty to your mother-country, no love for her? asked Mr Heffernan.

— Honestly, I don't.

— You live then like an animal without reason! exclaimed Mr Heffernan.

— My own mind, answered Stephen, is more interesting to me than the entire country.

— Perhaps you think your mind is more important than Ireland!

— I do, certainly. (*SH*, 216)

In *A Modern Daedalus* John O'Halloran, when his father and brothers want him to use his new discovery in war against the English, at first refuses indignantly<sup>5</sup>:

"Never will I join in such a mad and hopeless and wicked enterprise!" I rejoined hotly. "I don't believe that men are parcelled out into tribes and nations, one all good and the other all bad". (*MD*, 37)

The sense of being an outsider in his own family, often expressed by Stephen, is voiced by Greer's hero, John:

Had my mother been living it might have been different; but since her death, my position in the family had been rather that of a tolerated intruder, than of a son and brother. (*MD*, 26)

John looks outward, and the more lyrical passages in the novel are all concerned with flight, flight away from Ireland:

Again I can ramble in imagination with all the free and careless facility of a bird lingering amid the scenes of old romance, dreaming over the mouldering monuments of departed glory, mingling with the rush and roar of

<sup>5</sup> Quotations and references to Tom Greer. *A Modern Daedalus*. (London: Griffith, Farran, Okeden & Welsh, 1885), abbreviated *MD*.

modern civilization in its most crowded haunts or tracing out the lines of its future development among the yet untrodden solitudes of virgin forests and the remote windings of giant rivers. (*MD*, 258)

The stress is on adventure and discovery, as is to be expected in a book for boys, and the mood is the same that we find in the reflection of Stephen near the beginning of the surviving portion of *Stephen Hero*:

Indeed he felt the morning in his blood: he was aware of some movement already proceeding out in Europe. Of this last phrase he was fond for it seemed to him to unroll the measurable world before the feet of the islanders. (*SH*, 36)

What I am asking is whether the seeds of Joyce's internationalism, his choice of the life of an "errant" which "seemed to him far less ignoble than the life of one who had accepted the tyranny of the mediocre" (*SH*, 161) may not have been sown by an early reading of Greer's book, one of that stream of scientific romances which flooded the last years of the nineteenth century.

In an argument with Madden who had asserted that:

— We want an Irish Ireland.

Stephen replies:

— It seems to me you do not care what banality a man expresses so long as he expresses it in Irish.

And when Madden insists

— I do not entirely agree with your modern notions. We want to have nothing of this English civilization.

Stephen answers

— But the civilization of which you speak is not English — it is Aryan. The modern notions are not English; they point the way of Aryan civilization. (*SH*, 53)

There are two comments which I would like to make regarding this affirmation. First it recalls John's statement at the end of Greer's book:

I share in all the life that goes on under the sun. I trace the footsteps of British civilization in India, of Russian civilization in Tartary. I see everything, I sympathize with everything, I love everything. (*MD*, 259)

But more than anything this refusal of an Irish writer to be restricted to an island which Stephen surmises was, for the Pope, "only an afterthought of Europe" (*SH*, 52) reminds me of a similar statement made by the young Irish poet, Paul Durcan, discussing the question of Celtic identity<sup>6</sup>. Like Joyce's Stephen, whom he did not say that he was quoting, though he well may have been, Durcan claimed that the only identity he acknowledged was Aryan.

In Tom Greer's novel, John O'Halloran's father, when he first learns of his son's invention of the flying machine, at once proposes that it should be utilized for war against the English:

...you must set yourself to train your brothers and other young men, till we have a flying brigade that can go anywhere and do anything! Nothing will be able to stand against it, and you will have the glory of delivering your country and striking the chains from her hands! (*MD*, 35-6)

It is only after John had been unjustly imprisoned by the perfidy of the English authorities that he comes round to his father's way of thinking and, refusing the offer of a thousand pounds from the British government who want to use his invention for war against Ireland, he consents to train and lead his flying squad. The first expedition leaves at dawn from Stephen's Green for a successful attack on Dublin Castle, the seat of British power. The argument which I quoted before between the young Stephen and Mr Heffernan shows that Joyce had often reason to reflect on these priorities, taking his stance on individual rather than national freedom. A novel in which another son and father hotly argue the same questions, and in which John declares

I would rather by far be a part of the great British Empire, than a fifth-rate little Irish Republic, if we could be even that. (*MD*, 50)

could, if it had fallen into Joyce's hands as a child, have interested and perhaps influenced one who was living through something of the same experience. Joyce was early aware that he possessed exceptional powers, and at the age of nine or ten, as Stanislaus recollects, his first work to be

<sup>6</sup> At a Seminar held in Turin in 1987.



printed as a broadsheet at his father's expense, was a poem for the death of Parnell. But soon, when the last copies of the broadsheet had been trampled underfoot by the removal men, Joyce refused to harness his gift as writer to the car bearing the spectacular pageant of Celtic tradition. John's banishment by his father:

Go, boy, from the home you have disgraced and the land you have betrayed,  
and let me forget that I ever had such a worthless son. (*MD*, 50)

would have echoed in James Joyce's mind as familiar words such as he had heard many a time from his own drunken father.

Certainly the father who had so proudly printed and distributed his child's poem on Parnell, and who moreover was looking to the young James to right the family's finances, must have been keenly disillusioned by the choices his son made, being quite unable to appreciate the moral rigour behind them. Not that Joyce ever repudiated Parnell, and in "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" he incorporates a poem attributed to Mr Hynes which may well contain echoes from his own early verses although the metre is quite different from the few lines recollected by Stanislaus. Greer too is concerned with Parnell and gives some space in his novel to an imaginary speech made by Parnell in the House of Commons in defence of John O'Halloran's flying machine. What both Joyce and Greer stress, in praising Parnell, is his coldness. In "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" we have the lines<sup>7</sup>

May everlasting shame consume  
The memory of those who tried  
To befoul and smear the exalted name  
Of one who spurned them in his pride. (*D*, 94)

while in Greer we read

A sudden hush fell upon the chamber as it was perceived that the Irish leader was upon his legs. A bitter smile curled his lip as he looked around, his voice was quiet and incisive, and his manner in striking contrast to the heated declamation of the previous speaker. (*MD*, 102)

Nor is Parnell willing to be goaded into speech by his opponents:

<sup>7</sup> Quotations and references to: James Joyce (*Dubliners*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1947), abbreviated *D*.

There were loud cries for the Irish leader, but he kept his seat, looking around with a very perceptible sneer upon his finely-cut features. (*MD*, 92)

and again

Still the Irish chief sat sneering and silent, amid the din of cheers and counter cheers which greeted the close of every speech. (*MD*, 95)

There can be no doubt as to which Irish leader Greer intended to refer to because a few pages later he is defined as "P - -" by a speaker who claims that

That speech of his is by far the ablest in the debate. It is not a reply to Lord —; it was a manifesto to Europe; and it will tell. (*MD*, 115-116)

So we find the same kind of admiration of Parnell in Greer as in Joyce and the same kind of emphasis on what the British interpreted as his arrogance.

This picture of the Irish leader has a historical basis and is not, of course, peculiar to the two writers in question — we can only note the coincidence of their views. What interests me more is the possibility that Greer's book may have had a more intimate appeal and played a formative part in the development of the younger writer.

Even before the young James Joyce began to write himself (and he was only nine years old when the Parnell poem was printed) may not the concept of a boy who could fly (that is to say who had developed a unique gift) have strengthened his awareness of his own exceptional powers, so that he found in this early essay in science fiction a personal message to persevere against all obstacles, which is one of the most striking features of James Joyce's career. An envious modern poet, Louis Untermayer, commented:

When Tennyson wrote a poem there was a hush in the house.

a line I often think of in connection with Joyce writing passages of *Finnegans Wake* in the crowded and noisy hallway of the Victoria Palace Hotel in Paris with his suitcase (green) across his knees as a writing desk<sup>8</sup>.

Boys' books in the nineteenth century were almost invariably directed to the encouragement of what were regarded as desirable features in the

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Miss Weaver, 17 October, 1923 (*L*, I, 205).

child's development, such as personal initiative, courage and perseverance, but Greer's science fiction, while emphasizing these traditional features, brings in a new element: the brotherhood of man and the destructiveness of war. While most boys' books are concerned to emphasize the themes of conquest and victory Greer brings in a new and more modern note and his hero refuses to join in the thanksgiving service for victory against the English organized by the Catholic church and all alone returns to the scene of the bombardment and to reflections which contrast strangely with the atmosphere of triumph and joy to be found elsewhere in the city.

In the city all was triumph and jubilation. Bells clashed in every steeple and crowds were pouring to almost every church; for a thanksgiving had been proclaimed by the Catholic bishops for the wonderful success of our arms. (MD, 221)

Instead of joining in the celebrations John visits the scene of the bombardment and then the hospital to which the wounded had been removed and it is clear that Greer was trying to impress upon his young readers a horror of war:

Here I was known to the officer in charge, and was admitted to gaze on the ghastly heaps of ruins, the broken walls, the shattered windows, the bloodstained tables where the surgeons had been at work, and last and worst of all, the chamber into which the mangled bodies of the slain had been gathered and piled in heaps to await burial. What a grim commentary it was upon the tramp of church-going feet outside, and the joyous clang with which the air was palpitating! (MD, 222)

I want to put forward a last hypothesis. Could Greer's descriptions of aerial warfare carried out by a flying squad of young men be behind Joyce's Epiphany of Wings? This short epiphany, which can be dated March 1903, is one of the most mysterious and tantalizing:

The spell of arms and voices — the white arms of roads, their promise of close embraces and the black arms of tall ships that stand against the moon, their tale of distant nations. They are held out to say: We are alone, — come. And the voices say with them: We are your people. And the air is thick with their company as they call to me their kinsman, making ready to go, shaking the wings of their exultant and terrible youth?

<sup>9</sup> James Joyce. *Epifanie*, a cura di Giorgio Melchiori. (Milano: Mondadori, 1982), 60.

The vision is apocalyptic, and there can be no doubt that Joyce considered it important because he reutilized it in *Stephen Hero* where it appears in a mutilated form in the additional pages of the manuscript<sup>10</sup>, and he reproduced it again in *A Portrait*<sup>11</sup>. He told his brother Stanislaus in a letter from Pola to Dublin dated 7 February 1905 that "The effect of the prose piece 'The spell of arms' is to mark the precise point between boyhood (pueritia) to adolescence (adulescentia) — 17 years" (L II, 79). In *Stephen Hero* he connects it with his departure for Mullingar, which had taken place in 1899 when Stephen was seventeen, the summer of the year before he entered the university. The insertion at that point of some words in blue crayon suggests that the passage should be transferred as a prelude to his departure for Paris, which is the use he makes of it in *A Portrait*. Obviously Joyce intended his epiphany to be read as an escape from Dublin in the company of kindred spirits, but these flying figures "shaking the wings of their exultant and terrible youth" could have been engendered by the combination of Greer's verbal description of the aerial raid on Dublin castle and by the visual suggestion called up by the unknown artist who designed the superman figure for the cover of Greer's book, giving him wings that were more bat-like than bird-like, so that he is more a devil than an angel, recalling the flying creatures in Bruegel and Bosch. We know that Joyce argued that everything was capable of an epiphany, even the ballast-house clock, so why not *A Modern Daedalus*?

<sup>10</sup> SH, 208-9. The fragmentary sentence is at the beginning of the first surviving page (p. 477) of the original manuscript, just before the Mullingar episode. See the facsimile of the page in JJA4, 1.

<sup>11</sup> P, 252. The epiphany, preceded by the words "Away! Away!", is the entry for 16 April in Stephen's "journal", on the last page of the book.