Stephen Hero

[*Stephen Hero* is the title of Joyce's autobiographical novel written between 1904 and 1907 when he abandoned it before refashioning it radically as A Portrait of the Artist (1916). Hoe radically he did so is really the key internal question of his development involving, crucially, a shift from personal egoism to a more universal position in which the 'whatness' of all the characters in his fiction-world – and therefore all the people in his home city of Dublin – became equal centres of awareness, reflected in acutely accurate internal monologues and indirect style. As a result of this development, the manuscript novel can be read as the record of a false direction but it is also extremely rich in ideas and materials which went towards the make-up of his mature achievement in *Dubliners, A Portrait, Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake*. In that sense study of Joyce is really possible without it although, admittedly, its survival and publication was essentially an accident. The term 'epiphany', which is arguably Joyce's best known contribution to modern culture, finds its origin there and is nowhere else mentioned directly in Joyce's writings. Yet, because the American scholars and teachers who were reading Joyce in the 1940s treated Stephen Hero as a kind of handbook to his thinking, the term became almost universally known in American and afterwards world-wide classes rooms by 1960s. All the rest, as the saying goes, is history. BS Oct. 2021.]

Extracts

A girl might or might not have called him handsome: the face was regular in feature and its pose was almost softened into a [positive distinct] beauty by a small feminine mouth. In [the] general survey of the face the eyes were not prominent: they were small light blue eyes which checked advances. They were quite fresh and fearless but in spite of this the face was to a certain extent the face of a debauchee. [27]

He read Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary* by the hour and his mind, which had from the first been only too submissive to the infant sense of wonder, was often hypnotized by the most commonplace conversation. People seemed to him strangely ignorant of the value of the words they used so glibly. And pace by pace as this indignity of life forced itself upon him he became enamoured of an idealizing, a more veritably human tradition. The phenomenon seemed to him a grave one and he began to [30] see that people had leagued themselves together in a conspiracy of ignobility … he desired no such reduction for himself and preferred to serve her [Destiny] on the ancient terms. [30]

Stephen's style of writing, [that] though it was over affectionate towards the antique and even the obselete and too easily rhetorical, was remarkable for a certain crude originality of expression. [30]

He got down off the tram at Amiens St Station instead of going on to the Pillar because he wished to partake in the morning life of the city. this morning walk was pleasant for him and there was no [32] face that passed him on its way to its commercial prison but he strove to pierce to the motive centre of its uglinesss. It was with a feeling of gloomy pleasure that he entered the Green and saw the gloomy building of the college. [33]

He doubled back into the past of humanity and caught glimpses of emergent art as one might have a vision of the plesiosaurus emerging from his ocean of slime. He seemed almost to hear the simple cries of fear and joy and wonder which are antecedent to all song, the savage rhythms of men pulling at an oar, to see the rude scrawls and portable gods of men whose legacy Leonardo and Michelangelo inherit. And over all this chaos of history and legend, fact and supposition, he strove to draw out a line of order, to reduce the abysses of the past to order by diagram. [34]

The spectacle of the world which his intelligence presented to him with every sordid and deceptive detail set side by side with the spectacle of the world which the monster in him, now grown to a reasonably heroic stage, presented also had often filled him with such sudden despair as could only be assuaged by melancholic versing. He had all but decided to consider

the two worlds as alien to one another … when he encountered … Henrik Ibsen. He understood that spirit instantaneously. … the minds of the old Norse poet and the young Celt met in a moment of radiant simultaneity. [41]

The damp Dublin winter seemed to harmonize with his inward sense of unreadiness and he did not follow the least of feminine provocations through tortuous, unexpected ways any more zealously than he followed through ways even less satisfying the nimble movements of the elusive one. What was that One: arms of love that has not love's malignity, laughter running upon the mountains of the morning, an [38] hour wherein might be encountered the incommunicable? And if he heart but trembled an instant at some approach to that he would cry, youthfully, passionately 'It is so! it is so! Life is such as I conceive it. He spurned from before him the state maxims of the Jesuits … he spurned from before him the company of [the] decrepit youth … [39]

His family expected that he would at once follow the path of remunerative respectability and save the situation but he could not satisfy his family. He thanked their intention: it had first fulfilled him with egoism; and he rejoiced that his life had been so self-centred. He felt [also] however that there were activities which it would be a peril to postpone. [48]

The Roman, not the Sassenach, was for him the tyrant of the islanders; and so deeply had the tyranny eaten into all souls that the intelligence, first overborne so arrogantly, was no eager to prove that arrogance its friend. The watchcry was Faith and Fatherland, a sacred word in that world of cleverly inflammable enthusiasm. …. the multitude of preachers ensured them that high honours were on the way … and in reward for several centuries of obscure fidelity the Pope's Holiness had presented a tardy cardinal to an island which was for him, perhaps, only the afterthought of Europe. [52]

As Stephen looked at the big awkward block of masonry looming [of the Seminary] before them through faint daylight, he re-entered again in thought the seminarist life which he had led for so many years, to the understanding of the narrow activities to which he could now in a moment bring the spirit of an acute sympathetic alien. He recognised at once the martial mind of the Irish Church in the style of this ecclesiastical barracks. He looked in vain at the faces and figures which passed him for a token of moral elevation: all were cowed without being humble, modish without being simple-mannered …

He proclaimed at the outset that art was the human disposition that art was the human disposition of intelligible or sensible matter for an esthetic end, and he announced furth er that all such human dispositins must fall into the divisions of three distinct natural kinds, lyrical epical and dramatic. Lyrical art, he said, is the art whereby the artist sets forth his image in immedate relation to himself; epical art is the art whereby the artist sets forth his image in immediate relation to himself and to others; and dramatic art is the art whereby the artist sets forth his image in immedate relation to others. [72]

Having by this simple process established the literary form of art as the most excellent he proceeded … to establish the relations which must subsist between the literary image, the work of art itself, and that energy which had imagined and fashioned it, that centre of conscious, re-acting, particular life, the artist. [73]

The artist, he imagined, standing in the position of mediator between the world of experience and the world of dreams — a mediator, consequently gifted with twin faculties, a selective faculty and a reproductive faculty … the perfect coincidence of the two artistic faculties Stephen called poetry [and the rest the coneshaped domain of] 'literature'.

… the artist who could disentangle the subtle soul of the image from its mesh of defining cirumstances most exactly and re-embody it in artistic circumstances chosen as the most exact for it in its new office, he was the supreme artist.

The romantic temper … is an insecure, unsatisfied, impatient temper which sees no fit abode here for its ideals and chooses therefore to behold them under insensible figures. As a result of this [73] choice it comes to disregard certain limitations. Its figures are blown to wild adventures, lacking the gravity of solid bodies, and the mind that has conceived them ends by

disowning them. The classical temper, on the other hand, ever mindful of its limitations, chooses rather to bend upon those present things ans so work upon them and fashion them that the quick intelligence may go beyond them to their meaning which is still unuttered. In this method the sane and joyful spirit issues forth and achieves an imperishible perfection, nature assisting with her goodwill and thanks. For so long as this place in nature is given us, it is right that art should do no violence to the gift. [74]

The poet is the intense centre of the life of his age to which he stands in a relation than which none can be more vital. He alone is capable of absorbing in himself the life that surrounds him and of flinging it abroad again amid planetary music. … it is time for the critics to verify their calculations in accordance with [this phenomenon] … to acknowledge that here the imagination has contemplated intensely the truth of the being of the visible world and that beauty, the splendour of truth, has been born. [75]

The age though it bury itself fathoms deep in formulas and machinery has need of these realities which alone can give and sustain life and it must await from those chosen centres of vivification the force to live, the security for life which can come to it only from them. Thus the spirit of man makes continual affirmation. [75]

His mother who had never suspected probably that beauty could be anything more than a convention of the drawingroom or a natural antecedent to marriage and married life was surprised to see the extraordinary honour which her son conferred upon it. Beauty, to the mind of such a woman, was often a synonym for licentious ways and probably for this reason she was relieved to find that the excesses of this new workshop were supervised by a recognized saintly authority. [78]

[Isabel] She had acquiesced in the religion of her mother … If she lived she had exactly the temper for a Catholic wife of limited intelligence and of pious docility and if she died she was supposed to have earned her place in the eternal Heaven of Christians … Her life had always been and would always be a trembling walk before God. [115]

These wanderings filled him with a deep-seated anger and whenever he encountered a burly black-vested priest taking a stroll of pleasant inspection through these warrens full of swarming and cringing believers he cursed the farce of Irish Catholicism: an island [whereof] the inhabitants of which entrusted their wills and mind to other that they might ensure for themselves a life of spiritual paralysis, an island in which all the power and riches are in the keeping of those whose kingdom is not of this world, an island in which Caesar [professes] confesses Christ and Christ confesses Caesar that together they may wax fat upon a starveling rabblement which is bidden ironically to take to iself this consolation in hardship ‘The Kingdom of God is within you’. [132]

The idea that the power of an empire is weakest at its borders requires some modification … in many cases the government of an empire is strongest at its borders and is invariably so when its power at the centre is on the wane … it will perhaps be a considerable time before Ireland will be able to understand that the Papacy is no longer going through a period of anabolism … [133] … the persistence of Catholic power in Ireland must intensify very greatly the loneliness of the Irish Catholic who voluntarily outlaws himself out of so strong and intricate a tyranny may often be sufficient to place him beyond the region of reattraction. [134]

He remembered almost every word she [Emma Clery] had said from the first time he had met her and he strove to recall any word which might reveal the presence of a spiritual principle in her worthy of so significant a name as soul … strove to locate a physical principle in [her body]; but he could not. [141]

The spirit of patriotic and religious enthusiasts seemed to him fit to inhabit the fraudulent circles where hidden in hives of immaculate ice they might work their bodies into the due pitch of frenzy. The spirits of the tame sodalists … he would petrify amid a ring of Jesuits in the circle of foolish and grotesque virginities … [143]

Stephen felt very acutely the futility of his sister's life. … The supposition of an allwise God [148] calling a soul home whenever it seemed good to Him could not redeem in his eyes the futility of her life. The wasted body … had existed by sufferance: the spirit that dwelt therein had literally never dared to live and had not learned anything by an abstention which it had not willed for itself. [149]

In a stupor of powerlessness he reviewed the plague of Catholic[ism] … the vermin begotten in the catacombs issuing forth upon the plains and mountains of Europe. Like the plague of locusts described in Callista they seemed to choke the rivers adn fill the valleys up. They obscured the sun. Contempt of [the body] human nature, weakness, nervous tremblings, fear of day and joy, distrust of man and life, hemiplegia of the will, beset the body burdened and disaffected in its members by its black tyrannous lice. He at least … would live his own life according to what he recognised as the voice of a new humanity, active, unafraid and unashamed. [174]

The Roman Catholic notion that a man should be unswervingly continent from his boyhood and then be permitted to achieve his male nature, having first satisfied the Church as to his orthodoxy, financial condition, [and] prospects and general intentions, and having sworn before witnesses to love his wife forever whether he loved her or not and to beget children for the kingdom of heaven in such manner as the Church approved of — this notion seemed to him by no means satisfactory. [182]

The general attitude of women toward religion puzzled and often maddened Stephen. His nature was incapable of achieving such an attitude of insincerity or stupidity. By brooding constantly upon this he ended by anathemising Emma as the most deceptive and cowardly of marsupials. He discovered that it was a menial fear and no spirit of chastity which had prevented her from granting his request. Her eyes, he thought, just look stange when upraised to some holy image and her lips when poised for the reception of the host. He cursed her burgher cowardice and her beauty and he said to himself that though her eyes might cajole the half-witted God of the Roman Catholics they would not cajole him. In every stray image of the streets he saw her soul manifest itself and every such manifestation renewed the intensity of his disapproval. It did not strike him that the attitude of women towards holy things really implied a more genuine emancipation than his own and he condemned them out of a purely suppositious [sic] conscience. He exaggerated their iniquities and evil influence and returned to them their antipathy in full measure. He toyed also with a theory of dualism which would symbolize the twin eternities of spirit and nature in the twin eternities of male and female and even thought of explaining the audacities of his verse as symbolic allusion. It was hard for him to compel his head to preserve the strict temperature of classicism …

More than ever he had done before he longed for the season to lift and for spring — the misty Irish spring — to be over and gone. He was apssing through Eccles' [sic] St. one evening, one misty evening, with all these thoughts dancing the dance of unrest in his brain when a trivial incident set him composing some ardent erses which he entitled 'Vilanelle of the Temptress.' A young lady was standing on the steps of one of those brown brick houses which seem the very incarnation of Irish paralysis. A young gentleman was leaning on the rusty railings of the area. Stephen as he passed on his quest heard the following fragment of cooloquy out of which he received an impression keen enough to afflict his sensitiveness very severely.

The Young Lady — (drawling discreetly) … O, yes … I was … at the …. cha …pel …
The Young Gentleman — (inaudible) … I … (again inaudibly … I …
The Young Lady — (softly) … O … but you're … ve … ry … wick …ed … .

This triviality made him think of collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies. By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments. [SH187-88]

[The Ballast House clock] ‘ … It is only a item in the catalogue of Dublin’s street furniture. Then all at once I see it and I know it at once for what it is: epiphany.’

No esthetic theory, pursued Stephen relentlessly, is of any value which investigates with the aid of the lantern of tradition … The apprehensive faculty must be examined in action. [189]

You know what Aquinas says: The three things requisite for beauty are, integrity, a wholeness, symmetry, and radiance. Some day I will expend that sentence into a treatise. Consider the performance of your own mind when confronted with any object, hypothetically beautiful. You mind to apprehend the object divides the entire universe into two parts, the object, and the void which is not the object. To apprehend it, you must lift it away from everything else: and then you perceive it as one integral thing, that is a thing. You recognise its integrity. …

That is the first quality of beauty: it is declared in a simple sudden synthesis of the faculty which apprehends. What then. Analysis then. The mind considered the object in whole and in part, in relation to itself and to other objects, examines the balance of its parts, contemplates the form of the object, traverses every cranny of [189] the structure. So the mind receives the impression of the symmetry of the object. The mind recognises that the object is in the strict sense of the word, a thing, a definitely constituted entity.

Now for the third quality. For a long time I couldn’t make out what Aquinas meant. He uses a figurative word (a very unusual thing for him) but I have solved it. Claritas is quidditas. After the analysis which discovers the second quality the mind makes the only logically possible synthesis and discovers the third quality. This is the moment which I call epiphany. First we recognise that the object is one integral thing, then we recognize that it is an organized composite structure, a thing in fact: finally, when the relation of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognize that it is that thing which it is. The soul of the commonest object seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany. [190]