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JAMES JOYCE

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NARRATIVE REREADINGS: SOME REMARKS ON "PROTEUS," "CIRCE" AND "PENELOPE"

by HANS WALTER GABLER

"SOME remarks on 'Proteus,' 'Circe' and 'Penelope'", — that means on the concluding chapters of the three main sections of *Ulysses* and, in "Penelope," the conclusion of the work as a whole. Joyce's habitual, at times veritably obsessive, rereading of his text and his œuvre is something that, as you know, has preoccupied me time and again. On earlier occasions I have approached it from a specifically textual angle to elicit from the peculiarly — albeit not exclusively — Joycean conditioning of the literary text perspectives on the text's, as well as the work's, condition of existence. Joyce was in the habit, as we know, of going over his earlier writings crayon or pen in hand to glean words, phrases, articulated images and expressions for use in the composition of his later ones. The textual critic has had, and still has, a great deal to contribute to rendering tangible the common metaphoric comparison of a Joycean text to a mosaic by exploring how the chips and particles, the multiform verbal units, can be traced through the œuvre. If I propose today some remarks on narrative rereadings, I wish to shift and to widen somewhat the earlier focus, to move from structural details to structures,

and to sketch some directions of how one might see the narrative itself, as narrative, conditioned by and through modes of 'narrative rereading.'

'Rereading,' in the sense of the term that I wish to use, engenders narrative analogous to, and at the same time significantly different from, a pre-existing narrative that stands revealed as its pre-narrative by the referential links in the structuring of shape and meaning that we are led, and expected, to recognise. Narrative and pre-narrative relate in ways similar to those linking the counter-texts of critical discourse to a fictional text; yet whereas between fictional text and critical discourse there is a necessary distinction of genre, the common genre of fictional texts — pre-narrative and narrative — establishes and ensures a *gestalt* relationship. It is of course a critical commonplace that Joyce's texts very strongly exploit pre-texts to whose *gestalt* they are formed: prototypically, both shape and meaning of the narrative of *Ulysses* are essentially conditioned by the pre-narrative of Homer's *Odyssey*. However, the principle of creativity at work — one that Joyce is known to have sought to help him overcome what he considered his innate lack of imagination — has more facets to it than have yet been fully explored. What I wish to suggest is that increasingly, and with increasing complexity as Joyce's life text accretes, discrete narratives within the œuvre itself become re-functionalised as pre-narrative for new narrative. If Joyce's macro-text is a system of homeomorph tales (in Hugh Kenner's nomenclature), the pre-narratives for the narrative rereadings ultimately come as much from outside as inside the œuvre.

The links of the "Proteus" episode with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are as ubiquitous as, on the whole, they are well known. Each text, the five-chapter *Portrait* and the third particularly of the three opening episodes of *Ulysses*, unfolds from a fictional consciousness identically named Stephen Dedalus. The later text, in moving onward, looks back to the earlier one. Whatever else the complex heraldic emblem

at the end of "Proteus" means, it may also be read as a self-reflexive comment: "*He turned his face over a shoulder, rere regardant.*" (*U*3.503) The signifiers that establish the link are many and have often enough been described: the figure of Stephen Dedalus himself, the setting on Sandymount strand, and a plenitude of motifs of incident and thought. Can we take a step further, one that has not to my knowledge as yet been taken, and try to discover how *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* contributes to determining main structures of "Proteus"? I believe we can, and that we may thereby even point a way out of difficulties that criticism has notoriously had in defining the narrative structure, or structures, of the "Proteus" chapter.

Its basic opposition pattern is obvious enough: set against one another are the linear onward movement of Stephen's walk along Sandymount strand, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the circularly arabesque movements of his reflections, and the movements, receding in time, of his memory. Yet, however obvious, the linking of Stephen's manifest progress and his mental processes is commonly felt to be quite tenuous. Neither properly necessitates the other. Stephen's memories and reflections are certainly not what guides him along the strand; and even though, on the other hand, the incidents of the action — what there is of it — regularly set in motion the mental processes, they yet appear as mere accidental points of connection between 'outward' and 'inward.' Thus, although outward incident and impression may be seen to initial Stephen's thoughts — and even this is not always the case — the outward nevertheless provides no intrinsic reason, let alone sufficient cause, for the thought contents, nor for the narrative shape of the mental processes rendered, even though it is these processes, and not the outward action, that constitute the narrative dominant of the chapter.

What, then, to consider Stephen's memories first: what is it that determines their selection, their narrative contour and their arrangement? The biographistic explanation, often enough

invoked, would appear too simplistic, whether it be confined to proposing the fictional exposition of character by way of that character's remembering incidents of his life — although this, too, is a dimension of the chapter's narrative technique — or whether extended to draw in the author's biography — although, again, I do not of course wish to deny the source quality of the autobiography. Yet no biographic argument can answer why, specifically, Stephen should evoke a visit to aunt Sara's that doesn't take place, why he should remember hours in Marsh's Library and reflect on priestly practices in the light of history, and why, accepting that for reasons of the plot mechanics he must be given memories of Paris, it is Patrice and Kevin Egan who should figure so prominently in them.

The narrative units thus indicated by their subject matter form the subdivisions of a consecutive bloc of text constituting, but for the introduction required to establish Stephen's consciousness, the episode's first half. By their matter, one might term the chapter's first half memory-dominated, while by the content of Stephen's subsequent thoughts the second half appears reflection-dominated. The workings of Stephen's memory, then, are in the first chapter-half exemplified from three subject areas: family, religion, and exile. A triad of themes so stated naturally rings bells in our memory (akin perhaps to the chimes at the elevation of the host that tinkle through Stephen's mind). Or maybe it is our memory from *Portrait* that first helps us to discern the triad. We think of 'silence, exile and cunning,' which however doesn't apply because it denotes modes of action that are not here in question. But we also recall: "*When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.*" (*P*, 203) This, from Stephen's mouth in *Portrait*, is a triadic expository recapitulation of themes informing, or derivable from, the over-all narrative structure of that novel. By transformation into narrative the

substance of those nets is woven, or textured, to become text, narrative text.

For the memory-dominated half of "Proteus," I suggest, an analogous triad of nets is conceived for Stephen to try to fly by. Their structure as well as the narrative process of their weaving is all the more clearly discernible against the foil of *Portrait*. Thereby *Portrait* becomes the pre-narrative of which "Proteus" is the narrative rereading. A rereading it certainly is, for it explores alternatives by reading Stephen into, as well as allowing Stephen to read himself into, new narrative surfaces. And a rereading it also importantly is because the narrative surfaces are not radically new, albeit they sport novel matter, but are indeed alternatives or extensions of the pre-narrative.

The least developed and, as it were, merely linear extension of the pre-narrative is Stephen's imagining of the priests at Mass, which would seem to follow straight on from his inner reasoning against taking orders in *Portrait*. It does not presuppose that, on the level of story, Stephen has been to Paris and returned to Dublin. Both the aunt Sara section, however, and the extended, and in itself bipartite, Paris section assume that progression of Stephen's biography, the latter more obviously so than the former.

The validity of the assumption for the aunt Sara section follows from a seemingly innocuous, but really quite important phrase by which Simon Dedalus is thought to comment on his son's imaginary movements. "*Did you see anything of your artist brother Stephen lately? No? Sure he's not down in Strasburg terrace with his aunt Sally? Couldn't he* FLY *a bit higher than that, eh?*" (*U*3.62–64). This is Daedalus making light of the pretensions to flight of Icarus, or rather, it is the transposition of the Daedalus myth of *Portrait* into the demythologizing context of 16 June 1904. As a metaphoric expression of disapproval of Stephen's supposed association with the squalor of aunt Sara's house and family, it does most neatly and succinctly to the myth of Daedalus what, for example,

the linguistic inflation of the *Aeolus* episode does to deflate the myth of Odysseus. In the case ot the Daedalus myth, of course, its deflation is also a result of lived experience for Stephen. His mythical identification, his Daedalian identity, exploded, he is threatened anew: a new set of nets is flung at him. In part they are reactualisations, after his Daedalian flight and fall, of the old ones. The telegraphic summons to his mother's deathbed called him back into the family fold *in extremis*. Meanwhile, as Simon's question implies, he again shuns the parental house. The vivid evocation thereupon of the visit to aunt Sara's that Stephen does not undertake now bodies forth in narrative both his recognition of the full extent of the web and his successful determination once more to fly by the family net.

The memories of Paris, by contrast, circumscribe a new net, that of exile. It marks the extent of his experience, since *Portrait*, that the goal of his flight, the location and condition of safety from the nets flung at him, should itself be recognised as a trapping net. In the narrative realisation, the condition of exile, though filled up with incident from Stephen's life in Paris, is yet clearly given significance only through the figures of Patrice and Kevin Egan. It is the Egans, father and son, who define the condition of exile. Through fathoming the forlorn state of Kevin Egan, Stephen conveys his recognition of the threat of exile as that of yet another web of netting to be shunned. And again, although Patrice and Kevin Egan are new personages just as aunt Sara and uncle Richie and their children were, we should recognise that the narrative structure is not independently new. As father and son, the Egans are fictional reembodiments — narrative rereadings — of Daedalus and Icarus who flew, and who flew, moreover, not homewards as in the classical myth, but into exile, as prefigured in the pre-narrative of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The significance of the bird imagery seems unmistakable:

Patrice, home on furlough, lapped warm milk with me in the bar MacMahon. Son of the wild goose, Kevin Egan of Paris. My father's a bird, he lapped the sweet *lait chaud* with pink young tongue, plump bunny's face. Lap, *lapin.* (3.163–166)

Or do we demur on the grounds that the son of a wild goose is a rabbit? For myself — and I am little afraid of out-Joyceing Joyce in this — I am quite ready to find submerged in that tortuous bilingual pun 'lap - *lapin*' the association of 'lap - lapwing':

Fabulous artificer. The hawklike man. You flew. Whereto? Newhaven-Dieppe, steerage passenger. Paris and back. Lapwing. Icarus. *Pater, ait.* Seabedabbled, fallen, weltering. Lapwing you are. Lapwing be. (9.952–954)

Thus, I am confident that the Egan story may legitimately be described as a narrative rereading of the specific version of the Daedalus myth that structures *Portrait.* It is a *narrative* rereading because it generates its own narrative surface of personnel, situation and incident, articulated in the individuality of its named characters, the meetings in cafés, the rolling of gunpowder cigarettes, or Kevin Egan's marital misfortunes. But it is also importantly a *rereading* of the pre-narrative of *Portrait.* It may be that the "Proteus" episode shows us Joyce exploring to his limits as felt around 1917 just how to turn back upon the text of his own œuvre a method of composition and conditioned invention that to his own satisfaction he had previously turned on the given myth of Daedalus and that he was then ambitiously in the process ot differently turning on the given myth of Odysseus.

Specifically, of course, he seems hard at work on demythologizing Stephen, of bringing him down from his Daedalean pinnacles and dispositioning him anew as a character to fit the context of *Ulysses.* As a character and a consciousness, Stephen is also a narrative structure — in so far as only the text constitutes the fictional character — and therefore a pre-narrative for *Ulysses.* The entire "Proteus" episode, however,

and especially its reflection-dominated sections, seem to indicate that he does not lend himself easily to rereading. His exposition in a new narrative mode, that of interior monologue proper as opposed to the narrated monologue of *Portrait*, is certainly a systematic attempt at rereading. Nevertheless, the Stephen of "Proteus," and thus of *Ulysses* as a whole, does not become shaped into a narrative alternative to the Stephen of *Portrait* in the way that, say, Shem the Penman of *Finnegans Wake* is a narrative rereading of Stephen Dedalus of *Portrait* and *Ulysses* together. In the workings of his reactions, memory and reflections, Stephen is 'a character that cannot be changed' as Joyce is known to have remarked to Frank Budgen. Joyces makes him do, and successfully so, for *Ulysses*. But it appears also as a token of his author's experience with him that he turns his face "*over a shoulder, rere regardant*" (3.503) at the end of the Telemachia of *Ulysses*.

With these remarks on "Proteus" I hope sufficiently to have laid out my perspective. Important dimensions to the view can be added from reflections on "Circe" and "Penelope," yet I shall be much briefer on these much longer episodes. Reaching "Circe," Joyce had realised, in the wanderings of Leopold Bloom through Dublin on 16 June 1904, a new text and a complex new set of narrative structures of his own. Again, it is common critical knowledge that "Circe" essentially depends on his comprehensive and detailed rereading of that text. Nevertheless, critical recognition and application of that knowledge tends to move on a material level and to be more concerned with the echoes of the preceding Bloomsday in "Circe" than with the mode of referentiality that they imply.

Attempts to come to terms with the chapter's referentiality have commonly been oriented towards traditional notions of the referentiality of narrative texts. Such traditional notions are concerned with the empiric substratum of the fiction. Fiction as written or read refers to truth or probability in the real world of experience. According to such a preconception,

it is thought that for "Circe" one may define a stratum of real action and another of visions or hallucinations, or whatever other term is coined to denote the 'surreal' things that do not actually happen in Bella Cohen's or in the streets of Nighttown. I am not overlooking, of course, that a considerable, and increasing, degree of discomfort has been arising from all attempts of thus bringing "Circe" into line with received notions of the referentiality of narrative texts — witness the continuing debate about the episode's narrative techniques.

But perhaps there is still room to refine upon — by which I wish to suggest to modify so as to simplify — our views on those techniques, and to do so by considering implications of the episode's inner-textual frame of reference. Following on from what I have remarked about "Proteus," it seems to me that the text of "Circe" not only documents to us the material result of Joyce's rereading, by reading over, the narrative of Leopold Bloom, but that it essentially also offers a structured sequence of what I continue to wish to call narrative rereadings of that narrative considered as their pre-narrative. This touches on theoretical conceptions of a narrative text's referentiality if one posits that, in the writing of "Circe," the pre-narrative of Bloomsday is made to function as if it constituted not a fiction, but an order of empiric reality. This assumption removes, I believe, the difficulties that beset any attempt at distinguishing between the 'real' and 'surreal' levels of incident and action and allows us instead to perceive the episode's discrete narrative units as straightforward tales told, or dramatised. As narrative rereadings, they lend new narrative surfaces to Leopold Bloom or Stephen Dedalus as characters or vehicles of consciousness, as well as to all other recurring personages, objects, events and incidents that in "Circe" realise new narrative potential from their fictionally real existence in the pre-narrative of Bloomsday. The combinatory virtuosity ot the tales unfolded from the Bloomsday pre-narrative in "Circe" is often breathtaking, yet they assume

a surreal quality only if we insist on their ultimate referrability to empiric reality alone. If, however, we accept a raising of the pre-narrative that so obviously engenders the episodes of "Circe" to the level of absolute reality, or else — which is at least as interesting — a 'lowering' of empiric reality to the state of relativity of fiction, we recognise the chapter's mode of referentiality as one that, rather than making the text conform to traditional notions of the rendering of reality in fiction, enlarges instead its field of reference so as properly to accommodate itself. By then making its phases of narrative rereading function formally in every way as conventional narrative and dramatic discourse, "Circe" succeeds in challenging and modifying traditionally received and theoretically articulated notions of the referentiality of fiction. The achievement of "Circe" much surpasses that of "Proteus," but its method of procedure would appear as the systematic extension of the generative, or re-generative, compositional process explored in the earlier chapter.

"'*Ithaca*' *is the true end of* Ulysses, *for* '*Penelope*' *has neither beginning, middle nor end.*" Nevertheless, "Penelope" is placed as the book's 18th and last episode, and by its position as well as by its author's characterisation of it, it might potentially at least be thought to provide a rereading, and if so, a comprehensive rereading of the 17 episodes of *Ulysses* that precede it. But how can we possibly so conceive of it? It is true of course that it provides a new narrative surface. But this new narrative surface, however much it recognisably refers back to discernible contents of the preceding narrative, would yet seem generated so individually and idiosyncratically from the character and experience of Molly Bloom that it were perhaps truest to say that "Penelope" constitutes a narrative independently new, to be distinguished from structures of narrative such as the memory sections of "Proteus" or the narrative projections of the realities of Bloomsday into "Circe," rather than to be likened to them.

From another point of attack, we may see Molly Bloom

narratively structured as a centre of consciousness in ways that make her comparable to Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, and her narrative realisation akin to theirs. Again, however, even as Bloom cannot be considered a narrative rereading of Stephen, so can Molly not be taken as a rereading of either Stephen or Bloom. Nevertheless: we have the new narrative surface, and we have the consciousness to which that surface is keyed. It may be, therefore, that we can discover how that complex structure, made up of narrative surface and consciousness together, does provide a narrative rereading of the pre-narrative of the 17 preceding episodes of text.

The structural element of the pre-narrative to which the central consciousness of "Penelope" refers back in the relational mode of a rereading is not Stephen or Bloom, but, I suggest, that hierarchically superior consciousness of the text most popularly known as the "Arranger." That superior consciousness of the pre-narrative, having in varying degrees made its presence felt through 17 episodes, is conspicuously absent from "Penelope." Its main function throughout these 17 episodes has been to transform the "histoire" of *Ulysses* into the "discours" of Bloomsday — but, aware of his function, we have as readers and critics throughout been as busy as he in reverting his arrangement and transforming the "discours" back into "histoire," adjusting parallax, constructing biographies, mapping topographies, discovering untold episodes to insert them into their correct sequential position, and generally putting horses properly before carts. In "Penelope," however, where the Arranger's functions are relinquished to a central consciousness projected into the fictional character of Molly Bloom, we at last — amazingly and with amazement — give ourselves over to a flow of "discours" characterized by that essential quality of "discours," the dehistoricizing of history, or dechronologizing of time. As Molly thinks herself to sleep, we learn at last what it may mean to awake from the nightmare of history. In the narrative rereading of *Ulysses*

in "Penelope" — constituting a text where the consciousness of Arranger, of Molly Bloom and of the reader intersect in a narrative mode that so clearly points the way to *Finnegans Wake* — we are taught, if we wish finally to learn, how to read the novel and how imaginatively to live in the real world of *Ulysses*.

Note: Except for an attempt at clearer definition of the term "narrative re-reading" of my title, this paper remains as it was delivered. Jacques Derrida's notion of the "iterability" of a text, of which Susan Bazargan has reminded us in "Oxen of the Sun: Maternity, Language, and History", *James Joyce Quarterly*, 22 (1985), p. 272, provides a suggestive theoretical point of perspective for the matter I have tried to explore.