

# **Between Two Roaring Worlds**

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## *Ulysses through The Parallax View*

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## Abstract

This thesis applies Žižek's theory of the parallax gap to the text of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. I've found I'm not the first to examine the function of parallax in *Ulysses*, or to apply Žižek to Joyce. I do, however, combine these materials differently and take a different approach. My work explores how psychoanalysis and ontology reveal a parallax gap in the self and in being. The very attempt to fill the parallax gap constitutes the endless renewal of subjectivity.

The self-alienation constitutive of subjectivity arises initially from an ontological impasse, the bookended pre-natal, post-mortem exclusion from being. Thus it seems that something immaterial (the life force) springs from a combination of matter and immateriality, 'thrown' into the world from nothing and nowhere. This 'immaterial something' is posited in Christian thought as the soul; in Žižek's work, it is the life-substance of *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is the inextricable pleasure-in-pain by which the subject continually seeks to transcend its internal and external limitations, and thus, to keep desiring. These limitations are immanent, thus each character must confront the internal impasse in himself in order to confront it in the world.

The parallax gap creates a sort of bend in the fabric of being, a traumatic emptiness which derails one from fulfilling desire. The very aim for failure ensures that one keeps desiring: as Stephen puts it, "A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery" (*U* 182). I explore this creative process of desire and loss in the case of Stephen and Bloom, whereby the traumatic emptiness or impasse in the self generates the negative capability by which these characters creatively push into the unknown.

Stephen and Bloom both avoid home, and they both voluntarily inflict suffering upon themselves. Through a parallax view, we can observe how the traumatic emptiness inherent in the self pushes one toward failure and loss: in this way, one pushes past the 'inauthenticity' of Imaginary and Symbolic supports, and confronts the abyss of the Real. This confrontation loops back in an 'eternal return,' an imperfect cycle whereby Joyce's characters are renewed without recourse to redemption; where the 'everlasting' Christian model is undermined and replaced by the 'incertitude' of the void.

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## 1. Introduction

The premise of James Joyce's 1922 novel *Ulysses* is fairly straightforward: on June 16, 1904 in Dublin, Ireland, the characters Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom avoid going home. There are of course countless ways to summarize the plot, but my work here approaches *Ulysses* from this general angle. Joyce structures the novel in relation to Homer's *Odyssey*, but if not for the extratextual notes and schemas he leaked to editors and friends, this point may have gone altogether unnoticed for quite some time. From their respective beginnings in *Ulysses*, Stephen's and Bloom's thoughts are coupled with physical movement, a peripatosis both parallel to and juxtaposed against the inner world of thought. Joyce's use of two central narrators (among multiple and sometimes indiscernible narrators) demands that we examine the same day in the same city through different eyes.

The theme of sustained movement and different perspectives is highlighted by Joyce's deliberate reference to the phenomenon of parallax, which appears eight times in the novel. In one instance, Bloom walks through Dublin and looks at the clock tower, thinking of Molly's impending adultery with Boylan: "Think no more about that. After one. Time ball on the ballast office is down. Dunsink time. Fascinating little book that is of Sir Robert Ball's. Parallax. I never exactly understood. There's a priest. Could ask him. Par it's Greek: parallel, parallax. [...] O rocks!" (*U* 147). Fitting its own seemingly stubborn assertion of self-contradictory positions, parallax has multiple nuances depending on the situation to which it is applied. The Oxford English Dictionary defines parallax: "The effect whereby the position or direction of an object appears to differ when viewed from different positions, e.g. through the viewfinder and the lens of a camera." Parallax is also useful in astronomy, as "the angular amount of parallax in a particular case, especially that of a star viewed from different points in the earth's orbit." Regarding the etymological origins of parallax, the OED states finally: "late 16th century: from French *parallaxe*, from Greek *parallaxis* 'a change', from *parallassein* 'to alternate', based on *allassein* 'to exchange' (from *allos* 'other')."

Thus, parallax tends to combine perception, alternation, and exchange between the self and others or the external world. Most importantly perhaps is that parallax

involves shifting, rather than fixed, positions whereby we (attempt to) exchange ourselves with the other in order to gain a parallax view. *The Parallax View* is the subject and title of Slavoj Zizek's fairly recent (2006) work which examines transcendental materialist subjectivity via political and cultural situations and artefacts. While some critics have focused on Stephen and Bloom as dual perspectives of a composite whole, I want to look at the tension in each and between the two, this parallax gap whereby constant shifting is both cause and product of creative discovery.

As for anyone approaching *Ulysses*, some general understanding of Western philosophy and Christianity is useful, if not presumed. My analysis deals heavily in Kantian thought and German Idealism as interpreted and extended by Zizek. The formal requirements of this thesis disallow detailed explanation of these foundational philosophies or of Christian theology, but in cases where I refer to aspects of either I intend to clarify anything which might be opaque to the general reader.

The primary texts I use in exploring my hypothesis are *Ulysses*, by James Joyce, and *The Parallax View*, by Slavoj Zizek. I've limited the textual selections from *Ulysses* to episodes and images which lend to multiple readings from various angles. It is my intention to work and rework these selections within the analysis, rather than create an exhaustive overview of the entire novel. In the theory section that follows, I will thoroughly explain the psychoanalytical and philosophical aspect of parallax as it is understood by Zizek. In the analysis, I will apply Zizek's ontology in order to uncover instances and implications of parallax in the case of Stephen and Bloom. Though it's not possible to fully separate concepts such as ontology from temporality, I'll try to draw transparent arguments regarding ontology and the individual in relation to spatial/material-, temporal- and social structures. In the conclusion, I will discuss connections and disparities between the two characters, and what parallax ultimately means for both.

## **2. Thesis Statement**

I argue that Žižek's ontological framework, culminating in the theory of the parallax gap, provides a useful structure for analyzing the ontological and social problems which Stephen and Bloom confront in Joyce's *Ulysses*. By tracing the subjectivity of each character and their interactions via this theoretical framework, it becomes apparent that parallax is more than a combination of their two perspectives, it's the impasse at the core of being, the very antagonism inside each character. This antagonistic rift extends from the microcosm to the macrocosm, from subjective concerns to temporal and spatial concerns. In this way, Joyce's textual references to parallax are more than exposition of scientific theory: he incorporates parallax in the text through the very structure of these characters' modes of experiencing, their ways of interacting with each other and the world. Stephen has not fully resolved the tension of his rejection of religion, thus this negation itself, a failed resolution, creates a constant parallax gap in his experiencing. In his constant contemplation of Christian thought, his reflexive activity of dis/belief provides the very tension by which he upholds his rejection of the faith. In a similar way, Bloom has difficulty resolving the tension between his complicity with and aversion to Molly's rendezvous with Boylan; his day is spent using material detail and libidinal fantasy to vacillate between desire and disgust and thus confront the impasse at the core of his own being. Bloom and Stephen both meet while avoiding home. Rather than seeking a perfect unity or circularity, the traumatic impasse of the parallax gap creates a radical trajectory into the unknown, where the abyssal confrontation with the Real illustrates the creative potential in rejecting unattainable Symbolic and Imaginary ideals for the productive tension of the parallax gap.

## **3. Theory and Criticism**

### **3.1 Žižek and *The Parallax View***

This method of examining the tension between incommensurable positions is what Žižek calls 'the parallax view.' In a work bearing the same title, he discusses various

cultural artefacts which create or embody the phenomenon of parallax. Žižek gives the parallax phenomenon a philosophical and psychoanalytical treatment, exploring cultural and political cases of parallax, and how psychological phenomena such as desire and identity interact within the self and the social context. Parallax spatially denotes a view of the same object from two different points in space, whereby multiple perspectives allow us to view the same object with different results.

Žižek explains parallax as “the confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible” (PV 4). Though this lack of common ground is the very ‘thing’ that constitutes the parallax, the simultaneity of two (or more) perspectives, it’s ontologically negative in that, as a tension, it can’t be posited. That’s why it’s referred to as a gap, a lack: rather than being the one position or the other, it is the minimal difference between the two. The lack of a neutral common ground results in a “gap between two points of perspective, perceptible only in the shift from the one to the other” (PV 26). Thus the very movement, rather than the one position or the other, allows one to see or be aware of the parallax gap. This gap allows space for multiple considerations which would otherwise be limited by an assertion of one ‘true’ position or a relativist assertion of the ‘truth’ of both positions.

In this way, the parallax gap corresponds to the Lacanian Real, but differs in that it is a negativity, rather than a position: “The Real is thus the disavowed X on account of which our vision of reality is anamorphically distorted. [...] This means that, ultimately, the status of the Real is purely parallaxic,” and “thus opposed to the standard (Lacanian) notion of the Real” (PV 26). For this reason, my analysis shouldn’t be considered fully Lacanian: though Žižek (and therefore, I) use the Lacanian term ‘the Real,’ it should be understood throughout this thesis in Žižek’s terms, as that which allows us to experience or encounter the parallax gap. Rather than enforcing ontological closure via a true/false dichotomy, this gap opens a space rife with creative possibility in the text and interpretive possibility for the reader.

Joyce’s earlier works foreground the techniques he further develops in *Ulysses*. Even prior to *A Portrait*, Joyce works with parallax shift in the short story ‘Araby’ in *Dubliners*: The boy’s relation to himself, his perception of his object of confused desire, and the carnival at Araby – these change in proportion to the boy’s internal movement from fantasy to the Real: as Žižek puts it, “the very thing which, viewed from a proper

distance, looks like the supreme Good changes into repulsive Evil the moment we come too near it” (*PV* 187). This is what makes the before-and-after difference – in the boy (and his perception of himself), of his object(s) of desire, and his social-spatial milieu (home, the train, the carnival at Araby) – indiscernible as it is striking: temporal and proximal shifts affect no substantial difference in the qualities of these things. There is no change without, only a change within. Each simply “appears in a different light only due to a parallax shift of our perspective” (*PV* 187). Fantasy thus requires a ‘proper distance,’ as the Real is too much to bear. Therefore the space between perceiver and perceived always contains gradations of fantasy and reality.

The ‘plague of fantasies’ begins within us, this quest for an identity, which must always end fruitless: one either accepts that the self is empty, and that identity is a failure; or one clings to material demarcations in an attempt to ‘hold’ or claim an identity, thereby enacting a self-delusional grasping after externalities which fail to function as ontological internalities or ‘self.’ This is the impasse of the self, which parallaxically produces and limits knowledge, as will be shown in the analysis. Both Stephen and Bloom attempt to gain knowledge of the empty fantasy in order to move beyond it. In Zizekian terms, they use loss and failure to ‘traverse the fantasy.’

It’s perhaps difficult to understand the text of *The Parallax View* without an understanding of what might be called Zizek’s ‘big three’: Kant’s epistemological-ontological theory in *A Critique of Pure Reason*, the German Idealists (most notably Hegel) who thought/wrote in response to this work, and Lacan’s interpretation of this trajectory of thought. The whole of Zizek’s oeuvre hinges upon the assertion and explanation of the immanence of the ontological gap. This requires a bit of background.

Kant posited an ontological divide between the noumenal and the phenomenal. The noumenal is the form or concept of a thing, whereas the phenomenal is the epistemological entity or object, the thing as it presents itself to a cognitively perceiving being. In terms of cognizance and subjectivity, this deceptively simple split irrevocably ruptures our understanding: to think of oneself as a noumenal idea (and thus immanently separate from and potentially inaccessible to us) simultaneously with oneself as a phenomenal being (perhaps yet further separated from our ‘self’ in that we fail to locate these or any thoughts within this substantial entity) creates a rift in our sense of self. According to Zizek, Kant ultimately “reduced the transcendental horizon

to a way in which reality appears to a finite being (man), with all of it located in a wider encompassing realm of noumenal reality” (PV 25). This other space beyond phenomenal reality is generally regarded as Kant’s fundamental limitation. Žižek argues rather that the gap of incommensurability is built into reality: “the place of freedom is in fact not noumenal, but the gap between phenomenal and noumenal” (PV 25). There are no ‘two worlds apart’, but rather, immanence and its inherent gap.

Though any pure philosophy disallows conflation of Kant’s noumenal and Aristotle’s formal or Plato’s ideal (*Ulysses*’ characters also disapprove: “John Eglinton, frowning, said, with waxing wrath: Upon my word it makes my blood boil to hear anyone compare Aristotle with Plato.” U 178) it’s easy to see basic similarities. Both suppose a transcendental concept to or from which a thing refers, thus an ontological position (a noumenal/formal world) that would otherwise nullify or fill the negativity of a parallax gap. Žižek allows for no such position. A position affirms positive being, while the negativity of the gap accedes only to negation, the lack in being. In *Ulysses*, Stephen refers to Aristotle a number of times. This thesis regards philosophy from a Žižekian standpoint, so Stephen’s musings on form, for example, will be filtered through Žižek rather than Aristotle.

Žižek’s transcendental materialist subjectivity is the foundation of *The Parallax View* and Žižek’s philosophy as a whole. Simply put, our subjectivity transcends our material being. As mentioned, we fail to locate our thoughts about our self within the physical matter of our self, and we fail to separate—or integrate—the cognizing ‘I’ from the ‘thing that is me.’ Thought seems to be something that stems from, yet is not bounded by, our corporeal matter. What separates this line of thinking from the Cartesian *ergo sum* is in its most basic ontological proposition: Descartes claims “I think, therefore I am,” where Žižek finds no causal link between thinking and being, only an inseparable negativity. Further, one’s self-concept is built around the trauma of being, which entails non-being at its core. This is the primordial trauma, where one is ‘thrown’ (to borrow from Heidegger) into the world from nothing or nowhere.

### **Lacan’s Imaginary, Symbolic, Real**

Part of this trauma is the material alienation that occurs with language acquisition. Language fails to fully re-connect us to the lost experience of primordial non-being and

the neonatal connection previous to developing subjective understanding. This impossible lack repeats its unattainability through our desires and drives, which lean upon the supports of the Imaginary and Symbolic to build in response to this and other traumas we encounter by living. Our *jouissance*, the inextricable pleasure and pain that drives us irrespective of such Imaginary/Symbolic supports, is what brings us closest to the Real. The Real is thus threatening: by giving us what we desire, it effectively destroys our desire. This is why Zizek claims that “*jouissance* is that which we can never reach, attain, *and* that which we can never get rid of” (PV 115, Zizek’s emphasis). To avoid the threat of the Real, we tend to remain in the comfort of our imaginary projections and fantasies, the comfort of symbolic structures.

People tend to orient themselves by seeking identities defined by social symbolic structures, within the guise of historical social reality. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus famously renounces allegiance to the ‘holy trinity’ of God, Nation, and Family. All three patriarchal symbolic structures are tied to Stephen’s native land of Ireland. The ‘nationless’ Stephen Dedalus as an artist can be likened to the ‘free’ Zizek as a philosopher:

For a philosopher, ethnic roots, national identity, and so on, are simply *not a category of truth*—or, to put it in precise Kantian terms, when we reflect upon our ethnic roots, we engage in a private use of reason, constrained by contingent dogmatic presuppositions; that is to say, we act as “immature” individuals, not as free human beings who dwell in the dimension of the universality of reason. (PV 9)

These symbolic structures are embedded in and constitutive of historical social reality. What, then, is the difference between reality and the Real? Stephen’s attempts at understanding objective ‘reality’ lead us to its inseparability from his subjectivity. Heusel delineates Stephen’s experience in terms of perception and reality:

We are reminded of Stephen’s experiments with perception in ‘Proteus.’ There Stephen’s mind wrestles with the changing face of the world, best depicted by the waves on the ocean. He begins with the ‘*signatures* of things,’ rather than their reality, which the mind receives through eyesight. (Heusel 136, Heusel’s emphasis)

Heusel sets up a dichotomy between signifier (“signatures”) and signified (“reality”) here, but doesn’t get down to the problems with or between the two. The term ‘reality’

usually implies a social consensus in regard to the perceivable world and various semi-perceptible phenomena (electricity for example). Its preliminary entry in the OED calls reality “the quality or state of being real,” which is a tautology. Reality is then further defined as: “real existence; what is real rather than imagined or desired; the aggregate of real things or existences; that which underlies and is the truth of appearances or phenomena.” Real is defined in opposition to imagination and desire, and is supposed to ‘underlie’ as the truth of appearances, like Kant’s noumenal (or Aristotle’s formal) realm. When Heusel states that Stephen is “here to read the signatures of things, rather than their reality,” she similarly disregards the way imagination, desire, and belief influence one’s perception of reality, as well as ontological dilemmas such as truth and appearance. This common, cursory elision fails to account for the inseparability of subjectivity and ontology. This approach

accepts so-called ‘external reality’ as such, as something *given* in advance, and reduces the problem of the ‘psychical apparatus’ to the question of how (if at all) this apparatus succeeds in accommodating itself to reality, in connecting, ‘coupling’ with it. In this perspective, the definition of ‘normalcy’ is a psychical apparatus open to reality, whereas the psyche is ‘pathogenic’ if, instead of establishing proper contact with reality, it builds its own ‘disjointed’ universe. (*EYS* 47, Zizek’s emphasis)

Heusel fails to recognize the non-neutrality of reality and rather seems to posit reality as the generalized “historically specified form of *social* reality” (*EYS* 47, Zizek’s emphasis). Historical social reality thus limits the individual psyche to a conformist position (normalcy, sanity) or a critical position (pathological). Zizek claims that our psyche operates on the pleasure principle, which only adjusts itself to the reality principle as a means of self-preservation in the face of traumatic cuts or losses. Even from this critical standpoint, it may seem difficult to establish reality as something other than *a priori*. Zizek’s point is that external reality does not cause the trauma which derails the pleasure principle, but rather our own inherent lack does.

There is something in the very immanent functioning of the psyche, notwithstanding the pressure of ‘external reality,’ which resists full satisfaction. In other words, even if the psychic apparatus is entirely left to itself, it will not attain the balance for which the ‘pleasure principle’ strives, but will continue to circulate around a traumatic intruder to its interior—the

limit upon which the ‘pleasure principle’ stumbles is internal to it. The Lacanian mathem for this foreign body, for this ‘internal limit,’ is of course *objet petit a*: [...] *objet a* prevents the circle from closing, it introduces an irreducible displeasure, but the psychic apparatus finds a sort of perverse pleasure *in this displeasure itself*, in the never-ending, repeated circulation around the unattainable, always missed object. The Lacanian name for this ‘pleasure in pain’ is of course enjoyment (*jouissance*), and the circular movement which finds satisfaction in failing again and again to attain the object, the movement whose true aim coincides therefore with its very path toward the goal, is the Freudian *drive*. The space of the drive is such a paradoxical, curved space: the *objet a* is not a positive entity existing in space, it is ultimately nothing but a certain *curvature of the space itself* which causes us to make a bend precisely when we want to get directly at the object. (*EYS* 48-49, Zizek’s emphases).

This curvature of space appropriately mirrors the effect of stellar parallax which both main characters in *Ulysses* observe and consider. In this way, the seemingly maligned external world reads like a reflection of the disjointed internal psyche.

I will demonstrate the ways in which both Stephen and Bloom approach ‘reality’ with a critical, disjointed view. Parallax illustrates this very gap, this inconsistency that inheres in the subject and the extended world and drives one to seek loss or failure. Zizek’s ontological exercises and previous work culminate in this phenomenon, ergo an application of these underlying processes leads to a clearer understanding of parallax and how it helps explain why these characters are bent on enacting loss. For this reason, I’ve chosen to read *Ulysses* through *The Parallax View*.

### **3.2 Brivic on Joyce**

As Zizek’s thought is heavily influenced by Lacan, it’s no surprise that the two are often paired in academic discourse, as in Brivic’s work on Joyce. Brivic claims that Zizek’s parallax “corresponds to [Lacan’s] *sinthome*, which is always divided between two levels, and like the *sinthome*, the parallax requires movement (two points of view)” (Brivic 22). Lacan’s *sinthome* proposes that knowledge can only be created via discovery, since meaning can only be applied after the fact. As Zizek puts it, “symptoms are meaningless traces, their meaning is not discovered, excavated from the hidden

depth of the past, but constructed retroactively - the analysis produces the truth” (*Sublime Object* 58). Thus truth is not something innate or preexisting, but the very process of discovery and interpretation. This is a simplified version of Kierkegaard’s famous assertion that “life must be lived forwards, but can only be understood backwards.” Though Žižek hasn’t done specific readings on Joyce as an object of inquiry, Lacan claims Joyce as inspiration for a number of his seminars. Lacan’s *sinthome* inspired Žižek’s *Enjoy Your Symptom!*, and my work here will also touch upon the symptoms/*sinthomes* in *Ulysses* both as they are part of a creative process (thus, to be enjoyed) and as they relate to the parallax gap.

Brivic says that Homer’s *Odyssey* “embodies a journey because the subject must become an object that is a process in order to realize itself” (Brivic 115). The subject must self-objectify in order to gain critical self-awareness. The spatial irony between thinker and thing-observed is the negative space which allows for this process. Thus, the ironic distance here allows for a sort of internal ‘journey’ whereby the subject makes itself real. With this Homeric narrative as its model, *Ulysses* forces us into foreign territory without and within. A common supposition of travel is that the barrage of the unfamiliar heightens our senses: awareness becomes keen, and memories are made sharp and lasting. Awareness amplifies in relation to difference as perceptual and interpretive patterns suffer a shocking break from habitual or normal situations and responses. Outside of our comfort zone, we cast a questioning gaze back at ourselves: amongst strangers, we are effectively strange, even to ourselves.

This is a simplified and preliminary explanation for why loss of self is key to creating oneself: the moment one is estranged from oneself, one is impelled to acknowledge this lack (of self-understanding) and to do something with this emptiness. The recognition of this lack doesn’t require extensive travel (the characters here only traverse their own city of Dublin), though it helps to illuminate it: for inasmuch as we ‘posit’ a firm identity, we miss its inherent kernel of negativity, and cling to external or symbolic demarcations which further alienate. To self-realize is arguably (and paradoxically) to resist such a position. Stephen and Bloom are constantly on the move – with and without purpose, mentally and physically – not only to find meaning, but as a means of creating meaning for themselves. This is what Brivic calls the ‘dynamic

imperative': subjectivity constantly changes truth, because truth is an act of circulation, rather than a fixed point.

In *Joyce through Lacan and Žižek*, Brivic uses Lacanian theory and Žižek's interpretations of it to examine three of Joyce's works: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegan's Wake*. The section on *A Portrait* explores young Stephen as a hysteric subject who uses the feminine power of creating knowledge as a response to the masculine oppressor who claims knowledge. Much of what Brivic discusses here is applicable to both Stephen and Bloom in *Ulysses*.

The middle section of *JTLZ* examines *Ulysses* in three chapters, with emphasis on Lacan's theory of the *sinthome*. In the first of these chapters, Brivic links *Ulysses* with its Homeric counterpart, claiming that the *Odyssey* works so well as a model for *Ulysses* because "Odysseus' major objective – from a modern point of view – is to get lost" (Brivic 10). The following chapter explores the creative act of discovery within *Ulysses* as it corresponds to Lacan's definition of the *sinthome*: "a temporary splicing of the functions of ordinary consciousness onto further levels that allow[s] them to reconstitute themselves" (Brivic 10).

Brivic's third chapter on *Ulysses* explores the chapter 'Circe,' which reads Bloom's social dealings through an economy of shame, where "shame is the real object of social exchange" (Brivic 10). These three suppositions – loss as impetus, *sinthome* as creative discovery, and shame as the object of exchange – are thus fairly well-trodden ground. Nonetheless, I've chosen different approaches and different textual matter, so though my work here is in close conversation with Brivic, my focus on other aspects of *Ulysses* intends to cover new ground.

### **3.3 Society and the Subject: Althusser and Žižek**

According to Louis Althusser, the social situation always precedes the individual subject. Society 'reads' or 'addresses' the subject and thus integrates itself into one's subjectivity. The self, therefore, is predetermined to an extent: we never begin as a blank slate, but are born into a world which foists symbolic identity demarcations (i.e., gender, nationality, religion) upon us. Stephen and Bloom are not subjects in a vacuum: we must consider them within a preexisting social historical order.

While the focus and spatial requirements of this thesis disallow an in-depth survey of the novel's sociopolitical climate, I will consider the oppressive functions of gender and colonialism in relation to my arguments. Joyce was critical of normative gender roles and colonial rule. The implicit 'claim to truth' and power to enunciate is precisely the function of such hegemonic structures, to render themselves seemingly *a priori* in the ontology of historical social reality. This invisibility mirrors the ontological function of history itself: history is that which, "precisely by staying invisible, by eluding the subject's grasp, in advance determines its field of vision: what we can see, as well as what we cannot see, is always given to us through a historically mediated frame of preconcepts" (*EYS* 15). This frame entices the subject to act in relation to being as if on a timeline, rather than recognizing the openness of time as something in the process of unfolding. This 'false historicity' will be explored further in the analysis.

The frame of history is arguably determined by the hegemonic utterance of Truth. This 'claim to truth' of the oppressor is what interpellates subjects. In his own words, Althusser's duplicate mirror-structure of ideology ensures simultaneously:

1. the interpellation of 'individuals' as subjects;
2. their subjection to the Subject;
3. the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the subject's recognition of himself;
4. the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be alright: Amen – 'So be it'. (Althusser 55)

Althusser's mirror-structure of ideology is influenced by Lacan's psychoanalytical theory of the mirror stage. Lacan claims that subjectivity is formed by the subject's misrecognition of him/herself. Althusser ties this misrecognition to ideological structures which interpellate the individual. Lacan and Žižek both explain how the free will inherent to being forces us to make choices, and thus limits our freedom. The angst of being relates to the impossibility inscribed in the burden of freedom. In Althusser's terms, this impossibility is the paradox itself:

In the ordinary use of the term, subject in fact means: (1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; (2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is

therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission. This last note gives us the meaning of this ambiguity, which is merely a reflection of the effect which produces it: the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'.* (56, Althusser's emphasis)

In this way, being a subject and being free is a paradox foisted upon the subject through the subject's inextricable being in historical social reality and its authoritative structures.

In relation to the repressive structures of imperialist power, Žižek's 'symptomal reading' seeks to locate the symptoms which undermine the totality of the structure.

Žižek claims that

modernism endeavors to subvert [this totality] by detecting the traces of its hidden truth in the details which 'stick out' and belie its 'official' truth, in the margins which point toward what has to be 'repressed' so that the 'official' totality could establish itself—modernism's elementary axiom is that details always contain some surplus which undermines the universal frame of the 'official' Truth. (EYS 120)

As a modernist text, *Ulysses* gives insight into how the colonial force builds its power upon the hegemonic utterance of "official Truth," and how this power can be subverted in drawing attention to the repression which founds it.

As I'll show in the analysis, Stephen and Bloom are quite Lacanian in their subversion of such ideological structures. "The big Other doesn't exist,' as Lacan puts it: it is just a subject's presupposition—the presupposition of an immaterial, ideal order [...] that guarantees the ultimate meaning and consistency of the subject's experience" (EYS 58). Althusser's theory of interpellation is a useful method for speaking of the way in which ideology addresses its would-be subject, but we have to also consider the subject's actions and response. As Žižek puts it, "Althusser misrecognizes the specific agency of the 'ideal,' 'immaterial' big Other [...] This 'big Other' is retroactively posited [...] by the subject in the very act by means of which he is caught in the cobweb of ideology" (EYS 59). In simpler terms, we deny our own agency by giving power to ideological symbols. This tautology reveals the ontological impasse of ideologies and

symbolic structures which try to impose themselves as *a priori*. They are instead historical contingencies, built upon the work of the “subject [who] poses the big Other in the guise of Historical Reason or divine Providence in the very moment and gesture of conceiving himself as its executor, its unconscious tool” (*EYS* 59). In this way, the subject effectively speaks the ‘big Other’ into being.

## **The Structure of the Analysis**

I’ve read *Ulysses* through this theoretical material in order to understand the actions and motives of Stephen and Bloom, and the implications for textual body of the novel. The analysis is composed of two primary parts. The first part focuses on Stephen, the second part on Bloom, with occasional overlap. These two primary parts contain subsections which build a successive argument that traces the intersections of subjectivity and historical social reality and the means by which the subject confronts ontological states at the level of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real. The parallax gap is thus part and productive of a fundamental lack at the minimal level of being, a rift which spreads outward into larger structures and creates an empty space for these two characters to explore unanticipated modes of being.

The first section on Stephen discusses the internal limit in the Self, the void at the core of being. This impasse in ontology is inscribed in subjectivity and historical social reality, which mirror one another in a sense. The second section discusses the trauma created by this lack of closure in the Self, and how this relates to the primordial trauma. The primordial trauma, as mentioned, deals with our anxiety in regard to the unknown which bookends our existence, before birth (or conscious awareness) and after death. Stephen attempts to understand the roles that his mother, his father, and God might have played in his creation, even as he ultimately rejects all three as authority figures. Stephen’s sense-experiments reveal how this trauma is bound up with broader considerations of temporality, where the enclosure of finitude paradoxically disallows (an experience of) infinity yet disallows (us to experience) time to stop. The bearing of the symbolic upon one’s relation to self and society is the focus of the third section. Stephen’s mother’s unconditional demand (and his ‘repetition’ via unconditional refusal) of the rites of final prayer is arguably the *objet petit a*, the core trauma around

which Stephen's subjectivity circulates. Here, God and the mother are extended symbolically in society as Church and the family. These are the primary structural forces which Stephen must contend with. His weapon is, paradoxically, the colonially imposed English language: the fourth section demonstrates how the colonizer's tools, in the hands of the subject, can be subversively appropriated for the purposes of undermining the oppressive symbolic order in which they are embedded.

In the first section of analysis on Bloom, I'll examine how Molly's adultery is effectively Bloom's own missive of extramarital desire sent back to him. The second section examines his subjective ontology as he is interpellated by societal symbolic structures, and the ways in which his productive deflection subverts the hegemonic order. I combine the focal points of desire and ontology to explore the production of disgust and waste within a colonial framework. The nationalist narrative constitutes Bloom as its 'foreign body' or waste product, which allows him a critical viewpoint toward these symbolic structures. In the fourth section, temporality is the focus of a discussion on transcendental materialism. The material and immaterial are caught and inverted in a false historicity, a ruse by which Bloom attempts to deny his own masochistic desire. Here, I'll look at how Bloom traverses the Imaginary and Symbolic to arrive at the Real. The final section will reveal the 'successful failure' of Bloom's quest, where I demonstrate how his imperfect repetition of the known affects a push into the unknown, thus allowing him to confront the Real of his gaping trauma, a void left in the absence of imaginary and symbolic structures.

## **4.0 Analysis Pt. I**

### **Stephen Dedalus**

#### **4.1 The Mirror and the Cut: Subjectivity as failure of self-recognition**

In order to understand why Stephen is on an intentional mission for failure, we must first understand the ontological tensions at the root of his being. Joyce sets up the problem of external reality and subjectivity in the very first line of *Ulysses* with the image "a mirror and a razor lay crossed" (*U* 3). That Joyce has placed a razor upon this

mirror, both as an object and a reflected image, evokes the cut between the noumenal and the phenomenal, and the inherent problem: How can we understand this suture between reality and its representation? This subtle image connotes a subjective perception at cross-purposes with reality, as well as its obverse, whereby immanent phenomenal reality cuts with its substance through the symbolic noumenal world of idea or form. The mirror also implies the question of self, for ourselves and others: For what is a mirror, if not primarily an object by which to see oneself, and to prepare a face for others?

A mirror has a doubled existence as a substantial thing and yet a thing which also sees and interprets the world. The mirror contains itself: the substance which makes it reflect, and the mirror contains the reflection: an intangible image, a symbol. As Žižek might say, something is ‘in the mirror more than the mirror itself.’ Stephen asks this question of himself, considering his own image in the glass: “Stephen bent forward and peered at the mirror held out to him, cleft by a crooked crack, hair on end. As he and others see me. Who chose this face for me? This dogsbody to rid of vermin. It asks me too” (*U* 8).

Stephen feels the split in himself and the suture between the phenomenal and the noumenal. He is estranged, not only as an object for these others, but as an object for and from himself: “*it asks me too.*” This ‘it’ and ‘me’ illustrate Kant’s notion of the subject as divided against itself. To move from Kant to Žižek, the incompleteness or unwholeness of the subject is immanent. Appropriately, the mirror is ‘cleft by a crooked crack.’ The Kantian distinction between noumenal (the transcendental ‘form’ of a thing) and phenomenal (the perceivable epistemological thing itself) in relation to Stephen is represented here by his noumenal ‘it’ and phenomenal ‘me’. The noumenal ‘it’ is the objectified body/Self at a remove from Stephen’s self-understanding, and the phenomenal ‘me’ is the Self doing the thinking, myself yet semantically removed from the Self doing the thinking. Thus the self-alienation, the split.

In Lacanian thought, ‘me’ (*moi*) is tantamount to the Freudian ‘ego’, a psychoanalytic stage of development in which one recognizes oneself in a mirror, and thereby attains self-reflexivity. Lacan’s crucial insight here though is not the occurrence of self-apprehension, but that “this ‘recognition’ is inherently a ‘misrecognition’ [*méconnaissance*]” (Johnston 7). In a double movement, Stephen fails to recognize

himself: first, he can't see himself as others see him (one cannot physically observe one's own face without the help of a mirror, nor can one access the sense-impressions received/formed by those who see him); second, he fails to overcome the gap between the *I* of subjective cognizance and the *me* of objectified self-reflection.

The problem remains as to Stephen's inability to see himself as others see him, and his cursory claim that the mirror might allow for it: "myself as others see me." Of course Stephen fails to recognize himself, to self-associate, because, as Žižek puts it, "the 'subject' itself is *nothing but* the failure of symbolization, of its own symbolic representation" (Žižek quoted in Johnson, 10. Žižek's emphasis). The mirror image is a symbolic representation, and the cognizance which apprehends this representation can never achieve a seamless connection to something which is thus an extension of its own cognizance, outside of itself so to speak, and thus alienated from its being and understanding. Stephen feels the emptiness of his ego, the empty place of the 'me':

Given a Lacanian conception of subjectivity, any form of self-acquaintance alienates the subject from itself, derailing this emptiness into the fleshed-out fullness of the ego and its embodied avatars. Since both Lacan and Žižek associate the philosophically loaded term *self* with what psychoanalysis calls the ego, self and subject are construed as two opposed poles. Žižek proclaims that the Lacanian matheme \$ (for the "barred" or split subject) signifies this primordial failure, this "lost cause" of the search for selfhood. Subjectivity itself is, ultimately, the permanent tension between the phenomenal, experientially constituted ego and the quasi-noumenal, unrepresentable *manque-à-être* (lack of being) in relation to which every determinate identity-construct is a defensive, fantasmatic response. (Johnston 9)

This permanent tension marks the inherent lack inscribed in immanence, which resists reduction into the phenomenal and noumenal 'two worlds apart'. This lack is the traumatic failure of recognition that constitutes subjectivity. The experience of reality can't be separated as such, thus Stephen's dilemma reveals Joyce's stance in regard to these problems of being, where Stephen's complication forces us to see the "intersection between the epistemological and ontological aspects, the way 'reality' itself is caught in

the movement of our knowing it [...] or, vice-versa, how our knowing of reality is embedded in reality itself” (PV 28).

Stephen’s pained misrecognition is compounded by nausea at the recognition of the genetic inheritance of his parents—he disassociates from the repulsive image that is himself, combined as it is with elements of his mother and father, and not of his own choosing. He can neither understand the ‘split’ in reality nor in himself. The mirror forces him to associate with this body he beholds in the mirror, yet he can’t recognize it as his Self: part of this anxiety is due to the subject’s inability to access, much less fathom, its preconditions for existence. In this way, the ‘lost cause of the search for selfhood’ is signified by the primordial failure.

## **4.2 Primordial Anxiety and Temporo-Spatial Irony**

In the Proteus chapter, Stephen’s sense experiments, his shadow-play and consideration of *nacheinander/nebeneinander* illustrate how concepts such as matter and form are inseparable from concepts such as time and extension. Stephen’s process of doubt creates a temporo-spatial irony by which he further self-objectifies and thus explores himself and the world. We deal with a “primordially chaotic and discordant Real that produces its own negation immanently out of itself” (Johnston 22). Proteus, the representative of such substance, is a shape-shifter which Stephen relates to the primal Father and the fertile ocean Mother. Here, Stephen grapples with this chaotic Real and its immanent negation, and the connection between primordial material and temporality.

In the psychoanalytical mirror stage during infancy, the subject is initially formed via a violent reaction to witnessing his or her own reflection. For Lacan, the mirror stage goes beyond infant development and represents a permanent structure in subjective development, where one’s symbolic image in the mirror is a problematic illusion. Appropriately, Stephen both does and does not associate with his reflection. Repulsed at the sight of his genetic inheritance, Stephen willingly accepts his debasement. He is the very ‘vermin’ that he seeks to rid himself of. He cannot separate or reduce his ‘father’s face’ (his materiality) and his semi-transcendental cognizing *I* into discrete entities, much less extract either from his being.

People generally attempt to understand life as if on a timeline, to rationalize isolated events by arranging history into a meaningful totality. The Lacanian ‘logic of the signifier’ reveals how such a totality is paradoxical:

The ‘horizon of meaning’ is always linked, as if by a kind of umbilical cord, to a point within the field disclosed by it; the frame of our view is always already framed (re-marked) by a part of its content. We can easily recognize here the topology of the Moebius band where, as in a kind of abyssal inversion, the envelope itself is encased by its interior. (EYS 15)

In a similar inversion, Stephen claims that he was ‘made but not begotten’ (U 38). He theoretically invokes divine infinitude to transcend his finite material condition of being born of two parents, and appropriates for himself a position of having been divinely willed, a child of God, so to speak. He inscribes their sexual act within a religious framework: “the coupler’s will” (U 38) makes the act a transcendental thought of God, rather than a material act based in sexual drives.

Regarding Kant’s influence on Zizek’s Lacanian framework, Johnston claims that the “feelings of revulsion toward the corporeal substratum of the mortal body essentially are indicative of the presence of a form of subjectivity resistant to being collapsed back into its material foundation” (Johnston 25). Here (in *Ulysses*, at least) are the first intimations of Stephen grappling with the transcendental-material subjectivity: as a semi-transcendental subjectivity proceeding from, attempting to understand, and railing against, a material foundation in this primordial substance. “The essential idea here is that subjectivity, in its effective existence, is the most profound symptom of the human condition (the *sinthome* par excellence), a violent reaction-formation precipitated by and setting itself up against the corporeal condition” (Johnston 43). Being composed of matter and yet able to ‘transcend’ this matter with intangible thoughts and emotions causes a sort of internal rebellion in the form of the *sinthome*.

Stephen attempts to both situate himself within the human historicity, this “strandentwining cable of all flesh” (U 38), and then invokes the indestructibility of the divine Word to explain away his mortal finitude. Through Stephen, we see how this ‘primordial anxiety’ deals with the existence of matter on a plane of both extension and time. Christianity is paradoxically embedded in nearly all his thoughts and considerations, part of his underlying *sinthome*, the trauma which returns. Philosophy

becomes mixed with litany: “See now. There all the time without you: and ever shall be, world without end” (*U* 38). The first phrase is arguably imperative: See *now*, where now is the object that one is impelled to see. This assumes the present as separate from past and future. The second phrase plays on the dual meaning of the word ‘without’ (i.e. Danish *uden* and *udenfor*,) where time is both there without (need) of you (whether you exist or not, i.e. independent of subjective cognition), and/or without (external to) you (a substance which surrounds you yet is not part of you). The end of the phrase, ‘and ever shall be, world without end,’ refers to the *Gloria Patri*, Catholic prayer to the Father, and proclaims God’s eternal will. To consider time as something separable or inseparable from oneself, its substance and one’s cognition in relation, is already a difficult matter; for Stephen this difficulty is compounded by the antagonistic Christian theological knowledge he possesses, which seems embedded in his very being.

Despite his professed nonbelief, he continues: “From before the ages He willed me and may not will me away or ever. A *lex eterna* stays about him” (*U* 38). If God’s will is embodied in the eternal Word, commanded with infinite wisdom, Stephen concludes that God’s acts are infinite and as such, irrevocable. Stephen thus inserts himself in an infinite temporal framework semantically bookended by ‘in the beginning was the Word’ and ‘world without end’ of the *Gloria Patri*. If the act of willing Stephen into being is eternally irrevocable, it follows that Stephen’s soul will persist forever. Why, then, can’t he experience infinity? The self, like infinity, or reality, lacks ontological closure. This is arguably why Stephen wonders if he is walking *into* infinity, rather than within its confines. As Zizek puts it, “what looks like an epistemological limitation of our capacity to grasp reality (the fact that we are forever perceiving reality from our temporal standpoint) is the positive ontological condition of reality itself,” (*TS* 158).

Stephen shortly thereafter thinks: “Hold fast to the here, the now, by which all future plunges into the past” (*U* 178). We cannot ‘be’ in the future or the past, thus the only option for ‘being’ is now. This ‘now’ is unlocatable yet continuous, and as such, is arguably Stephen’s proposition for conceiving of eternity: “in philosophy, the point is not to conceive of eternity as opposed to temporality, but eternity as it emerges from within our temporal experience—or, in an even more radical way, as Schelling did it, to conceive time itself as a subspecies of eternity, as the resolution of a deadlock of

eternity” (PV 31). If the ‘here, the now’ were a positive position, it wouldn’t require such tenacity in order to hold fast to it, to ‘be’ in it. The ‘now’ itself seems to be a temporal negativity between future and past, a creative space for pushing into the unknown.

This ‘deadlock of eternity’ is our simultaneous inability to conceive of infinite or finite time, endlessness or an end to either the external (the world/universe) or the internal (the cognizing Self). Our rational comprehension of mortality supposes an external limit, while feeling no such internal limit. This very lack of internal limit is the excess of Lacan’s *objet petit a*, the object driving our desire, which disallows an internal grasp of either the end or infinite continuation of time.

In general, the continuousness of the present is an enclosure that theoretically ensures against irony. Nobody understands cosmic irony better than Orpheus or Lot’s wife. Without distance, temporal and/or spatial from its object, irony obviously cannot manifest itself. This idea is integrated into the German term for ‘the present,’ *Gegenwarte*, compounded as it is by *gegen* - against, or contrary to - and *Warte*, a clear or lofty point of view. (Conley 82)

Thus when we switch from considerations of cosmic time to Stephen’s near-sighted navel-gazing focused on the present moment, our view of his surroundings becomes blurry. The continuous ‘now’ of the lived-in present is contrary to a clear or omniscient perspective. Stephen applies this temporo-spatial irony to himself and his surroundings, attempting to understand the beginnings of time and the end of time, and infinity as it emerges from experience; he thus gains a parallaxic non-position of omniscience juxtaposed with the moment: “Will you be as gods? Gaze in your omphalos. Hello. Kinch here. Put me on to Edenville” (U 38). Stephen’s ‘walking into infinity’ and non-position of in/finitude mirrors the Post-Kantian solution read through Žižek:

Through a purely formal, parallaxic shift, Post-Kantian Idealism gains the insight that the reflective positing of the distinction constitutive of finitude already is the reconciliation. [...] Kant is not unable to reach the infinite, because there is no such ‘thing’ as the infinite waiting to be discovered. This is why Kantian reflection always already inhabits the transcendent realm of freedom. Our freedom consists in the ability to draw the distinction constitutive of finitude. (Gabriel & Žižek 6)

Despite the freedom offered through this parallax, the ‘horizon of meaning’ enforced by historical social reality still leaves Stephen in a position between this very freedom and the false historicity of reality. Thus the antagonism inherent in the ontological structure in time is the very ‘disjointed reality’ that he builds through his critical view to historical social reality. If time seems to fail as a historico-social narrative chain and a spatio-temporal ontology, then it’s no surprise that for Stephen, like his doppelganger Hamlet, the ‘time is out of joint’:

The irreducible temporality of act presupposes the paradoxical ontology of a space where there is always, constitutively, something ‘amiss,’ ‘out of joint,’ ‘not at its own place.’ The famous line from *Hamlet* that the time is ‘out of joint’ should be ‘reflected into itself,’ as Hegel would say: from the experience of a certain period of time as ‘out of joint,’ corrupted, abnormal, pathological, we should pass to a ‘derailment,’ imbalance, that pertains to the very *form* of time: time as such implies spatial imbalance, a universe where the thing is always ‘wanting (at) its own place.’ It is against this background that we should conceive ‘being thrown into the world’ (*Geworfenheit*) as the fundamental determination of ‘being there’ (*Dasein*) with Heidegger: time is the irreducible horizon of our understanding of being precisely because ‘being there’ (‘man’) is in an ontologically constitutive way ‘out of its place,’ i.e., finds itself thrown into a place which is not ‘its own.’ (EYS 64, note 24, Žižek’s emphases)

Stephen is, of course, associated with the tragic figure Hamlet throughout, whose echoes ring here. We’ve seen how Stephen’s ‘disjointed’ reality created by his disbelief in *a priori* ‘reality’ is the very failure that constitutes his being. Now it’s apparent that the failure of temporality is inherent to the primordial failure: time existed before us, it will exist after us, and it’s impossible to perceive its existence at all, as anything other than a negativity, cast behind or before us, the *nacheinander* (one thing after another) of the count and the *nebeneinander* (one thing next to another) of space and substance. This space and substance is something we are thrown into, thus it to an extent first excludes ‘what we are.’ In regard to temporality, the Real points to two conditions: First, one can neither ‘know’ or experience oneself before being, nor can one ‘know’ oneself after dying; Second, that there was a ‘before’ without me, and will be an ‘after’ without me, is an absolute certainty.

Since finitude is constitutive of being, the seeming externality of this limit is actually inscribed in subjective being. The paradox seems insurmountable when one considers that ‘external reality’ partially proceeds from the self:

What we call ‘(external) reality’ *constitutes* itself by means of a primordial act of ‘rejection’: the subject ‘rejects,’ ‘externalizes’ its immanent self-impediment, the vicious circle of the drive antagonism, into the ‘external’ opposition between the demand of its drives and those of the opposed reality.

(*EYS* 49, Žizek’s emphases)

Thus the problem of Stephen’s limits, the temporal beginning and end of things, is inscribed in the disjointedness in himself and his external reality. His thoughts regarding temporal presence of being echo St. Augustine: “The intention to act is of the present, through which the future flows into the past” (*U* notes p.831). Thus Stephen’s “hold to the now, the here, through which all future plunges to the past” (*U* 178) contains a theological kernel, even if viewed askance through a non-conformist Blakean lens.

In the next section, I’ll explore Stephen’s drives as they are externalized and opposed to historical social reality. The immanent antagonism in Stephen lies in his paradoxical position in the shadow of Christianity despite his rejection of Christian belief. This traumatic antagonism is externalized in his mother’s demand for him to pray with her, and his refusal. This refusal embodies his primordial rejection and potentially creates a space for the emptiness of the self, and thus an encounter with the Real: “The symbolic order, the universe of the Word, emerges only against the background of the experience of this abyss,” an abyss where external reality, which has in a temporal sense been the “antagonism of God’s prehistory, [is] resolved when God speaks out his Word” (*EYS* 50). The symbolic order of God’s Word is thus at odds with Stephen’s internal drives, his experience of the abyss of self.

### **4.3 God’s Body and the (M)Other: Subjectivity & the Symbolic**

The Church and the Family are two of the central symbolic structures which Stephen rebels against. In the first two sections, I explored the internal impediments constituting Stephen’s subjective alienation; here, I’ll look at his symbolic alienation in regard to societal structures. Three forms of misrecognition organize the way Stephen structures his subjectivity in regard to symbolic structures. This section will examine how he

misrecognizes his relationship to the 'big' Subject (God), then to other subjects, and thus misrecognizes himself as a subject. Stephen's misrecognitions at subjective ontological and symbolic levels lead him to the act by which he cuts free of symbolic limitations and confronts the Real.

In the initial scene of *Ulysses*, Malachi Mulligan performs a mock Mass in which he interpellates Stephen as "fearful Jesuit" (*U* 3). Joyce thus illustrates the twofold structural antagonism at play: between Mulligan and Stephen, and between Stephen and himself. As a peer with access to personal details of Stephen's life, Mulligan knows that Stephen was once set for a life within the Jesuit priesthood yet ultimately renounced the Church to follow his calling as a literary artist. He also knows that Stephen's late mother's dying request was that Stephen would pray with her, which Stephen refused. "He kills his mother but he can't wear grey trousers," Mulligan remarks (*U* 6). Appropriately, the symbolic field mirrors its inherent ontological problem here: "it is commonplace to state that symbolization as such equates to symbolic murder: when we speak about a thing, we suspend, place in parentheses, its reality" (*LA* 23). Thus Mulligan's offhand remark gets at the underlying symbolic death of Stephen's mother, where language kills the life substance of being.

Hegel's statements on how understanding breaks up the living organic whole and confers autonomous existence on what is effective only as a moment of concrete totality are to be read against the background of the fundamental Lacanian notion of the signifier *qua* the power which mortifies/disembodies the life substance, 'dissects' the body and subordinates it to the constraint of the signifying network. Word is murder of a thing, not only in the elementary sense of implying its absence—by naming a thing, we treat it as absent, as dead, although it is still present—but above all in the sense of its radical *dissection*: the word 'quarters' the thing, it tears it out of the embedment in its concrete context, it treats its component parts as entities with an autonomous existence: we speak about color, form, shape, etc., as if they possessed self-sufficient being. The power of understanding consists in this capacity to reduce the organic whole of experience to an appendix to the 'dead' symbolic classification" (*EYS* 51).

Put simply, the signifier kills the life substance by turning it into a dead symbol. Stephen mentally catalogues his mother's effects, the memories and the material scraps

of a life left behind. He broods on this death of his mother and these dead symbols, and tries to recognize his mother as an autonomous existence, before symbolization and death disembodied her life substance.

Mulligan's remark reveals the manifestation of the excessive *objet petit a* in Stephen: his refusal of his mother's last wish, to pray with her on her deathbed, is the traumatic object in external reality that opposes his inner drive toward freedom from the symbolic. A drive toward freedom, though, suggests a precondition of bondage. Mulligan prods at this antinomy in Stephen, this non-belief which seems to be passionate enough to contain yet a kernel of belief. As he puts it: "you have the cursed jesuit strain in you, only it's injected the wrong way. To me it's all a mockery and beastly" (U 8). Mulligan the medical student chooses his words with care: *strain* connotes a form of virus or bacteria. Stephen is the subject of a 'sick' theology, and he seeks freedom from the very sickness that has invaded his self.

Though Stephen rejects the Church, it has already determined him as a subject. In this sense, Christian ideology is an inextricable part of Stephen, whether or not he wants it. Stephen is aware of this embeddedness, this sense in which he and his associates are 'always-already-constituted' by Christian ideology: "Of him that walked the waves. Here also over these craven hearts his shadow lies and on the scoffer's heart and lips and on mine" (U 26). Althusser's line of thought parallels Lacan's mirror stage, by which individuals are hailed as *reflections* of a primary Other: "the interpellation of individuals as subjects presupposes the 'existence' of a Unique and central Other Subject, in whose Name the religious ideology interpellates all individuals as subjects" (Althusser 53). Christian ideology's central Other Subject is of course God. Human subjects are, in Althusser's words, God's "*mirrors, his reflections. Were not men made in the image of God?*" (53, Althusser's emphases).

In as much as a mirror reflects something, without actually possessing the substance of the reflected object, well: Yes *and* no, we might say. Stephen's allusion ('him that walked the waves') highlights the ontological split by which humans attempt to understand immortality and arrive at the Žižekian 'living dead': Jesus Christ is said to have transcended material limitations during his embodiment or existence ('him that walked the waves'), and is said to (even still) transcend formal limitations during his disembodiment or nonexistence ('over these craven hearts his shadow lies'). This

symbolic alienation, represented by Stephen's (mis)recognition of his mirror image, is "an outcome conditioned by the desperate struggle to tame and cope with this monstrous, palpitating *corps morcele*," the dead symbolic order (Johnston 52). As Zizek puts it:

For a human being to be "dead while alive" is to be colonized by the "dead" symbolic order; to be "alive while dead" is to give body to the remainder of Life-Substance which has escaped the symbolic colonization [...] What we are dealing with here is thus the split between ... the "dead" symbolic order which mortifies the body and the non-symbolic Life-Substance of *jouissance*. (Zizek quoted in Johnston, 51)

What Zizek is getting at here is that the dead symbolic order (and what Stephen recognizes in the dead body of Jesus, for example) seeks to both mortify the flesh and the will of the flesh. There would be no reason for the Church to mortify the flesh if the flesh didn't also contain something that opposed the saintly virtues; this will of the flesh, the basest kernel of the drive to pleasure, is what Zizek calls the non-symbolic Life-Substance of *jouissance*. This 'enjoyment' is what one must give up in order to signify oneself in The Name of the Father (Lacan's *Nom du Père*, thus to include oneself in communion with God), yet Stephen refuses to give up enjoyment: *jouissance* is the very life-force that gives creative meaning, that pushes one toward the Real and away from the 'dead substance' of the Church. Because it involves a rejection of the Father, who Stephen's mother interprets as the giver of life, she considers Stephen to be 'alive while dead,' and fears for his soul.

The ontological foundation of the symbolic order of the Church is built upon the assertion of this split. Stephen sees this as a failure of the Church, the tautology which makes it require sin as it requires itself. "There can be no reconciliation, Stephen said, if there has not been a sundering" (U 187). God sundered himself into a paradoxically tripartite unity, and sent Christ to sunder upon the material world. Though Jesus transcended materiality in walking the waves, he later had to submit to non-transcendent materiality in order to fulfill the sacrificial function. For Stephen, this is problematic: Christianity requires the Fall in order to offer redemption, and the Fall seems to include a failure of matter and spirit inscribed within the body of God as

manifested in Jesus. The foundation of anything which seeks wholeness is a primary split; Žizek claims this split is inherent to the thing itself.

Mulligan semantically inverts this split in the ‘living dead’ body of the Church: his half-spoonerism ‘dog’s body’ appears throughout the novel as Stephen appropriates the insult in his own contemplative process. Standard liturgy operates on the premise whereby wine and wafer are transubstantiated through the authority of the priest into the blood and body of Christ, the wafer being referred to as ‘God’s body.’ The believer consumes wafer and wine, completing the transubstantiation, as this blood and body of Christ renders one’s own body and soul immortal as well. Mulligan’s ‘dark mass’ invokes the world rather than God, the fallen state of matter dispossessed of spirit. Thus ‘dog’s body,’ in its semantic reversal, signifies a reversed or inverted transubstantiation, where the subject thus regresses into a primordial, arguably prelapsarian state: assuming dogs have no soul, they are simply animate matter dispossessed of transcendental subjectivity. When Mulligan hails Stephen as estranged from yet belonging to the Church, the term ‘fearful Jesuit’ is intentionally ambiguous – does Stephen have a pious and humble fear of God, or does Stephen, despite and as a result of rejecting the faith, mortally fear God and fear for his own soul? Mulligan mocks Stephen’s dilemma by invoking the marionette-like dog’s body.

Stephen’s mother eventually materializes posthumously as an ‘undead’ embodiment of this trauma, imploring him to return to the faith. In transcending the materialism and life-substance of reality, her (or perhaps, Stephen’s projection of her) situatedness within the symbolic fabric of Irish Catholicism creates a double-bind for Stephen: he must grapple with this ontological incommensurability, as well as extricate himself from the scaffolding of the Symbolic.

The death of Stephen’s mother is not so much the primary trauma, as is her desire to have him pray, this unconditional demand, which he refuses. Her demand gets at the core of Stephen’s self: it is not only that Stephen bless *her* soul, but that he allow *his* soul to be blessed. In this way, he can join her in the symbolic community, the immortal procession of souls heavenward. Žizek argues: “It is precisely for this reason that the funeral rite exemplifies symbolization at its purest: through it, the dead are inscribed in the text of symbolic tradition, they are assured that, in spite of their death, they will continue to live” in the memory of the community (LA 23). Stephen’s mother

seeks, for herself and Stephen, to continue to live: not just in the memory of the community, family, or Ireland, but in the immortal and infinite register of souls in communion with God.

This lack of mutuality in last rites leaves a void in the place of symbolic ritual; it is this void which haunts Stephen and causes his mother to ‘return from the dead’ to haunt him. “The return of the dead is a sign of a disturbance in the symbolic rite, in the process of symbolization; the dead return as collectors of some unpaid symbolic debt” (LA 23). The final prayer demanded by his mother, the last rites of the Church, is the symbolic debt on Stephen’s head. Žižek’s analysis of the ‘living dead’ appropriately refers to Lacan’s lesson on the ghost of Hamlet’s father, who returns from the dead to ‘settle symbolic accounts’.

In response to symbolic debt, Stephen’s innermost fears manifest as the excess in his self which rails against such subjectification. We can read Stephen via Althusser’s duplicate mirror structure of ideology by holding him up to the conditions outlined previously in the theory section. I’ve shown that he meets the first two: he is an individual interpellated as a subject, and as such, subjected to the Subject (God). The final two involve recognition: of the subject’s relationship to (in this case) divine Authority, to other subjects in society, and to oneself. In rejecting the Church and his mother, Stephen is a ‘bad subject.’ He fails to recognize his subjection and behave accordingly, thus he fails to recognize himself. As for the fourth condition, it follows that it is not met: “on the condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be alright” (Althusser 55). Stephen doesn’t believe that ‘everything will be alright.’ This very injunction to belief leaves no room for choice, thus he isn’t free.

According to Althusser, the choice and the lack of choice is an inseparable paradox: “there are no subjects except by and for their subjection” (56). Thus we could argue that Stephen is both an interpellated subject in this sense and yet not: he is a subject insofar as he is already hailed by Christian ideology (among other things), and yet he renounces subjection, as he refuses to submit to the big Subject (God) and the big Other (Church, Family, Nation). If simply by virtue of existing, Stephen is already ‘called by his Master’ and has no choice in being a subject, it is this very lack of choice that casts the shadow over Stephen’s heart.

Though his path to freedom is constrained by the symbolic systems ingrained in him, he wields his knowledge to combat their seeming *a priori* existence. Stephen won't pray with his mother, and will forever bear the shackles of defiant disbelief, even as it fuels his antiheroic artistry. "But in here it is I must kill the priest and the king" he says, as he taps his brow (*U* 548). He has to kill *his own* consent to subjectification. In this way, Stephen pushes to become a subject only for himself, which entails a constant shift around the very emptiness at the self's core. Žižek's parallax, this "constantly shifting perspective between two points between which no synthesis or mediation is possible" (*PV* 4), is the mode of Stephen's aesthetic: it is the non-position from which he enunciates his freedom.

Having demanded prayer of him in her final moments, Stephen's mother occupies the shadow-space that Jesus once alone did. The inherent lack in Stephen's own ontological being, doubled by this Jesus/mother shadow, pulls at him like an unwieldy carcass, a part of himself he would rather cast off but can't. In Žižekian terms, the kernel of his internal lack externalizes itself in his mother's demand. This non-freedom mirrors the ontological limitations of consciousness which prevent one from 'grasping' infinity. In order for Stephen to realize his inner drives to freedom, he must confront this traumatic *objet petit a* in external reality via the Act: a decisive break with the symbolic order. Though he has already committed the act of refusal before the novel begins, his thoughts and hallucinations 'return the repressed,' revealing the act as a commitment which demands constant renewal. This perpetual renewal of confrontation with the Real arguably drives his creative process of forging into the unknown.

#### **4.4 The Act: Murthing the Irish Language**

Irish terms and phrases are scattered throughout the text of *Ulysses*, yet among its characters, the Irish language is ironically best known by the Englishman, Haines. The Irish and the English language compose two of the symbolic worlds Stephen draws from while refusing full symbolic allegiance to the one or the other. He has a fraught relationship with both: he knows that English is the language of the oppressor, but he wields it brilliantly. The very mirror by which we examined his subjectivity so closely is tellingly cleft by a crooked crack, a suture in its own material fabric: "It is a symbol of Irish art. The cracked lookingglass of a servant," Stephen says (*U* 7).

How then can Stephen become independent from this servile, cracked reflection of the oppressor while using the oppressor's language, the oppressor's symbolic death? We've observed how the parallax structure of his subjectivity allows him to deconstruct the symbolic and material foisted upon the otherwise empty Self:

What am I? I am neither my body (I have a body, I never "am" my body directly [...]), nor the stable core of my autobiographical narratives that form my symbolic identity; what "I am" is the pure One of an empty Self which remains the same One throughout the constant change of autobiographical narratives. This One is engendered by language: it is neither the Core Self nor the autobiographical Self, but what the Core Self is transubstantiated (or rather, desubstantialized) into when it is transposed into language. (*PV* 227)

The unity of this empty self is thus engendered by language, immaterial yet against the 'stable core of symbolic identity.' Stephen recognizes the externalities that have filled the sameness in this empty self: "So I carried the boat of incense then at Clongowes. I am another now and yet the same" (*U* 11). In this way, the symbolic structure of language 'kills' the subject by desubstantiating the core self, which otherwise resists symbolic confines. The parallax of an empty self which both resists symbolic confines yet is engendered by language mirrors Stephen's problem on a superficial level: though he hates the oppression England casts upon Ireland, and he recognizes the futility of Irish/Gaelic in overcoming linguistic oppression, he also wields the English language with immaculate skill and poetry. "In Lacanian terms, the Symbolic is both the condition of possibility and impossibility for the subject's access to the Real" (Johnston 19). Thus Stephen's linguistic creation seeks to create a new and living Irish language of English, while killing off the dead weight of the old symbolic order.

As seen above, Stephen's refusal is his mode of holding fast to the emptiness of the self, 'tarrying with the negative' as Žižek would say. He remains in mourning long after the standard period has passed. His insistence in looking at this 'death,' of himself as a subject, and his mother literally and symbolically, is the process by which he converts himself into being. "We already know how the negative is converted into being: through language as name-giving power, i.e., through the emergence of the symbolic order" (*EYS* 51). The otherwise empty negativity of the self is given expression as Stephen breaks with the hegemonic symbolic order and creates his own:

this 'break' is the very rift from which his new language emerges. Thus a Middle English term becomes an ambiguous portmanteau: "*Murthering* Irish," Stephen thinks, connoting simultaneous creation and destruction: mothering, murdering, an act done to, and done by, the Irish (*U* 192, my emphasis).

The dead symbolic classification in Stephen's case is controlled by England, the colonial oppressor. Stephen's critical reaction to this oppression is largely hysteric. Though space is "what you damn well have to see" (*U* 178), we know that Stephen's glasses are broken, and his blurred vision arguably heightens his introspection throughout the day. In as much as the impaired orb of Stephen's eye displaces his ability to see clearly, he is able to 'look awry,' as Žižek might put it. Brivic claims that a skewed, non-rational way of seeing things is the hysteric's mode of non-compliance with the oppressor, who conversely imposes control manifested as obsession (Brivic 63-80). Obsession uses logic, while hysteria dismantles itself from rational thought and proceeds into the unknown.

The hysterical response matches Stephen's very thought process, as the term hysteria originates from the archaic medical theory of a travelling womb which would dislodge from the torso and travel up to the brain. Stephen's phrases reflect this motion: "Mouth to her womb. Ooomb. Allwombing tomb" (*U* 47). In this way, Joyce connects feminine creativity, the church/state injunction to reproduce, the violence of British Imperialism, and the void of death: the assonant 'ooomb' repeated four times here acts as an umbilical cord linking the orifice of speaking language to the organ of maternal creation to the eternal resting place of the material body. Stephen's gaze is arguably 'skewed' in *Circe*, where his mother returns from her resting place: "She fixes her bluecircled hollow eyesockets on Stephen and opens her toothless mouth uttering a silent word" (*U* 539). Words then, even silent and without breath, have the power to connect at both ends of the ontological: to the dead symbolic, the dead matter, to the new creation, the life-giving *mater*.

The feminine artefacts that tend to drive Stephen and Bloom's mental processes reveal a close contact with the feminine aspect of creation. This feminine drive thwarts the oppression of patriarchal representatives (Britain, Boylan) and opens a creative space of negativity for these two characters. These are the lessons which Socrates learned from Xanthippe, according to Stephen: "What useful discovery did

Socrates learn from Xanthippe? –Dialectic, Stephen answered: and from his mother how to bring thoughts into the world” (*U* 183). In this view, wives help one parse and understand philosophical problems, and mothers help one create. Thus Stephen’s ‘thought through my eyes’ issues new things from the womb-orb. Stephen’s artistic process of pushing into the unknown effectively generates meaning from primordial matter, and thus reverses the dead symbolic order’s murder of *mat(t)er*.

When Stephen likens winds to words, he shows both their geographical significance and their ability to transport. Winds originally bolstered Britain’s sails, bringing the English to colonize Ireland. Stephen dwells upon the English language, the ways he has been colonized by it. Accordingly, Shakespeare in Stephen’s *Hamlet* theories becomes “a shadow now, the wind by Elsinore’s rocks or what you will, the sea’s voice, a voice heard only in the heart of him who is the substance of his shadow, the son consubstantial with the father” (*U* 189). The symbolic structure of language, as a hegemonic claim to knowledge, is thus masculine and tied to the enunciative power of the Father.

Stephen’s theories on Shakespeare outline this consubstantial insubstantiality. They explore the simultaneous death-creation that occurs when ideas reach and resist embodiment. This wholly/holy encompassing alpha-omega of existence, antagonistic im/materiality is portrayed by “Father, Word, and Holy Breath. [...] Hiesos Kristos, magician of the beautiful” (*U* 178). Stephen combines the Holy Father with the mortal father, the eternal Word with Shakespeare/Hamlet’s word, and the Holy Ghost with mortal breath. Thus the transcendental stuff of thought is linked to material substance, and more problematically, to Christian theology. Stephen has trouble determining whether Christian thought is thus consubstantial, or insubstantial.

Stephen is ‘consubstantial with his insubstantial father,’ as Mulligan taunts, both Dedaluses rendered insubstantial (transcending their material subjectivity with cognitive functions distilled by aptly named ‘spirits’) to an extent by the predilection to drink. The desire to escape consciousness is part of the collective hysteria of Ireland unable to deal with Britain’s colonial oppression. This hysteria is visible at the subjective level for Stephen, whose blood augmented by alcohol allows him to lose self-control and enter artistic reverie, to push forward both physically and mentally into places and thoughts yet unknown. “The sacred pint alone can unbind the tongue of

Dedalus,” claims Mulligan (*U* 18). The drink may control them economically as a tool of imperialist oppression, yet these men voluntarily seek to escape the fantasy of the symbolic order via internal loss of control. Thus the voice that Stephen speaks of, at once freeing and oppressive, of the insubstantial wind and sea roar, the “voice heard only in the heart of him who is the substance of his shadow” (*U* 178) is arguably expressed via the inward effects of alcohol. Žižek claims that the ‘pure’ *jouissance* of mind-altering substances threatens the *jouissance* of the Other: “What drugs promise is a purely autistic *jouissance*, a *jouissance* accessible without a detour through the Other (of the symbolic order)—*jouissance* generated not by fantasmatic representations but by directly attacking our neuronal pleasure centers” (*PV* 190).

The *jouissance* of alcohol offers only a different means of fantasy, and is thus a problematic solution to the fantasy of the Symbolic. Stephen hasn’t written a great work yet, collects a pittance for rather menial jobs, gets drunk and gets knocked down. In worldly terms, he is a man of *inaction*. Paradoxically, his lack of worldly ‘masculine’ action allows him the freedom to engage in the hysteric ‘feminine’ act. Action is connoted by male activity, the means by which one asserts oneself in the symbolic community with the phallic authority to enunciate; whereas the act is an irrevocable break with the symbolic order, by which one removes oneself from intersubjective symbolic community. Stephen ultimately renounces the patriarchal symbolic Name of the Father (effectively the tripartite Simon Dedalus, Leopold Bloom, and the Church) by means of the act. Even in following his father as a drunk, Stephen refuses to posit a plan of action beyond this ‘no!’, beyond this alienation and loss of self. His renunciation of patriarchal authority is what Žižek considers an act:

The paradigmatic case of such an act is feminine: Antigone’s ‘No!’ to Creon, to state power; her act is literally suicidal, she excludes herself from the community, whereby she offers nothing new, no positive program—she just insists on her unconditional demand. Perhaps we should then risk the hypothesis that, according to its inherent logic, the act as real is ‘feminine,’ in contrast to the ‘masculine’ performative, i.e., the great founding gesture of a new order. (*EYS* 46)

In rejecting the objectification his mother tries to foist upon him (playing the role of the good son, allegiance to family and Church), Stephen’s “empty gesture” (his refusal to

pray with her on her deathbed) is the means by which he “freely assumes what is imposed upon [him], the real of the death drive” (LA 64). The death drive is not simply the desire to break free of the symbolic order and return to protean matter, it is the very inhuman excess in us, the subjective *jouissance*, which paradoxically incites us to live beyond our means, beyond the limitations of life and death. Through the act, Stephen becomes a subject for himself. By removing symbolic supports which would bolster a false ego, he is able to redirect the futility of the gaze of the other back upon himself. This subjectification “is the name for the gaze by means of which we confront the utter nullity of our narcissistic pretensions” (LA 64). Stephen is beyond the aim to please or impress others (“For that are you pining, the bark of their applause?” U 45); his words aim rather to destroy and create at the most basic level. He is interested in transubstantiating the symbolic dead word into the living act.

He confronts the symbolic orders of family and Church by grappling with this abyss of time, self, and materiality. The “abyss which separates ‘things’ from ‘words’” is much like Hegel’s process as described by Žižek: “For him, the true theoretical problem is not how to leap over the abyss which separates acts from words, but how to conceive this abyss itself: the absolute act, the act stronger than all interventions in reality, is the act by means of which we disjoin the ‘great chain of being’ and acquire distance from it” (EYS 54).

The freedom Stephen has at the crucial moment of his mother’s death is thus to give her *nothing*, which is *something*: Stephen’s refusal to pray with her on her deathbed is actually the pinnacle of his belief, a parallax deadlock between faith and doubt. Mulligan hits the nail on the head with his scathing comment, and that’s why it really gets under Stephen’s skin (“you have the cursed Jesuit strain in you, only it’s injected the wrong way” U 8). She approaches him with an unconditional demand that would lay a claim upon him, and thus objectify him, but counters this with an unconditional refusal which essentially removes both her and himself from the equation as objects. Stephen’s subjective doubt would make praying an empty gesture. It would reinscribe him into the role of son and Catholic and make him inauthentic, supported by the network of symbolic fictions. Rather than sacrifice himself for her, he makes the infinitely greater move: he sacrifices himself by confronting “the radical negativity upon which the [network of symbolic fictions] are founded,” (EYS 53). This

renunciation is a true act in the Zizekian sense: “The freedom attained by the act is the very opposite of this freedom [gained by a sacrifice which implies the Other as its addressee]: by undergoing it, all the burden falls back upon the subject since he renounces any support in the Other” (*EYS* 59).

Stephen’s act, his refusal to pray here, his ‘subjective destitution,’ marks his break from the symbolic structure. He thus approaches his mother not as an Irish citizen, or a Catholic, or even her son, but as an autonomous self who kills the inward presupposition of the ‘big Other.’ By refusing to pray, he gives his mother the fullness of an act of belief, even though it appears empty. He gives her the parallax of himself: it is the ‘nothing’ which really is ‘something,’ and that’s why Stephen chooses it.

## **5.0 Analysis Pt. II**

### **Leopold Bloom**

#### **5.1 Failure and Time: No Roses Without Thorns**

In *Lotus Eaters*, Bloom anesthetizes himself against the realization of his complicity in Molly and Boylan’s rendezvous. Molly has received a letter from Boylan: “Mrs. Marion Bloom. His quick heart slowed at once. Bold hand. Mrs. Marion” (*U* 59). The letter thus addresses them both: Molly, rather than Mrs. Leopold Bloom, as was tradition at the time; and Bloom, who should recognize his own symbolic effacement therein. Boylan sees no obstacle in Bloom as Molly’s husband, and thus inscribes his disregard.

Bloom focuses on his letter from Martha, while attempting not to think about Boylan’s letter to Molly. Martha’s original message held up against Bloom’s mentally transposed message reveals the impasse in communication, the way in which desire addresses itself without fully reaching its addressee. Molly’s impending adultery mixes with Martha’s details and demands here. In simple terms, Bloom’s own guilt and anxiety is mirrored in his interpretation of the letter:

He tore the flower gravely from its pinhold smelt its almost no smell and placed it in his heart pocket. [...] Angry tulips with you darling manflower punish your cactus if you don’t please poor forgetmenot how I long violets

to dear roses when we soon anemone meet all naughty nightstalk wife  
Martha's perfume. (U 75)

Bloom's 'manflower' becomes a cactus here, where his own 'prick' of conscience doubles as slang for this cactus-phallus.

Bloom's own infidelity, however trivial or imaginary compared to Molly's, disallows him to be upset without being a hypocrite. Molly herself knows of all his underhanded dealings, his flirtations, letters and possible infidelities. But amongst these angry and unpleasant details, Molly also relates happy memories, for example of their courting days: "the day I was in fits of laughing with the giggles I couldn't stop about all my hairpins falling one after another with the mass of hair I had (U 695). The hairpins that fail to keep up Molly's hair remind of the hairpin that binds Martha's letter to Bloom.

The image of pins leads Bloom to a musical refrain: "*O, Mairy lost the pin of her drawers./ She didn't know what to do/ To keep it up/ To keep it up*" (U 76), which comically suggests a girl who has trouble keeping her underwear on. The significance of the song is compounded by McCoy's question regarding Molly's coming musical performance with Boylan: "who's getting it up?" to which Bloom thinks: "Mrs. Marion Bloom," as addressed in her letter from Boylan, "Not up yet" (U 72). 'She didn't know what to do to keep it up' plays on the tension between the feminine pins, as well as Bloom's failure of desire and arousal. The hysterical repetition of pins and 'to keep it up' puts Bloom inside the circular trajectory of his own making: "Lacan defines 'hero' as the subject who [...] fully assumes the consequences of his act, that is to say, who does not step aside when the arrow that he shot makes its full circle and flies back at him—unlike the rest of us who endeavor to realize our desire without paying the price for it" (EYS 14). Thus we begin to see failure at the base of Bloom's drive: to 'keep it up' means also to encourage someone to keep doing something, and Bloom is literally 'keeping it up': his extramarital desires, his drive to failure and his allowance for Molly's adultery.

Bloom is an antihero who both avoids and takes his own arrow. Though he tacitly consents to Molly's adultery, he represses this agreement by delusional investment in desire at the Imaginary and Symbolic levels. The letter Bloom receives from Milly contains mention of "Blazes Boylan's seaside girls," (U 60), and when

asked of her own letter, Molly says that Boylan is coming by with the program, *La ci darem* and Love's Old Sweet Song. These songs will compose another circulating string of refrains throughout Leopold Bloom's day:

*All dimpled cheeks and curls,  
Your head it simply swirls.*

Seaside girls. Torn envelope. [...] Friend of the family. Swirls, he says. Pier with lamps, summer evening, band,

*Those girls, those girls,  
Those lovely seaside girls.*

[...] Will happen, yes. Prevent. Useless: Can't move. (U 65)

Bloom's paralysis and the repeated songs hint at the repressed guilt and horror he feels: "What are symptoms qua 'returns of the repressed' if not such slips of the tongue by means of which the 'letter arrives at its destination,' i.e., by means of which the big Other returns to the subject his own message in its true form?" (EYS 14) Bloom's letter to Martha is inscribed in the details of the day, as Molly's adultery returns Bloom's own message to himself.

The circularity of the return of the repressed reveals the libidinal death drive in Bloom's own chase after desire. Bloom has never met Martha, she is simply an inscription, an object on paper. "In the case of *objet petit a* as the object-cause of *desire* we have an object which is originally lost, which coincides with its own loss, which emerges as lost; while in the case of *objet petit a* as the object of drive, the "object" is directly loss itself—in the shift from desire to drive, we pass from the lost object to loss itself as an object" (PV 62). This movement, and its eventual "*push to enact 'loss'—the gap, cut, distance—itself directly*" (PV 62, Zizek's emphasis) serves in a structural view of Bloom: he initially seems to chase after lost objects, but as a result of the trauma at the start of this day (Boylan's letter, Molly and Bloom's tacit agreement to avoid each other the rest of the day) we come to see that his desire is in fact a *drive*, a push to enact loss.

The Freudian death drive is paradoxically the "name for its very opposite, for the way immortality appears within psychoanalysis, for an uncanny *excess* of life, for an 'undead' urge which persists beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death, of generation and corruption" (PV 62, Zizek's emphasis). Bloom hopes his letter to Martha

doesn't get "chucked in the dead letter office" (*U* 104) which betrays his fear of the failure of an actual exchange, and the impossibility of fully communicating meaning inscribed in all communications. His meditation on the cycle of generation and corruption leads back to the immediate trauma underlying his shift from desire as object to loss as drive, Molly's adultery with Boylan: "Of course the cells or whatever they are go on living. Live for ever practically. Nothing to feed on feed on themselves. But they must breed a devil of a lot of maggots. Soil must be simply swirling with them. Your head it simply swirls. Those pretty little seaside gurls" (*U* 105).

In this circularity of the libidinal death drive and the potentially live-giving productivity of sexuality, mortality makes meaning. Material things transcend their materiality into ideological or symbolic meaning in the face of birth and death. "Rusty wreaths hung on knobs, garlands of bronzefoil. [...] Still, the flowers are more poetical. The other gets rather tiresome, never withering. Expresses nothing. Immortelles," thinks Bloom (*U* 109). So poetics is time-bound, and the aging process bestows meaning upon material substance which would otherwise be soulless. A true flower's lyrical power is in its fleeting beauty. The tragedy inherent to mortal temporality means that all things in life change, a preferable lot in regard to the changeless permanence of death. This highlights Martha's slip, "I called you naughty boy because I do not like that other world. Please tell me what is the real meaning of that word" (*U* 75). In the first of these two sentences, she confuses 'word' with 'world,' thus rendering the 'dead' symbolic order of words frightening in its subjective inaccessibility (much like the 'world' of death).

This letter-economy is where we begin to see Bloom's avoidance as a temporal move, where the push for both life and loss is tied to this excess in the death drive, the satisfaction of repetition aimed at an impossible fullness, an impossible urge toward immortality. Leaving Dignam's funeral, Bloom thinks of Martha's letter, and it sends his thoughts from death to life: "I do not like that other world she wrote. No more do I. Plenty to see and hear and feel yet. Feel live warm beings near you. Let them sleep in their maggoty beds. They are not going to get me this innings. Warm beds: warm fullblooded life" (*U* 110). In this case, it hardly matters whose warm bed or who's in it, a sentiment which echoes Molly's life-affirming 'Yes'.

The bed and its occupant do matter, though, when the closeness of death recedes enough for Bloom to feel the shock of lost time. For Bloom, lost time implies a death of part of the self, an end to certain possibilities. Just as Stephen ‘gazed in his own omphalos’ while perambulating Sandymount Strand, Bloom imagines his own “bud of flesh,” and below it, the “limp father of thousands, a languid floating flower” (*U* 83). At the Lacanian level of the imaginary, his imagined virility is a coping mechanism for the excess of his libidinal *jouissance*: subjectively, ‘father of thousands’ must refer to sperm. It cannot mean children, as he refuses a coupling that would produce a single child (much less thousands). Time, then, is the primary thorn on Bloom’s rose. It gives, but it also takes. Bloom could focus his libidinal energies upon creating another son, but too much time has passed. We thus hear the failure in his thoughts: no progeny of countless *begats*, only a ‘darling manflower’ which has become more a cactus, betraying the symbolic thorns of his impotence: One thorn his failure to produce a son, the other being his complicity now in cuckoldry.

## **5.2 Life in Death: Productive Avoidance and Necropolitics**

The failure to produce a son is arguably the core trauma behind Bloom’s drive to loss. This failure incites shame in Bloom, especially in relation to fathers such as Cunningham. “Noisy selfwilled man. Full of his son. He is right. Something to hand on. If little Rudy had lived” (*U* 86). Pages later, the shame is doubled, as he takes responsibility for Rudy’s death: “Mistake of nature. If it’s healthy it’s from the mother. If not the man” (*U* 92). Failure here is paternal or masculine, but rather than take personal responsibility or try again for a soon, Bloom takes a passive stance of faulting nature. The implications of Bloom’s son’s death extend in proportion to his own feelings of shame and failure in being a son. His father Virag committed suicide after his mother’s death, and Bloom feels guilt and regret for not being more supportive during his father’s depression. This is why Bloom looks kindly upon Cunningham, who speaks up against the others who condemn suicide as weak and unforgiveable. Cunningham knew Virag was a suicide, and arguably feels embarrassed for Bloom. Bloom’s compassion for suicides surpasses the necropolitics of the Church which “used to drive a stake of wood through his heart in the grave. As if it wasn’t broken already” (*U* 93).

Bloom's sentiment here underlines the hypocritical message of love proclaimed by the Church. Where human authority structures attempt to appropriate transcendence by quashing personal freedoms, Bloom wields a strong (though often indirect) intent to use materiality to transcend hegemony: Bloom believes in 'life in the midst of death,' where the state/church apparatus seeks to enforce a necrotic 'death in the midst of life.'

The Church condemns non-productive sexual acts and thus inscribes death in the sex drive, the *jouissance* of sex for the purposes of enjoyment. This was, in *A Portrait*, one of Stephen's initial gripes with religion: it effectively replaces copulation with masturbation, which is still condemned as a sin. Bloom's inability to cope with Rudy's loss is part of the central trauma underlying his non-productive sex drive. Later in the novel, it becomes clear that he has refused to inseminate Molly for over ten years. A large part of Bloom's cuckoldry is in his own libidinal drive, where he chooses to 'spill seed' rather than please Molly: "Ill let him know if thats what he wanted that his wife is fucked yes and damn well fucked too up to my neck nearly not by him" (*U* 729, Joyce's exclusion of punctuation throughout). Stephen jokes about masturbation, unwittingly referring to Bloom: "But, gramercy, what of those Godpossibled souls that we nightly impossibilize, which is the sin against the Holy Ghost" (*U* 372). The narrative voice in *Oxen of the Sun* blames Molly's unhappiness on Bloom: "has he not nearer home a seedfield that lies fallow for the want of a ploughshare?" (*U* 390). Bloom's wastefulness is a pagan sin in the Judeo-Christian view, as the term "rite of Onan" reminds us (*U* 681).

In Bloom's masturbation on the beach, Gerty, whose thoughts and body are of course inaccessible, serves as the perfect *objet petit a* for Bloom's desire:

It is that lack at the heart of desire that ensures we continue to desire. To come too close to our object of desire threatens to uncover the lack that is, in fact, necessary for our desire to persist, so that, ultimately, desire is most interested not in fully attaining the object of desire but in keeping our distance, thus allowing desire to persist. (Felluga 2011)

Bloom is compelled by his mental 'chase' with both Gerty and Martha because the underlying trauma-drive constitutive of subjectivity incites one to continue desiring endlessly. Non-reproductive acts allow imagination and fantasy to dominate, and thus

reduce the primacy of the material body, where generation and corruption and inextricably bound together.

This Symbolic-Imaginary chain links Bloom's thoughts to the churchyard caretaker and his possible sexual relations in graveyards: "they'd kiss alright. Might thrill her. Courting death. [...] In the midst of death we are in life. Both ends meet" (*U* 104). The 'both ends' that meet here are arguably the insubstantial yet substance-giving imaginary desire, meeting as it were in the flesh: desire leads to reproduction in some instances, yet desire as a fantasy isn't located in the materiality of the body. It's rather located, as mentioned above, in the projected *objet petit a*, the unattainable lack in our being which we project upon others. If Martha and Gerty are the object of Bloom's desire, then Molly's implicit adultery has become the object of Bloom's drive.

To understand why Bloom's desire has become a non-productive drive toward loss whereby he avoids consummate intercourse with his wife, we have to look at his aversion to production. As with Stephen, the traumatic split in Bloom's Self is rooted in the empty core of his being, and expands in regard to temporal and symbolic structures. Bloom, who is technically half-Jewish, mentally traces the Judaic lineage from Sodom and Gomorrah (connoting illicit sexual practices which anger God) to its apparent present death in the Dead Sea, the "grey sunken cunt of the world" (*U* 59). The very orifice that should be productive of life and desire, the vagina, is inverted to death and repulsion. Bloom links this obscene sterility to his own horror at the thought of never again having this symbolic mother produce desire in him, or a son for him. Thus the 'death of the mother' for Bloom here is twofold. In cutting off both his desire and his reproductive chances, the matrilineal yet dead Judaism symbolically castrates Bloom. He has lost the phallic authority to enunciate, where 'enunciating' would be to inscribe a new life into Molly, make her a mother. This failure to 'speak the word into being' mirrors his erasure of Jewishness on the beach in Nausicaa.

Though Bloom has been baptized, he has not taken communion and is perhaps more accurately labeled as a "Non-Catholic" (Kenner 71). His position of non-belonging between Judaism and Catholicism allows him a parallax perspective, an outsider stance which is critical of both. Though he is 'symbolically castrated' by Judaism (amongst other things), he disallows the Catholic Church to wield enunciative authority over him. The enforcement of a teleological goal on sex debases its immaterial

spirituality. By attempting to colonize sex, which should otherwise transcend materiality as an expression of divine love, the Church effectively drains love of its potential or inherent good. In psychoanalytical terms: if love is a narcissistic fantasy construction on the imaginary level, if marriage is a regulatory construction on the symbolic level, and if procreative copulation is a biological drive, the Church fails in its attempt to inscribe transcendental love into any sexual relationship. This, as Žižek says, is what makes the Church corrupt in view to sex: “It is the Catholic attitude of allowing sex only for the goal of procreation that debases it to animal coupling” (*PV* 249).

Bloom finds the corrupt death-substance in both Judaism and Catholicism. Father Coffey, whose name reminds of ‘coffin,’ suggests the worm-chewed materiality, the death-in-life, of the Church. During Dignam’s funeral, Bloom considers the Mass: “Shut your eyes and open your mouth. What? *Corpus*. Body. Corpse. Good idea the Latin. Stupefies them first. Hospice for the dying. They don’t seem to chew it: only swallow it down. Rum idea: eating bits of a corpse why the cannibals cotton to it” (*U* 77). Cunningham reverses Bloom’s love among the tombstones, in an utterance where “in the midst of life” seems to imply an unspoken predicate, *there is death* (*U* 93). The ‘croak’ emitted by Father Coffey even evokes death: the animal croak of the raven, mythological messenger of the underworld (which reminds of Stephen’s “reverend Carrion Crow,” *U* 553) and the vernacular verb ‘to croak,’ or to die.

Bloom uses his ‘outsider’ position to criticize religion and nation. From the position of the oppressed, one who doesn’t entirely belong, Bloom is free to wield his shame in a criticism of these ideologies. Even in his defeat, Bloom subverts the Church’s phallic authority of enunciating truth. Just as destruction is the other side of creation’s Möbius strip, anti-creation is part of Bloom’s productive drive. It allows him to let Molly keep creating, to keep her mind and body open to the universe. His humanistic acceptance of both Molly’s affair and his own father’s suicide suggest that Bloom’s powers for forgiveness extend beyond the limitations of the doctrines of the Church, thus undermining their authority. In this way, Bloom is able to gain a critical view of these Symbolic structures in which he might otherwise be enmeshed.

### 5.3 Politics of Disgust and the Excrement of Nationalism

#### Disgust

The eating and drinking practices of an average male Dublin citizen reveal Bloom's relationship to materiality, and reveal certain ways in which this community perceives him as an outsider. Consider the phrase: "In the midst of death we are in life. Both ends meet," which I have just examined in relation to the necropolitics of the Church. In Bloom's Dublin, the Church and State function as oppressor at the structural level, and Boylan as oppressor at the subjective level. Bloom responds to this oppression with hysterical aversion to a life that literally feeds on death.

By 'looking awry' at this phrase, we can examine where both ends (are) *meat*: the reduction of life to material substance echoes Bloom's musings on the beauty of a flower, but with a new perspective. Dead meat, in this case, literally gives life. 'Eating bits of a corpse' is also part of secular life, as Bloom observes the others in the Burton restaurant: "Bitten off more than he can chew. Am I like that? See ourselves as others see us" (*U* 161). His disgust toward the "halfmasticated gristle" and the patron with "no teeth to chewchewchew it" is double, where dead meat is as nauseating as decayed teeth in a decaying face. Bloom has also 'bitten off more than he can chew' in a metaphorical sense; thus teeth become part of his hysterical reactions of desire and disgust. Even as dead, calcified structures, teeth are connected to the sexual appetites. Molly remembers the passion of their courting days: "splendid set of teeth he had made me hungry to look at them" (*U* 698).

Bloom fears his and Molly's mutual loss of desire as he fears the decay in his own body. Though he can tolerate and counter the condescension heaped upon him for being 'foreign' and 'Jewish', he cowers at the inevitability of becoming an object of others' corporeal disgust. It's no surprise that Bloom's hysteric talisman is a shriveled old potato, a gift from his mother said to ward off illness. "Disgust is deeply ambivalent, involving desire for, or attraction towards, the very objects that are felt to be repellent" (Ahmed 84). The repulsion that Bloom feels in relation to this cycle of desire and appetite is yet another instance of the 'return of the repressed,' the disgust with the self that has landed him in this very productive-avoidance cycle. As mentioned, his 'primordial revulsion' is connected to the death of his son and father, as well as his repulsion (read as avoidance) in relation to Boylan.

The contradictory impulses of desire and disgust do not necessarily resolve themselves, and they do not take us to the same place. Disgust pulls us away from the object, a pulling that feels almost involuntary, as if our bodies were thinking for us, on behalf of us. In contrast, desire pulls us towards objects, and opens us up to the bodies of others. (Ahmed 84)

Bloom, unlike Molly, is seen nowhere in the text as fully ‘open to the bodies of others,’ thus his disgust arguably overrides his desire. Rather than encounter the body of Gerty or Martha, he simply encounters them as projections of his own thoughts. As he ‘doubles back’ upon himself in this way, his desire becomes mixed with disgust, an involuntary peristalsis which mirrors the theme of digestion as well as his doubled-back trajectory in the lunchtime Lestrygonians chapter.

When Bloom wonders whether Boylan will ‘infect’ Molly, his disgust is already inscribed in his stomach: earlier, he relished the urine-tinged kidneys of fowls, now, his own inner organs have turned foul as he considers the disintegration of their bodily barriers, and Boylan in his place. Stephen’s thoughts echo here: “Dead breaths I living breathe, tread dead dust, devour a urinous offal from all dead” (*U* 49). Ahmed’s theory of disgust extends Zizek’s primordial revulsion to a fear of incorporating the other:

The object that makes us sick to the stomach is a substitute for the border itself, an act of substitution that protects the subject from all that is ‘not it’ [...] it suggests that what makes ‘the not’ insecure is the possibility that what is ‘not not’ (what is ‘me’ or ‘us’) can slide into ‘the not,’ a slippage which would threaten the ontology of ‘being apart’ from others. (Ahmed 86)

Thus the Zizekian gap, the split inherent in Bloom’s being, is linked to the ontological slippage in disgust, one’s fraught position in relation to others. Bloom’s disgust is tied to his conflicted acceptance and rejection of his own extramarital sexual desires which must now allow for Molly’s adultery, thus his repressed horror at his own insignificance, the end of which is death. Ahmed recognizes the ‘danger’ here of not just becoming protean material, but mixing with the protean material of others. By confronting the collapse of symbolic structures which support his self, Bloom confronts the underlying abyssal Real of existence.

## **Waste/d**

Food gives sustenance, and creates waste. At the bodily level, excrement is something one is made to be ashamed of, thus something to cover or get rid of. At the political structural level, the waste of the nation is its unwanted body, those citizens who do not fit the State-regulated definition of a desirable citizen. These undesirable citizens become scapegoats of the State's own production of waste.

The musings of Professor MacHughes reveal the antagonism between transcendentalism and materialism inscribed in the imperial compulsion to cleanliness: "The Jews in the wilderness and on the mountaintop said: *It is meet to be here. Let us build and altar to Jehovah.* The Roman, like the Englishman who follows in his footsteps, brought to every new shore on which he set his foot in his toga and he said: *It is meet to be here. Let us construct a watercloset*" (*U* 126, Joyce's emphasis). The purpose of religion is to transcend materiality via the altar, which is absurdly surpassed by the modern technology of transcending materiality via the 'throne of alabaster.'

Thus the imperial mission of Church and State is founded upon a different 'transubstantiation': to make invisible that which is material (waste in pipes, hidden safely) while wishing to make visible that which is immaterial (spirit, belief). Bloom is the non-European who refuses expulsion, thus he is the perfect scapegoat for the others' shame, their symbolic constipation. He is the material embodiment of their own shameful waste product, which is the failure of their hegemonic definitions. The structure of nation: "A nation? says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place" (*U* 317); and the structure of religion: "Your God was a jew. Christ was a jew like me" (*U* 327). His 'Jewness' marks him as a foreign body, potentially infectious: "Saint Patrick would want to land again at Ballykinlar and convert us, says the citizen, after allowing things like that to contaminate our shores" (*U* 324).

The pub arguably surpasses the Church, in frequency at least, in terms of ritual in the symbolic-substantial community of 'Irish' men. The guys at the pub spend a good deal of time sitting around getting wasted. Bloom rarely shares their company, and never gets drunk. When Bloom was at the pub, he avoided drinking, "letting on to be in a hell of a hurry. [...] There's a jew for you! All for number one. Cute as a shithouse rat" (*U* 326). Bloom's failure to meet their requirements places him figuratively in the toilet.

As an excremental figure, Bloom reveals the irony of the discursive network created by the men, a discourse based on a parallax, a gap in the fabric of the discourse itself: the men attempt to “knit a discourse starting precisely from the element that escapes the discursive network, that ‘falls out’ from it, that is produced as its ‘excrement’” (LA 131). This is the discourse of the analyst, which Žižek claims is the inverse of that of the master. In this way, the men reveal their own oppressed position, though they deny it by bolstering their identities against the outsider who occupies an even lower position.

On the beach at Sandymount, Stephen observes his surroundings: “A porter bottle stood up, stogged to its waist, in the cakey sand dough. A sentinel: isle of dreadful thirst” (U 41). Amongst the trash, this bottle up to its waist (a pun on *waste*?) reminds us of Dante’s quest to leave Inferno by climbing the hairy trunk of Satan, who stands trapped up to his waist in the ice of Cocytus. The Irishmen are trapped in their own sort of hell by drink, as their habitual drinking is one form of colonial oppression. Bloom’s voluntary sobriety is puzzling, even threatening, to his contemporaries. They sneer at him, using the temperance movement’s slogan sarcastically: “Ireland sober is Ireland free” (U 298). The movement may seek Ireland’s independence, but being endorsed primarily by women, these men deem it feminine. “It’d be an act of God to take a hold of a fellow like of that and throw him in the bloody sea. Justifiable homicide, so it would. Then sloping off with his five quid without putting up a pint of stuff like a man” (U 323). The hegemonic interpellation of Irishness, especially in relation to masculinity, requires that its subjects are fond of drink.

Bloom’s position allows him the ironic distance required to see through the spectacle of substantial community and ‘traverse the fantasy’ of the Symbolic to encounter the Real. The others, caught in a nationalistic pride bolstered by heritage, local normative religion, and masculine drinking practices, are thus mired to a greater extent than Bloom in the oppression of British rule. He is able to see the fundamental lack in these three elements of the substantial community because his gaze is external: “those who find themselves *within* the substance are necessarily blinded” (EYS 55, Žižek’s emphasis). Though he is not without scant elements of each (Irish heritage, Catholicism, drinking), he fails to fully embody these traits as the others do. “The elementary function of the sacrifice is to heal the fissure of the Other. What holds

together a 'substantial' ('primordial') community is its rite of sacrifice, and the position of a 'stranger' is defined precisely by his refusal to partake in this rite" (*EYS* 55). Bloom refuses to partake in the rites that bond the men in this community, thus he is viewed as a stranger and a threat, an excremental receptacle for their hatred and disgust.

#### **5.4 False Historicity and Forced Freedom**

As previously mentioned, Bloom's deflected desire is the 'arrow' he has sent out and must now take. We can now see how Molly's adultery sends this 'message' back to Bloom in the guise of a forced choice. With Molly, Bloom is part of the symbolic community of marriage. In order to accept his own failure and its attendant extramarital and non-productive sexual impulses, he is forced to accept Molly's adultery. The love which he professed to the others is essentially the 'religious' tool by which he cuts himself off from his symbolic relationship to Molly, and chooses "a, the exception, the particular object that sticks out from the symbolic order" (*EYS* 78). As mentioned, Martha and Gerty stood in as the objects of his desire, whereas the *objet a* here is the core trauma of his drive toward loss.

He must reintegrate this traumatic core as a freely chosen thing. Žižek uses Kierkegaard's 'leap into the religious' to outline how a subject accomplishes this reintegration by confronting the Real. As such, the stages of repetition for Kierkegaard (aesthetic, ethical, religious) correspond to the Lacanian system of Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real (*EYS* 78). Kierkegaard's theory takes the biblical story in which God commands Abraham to murder his infant son Isaac. Abraham was prepared to commit the non-ethical act of murder, in a 'leap' into the religious. In a similar turn, Bloom must be prepared to 'commit' the non-ethical act of adultery (he facilitates Molly's adultery by staying away from home all day), in a 'leap' into the Real. Just as Abraham struggled with God's command to kill his own son Isaac, Bloom struggles with making this 'forced choice' a freely chosen one. The symbolic structure of family (as in Abraham's dilemma) is difficult for Bloom to overlook, as it gives meaning to so much of his past. Rather than examine this familial structure via his memories of Molly and their daughter Milly, I want to explore the present, the way he manipulates the symbolic structure of time in order to retreat from the possibilities of the day.

Though Molly is still young enough to get pregnant, Bloom refuses the possibility and thus relegates this chance to the past. Now, in the present, he is also in the process of making Molly's adultery a thing of the past, fixed and unchangeable. Though in possession of the knowledge of Boylan and Molly's plan, his comment "coming events cast their shadows before" betrays a denied complicity with these events (*U* 158). The openness of the present—the fact that he is in the process of being cuckolded, and thus has a choice as to what he does about it—is the Real that Bloom rails against. He's like Žižek's 'backward-looking prophet' who does things or lets things happen, and then speaks of them as if they were necessary, fated, immovable, thus forgetting or denying their moment of becoming. This is what Žižek calls 'false historicity,' where one reads actions and events on a timeline, rather than in their process of becoming. False historicity is an inauthentic stance which allows one to relinquish responsibility.

Bloom's oppressors might be very real, but he is not without responsibility. He initially inserts himself in a false historicity through repetition at the Imaginary and Symbolic levels. Here, his attempt to retain a sense of self despite (self-)victimization causes him to act hysterically, a creative and (according to Lacan and Žižek) feminine response to oppression. He has a choice, and therefore must freely accept his decision in order to confront the Real. In this way, Bloom refuses the trap of the forced choice. By embracing his 'gift' to Molly, he acts as if he has "always already chosen," as if he knew always that Molly would commit the act and yet that he would love her all the same.

### **The Imaginary and the Symbolic**

Bloom's seeming engrossment in quotidian details reveals to us his underlying compulsive deflection of awareness, which is his true task of the day: to avoid thinking of Boylan with Molly, and to appear to others as if everything is normal, as if he is unaware of such knowledge. Bloom's coupling of time with the Imaginary allows him to destabilize both from their given parameters: he substantializes time, and he posits things missed by subjective sight as nonexistent. In short, time is made firm and 'real,' while Molly and Boylan having sex is made flimsy and invisible 'unreal'. He repeats Stephen's sight experiments in a sense: "his lids came down on the lower rims of his

irides. Can't see it. If you imagine it's there you can almost see it. Can't see it" (*U* 159). Ironically, this same turn of 'making invisible' is euphemized by the pub crew who call Bloom's masculinity into question: "–Do you call that a man? says the citizen. –I wonder did he ever put it out of sight, says Joe. –Well, there were two children born anyhow, says Jack Power" (*U* 323).

Bloom's refusal to accept the realness of an imagined image is a weak positivist retreat into the limits of sense-observation. He knows that Molly and Boylan will have sex, even though he "can't see it" literally. Denial only heightens his anxiety, since it ontologically turns in upon itself. His thought "Not here. Don't see him" sounds more like an imperative to himself (don't look at him) than a declarative (I don't/can't see him). He can close his eyes to the material world, but he can't avert his eyes from the transcendental stuff of thought. In this way, he admits to a certain 'realness' in thought and imagination. The Imaginary is thus no longer a stable support for his denial, so he retreats into the Symbolic structure of time.

As Bloom's sense-experiments lead him to the question of parallax, the falling action of his hands matches the descent of the time ball on the city clock. This image ties Bloom's fatalistic temporality to his impotence: "What's parallax? Show this man to the door. Ah. His hand fell again to his side" (*U* 159). The image of hands as a simultaneous instrument of time and sex repeats in reference to Molly and Boylan: "Time going on. Hands moving" (*U* 164). After his fantasy-driven masturbation on the beach, he looks at his watch, stopped at half past four, and considers his moment of climactic reverie, and thinks of them: "O, he did. Into her. She did. Done" (*U* 353). Having decided that their act is ultimately (like time) unstoppable, he conflates a symbol of stopped time with the conclusion of their deed. Just as he stabilized Gerty as an object of desire by reducing her to an amalgamation of commodity objects, he crystallizes the openness of temporal flow by connecting his stopped watch with the concretion of Molly and Bloom's act.

The openness of history confronts us with the burden of freedom, our power of choice. In the course of living we make choices; it is only "afterward, when we cast a retrospective gaze on it, its course loses the character of 'becoming' and appears as the manifestation of some 'eternal' necessity" (*EYS* 79). Bloom's cuckoldry isn't a necessity, but he projects it into the future in order to gaze upon it as done and thus

unstoppable. He not only historicizes the act, making it irreversible, he also inscribes his own desire into it. They are, in a sense, all climaxing at the same time. In this way, his compliance takes the flavor of an act, rather than a passive acceptance; this points to the freely made choice whereby he too can break the symbolic injunction to marital fidelity.

### **The Real**

Bloom seems aware that his resort to false historicity is a failure: “Think you’re escaping and run into yourself,” he says (*U* 360). This is where he realizes the ‘arrow’ that he shot has come full circle and stands to receive it. True to Žižek’s line of thought, the freedom Bloom gains in his choice allows him to re-encounter himself at the level of the Real: “A free Self not only integrates disturbances, it creates them, it explodes any given form or stasis. This is the zero-level of the ‘mental’ which Freud called the ‘death drive’: the ultimate traumatic Thing the Self encounters is the Self itself” (*PV* 210). This is where Bloom starts breaking through the Imaginary, to the Symbolic, and on to the Real. The Imaginary stage gives the impossibility of repetition of the ‘fullness of past pleasures.’ One can never truly repeat anything to the same effect, due to the internal distance one acquires from a former moment, a former feeling. Thus one moves forward to the Symbolic stage, where the acceptance of the impossibility of experience is maturely traded for the ‘certitude of repetition.’ “We find satisfaction in the return of the Same, like the happy marital couple who has overcome the yearning for exotic adventures, yet is still able to avoid melancholic remembrance of past passions” (*EYS* 78). But as Žižek explains, the deadlock which pushes us to the next stage

is of course the experience of how, at this [symbolic] stage too, repetition is impossible: the ideal point at which we overcome the futile yearning for the New without falling into a nostalgic backward-directed attitude, is never present as such. The structure of subjective time is such that, from hopeful expectations, from ‘too early,’ we are thrown all of a sudden into melancholic remembrance, into ‘too late.’ In other words, the self-referential paradox consists in the fact that the ideal point between hope and memory *is present precisely and only in the mode of hope or memory.* (*EYS* 79, Žižek’s emphasis)

Bloom's message of 'universal love' repeats his own failure by giving its permission further to Molly, giving her the complete sexual satisfaction he's otherwise denied her for over a decade. "Insofar as repetition is not possible, it is possible to repeat this very experience of impossibility, i.e., the failure to attend the Object" (*EYS* 79). This gift empties him of things that he considers the opposite of 'life' and connects his paradoxically Christ-like love with the return of the annual solar cycle: "all are washed in the blood of the sun," which puns on sun and Son (*U* 592).

In repeating the Real, he reestablishes the circularity of time into a sort of spiral on which one passes the same place at a similar time each year, and from this same/new vantage point, can gain a parallax view of things. "By means of the repetition of the past, we undermine this image of history qua the linear process of the unfolding of an underlying necessity and unearth its process of becoming" (79). In the abyss of Bloom's traumatic kernel lies the fact that Molly and Boylan's affair isn't a necessity, but rather an empty space for an event in the process of becoming. Having confronted the Real by giving Molly his freely chosen consent, he moves into the void-space that remains in the absence of fantasy and the Master-Signifier.

## **5.5 Bloom The Split Subject: Filling His Own Void**

Zizek claims that "the function of fantasy is precisely to fill in the void of the signifier-without-signified: that is to say, *fantasy is ultimately, at its most elementary, the stuff which fills in the void of the Master-Signifier*" (*PV* 373, Zizek's emphasis). Boylan is the Master-Signifier, because he is everything Bloom is not. First, as the counterpart to Bloom's hysteria, Boylan wields the obsessive control of the oppressor. He knows where he's going (to Eccles Street, to sleep with Bloom's wife), where Bloom's hysteric movement is into the unknown (Bloom is going away from home, with no real plan or purpose after the funeral).

The Master-Signifier is the signifier of potentiality, of potential threat, of a threat which, in order to function as such, has to remain potential (just as it is also the signifier of potential meaning whose actuality is the void of meaning: [...] – and as such, it means nothing in particular, it has no determinate meaning, it can be articulated only in the guise of a tautology [...]). (*PV* 373)

As with indeterminate threats, the very lack of specification is what really does the job, “since it invites the power of [Bloom’s] fantasy to fill it in with imagined horrors” (*PV* 373). After Bloom fills the day with these imagined horrors, his imagination is given a break, and he fills the void with his corporeal substance.

Temporality is the medium through which Bloom commodifies and thus ‘makes material’ his desire, and the medium by which he affects this parallax shift in relation to trauma. The actuality of the ‘threat’ comes only after that threat has passed: having returned home, there’s obviously been a strong man there to rearrange the furniture, causing Bloom (like Stephen’s Aristotle) to knock the limits of the formal (the imaginary, the void of the Master-Signifier) ‘with his sconce.’ Bloom’s entire day has been a circuitry of preemptive strikes against the virtual threat of Boylan, a rather ‘real’ threat which, more precisely, Bloom wanted to render virtual in his shunting of Boylan-signifiers onto the various objects and symbolic structures at hand. Bloom, the material man said to deal so much with ‘reality,’ wanted a fantasy. Ironically, it was the very push toward fantasy which brought reality back around to knock him in the head.

When Bloom enters the bed, he does so “with circumspection, as invariably when entering an abode (his own or not his own): “with solicitude [...] lightly, the less to disturb: reverently, the bed of conception and of birth, of consummation of marriage and of breach of marriage, of sleep and of death” (*U* 683). Against a series of oppositions, we see that Bloom both belongs to and is estranged from this bed. This parallels the simultaneous belonging/alienation inherent in the Self, the parallax gap at the core of being.

Beside the presence of a human form, female, hers, Bloom encounters “the imprint of a human form, male, not his,” the ‘man-shape ineluctable’ which has left the outline of its form behind (*U* 683, & paraphrasing Stephen). Bloom knows quite well that Molly has slept with Boylan; but it’s not that he ‘doesn’t want to know,’ rather he would ‘prefer not to know.’ There is a knowing, but his activity lies in “the reduction of all qualitative differences to a purely formal minimal difference” (*PV* 382), the act of *not to know*. This is why we find Molly in the bed, and the form there is “hers,” whereas the imprint left by Boylan is not “his” (Boylan’s) but “not his” (not Bloom’s). In other words, who was there? Not-Bloom. This gesture of “impassive refusal” is a withdrawal which creates the negation to open up “a new space outside the hegemonic

position and its negation” (*PV* 382). He uses this minimal difference to reclaim agency: a sort of pure difference between Boylan’s (temporally former) presence in the bed and the (present) void of his absence Bloom reduces Boylan to a material thing, thus the imprint can’t ‘hurt’ him, and he slides right into its dent.

He’s been creating a space for himself all day and night long: to paraphrase Žižek, Bloom’s gesture is what remains of the mental energy he’s invested in Boylan when Boylan’s place as Master-Signifier is “emptied of all its obscene superego content” (*PV* 382). This is arguably why the binaries listed here make a breach of marriage analogous to death: Bloom makes the logical move “from something to nothing, from the gap between two ‘somethings’ to the gap that separates a something from nothing, from the void of its own place” (*PV* 382). Just as Bloom effectively reduced the Molly-Boylan rendezvous to a material ‘thing,’ a crystallized temporal moment and thus robbed it of transcendence, that very materiality is what now allows Bloom to create a gap between Boylan’s material presence and absence. We are now in a position to observe the overarching structure of this very gap, by looking at the original narrative void.

Bloom’s side of the story (allowing for such a reductive split) arguably begins with his concession to Molly, when he volunteers to remain away from home for the remainder of the day. This concession is posited as a negativity, an absence: we are only presented with this information at the end, by Molly: “he said he’d be dining out, going to the Gaiety” (*U* 692). The void left by this unspoken detail becomes the ‘traumatic kernel’ around which desire circulates. Someone who was otherwise “constantly underfoot” (Bloom) and someone who otherwise relates all details of the day’s plans (Molly), both have tacitly agreed to avoid each other, and not a word is spoken of these awkward arrangements before they are recounted by Molly in Ithaca. After Žižek, we can replace the ‘murder’ of a detective story with their tacit ‘agreement’ and get the same result: “At the beginning, there is thus the [agreement]—a traumatic shock, an event that cannot be integrated into symbolic reality because it appears to interrupt the “normal” causal chain” (*LA* 58). Bloom’s day is thus structured around this non-integral trauma, as he vacillates between obsession and hysteria, reality and hallucination, in an attempt to ‘re-weave’ the fabric of symbolic reality, like Penelope at her nocturnal loom.

The telling of the story would fall flat if Joyce had given Molly and Bloom's dialogue there at the beginning, a point Joycean critics have explored quite thoroughly. My reason for revisiting this perhaps well-worn subject is to reveal its implications on the level of psychoanalysis, and how it structures the day for Bloom.

From the moment of this eruption, even the most ordinary events of life seem loaded with threatening possibilities; everyday reality becomes a nightmarish dream as the "normal" link between cause and effect is suspended. This radical opening, this dissolution of symbolic reality, entails the transformation of the lawlike succession of events into a kind of 'lawless sequence' and therefore bears witness to an encounter with the 'impossible' real, resisting symbolization. Suddenly, 'everything is possible,' including the impossible. The [protagonist's] role is precisely to demonstrate how 'the impossible is possible,' that is to resymbolize the traumatic shock, to integrate it into symbolic reality. (LA 58)

This is why the concrete details of their agreement wait until the end: we need this void, in order to travel with Bloom through the fantasy, through his desire and disgust, through his shame-exchange as a 'Jewish merchant' (even an acquaintance's reference to Shakespeare's Shylock), through his debasing masochistic hallucinations in Circe, to a void into which he can reintegrate himself, and re-establish a symbolic normalcy.

By 'taking his own arrow' all day, Bloom is able to reinstall himself in the position of Boylan, his supreme object of agony, his Master-Signifier, and thus enjoy having pleased Molly without having done it himself. "The immense pleasure brought about by the [...] solution results from this libidinal gain, from a kind of surplus profit obtained from it: our desire is realized and we do not even have to pay the price for it" (LA 59). Once again, Stephen's theories and remarks inadvertently comment on Bloom's situation: "The sentimentalist is he who would enjoy a thing without incurring the immense debt of its enjoyment" (U 392). In facilitating Molly's enjoyment, Bloom discharges himself of the guilt of his drive toward loss, and is thus able to fully enjoy his failure. This is not to suggest that Bloom hasn't paid any sort of price for his freely chosen sacrifice, but that the debt inscribed in Bloom's trauma has been there all along, since the trauma of Rudy's death, and could essentially not compound in regard to Molly's actions. "No later undoing will undo the first undoing. [says Stephen...] A like fate awaits him and the two rages commingle in a whirlpool" (U 188). These two

traumas are the *Scylla and Charybdis* which Bloom has navigated all day, on a path whose temporal spiral trajectory allows him to re-encounter the same emptiness in himself from a new vantage point by means of the parallax. His symptom/*sinthome* has pointed to this revelation throughout the day: the sirens of the ‘seaside girls’ call to Bloom, tied like Odysseus tied to mast in his heart between two roaring worlds where they *swurrrrl*.

## 6.1 Conclusion

In the introductory section entitled ‘Structure of the Analysis,’ I outlined the key points of each subsection of the analysis. Rather than recapitulate those points here, I’d like to conclude by examining certain instances where Stephen and Bloom seemingly repeat or refer to one another, in a comparative analysis which focuses on similarities rather than differences. Here, Joyce’s parallax is an overarching ontological structure that ranges from internal psychology and molecular movements, to the philosophy of our connections with each other and the world, to the astronomical implications of humans in relation to the positions of stars, universal cycles, and time.

### Unholy Water

Heusel claims that Stephen and Bloom’s points of view are “subtly superimposed until the urination scene in which literal convergence of their creations, water, foreshadows a fuller vision of life” (Heusel 135). Though I do agree that Joyce’s work reveals a fuller vision of life, and that this water-making certainly illustrates the flux of life, of consciousness and language, matter, and relationships, I disagree with the claim that the convergence of urine here is what finally foreshadows this fuller vision. Though Bloom and Stephen do merge in a sense, the question of a lasting connection is open-ended, and we might easily assume their water, as well as their relationship, bifurcates and disintegrates. Like time, the flow is *away*. Duality installs the pair into a complete circuit, where I argue that an impasse remains which disallows completion. Only the tension between their perspectives remains, while no real union is achieved.

My analysis departs from Heusel to assert that discordance is what allows these two anti-heroes to assert their creative powers and invest meetings and moments with meaning, even as underlying trauma causes them to move around and away from central desires which resist attainment. If anything, this scene uses the ‘unholy’ water - the secular (Bloom’s) and the blasphemous (Stephen’s), waste liquid (urine) rather than generative liquid (semen) - that best illustrates failure as goal and achievement, and illustrates relationships between subjects sundered from even themselves, people who fail to achieve full unity within themselves or with others.

This needn’t be a depressing view: we can still *enjoy* our attempts, our creation, despite the ultimate failure of connection and the unattainable ideal of home. As I’ve explained via Zizek, this ‘enjoyment,’ the pleasure-in-pain of *jouissance*, is the very substance of life, and the only thing we truly have. Stephen and Bloom’s closest link to each other resembles the inherent parallax gap in being itself, thus where Stephen and Bloom meet is in this “purely nonsubstantial link between individuals” (PV 80).

Rather than reinforce literature’s normative quest, an attempt at reunification and thus a closed circle, Stephen and Bloom quest against themselves. This process of creation, rather than going straight-on for its mark, deflects and resists attainment, and in this way sustains itself. This is arguably why Joyce’s writing sustains endless rereading, as its very process both creates and mirrors the psyche of its characters.

### **A Keyless Existence**

That Bloom finds himself keyless upon arrival to Eccles Street forces him to confront the stark difference between yesterday and today. His keys are in yesterday’s trousers. Rather than Blazes sneaking in or out through the window, it’s Bloom who’s forced to do so. He is a burglar in his own home, which perhaps points to the human condition: being ‘locked out’ from the abyss of our beginning, we attempt to force our way ‘in,’ only to find that ‘in’ is an Imaginary/Symbolic attempt at comfort, and the ‘Real’ is the antagonistic feeling of not being completely ‘home.’ Ironically, Bloom’s entire day is spent talking about the ‘crossed keys’ in the ad for Keyes in his pocket, while unaware that he’s crossed himself by forgetting his keys at home. Stephen has “lost” his keys as well – he symbolically refuses the oppressions of Haines and Mulligan, and thus gives up his keys to the Martello Tower.

Stephen does not expect to find any “finally discovered conceptual true home”; as Žižek says, “we remain forever split, condemned to a fragile position between the two dimensions, and to a ‘leap of faith’ without any guarantee.” Thus Stephen’s ‘new home’ is “*homelessness itself*, the very open movement of negativity” (PV 9, Žižek’s emphasis). This open movement is literal and figurative, and embodies the quest of creative becoming via loss and failure. The “conceptual true home” arguably arises as a need left unmet by the traditional home, and as such is an extension of the same oppressive system from which Stephen seeks to free himself. Bloom would be another symbolic father, thus Stephen has to resist him. If the object of desire is actually fantasmatic, Stephen ‘traverses the fantasy’ by rejecting Bloom’s offer. To accept would be to materialize the Real, to concretize his drives into known coordinates, which would arrest the continuous movement into the unknown. Failure runs the drives of both characters because it allows them to keep desiring. Their goal can be failure, homelessness, “but the true aim is the endless continuation of this circulation of such” (PV 61).

### **Upon the Incertitude of the Void**

Stephen vacillates ‘between two roaring worlds’ while not inhabiting either: his act destroys the narcissistic projection of Self, while also destroying the symbolic order which would support it. Thus he gains contact with the void of being:

the act qua real, transgression of a symbolic limit, does not enable us to (re)establish a kind of immediate contact with the presymbolic life substance, it throws us, on the contrary, back into that abyss of the Real out of which our symbolic reality emerged. (EYS 54)

Stephen proclaims the abyss of God’s creation as the abyss of fatherhood, the mystery which the patriarchal Church has suppressed. “Fatherhood, in the sense of conscious begetting, is unknown to man.[...] On that mystery and not on the Madonna which the cunning Italian intellect flung to the mob of Europe the church is founded and founded irremovably because founded, like the world, macro and microcosm, upon the void. Upon incertitude, upon unlikelihood” (U 199). He recognizes the negative space between positions at the cellular, microstructural level: “As we, or mother Dana, weave and unweave our bodies, Stephen said, from day to day, molecules shuttled to and fro,

so does the artist weave and unweave his image” (*U* 186). This constant motion extends from the molecular level to temporality, allowing for a parallax view: “So in the future, the sister of the past, I may see myself as I sit here now but by reflection from that which then I shall be” (*U* 187). Bloom encounters himself in this same way: “No longer is Leopold, as he sits there, ruminating, chewing the cud of reminiscence, that staid agent of publicity and holder of a modest substance in the funds. He is young Leopold, as in a retrospective arrangement, a mirror within a mirror (hey, presto!), he beholdeth himself” (*U* 393). The theme of mirrors and time points to the way mis/recognition at the basis of the formation of subjectivity is enabled by constant movement through space and time, allowing one a parallax view of oneself.

The internal gap(s) caused by the constant movement of bodies is arguably the very space where Stephen and Bloom ‘meet.’ Though their trajectories are different, their paths constitute the obverse of one another, two sides of the same Moebius strip, entwined yet never fully meeting. In Stephen’s case: “He affirmed his significance as a conscious rational animal proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown and a conscious rational reagent between a micro and macrocosm ineluctably constructed upon the incertitude of the void” (*U* 650). In Bloom’s case: “That as a competent keyless citizen he had proceeded energetically from the unknown to the known through the incertitude of the void” (*U* 650). A syllogism is the philosophical logic by which two general statements lead to a more particular statement. Thus the syllogistic procession of the two ‘general’ positions of Stephen and Bloom’ reveal the particularity, the exceptionality, of universality. Through imperfect repetition, an act which confronts the Real, each character achieves a spiral-circularity which breaks free of the Imaginary-Symbolic attempt at exact sameness in repetition.

### ***Ecco, Echo***

Joyce seems to suggest that the world bounces one back to oneself, sonically and spiritually. To echo thus is to be human, to repeat imperfectly is part of the subjective and universal cycle, a temporo-spatial metastructure for humanity:

Interval which. Is the greatest possible elipse. Consistent with. The ultimate return. The octave. Which. [...] What went forth to the ends of the world to traverse not itself, God, the sun, Shakespeare, a commercial traveler, having

itself traversed in reality itself becomes that self. Wait a moment. Wait a second. Damn that fellow's noise in the street. Self which it itself was ineluctably preconditioned to become. *Ecco!*" (*U* 475, Joyce's emphasis). 'Ecco' is Latin for 'behold'; thus, as in an act of creation (i.e. "behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live," Ezekiel 37:1) Stephen speaks the interval and the return into being. This encounter of the Self is not unlike Bloom's 'a mirror within a mirror, he beholdeth himself.' The noise of speaking the Self into being creates an echo of itself, of course: thus Stephen's '*Ecco!*' literally shouts what it is to 'be human', *Ecce Homo*.

Stephen's 'learned speech' here also reminds of Bloom's earlier lamentation, with its echoed call and answer:

A low incipient note sweet banshee murmured: all. A thrush. A throistle. His breath, birdsweet, good teeth he's proud of, fluted with plaintive woe. Is lost. Rich sound. Two notes in one there. Blackbird I heard in the hawthorn valley. Taking my motives he twined and turned them. All most too new call is lost in all. Echo. How sweet the answer. How is that done? All lost now. Mournful he whistled. Fall, surrender, lost. (*U* 261)

The 'too new call' ties the effort of creation with destruction ('lost in all'). These two notes in one ("The ultimate return. The octave."), taken, twined, and turned, create the echo, the parallax between call and answer. Having examined the correspondence of Kierkegaard's repetition (esthetical, ethical, religious) and Lacan's cycle (Imaginary, Symbolic, Real), the tripartite movement here concludes with the abyss that one encounters as a result of the 'leap' to the Real. Bloom's free choice matches Stephen's act, as they both surrender the false supports of the Imaginary and Symbolic.

Joyce, like Stephen (or Stephen, like Joyce) shares the 'jesuit curse, injected the wrong way,' thus many of the themes in *Ulysses* have a background in Christian thought, though Joyce pushes them to new conclusions. Žižek explains how the logic of the minimal difference of parallax was first introduced in the Christian narrative:

Not only—as the cliché would have it—is universality based in an exception; Lacan goes a step further: universality *is* its exception, it 'appears as such' in its exception. This is [...] the 'supernumerary' element: the exception (the element with no place in the structure) which immediately

stands for the universal dimension. [...] Christ, the miserable outcast, is man as such (*ecce homo*). (PV 39, Žižek's emphases).

True to the paradoxical incommensurability in Stephen, Christianity injected the wrong way, Joyce frames universality by the exceptionality of his characters. Thus the Christian narrative is pushed to its Joycean conclusion: Contrary to the fall, surrender, and resurrection of the Christian narrative, whereby one is 'redeemed' or reinstated in perfect unity (a complete circle), this fall and surrender leave one lost: to volley in the parallax interval between positions, the very movement of which creates the eternal return, the continuous trajectory of discovery.

## 6.2 A Final Note on Limitations and Future Work

My purpose has been to examine the parallax gaps in the subjectivity of Stephen and Bloom, and to explore the antagonistic desires and drives that arise in result. My argument centers upon the proposition of the parallax gap as the driving force in these two characters. For this reason, I've singled out one traumatic event for each character, and shown how it 'cracks' the fabric of being for this character, so to speak. The fault lines extend from an inherent gap at the minimal level of being out to larger structural entities, exerting a negative pull on the internal drives and external trajectories of these characters.

Limiting my work to this theoretical scope (along with the spatial limitations of the thesis) has also limited my ability to explore a number of topics here in depth. For example, though I demonstrate masculinity as a product and requirement of Irish nationalism, and mention its paradoxical ties to alcohol (arguably an instrument of British imperialism), I don't explore the problematic cases in which Bloom responds to racism *with* racism. These themes are eloquently explored by Joseph Valente in a chapter in *Semicolonial Joyce*, entitled: '*Neither fish nor flesh*'; or how '*Cyclops*' stages the double-bind of Irish manhood.' This double-bind arguably demonstrates a parallax

social antagonism, and would certainly contribute to my purpose. Throughout this thesis, I've explored the failure of interpersonal connection that attends desires and drives. This phenomenon is similar to the 'failed communion' which Hélène Cixous posits in *The Exile of James Joyce*. It is also illustrated superbly in a piece entitled *Joyce the Post*, which reads the postal service as a metonym for Lacanian desire in *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*.

Finally, a more thorough immersion in psychoanalysis and phenomenology via Zizek, Lacan, Hegel and others could certainly add to my considerations here. Given more time and space, I would have explored the relation of Bloom 'filling his own void' to the ontological question of God using humanity to fill his own void. This is what Zizek means by calling humanity 'divine excrement.' Stephen's own considerations of the paradox in theology, that God's Fall and Redemption via man and Jesus is self-requiring, a sort of ontological tautology, points to further explorative possibilities.

Expanding the delimitations of my hypothesis to test these and other materials could be the focus of further research or doctoral studies. While I have only skimmed the surface of possibilities, I have attempted to thoroughly demonstrate the usefulness of Zizek's theoretical body in illuminating the drives of Stephen and Bloom and crucial themes in *Ulysses*.

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