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As Camp as a Row of Pink Tents: Stephen's Portrait of Mr W. S.

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In the 'Scylla and Charybdis' episode of *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus presents a theory about Shakespeare's biographical motivations for writing *Hamlet*, which he ultimately claims, perhaps disingenuously, to not believe. Stephen's apparent disbelief in his own theory echoes Oscar Wilde's 'Portrait of Mr W. H.', which is referenced within 'Scylla', and which also propounds a theory of Shakespeare's artistic production in terms of his biography. Furthermore, like the various characters in Wilde's story, Stephen's theory is propelled primarily from the internal evidence of Shakespeare's texts. In this article, I will analyse the playful and learned insincerity of both theories through the optic of camp in order to tease out the implications that Stephen's argument about Shakespeare has for James Joyce's aesthetics.

Were one to think of Stephen Dedalus from James Joyce's 1922 novel *Ulysses*, the word *camp* would not immediately leap to mind. Yet there is a strain of camp, albeit mild, to Stephen's discourse apropos Shakespeare in the 'Scylla and Charybdis' episode that can be educed through the reference to Oscar Wilde's short story 'The Portrait of Mr W. H.' (originally published in 1889). Like the various characters in Wilde's story, Stephen proposes an extravagant theory of Shakespeare's artistic motivations and inclinations that is propelled primarily from the internal evidence of Shakespeare's texts. And crucially, it remains unclear whether each theory is sincerely believed by their respective advocates. I will argue that through the optic of camp, Wilde's 'Portrait of Mr W. H.' informs both the rhetorical strategies and aesthetic purpose of Joyce's representation of Stephen's argument about Shakespeare.

Before turning to Wilde and *Ulysses*, a provisional working definition of camp is needed. The almost contractually obligated starting point for any discussion would be Susan Sontag's foundational 1964 essay 'Notes on "Camp"'. Its granular, unfocused approach is perhaps apposite in that it resists an overly thetic and deterministic delimitation while still allowing for a loose coherence across the various attributes she enumerates. Camp is, as she argues, above all else, a sensibility, 'a vision of the world in terms of style—but a particular kind of style. It is the love of the exaggerated, the "off", of things-being-what-they-are-not' (Sontag, 2013: 262). An important correlative attribute to camp's excessive stylisation is that it 'is art that proposes itself seriously, but cannot be taken altogether seriously because it is "too much"' (266). The consistent thread across Sontag's article is to propose camp as an aesthetic that manifests an excessive concern with the manner and matter of aesthetics.

After Sontag, the next major critical appraisal of camp was Mark Booth's 1983 book, *Camp.* Booth argues that Sontag's examples are too diverse to really make any sense of the subject; for Sontag, the rubric camp encompasses not just Wilde and Ronald Firbank and Tallulah Bankhead and Aubrey Beardsley, but also de Gaulle and *Swan Lake* and Beethoven's quartets. Because of such examples, Booth argues that Sontag consistently amalgamates camp fads and fancies into camp. These fads would not be camp as such, but evince qualities that would appeal to camp people. For example, Wilde is camp, Tennyson a camp fancy (Booth, 1983: 12–17). Booth's starting definition is: '*To be camp is to present oneself as being committed to the marginal with a commitment greater than the marginal merits*' (18). For Booth's purposes, the term marginal can be construed variously: the focus of camp's mannered stylisation need hardly be fixed. As Booth states, 'The far-fetched, the bogus and the patently ludicrous will always cluster round camp' (30). Such a proposition helps keep camp distinct from camp fancies. In terms of camp in literature, Booth takes Pope's *Rape of the Lock* as a key example by virtue of its 'commitment to

trivia' and the disproportion between its 'elaborate form' and its 'slight subject matter' (118). Indeed, the distention of mock epic—that is, of epic transvalued—while not necessarily camp in and of itself, is most certainly liable to camp. For our purposes, then, a provisional working definition of camp is that it is a stylised exaggeration or inflation of the trivial into the seemingly, deceptively profound, while holding back from a total, sincere commitment. It takes itself seriously, but not *too* seriously.

While camp is not exclusively homosexual, it certainly has been associated with homosexual culture.[1] As a sensibility that favours the marginal, it would, of course, be a tempting vestment for a marginalised community, a way of flaunting marginality in a way that can just barely be acceptable by virtue of being misunderstood. In his book *Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility*, Michael Bronski states that for gay people before Stonewall, camp was 'a means of communication and survival' (1984: 42). But, while *camp* and *queer* share many attributes, there are other dimensions of marginality, ones that are less overtly ideologically inflected. Camp's concerns fan beyond sex and gender: it is a means of smuggling in subversion with an elaborate wink.[2]

Wilde's 'Portrait of Mr W. H.' is very much an elaborate wink, although what exactly is being concealed or revealed remains an open question. The story begins as a discussion between an anonymous narrator and his friend Erskine who relates his friend Cyril Graham's theory about Shakespeare and the sonnets, a theory Erskine finds interesting even though he does not believe in it himself. Graham proposed that the enigmatic 'Mr W. H.' to whom Shakespeare dedicated the sonnets, their 'onlie begetter' (Shakespeare, 2017: 1444), was a young boy-actor named Willie Hughes. 'He was Will, or, as he preferred to call him, Willie Hughes. The Christian name he found, of course, in the punning sonnets, CXXXV and CXLIII; the surname was, according to him, hidden in the seventh line of the 20th Sonnet, where Mr W. H. is described as—"'A man in hew, all *Hews* in his controlling'" (Wilde, 1908: 160).[3] Wilde's conceit about

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[1] Booth claims that 'Camp people tend to be asexual rather than homosexual. [...] So, while it may be true that many homosexuals are camp, only a small proportion of people who exhibit symptoms of camp behaviour are homosexual' (1983: 20). Sontag is a little more circumspect and writes, 'Camp is the triumph of the epicene style' (2013: 263).

[2] This subversive aspect of camp has largely been lost as it has become increasingly appropriated and domesticated by the mainstream. Paul Rudnick and Kurt Anderson discussed this phenomenon in a 1989 article for *Spy Magazine* about what they called 'Camp Lite': 'True camp, homo- or heterosexual, lampoons and adores, while Camp Lite reflexively eulogizes and coddles' (96).

[3] I will be citing from the earlier, shorter version of the story as this is the one that Joyce would have used for *Ulysses*. The longer version was published in 1921 and more than doubles the length of the earlier publication. Beyond the expansion in size, the longer version expands the analysis of Shakespeare's texts thereby diminishing the importance of the framing narrative of Graham and Erskine. Indeed, Ian Small argues that the 1921 is a 'second text' rather than a revision or later version precisely because it is qualitatively different from the text published in Wilde's lifetime (Small 2020, 509).

Willie Hughes originated with Thomas Tyrwhitt in the late eighteenth century, whose proposition had been revived by C. Elliot Browne in a letter to the *Athenaeum* in August 1873 (Schoenbaum, 1993: 319–20). Wilde takes great liberties with Tyrwhitt's theory and amplifies it greatly. In the story, Graham claims his theory is propelled entirely by 'internal evidence' (Wilde, 1908: 153) and co-relates each and every element within the sonnets to the figure of this Willie Hughes, such that he claims 'It is the only perfect key to Shakespeare's Sonnets that has ever been made' (167).

To prove the soundness of this theory to the sceptical Erskine, Graham surreptitiously arranges for a forged portrait of Willie Hughes holding a copy of the *Sonnets* with the dedication page legible. When confronted with this subterfuge, Graham admits that he did it purely for Erskine's sake and claims that the forgery 'does not affect the truth of the theory' (166). The next day Graham is found dead, having killed himself. He leaves a letter in which he claims that his suicide is an expression of his total commitment to his theory: as Erskine says, 'in order to show me how firm and flawless his faith in the whole thing was, he was going to offer his life as a sacrifice to the secret of the Sonnets' (167). While Graham's sacrifice fails to persuade Erskine, it does affect the narrator, who becomes consumed by the theory and goes on to elaborate it further, finding more and more evidence in its favour. After months of labour, he then writes Erskine to try to convince him of Graham's theory once and for all. But the narrator finds that his fervour has a limit, or rather that fervour is self-limiting:

> It seemed to me that I had given away my capacity for belief in the Willie Hughes theory of the Sonnets, that something had gone out of me, as it were, and that I was perfectly indifferent to the whole subject. What was it that had happened? It is difficult to say. Perhaps, by finding perfect expression for a passion, I had exhausted the passion itself. [...] Perhaps the mere effort to convert any one to a theory involves some form of renunciation of the power of credence (188–89).

Even as the narrator now no longer believes in the theory, Erskine is finally convinced. After the two men argue over the theory, Erskine takes his leave. Two years pass and the narrator receives a letter from Erskine, now in Cannes, where he claims that, because he has been unable to conclusively prove the Willie Hughes theory, he will follow Graham's example and kill himself. If Graham's suicide had been a positive inspiration for the narrator, Erskine's suicide fills him with revulsion: 'To die for one's religious beliefs is the worst use a man can make of his life, but to die for a literary theory! That seemed impossible' (193).

The final irony of the story is that Erskine did not commit suicide and that the letter was a final prank on the narrator: his widow admits to the narrator that Erskine was suffering from consumption and had moved to Cannes to die. And so, Wilde's story is interlaced with vectors of belief and unbelief intersecting with persuasion, self-persuasion, and forgery. Indeed, the figure of Wilde himself looms over the matter of credence and credibility. It is an open question as to whether he himself believed in the Willie Hughes theory. Samuel Schoenbaum relays the following anecdote:

> Wilde's destructive minion Lord Alfred Douglas [...] long afterwards wrote a volume in advocacy, *The True History of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1933). Yet Wilde drew back from total commitment. In *The Portrait of Mr W. H.* he chooses a species of fiction rather than the essay form [...] 'You *must* believe in Willie Hughes', Wilde once said after a recital that left his audience deeply impressed; then added, 'I almost do myself' (1993: 322).

Wilde's own attitude of near-belief to this theory echoes his characters, or at least it does in the context of a self-promoting performance, which makes it impossible to definitively disentangle sincerity from disingenuousness, or vanity from duplicity.

The barely-concealed subtext of the Willie Hughes theory—and, indeed, of Wilde's story—is thus the way in which homosexual desire is encoded and deciphered. Wilde's belief or unbelief in the Willie Hughes theory is perhaps almost irrelevant, what matters is that the theory, and the story in which it is framed, affords him the possibility of expressing his own homosexuality in a coded manner, by deflecting it onto a piece of excessively detailed literary ratiocination. That is, the interweaving layers of belief and unbelief about the Hughes theory indicate the complexities of expressing multifarious sexual desire in language. As Dustin Friedman puts it, 'the story foregrounds the linguistic indeterminacy lying at the heart of literary interpretation in order to reflect or repeat the psychic incoherence lying at the heart of sexual desire' (2013: 601). Wilde expresses himself, his concealed, complicated sexuality, through the guise of a story that dares its reader to disbelieve it. Indeed, as Horst Schroder has documented, the initial reviewers of Wilde's text were neither scandalised by any claims of Shakespeare's homosexuality nor did they read into it any implications of Wilde's sexuality (1984: 8–14). Deception is fundamentally, inextricably, part of the theory, and Wilde's deception, at least for a time, seemingly worked. As the narrator has it in the story's first paragraph, 'all Art being to a certain degree a mode of acting, an attempt to realise one's personality on some imaginative plane out of reach of the trammelling accidents and limitations of real life' (Wilde, 1908: 145). Right before Erskine begins his account of Graham, he tells the narrator that while he doesn't believe in the theory, it still may

be of interest and delight (149). That is, even before the various reversals of opinion, the story is presented as a divertissement whose aesthetic merits are independent of any putative veracity. The self-conscious aestheticization is thus medium and message in the expression of desire.

No theory, no interpretation, can ever quite be definitive and thus can never expunge all quibble and doubt. Something other than conclusive proof is needed for the theory to be convincing and this would be aesthetic appeal. For example, the narrator initially becomes attracted to Graham's theory because of his excessive devotion to it, that he was charmed by it. But, after devoting himself to it, the theory loses its charm. Earnestness spoils the fun. This allows us to get at the untamed essence or soul of camp. Camp is aestheticized insincerity: its posture is of the supreme importance of *not* being earnest, of not being concerned with those 'trammelling accidents and limitations of real life' (Wilde, 1908: 145).

Booth's uncovering of the origin of the term *camp* can help explain this idea of aestheticised insincerity. This idea of *se camper* follows from the extravagant camps set up for courtiers during the reign of the Sun King to temporarily recreate the luxuries of Versailles elsewhere—vast, ornamented, particoloured tents set up for the benefit of the ostentations and vanities of court life (Booth, 1983: 39–40). He provides a genealogy of the term: '*Se camper* is to present oneself in an expansive but flimsy manner (like a tent). With overtones here of theatricality, vanity, dressiness, and provocation' (33). Camp is a form of theatricality, but specifically an offstage affect of theatricality, theatre without the benefit of an elucidating frame that unambiguously clarifies the fictional status of the performance.

Wilde's restraint from total commitment is what distinguishes his foray into the 'happy hunting ground' (*U* 10.1061) of Shakespeare from other unconventional, or even far-fetched theories, such as the one Graham relates to Erskine, much to his amusement, by a German commentator called Barnstorff, who insisted that Mr. W. H. was no less a person than '"Mr. William Himself"' (Wilde, 1908: 157).[4] Whatever problems one might find in Barnstorff's theory, he himself certainly did not suffer from a lack of sincerity and conviction. His uncomplicated belief in his theory means it can never be camp, although it can certainly be a camp fad or fancy precisely because it is so outrageous. While such uncompromising, uncomplicated commitment to the far-fetched might occasion a camp appeal, their sincerity means that these theories can only be camp fads:

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[4] This is Diedrich Barnstorff's *Schlüssel zu Shakspeare's Sonnetten* (1860, translated 1862, *Key to Shakespeare's Sonnets*): 'This odd Schlüssel provoked howls of derision from scholars in England and on the Continent; scholars whose own views were often not much less far-fetched' (Schoenbaum, 1993: 319).

> Total sincerity is a terrible thing. It is fierce, relentless and unable to relax. It cannot be easy-going or take things as they come. It leaves no latitude for humour. There is fanaticism in it. [...] If it follows that we should be at least a little insincere, is it not better that our insincerity [...] should be of the self-conscious, candid kind we call camp? (Booth, 1983: 181–82).

Wilde's near-belief or self-conscious insincerity is the dividing line between Willie Hughes and Barnstorff's 'Mr. William Himself'. In 'Scylla', numerous theories, such as Barnstorff's, are referenced, but, other than Wilde's text, all suffer from the sincerity of their advocates. Indeed, Eglinton chides Stephen that these various critics at least still believed in their gnarly theories. The reference to Wilde's story is important because it signals the presence of insincerity and equivocation around the contested figure of Shakespeare. Stephen is silent during the discussion of Wilde, but his thoughts serve as sardonic counterpoints to the librarians. Best is the first to mention Wilde, calling his theory 'The most brilliant of all' (*U* 9.522). He initially thinks that Wilde was proposing that the Sonnets were written *by* Willie Hughes (*U* 9.524), thereby making the line 'a man all hues' (*U* 9.524) entirely self-referential. After Lyster corrects Best, Stephen slyly thinks of Barnstorff's proposal, 'Or Hughie Wills? Mr William Himself. W H.: who am I?' (*U* 9.526).[5] While the librarians praise Wilde's 'light touch' (*U* 9.530), Stephen thinks that their discussion, and perhaps also his own thinking, is but the 'Tame essence of Wilde' (*U* 9.532).[6]

Stephen's theory is ostensibly one more far-fetched theory about Shakespeare. It is first mentioned in 'Telemachus' with Mulligan's demeaning caricature: 'We have grown out of Wilde and paradoxes. It's quite simple. He proves by algebra that Hamlet's grandson is Shakespeare's grandfather and that he himself is the ghost of his own father' (*U* 1.554–57). Mulligan's jaded, arch, mocking characterisation is apt in ways that Mulligan is unaware of, as I will get to shortly, but its ostensible intent is to link Stephen's conception of Shakespeare with Wilde's 'abstrusiosities' (*U* 3.320). In effect, to borrow Stephen's line from 'Scylla', Mulligan mocks Stephen's theory by claiming it is the 'Tame essence of Wilde' (*U* 9.532).

Throughout *Ulysses*, Mulligan is cast as the great mocker. In his Trieste notebook, Joyce wrote of Mulligan's prototype, Oliver St. John Gogarty, 'He discovered the vanity of the world and exclaimed "The mockery of it!"' (Scholes and Kain, 1965: 98), a line

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[5] Hughie Wills is a pun on 'Who He Wills', which alludes to the subtitle of *Twelfth Night*, 'or What You Will'.

[6] Stephen's line riffs on *Punch*'s demeaning caricature of Wilde: in the 25 June 1881 issue, they published a cartoon of Wilde as a sunflower with the following verse caption: 'Aesthete of aesthetes! / What's in a name? / The poet is Wilde, / But his poetry's tame' (Slote, Mamigonian and Turner, 2022: 388).

which Mulligan repeats twice in 'Telemachus' (*U* 1.34, 1.116). The mocker trivialises what is serious, whereas camp, as per Booth, takes the trivial far too seriously. But, for Mulligan's mockery to work as mockery, Stephen would have to really believe in his theory. That is, Mulligan can recognise only total sincerity or complete hypocrisy: he cannot quite register something in-between. Indeed, in the librarians' discussion of Wilde's Willie Hughes theory, Lyster states that 'The mocker is never taken seriously when he is most serious' (*U* 9.542–43). They read Wilde as being no more than a mocker, like Mulligan.

Mulligan's line 'that he himself is the ghost of his own father' refers to the central conceit of Stephen's theory, that Shakespeare devised the role of the ghost so that he could play that part himself, so that 'he himself is the ghost of his own father' (*U* 1.556–57). But the ambiguity of the pronoun admits an additional referent, that it is Stephen who is, somehow, the ghost of his own father. This possibility is further hinted at by Lynch's reply to Mulligan's line, 'What? Haines said, beginning to point at Stephen. He himself?' (*U* 1.558). As with Barnstorff's proposal, Stephen's theory is a vehicle to implicate himself into a Shakespearean corpus.

Stephen's disquisition in the library is nothing if not a self-conscious *performance*. And, of course, shock is part of Stephen's performance, which does, on occasion, turn to the lewd. Stephen is the only participant educated at University College Dublin and so part of his performance involves offending the sensibilities of his Trinity-educated interlocutors. Rather than merely present his theory schematically, he embellishes it by infusing it with all manner of Shakespearean detail:

> Local colour. Work in all you know. Make them accomplices.
> —Shakespeare has left the huguenot's house in Silver street and walks by the swan-mews along the riverbank. But he does not stay to feed the pen chivying her game of cygnets towards the rushes. The swan of Avon has other thoughts.
> Composition of place. Ignatius Loyola, make haste to help me! (*U* 9.158–62).

This account is very much filled with 'local colour' as part of Stephen's rhetorical strategy to 'Make them accomplices', to implicate his interlocutors within his discourse.[7] The phrase 'local colour' is itself an example of the local colour that Joyce used in constructing his text. It is lifted from Georg Brandes's study of Shakespeare, one of the cardinal sources

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[7] These include the Elizabethan diction ('pen chivying her game'), the details about Shakespeare's house at 13 Silver Street, London, in a house owned by the Huguenot, Christopher Mountjoy, as well as Ben Jonson's famous line 'Sweet Swan of Avon' (Slote, Mamigonian and Turner, 2022: 356). The overall tone of this passage roughly follows from the opening of *A Day with William Shakespeare*—a fictionalised and imaginative account of a day in Shakespeare's life written for a wide, popular audience—by Maurice Clare (1913: 15, 18).

Joyce used. Brandes writes of *Hamlet*: 'And it is quite certain that when, in the first and fifth acts, he makes trumpet-blasts and the firing of the cannon accompany the healths which are drunk, he must have known that this was a specially Danish custom, and have tried to give his play local colour by introducing it' (Brandes, 1927: 359). This valorisation of local colour implies that aesthetic value emerges from the precise delineation of the world. Joycean mimesis is quite literally committed to trivia.

Stephen's theory, in brief, is that Shakespeare devised the play *Hamlet* as a means of expressing tangled sexual emotions occasioned by events in his life, specifically that his wife Anne Hathaway is having an affair. By having the play's protagonist echo his dead son's name, Shakespeare, by playing the ghost, can confess his wife's adultery to his dead son:

> Is it possible that that player Shakespeare, a ghost by absence, and in the vesture of buried Denmark, a ghost by death, speaking his own words to his own son's name (had Hamnet Shakespeare lived he would have been prince Hamlet's twin), is it possible, I want to know, or probable that he did not draw or foresee the logical conclusion of those premises: you are the dispossessed son: I am the murdered father: your mother is the guilty queen, Ann Shakespeare, born Hathaway? (*U* 9.174–80).

One small fact unmentioned in *Ulysses* is that Hamnet Shakespeare shares his birthday with Joyce: February 2. This is, I think, a key detail in understanding the theory's role and of understanding how Joyce is aligning himself with Shakespeare. Frank Budgen said that Nora once said to him about her husband, 'Ah, there's only one man he's got to get the better of now, and that's that Shakespeare!' (Hart, 1962: 163). In 'Scylla', Joyce uses Stephen and his theory to inscribe himself into a Shakespearean lineage as if he were inheriting the role of Shakespeare's dead son. This would be part of his strategy of remaking and remodelling the bard. Of course, Joyce is not making such lofty claims literally, but rather through the figurative displacement of Stephen who proposes, as Mulligan chided, 'that he himself is the ghost of his own father' (*U* 1.555–57). There is, of course, another element to Stephen's theory even if Stephen is not overtly aware of this. Like Stephen's Shakespeare, Bloom is a cuckolded husband and father to a dead son. As well as Stephen, Bloom is implicated in the theory, which gives it a larger function within the thematics of *Ulysses* and thus helps distinguish Stephen's theory from Joyce's.

Fundamentally, Stephen proposes Shakespeare as an artist who reconfigures the events of his life into his art, 'transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving art' (*P* 221), as he has it in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. This is not to say that Stephen claims that *Hamlet* is autobiographical in the sense of

representing the facticities of lived experience in something like a coherent narrative. Rather, the play represents the emotional affects of those lived experiences into a transvalued, aestheticised, stylised narrative. This is congruous with how Joyce defined the valences of the autobiographical portrait right at the start of the 1904 'A Portrait of the Artist' essay, 'a portrait is not an identificative paper but rather the curve of an emotion' (*P* 258). We get a sense of this conceptualisation of artistic portraiture in an exchange between Eglinton and Best:

> —Certainly, John Eglinton mused, of all great men he is the most enigmatic. We know nothing but that he lived and suffered. Not even so much. Others abide our question. A shadow hangs over all the rest.
> —But *Hamlet* is so personal, isn't it? Mr Best pleaded. I mean, a kind of private paper, don't you know, of his private life. I mean, I don't care a button, don't you know, who is killed or who is guilty… (*U* 9.359−64).

The autobiographical mode that Joyce proposes synthesises Eglinton and Best's points, thereby revealing that they do not contradict each other: the portrait is personal, deeply personal, without necessarily revealing anything of the facts of the artist's life.

Indeed, such an autobiographical mode is exactly how Stephen advances his argument. The librarians take a Platonic view of artistic creation, that the artist's creative genius is utterly independent from 'the trammelling accidents and limitations of real life' (Wilde, 1908: 145), to quote the unnamed narrator of Wilde's story. Thus, Eglinton challenges Stephen's emphasis on the relevance of Anne Hathaway to Shakespeare's plays, saying 'She died, for literature at least, before she was born' (*U* 9.216). To which Stephen retorts:

> She died […] sixtyseven years after she was born. She saw him into and out of the world. She took his first embraces. She bore his children and she laid pennies on his eyes to keep his eyelids closed when he lay on his deathbed (*U* 9.217−20).

Stephen here asserts Anne Hathaway's primacy through the accumulation of local colour. He gets the detail about the pennies set on Shakespeare's corpse's eyelids not from any of the various critical and biographical works he has read, but rather from his own experiences:

> Mother's deathbed. Candle. The sheeted mirror. Who brought me into this world lies there, bronzelidded, under few cheap flowers. *Liliata rutilantium* (*U* 9.221−23).

Stephen transposes an element from his mother's funeral onto his Shakespearean drama. Indeed, once this detail is recognised, one can no longer see his reply to Eglinton as being only about Anne Hathaway: 'She saw him into and out of the world. She took his first embraces'. This suggests that Stephen's theory is haunted by his guilt over his mother's death, by his 'Agenbite of inwit' (*U* 1.481). If Wilde had expressed the complexities of his sexuality through his theory of Shakespeare and Willie Hughes, then Stephen expresses the complexities of his Agenbite by deflecting his guilt into a theory of artistic patrimony, one which suppresses the maternal in favour of a patrilineal succession:

> A father, Stephen said, battling against hopelessness, is a necessary evil. […] Fatherhood, in the sense of conscious begetting, is unknown to man. It is a mystical estate, an apostolic succession, from only begetter to only begotten. 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. *Amor matris*, subjective and objective genitive, may be the only true thing in life. Paternity may be a legal fiction. Who is the father of any son that any son should love him or he any son? (*U* 9.828–45).

Fatherhood supersedes maternity precisely because it is uncertain. The patrilineal relation is paramount because it is metaphysical, not merely physical or biological. This is the rhetorical move Stephen makes as part of his strategy of inscribing himself as an artist of Shakespearean magnitude. But this move is also made as a battle 'against hopelessness', a bulwark against uncertainty. He has characterised Shakespeare as an artist suspiciously not unlike the type of artist he himself aspires to become, an artist who transvalues life into art. Stephen's portrait of Shakespeare is thus also, at least in part, a portrait of himself as an artist. Such a rhetorical move inverts the Bloomian (as in Harold Bloom) anxiety of influence into something like what Jonathan Lethem calls the ecstasy of influence.[8] Rather than occasion paralysis, influence can occasion inspiration, such as Joyce's creative reworkings of, among others, Shakespeare and Wilde's imaginative tweaking of Thomas Tyrwhitt's Willie Hughes idea. But this move Stephen makes is bi-directional or even uroboric: he inscribes himself as the successor to Shakespeare *by* characterising Shakespeare as an artist like himself. This is analogous to the move Blake posits in his poem *Milton*: 'Thus Milton stood forming bright Urizen' (Blake, 1988: 114, pl. 20, l. 10). Milton creates the very god who creates

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[8] Lethem credits the expression—and its 'rebuking play' to Bloom—to spoken remarks made by Richard Dienst (Lethem, 2007: 68).

Milton. Stephen's self-portrait, realised through Shakespeare, enables 'the son [to be] consubstantial with the father' (*U* 9.481).

Beyond using Shakespeare as a vehicle to express a complex psychological state, Stephen's theory, like Wilde's, uses Shakespeare as a model for the manner of artistic expression. Unlike Graham's theory of Willie Hughes, Stephen's theory does not rest solely on the internal evidence of the text as he makes recourse to various secondary and critical studies of Shakespeare. And while he does not resort to outright forgery as Graham had done, Stephen does knowingly distort facts to fit his narrative. For example, Stephen claims that Shakespeare's birth in 1564 was marked by the appearance of a bright new star (a nova) in Cassiopeia, a constellation whose main stars trace out the letter W, 'A star, a daystar, a firedrake rose at his birth [...] by night it shone over delta in Cassiopeia, the recumbent constellation which is the signature of his initial among the stars' (*U* 9.928−31). However, as he admits to himself right afterwards, this supernova did not actually appear at Shakespeare's birth: 'Don't tell them he was nine years old when it was quenched' (*U* 9.936).[9] Shakespeare's birth-star is Stephen's forgery.

A more egregious distortion comes in the initial formulation of Stephen's theory. A key element of the theory is that Shakespeare wrote the play *Hamlet* so he could address his son Hamnet, 'calling him by a name: *Hamlet, I am thy father's spirit*, bidding him list' (*U* 9.169−71). The problem here is that Stephen is mis-citing the play to suit his rhetorical purposes. In the play, the line is simply 'I am thy father's spirit' (*Hamlet* I.v.9); the ghost does not address his son by name.[10] In 'Lestrygonians', Bloom had also cited this line (*U* 8.67) with this same spurious apostrophe, thereby further implicating him into the argument as presented in 'Scylla' (Slote, 2008: 166−67). Bloom's mis-citation is a characteristic flub, whereas Stephen's may well be a fib.

Stephen's argument, which started by positing Shakespeare as playing the role of King Hamlet, evolves into a theory of Shakespeare as the pre-eminent figure of a godlike artist, Coleridge's polytropic 'myriadminded man' (*U* 9.768),[11] who encompasses all creation and, in so doing, creates himself. But it does stem from what Stephen calls the 'original sin that darkened his understanding' (*U* 9.1006), that is, his cuckolding and betrayal by his brother which finds sublimated expression everywhere in his works:

[9] The supernova Stephen refers to was discovered by Tycho Brahe on 11th November 1572 and disappeared after eighteen months (Slote, 2008: 165).

[10] The *New Variorum* edition of *Hamlet* does not indicate any textual or editorial issues here: the apostrophe is unequivocally absent (Shakespeare, 1877: vol. 1, 96). The *New Oxford Shakespeare* corroborates this (Shakespeare, 2017: 1154).

[11] In the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge writes that his own work could not surpass 'the greatest genius, that perhaps human nature has yet produced, our myriad-minded Shakespeare' (Coleridge, 1985: 320).

Age has not withered it. Beauty and peace have not done it away. It is in infinite variety everywhere in the world he has created, in *Much Ado about Nothing*, twice in *As You Like It*, in *The Tempest*, in *Hamlet*, in *Measure for Measure*—and in all the other plays which I have not read (*U* 9.1011−15).

After this bravura performance, Stephen 'laughed to free his mind from his mind's bondage' (*U* 9.1016). He attempts self-abnegation through an act of vanity and humour. Theatricality is part of Stephen's strategy in presenting his theory. Beyond Stephen, theatricality and artifice are very much part of Joyce's strategy in presenting Stephen, as evinced throughout the episode in flourishes of Shakespearean diction, a brief excursion into dramatic form (*U* 9.893−934), and the plainchant musical notation of the opening words of the Great Doxology of the Mass (*U* 9.500). Joyce, through Stephen, has created a vast imaginary world in which Shakespeare creates a vast imaginary world, but there is still something off. Stephen's initial premise is incomplete since Shakespeare, in his divine plenitude, could not be reduced to any one of his characters. As Eglinton observes: 'The truth is midway […] He is the ghost and the prince. He is all in all' (*U* 9.1018−19). Stephen is struck by this comment and agrees: 'He is […] The boy of act one is the mature man of act five' (*U* 9.1020). Stephen has thus responded to the dialectical exchange and modified his theory into something else, no longer a theory of Shakespearean autobiographical transvaluation, but rather a more general theory of artistic production in a scene concatenated from Shakespeare's works and days:

Every life is many days, day after day. We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love, but always meeting ourselves. The playwright who wrote the folio of this world and wrote it badly (He gave us light first and the sun two days later), the lord of things as they are whom the most Roman of catholics calls *dio boia*, hangman god, is doubtless all in all in all of us, ostler and butcher, and would be bawd and cuckold too but that in the economy of heaven, foretold by Hamlet, there are no more marriages, glorified man, an androgynous angel, being a wife unto himself (*U* 9.1044−52).

If Shakespeare is all his characters, 'all in all' as Eglinton has said, then this omnipresence is itself present in everyone, 'all in all in all of us', as Stephen says. This marks the important modification Stephen makes to his æsthetics of egoism. The artist, whether Shakespeare or Wilde or Stephen or Joyce or God, is not the sole focal point; egoism is multi-polar. Any man can be an everyman, just as any day can be a Bloomsday, or as Stephen puts it, 'Every life is many days, day after day' (*U* 9.1044).

This has obvious ramifications for *Ulysses*. Bloom is not just implicated in Stephen's theory through the details of adultery and the dead son, but also through the multi-polarity of the myriadminded everyman. And so, the characterisation of Shakespeare as an everyman indicates how Joyce's theory of Shakespeare differs from Stephen's. Corollary to Bloom's status as an everyman is the proposition that *any* man could be an everyman. Joyce's Shakespeare is the artistic everyman through which Stephen and Bloom are synthesised.

Stephen has elevated Shakespeare to artistic divinity—the 'all in all in all of us'. This makes the figure of the artist entirely self-sufficient and self-creating, ontologically self-sufficient but also, as a direct consequence of Stephen's formulation, alone and isolated, 'an androgynous angel, being a wife unto himself' (*U* 9.1052). In crafting this new formulation of this theory, Stephen has doubled back on himself and so remains not quite free from his 'mind's bondage' (*U* 9.1016). Mulligan immediately sees the implication of this point and uses it in his mocking pastiche of Stephen's argument: '*Everyman his own wife*' (*U* 9.1171). Mulligan's crass joke reveals the fundamental flaw in Stephen's theory: that it is sterile.[12]

When asked by Eglinton whether he believes in his own theory about Anne Hathaway's adultery, Stephen promptly admits that he does not (*U* 9.1065–67). But his thoughts betray some doubt about his unbelief:

> I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief. That is, help me to believe or help me to unbelieve? Who helps to believe? *Egomen.* Who to unbelieve? Other chap (*U* 9.1078–80).

As with Wilde's story, this passage complicates and ambiguates the status of belief. Stephen does not necessarily *not* believe in his proposed theory, and there's the rub. On the side of belief lies the *egomen*, which can be explained as the Greek expression *ego men*, 'I, for my part' or 'I myself'. This is clearer on the Rosenbach draft, where Joyce wrote: 'Who helps to believe? I myself' (Joyce, 1975: 'Scylla' f. 32). This *egomen* connects to Mulligan's mocking characterisation: 'He proves […] that he himself is the ghost of his own father' (*U* 1.555–57). To believe wholeheartedly in the theory is to believe unreservedly in *he himself*, without admitting doubt. And, as Booth has it, 'Total sincerity is a terrible thing. It is fierce, relentless and unable to relax' (1983: 181). In asking, or pleading, 'help my unbelief', Stephen wants to loosen the binds of total sincerity. And so, on the side of unbelief there's everybody else, the 'other chap'. Stephen

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[12] This point redounds to the famous editorial problem of whether or not love *is* the word known to all of humanity; I discuss this in my essay 'A Portrait of the Editor as Arranger' (Slote, 2024: 107–11).

thus retracts an admission of belief ever so slightly, not unlike Wilde's near-denial after his performance of his 'Portrait of Mr W. H.'.

Stephen himself does not believe, necessarily, in the manifest content of his theory (all the business about Anne Hathaway's adultery), but that is perhaps the least essential question here. Stephen's theory matters for *Ulysses* not because it is a forensic explanation of the factual or historical factors behind Shakespeare's artistic motivations. Rather, like Wilde's text, it demonstrates or even performs how art can be made out of life. What is more important is not the belief in the manifest content of the theory, but rather that Stephen believes in the artistry or artifice that sustained that theory during its performance at the National Library. That is, he commits to his performance. Of course, Stephen's theory is neither camp nor even a camp fad—as per Booth's typology—but it has a camp element in that Stephen's near-belief is no impediment to an authenticity of artistic expression. For both Stephen and Graham, insincerity itself is part of the aesthetic content. Like Cyril Graham, Stephen has concocted a fictional world devised for a deflected, transvalued aesthetic self-expression. He expresses himself through Shakespeare, the 'all in all in all of us'. In proposing a theory about Shakespeare, Stephen and Graham reveal something of themselves. Stephen's autobiographical self-presentation through Shakespeare may be insincere—he may still not himself believe in his theory—but it is still honest in its fastidiousness, its focus on trivia, on local colour, on the mechanics of turning life, however imperfect, into art.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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