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in
James Joyce's
A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man**

Michelle Brackvitch
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The construction of identity. This is the aim of Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, as he attempts to fashion, for himself, an image of the ideal artist. Indeed, he reinvents himself by painting a new self identity. By adopting the mythological figure of Daedalus, the great artificer of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Stephen gains a new father figure, a new sense of destiny, and a new role as son.

Daedalus serves as a symbol for Stephen's call to art, and by answering this calling, Stephen believes that he can find his way to personal and artistic freedom. With Daedalus as his guide, Stephen seeks to transform life into art, indeed, "to recreate life out of life" (*Portrait*:339). Stephen is perfectly warranted in calling on Daedalus to be his guide, for the image of the great craftsman is often associated with the successful artist or poet. In his treatise, *An Apology for Poetry*, Sir Philip Sidney (1595:158) asserts "Yet confess I always that as the fertilest ground must be manured, so the highest-flying wit have a Daedalus to guide him. That Daedalus, they say, both in this and in other, hath three wings to bear itself up into the air of due commendation: that is art, imitation, and exercise". Yet, there is a danger for Stephen in adopting Daedalus as his guide, for proud Stephen invariably runs the risk of casting himself in the role of Icarus, Daedalus' overeager son who is doomed to fail. The image of Icarus has ominous undertones and is often associated with the idea of the failed poet. As Robert McMahon (1998:28) states in *The Two Poets of Paradise Lost*, "Icarus is a traditional figure for the poet who fails through excessive ambition and, in Christian allegory on Ovid, a figure for Satan". Not only does Stephen run the risk of being

associated with Icarus, but his arrogant assertion that he is not afraid of even eternal damnation, accompanied with his refusal to serve God and country, echoes Satan's proud, "Non Serviam".

Many scholars have contemplated the ironic complexity of the Daedalus and Icarus myth, and have debated exactly what it implies about the character of Stephen. How should one read Stephen; is he a Daedalus or an Icarus? Should his flight to art be perceived as one of success or failure? Some scholars argue in favor of Daedalus (Evans:1956, Reilly:1956) others Icarus (Harkness:1984, Kenner: 1956, Buttigieg:1987, and Thornton:1994). Some have argued that Joyce is purposefully ambiguous so that a clear reading is impossible (Radford:1987, Harkness:1990), and still another argues that Stephen is both Daedalus and Icarus (Reguelin:1983), and the opposing figures should be read as an inseparable duality. I would argue, however, that Stephen is indeed an Icarus figure, for the images of chaotic flight, flames, falling and, most significantly, images of the sea link Stephen overwhelmingly with Icarus.

Although images of chaotic flight, flames, and falling litter the text, it is the undercurrent of water imagery that solidly connects Stephen's fate with that of the fallen Icarus. Joyce himself deflates the main epiphany found in chapter IV before it even begins, for Stephen's call to be an artist initially issues forth from the sea. It is here too, within the shallow waters, that he meets his soul, and thus seemingly confirms his destiny. Finally, the creative process itself swims within the imaginative waves of sea imagery. Stephen may adopt Daedalus as the symbol of his calling yet, ironically, the

entirety of his great flight is undercut by this watery metaphor. If Stephen's imaginary and literal flight were meant to be read as successful undertakings, then Joyce would not have left his young protagonist drowning in such carefully designed imagery.

Finally, Stephen's last words in the narrative link him directly with Icarus. As he writes "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead", Stephen casts himself firmly in the role of Icarus. Throughout the narrative, Stephen remains unaware of the Icarian implications and the unrealistic nature of his expectations. Nevertheless, I believe that the words, written much like a final prayer, are, in fact, an act of defiance, a further manifestation of his "Non Serviam". As he tells Davin in chapter V, "When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, and religion. I shall try to fly by those nets" (Portrait:367). I believe that Stephen flies in the face of danger for he is confident in his ability and trusts that he will not fail. To aim at freedom, even in the face of imminent defeat, is the boldness of youth. It is the act of striving, of attempting flight that truly inspires this young artist.

In this essay, I will relate the Daedalus myth, and indicate how it portends disaster for Stephen. I will present the origins of Icarus as the failed poet and show how the image of Icarus is often used as an allusion for Satan. I will then demonstrate that Stephen is meant to be read as an Icarus figure by drawing attention to the significance of the water imagery surrounding Stephen's call to be an artist. I will show that Joyce uses sea imagery throughout chapters IV and V to deflate not only

Stephen's initial calling, but also his grand epiphany and his attempt at transmuting life into art.

The Daedalus Myth

The myth of Daedalus and Icarus, as it is told in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, is a tale that examines the risks associated with over-confidence, misplaced ambition, and disobedience to one's father or creator. Daedalus is the famous artisan who, in the service of Minos, constructed a labyrinth on the island of Crete to contain the Minotaur. He and his son were subsequently imprisoned within the maze in order to protect its secrets.¹ Growing homesick for his native land, the exiled Daedalus uses his arts to create wings for him and his son to escape Crete. Before the fateful flight, Daedalus warns his son to stay the middle flight. "I warn you Icarus" he says "fly a middle course. Don't go too low or the water will weigh the wings down; don't go too high, or the sun's fire will burn them. Keep to the middle way" (*Metamorphosis* VIII, 203-206). He then tells his son to follow his lead. Daedalus also tells his son not to fly to the North or to the South. Icarus, however, overjoyed by the wonders of flight, leaves his father and strikes his own path. As the tale tells us, Icarus "soared higher, higher, drawn to the vast heaven, nearer the sun, and the wax that held the wings melted in that fierce heat, and the bare arms beat up and down in air, and lacking oarage took hold of nothing"

¹For Stephen Dedalus, Ireland is his Crete, and the streets of Dublin form the maze which entraps him. Like Daedalus, he must resort to flight in order to escape. See Cheryl Herr's essay, "Deconstructing Dedalus." She asserts that, "Ovid's maze stands equivalent to the narrative structure of *Portrait*" (Herr:1993:353).

(Metamorphosis VIII, 225-229). Then the boy plummeted, “until the blue sea hushed him” (Metamorphosis VIII, 230).

The story of Daedalus and Icarus portends disaster for the character of Stephen Dedalus. By adopting the figure of Daedalus as his new father and guide, Stephen runs a number of risks. First, he is in danger of being associated with Icarus. Such an association would suggest that he is doomed to fail as a poet. Second, since Icarus’ failure is a consequence of Daedalus’ ambition to transmute nature into art, the implication is that art itself is a source of danger. And lastly, Stephen risks an association with Satan, for Icarus is a well-known allegory for the Satan.

(McMahon:1998:31)

The origin for Icarus as a failed poet comes from the odes of Horace. In book four, Horace writes, “Whoever labors to be Pindar’s equal,/ Iulus, mounts on wings that are fastened with wax,/ Daedalus-fashion, and will give his name to/ glittering water” (Horace: IV,2). The poet’s address to Iulus Antonius warns that all those attempting incredible heights of ambition will fall, like Icarus to a disastrous end. In book two, Horace, celebrating his success as a renowned poet, describes his transformation into a swan and his ensuing flight. He says, “No paltry or commonplace wings will loft me / through the fluent air in my doubled form as / a poet...I am metamorphosed / to a white bird, and soft feathers are / forming upon my fingers and shoulders” (Horace: II,20). He goes on to say that he will be more celebrated than Daedalean Icarus because his flight will be successful. Icarus gave his name to the

Icarian Sea, into which he fell, but Horace's name will forever soar among the great poets.

The tradition on Icarus as a failed poet shadows Stephen's flight to art. Although he calls on Daedalus, the great artificer, to guide him, the Icarian implications weight him down. By adopting such an image, Stephen risks casting himself in the role of the fallen son, and thus, the failed and forgotten artist, indeed, one drowned in a sea of anonymity. Such anonymity is described by both W.H. Auden and William Carlos Williams as they comment on a painting by Brueghel.² In his poem "Musee des Beaux Arts" Auden writes, "the ploughman may/ have heard the slash, the forsaken cry,/ But for him it was not an important failure... and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen/ Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,/ Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on." Likewise, Williams in "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus", writes that Icarus fell with "a splash quite unnoticed" as spring blossomed and farmers worked in the fields. In both poems, no one was concerned with the fate of Icarus, and his foolhardy attempt went unnoticed. The Daedalus myth suggests that this too will be Stephen's fate, a foreshadowing that he will fail as a poet. At the very inception of his call to art, Stephen himself unknowingly impairs his *vision* of becoming a successful artist .

² Pieter Brueghel the Elder (c. 1525-1569), a Flemish painter who painted a landscape in which Icarus is depicted by only a tiny leg sticking out of the sea in one corner of the picture.

Not only does Stephen run the risk of casting himself in the role of the failed poet, he also risks another type of failure. Like Daedalus, Stephen, in his desire to become a poet, “turned his thinking toward unknown arts, changing the laws of nature”(Metamorphosis: 189-190) . Stephen proclaims that as an artist, he will become “a priest of the eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life.”(Portrait: 382) The Daedalus myth, however, suggests that art is a source of danger. Because of his art, indeed, because of his transformation of nature, Daedalus loses his only son, and the artificer is left cursing “his own arts” (Metamorphosis: 234). In the *Inferno*, Dante Alighieri tells of a man eternally condemned for practicing such arts, such “alchemy.” (Inferno:XXIX:118-120) And as McMahon(1998:29) asserts, “the greater one’s power to transform nature, the greater the danger... Icarus’ excessive boldness in flight emerges from Daedalus’ bold excess in invention”. Stephen, therefore, whether he is perceived as a Daedalus or an Icarus, is in danger of falling victim to his own arts.

More disastrous for Stephen, however, is that the allusions to Icarus give rise to allusions of Satan. Icarus is a noted allegory for Satan, the tradition being found in any number of sources. The *Ovide Moralise’* links Icarus to the fallen angels, and images linking Icarus to Satan are also found in Dante’s *Inferno*. In Canto XVII of the *Inferno*, both Icarus and Phaeton are used as examples of pride and as allegories for Satan (McMahon:1998:31). Of Phaeton and Icarus Dante writes:

I doubt if Phaeton feared more—that time
he dropped the sun—reins of his father’s chariot

and burned the streak of sky we see today—

or if poor Icarus did—feeling his sides

unfeathering as the wax began to melt,

his father shouting: Wrong, your course is wrong”—

(Inferno XVII:106-111)

Just as Satan aspired to achieve godly heights, so too do Phaeton and Icarus aspire to heavenly heights beyond their natures. Consequently, they both plummet headlong into the sea, and their falling imitates that of Satan's when he is cast from heaven.

Images linking Stephen with Satan are found throughout the text of *Portrait*. In the beginning of chapter IV, Stephen rejects the idea of serving his God and church by refusing the call to the priesthood. Recalling the voice of the director offering him secret knowledge and power, Stephen thinks, "His soul was not ready to hear and greet it and he knew that the exhortation he had listened to had already fallen into an idle formal tale." (Portrait:331) Stephen then predicts his own fall. He thinks:

The snares of the world were its ways of sin. He would *fall*.

He had not yet *fallen* but he would *fall* silently, in an instant. Not to *fall* was too hard, too hard: and he felt the silent lapse of his soul, as it would be at some instant to come, *falling, falling*, but not yet *fallen*, still *unfallen*, but about to *fall*. (Portrait:331: my emphasis)

This imagery of falling links Stephen with both Icarus and Satan. So too do the many references to Stephen's pride. Joyce writes, "Pride after satisfaction uplifted him like slow waves. The end he had been born to serve yet did not see had lead him to escape by an unseen path: and now it beckoned to him once more and a new adventure was about to be opened to him" (Portrait:333).

The strongest of the satanic implications is revealed when Stephen boldly proclaims "I will not serve". In chapter V, Stephen tells Cranly:

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call
itself my home, my fatherland or my church: And I will try to express
myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I
can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use, silence,
exile, and cunning. (Portrait:405)

Stephen's refusal to serve calls to mind a tradition on Satan that has developed throughout the ages. In the book of Jeremiah, a message is delivered to the Israelites calling for them to repent for they have turned away from God. In his speech, Jeremiah alludes to Satan's refusal to serve, "Long ago you broke your yoke, you tore of your bonds. 'I will not serve' you said." (Jeremiah:2:20) In Milton's, *Paradise Lost*, Satan makes a similar boast. In book I, 258-263, Satan proclaims, "Here at least/ We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built/ Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:/ Here we may reign secure, and in my choice/ To reign is worth ambition in Hell:/ Better to reign in

Hell, than to serve in heav'n". Just as Satan is recorded as having refused to serve God in heaven, so too does Stephen proudly assert his freedom by refusing to serve both his God and country.³

A further allusion to Satan surfaces when Stephen asserts, "I do not fear to be alone or to be spurned for another or to leave whatever I have to leave. And I am not afraid to make a mistake, even a great mistake, a lifelong mistake and perhaps as long as eternity too"(Portrait:406). Stephen's arrogant assertion that he is not afraid of making a mistake, even a mistake that could cost him eternal damnation, along with his refusal to serve his God and country, clearly mirrors Satan's proud, "Non Serviam".

According to Reilly (1956:48), "Stephen's defiant *non serviam* is the public announcement of his mission. It is the prelude to the new cult of art, whose priest is Daedalus incarnate". Although Stephen embraces the figure of Daedalus as the inspiring force of his new vocation, the Daedalus myth forecasts a dark shadow on his future as an artist. Not only is Stephen ignorant of the risks associated with the practicing of "his own arts," he is also unaware of both the Icarian and Satanic implications attached to the myth.

³Stephen views Ireland and the Catholic church as systems which threaten his individuality. Seamus Deane asserts that, " Stephen feels the threat of his borrowed culture when it seeks to co-opt him, when it tries to recruit him into a system of institutionalized borrowing, either through the vocation of the priesthood or through a commitment to Irish nationalism. (Deane:xviii)

Stephen as Icarus

Chapter IV of *Portrait* contains one of Joyce's most profoundly beautiful, yet paradoxical, epiphanies (337-338). It is a moment of ecstasy for Stephen as he soars on the newly fashioned wings of his newly created identity. For the first time, Stephen begins to identify fully with his namesake, his mythological father, Daedalus. Indeed, the figure of the fabulous artificer becomes the prophetic symbol of his calling. Stephen's choice of a symbolic father, however, is ripe with paradoxical implications and many scholars have debated whether Stephen is, indeed, a Daedalus figure or that of his ill-fated son Icarus. Joyce himself further complicates how one should read Stephen by invoking the Daedalus myth and presenting its darker implications through the epigraph heading the novel. According to Hugh Kenner (1956: 17), the well placed epigraph tells all. He asserts, "That Dedalus the artificer did violence to nature is the point of the epigraph from Ovid, *Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes*; the Icarian fall is inevitable."⁴ Thus, by employing the myth before the story begins, Joyce artfully foretells Stephen's doom, that he is fated to fall victim to his own arts.

In his essay, "The Portrait as a Literary work" Fallon Evans (1956:27) asserts that, "The Dedalus myth controls the action dealing with Stephen's flight from Ireland to a life of exile; as Dedalus of the myth fashioned wings to escape from the island of Crete... so Stephen fashions his wings. He *will* escape the nets of religion, language, and nationality, by cunning, silence, and exile." (my emphasis) John Paul Reguelin

⁴ "And he sets his mind to work upon unknown arts." (Ovid, *Metamorphosis* VIII,190)

(1983:105) maintains, however, that Stephen is both Daedalus and Icarus and should be read as an inseparable duality. He states, "For Ovid, Daedalus and Icarus are separate. For Joyce they are not. Stephen as a character and as a narrator is both the immature and the mature artist, both Icarus and Daedalus. Because of the narrative's peculiar form, Stephen's destiny, like the fate of the mythic figures behind and within Joyce's fiction are to be read as dual". Still, Marguerite Harkness (1990) who, in an earlier work (1984), argued for Stephen as an Icarus, and who personally feels that Stephen is, indeed, doomed, now suggests that Joyce is deliberately ambiguous so that a clear reading is impossible. She states that the text offers inadequate information, maintaining that "The uncertainty of the novel's closure is the uncertainty of life. While some lines of images predict success and some failure, what is crucial is that which we do not know; it cannot be determined" (Harkness: 1990).

My contention is that Stephen is an Icarus figure. I am not alone in my conclusion, for many scholars have associated Stephen with Icarus, most notably, Harkness (1984), Kenner, Buttigieg, and Thornton. They have argued that although Stephen sees himself as Daedalus incarnate, one must bring the entire myth into examination, and thus find that there are Icarian implications littered throughout the text of *Portrait*. Kenner focuses on the epigraph, whereas, Buttigieg and Thornton concentrate primarily on the images of chaotic flight. Indeed, the imagery of flight, flames, and falling, clearly suggest that Stephen is not at all a Daedalus figure, but rather an Icarus figure. Just as he is the son of Simon Dedalus, so too is he the son of

his imagined father Daedalus. Stephen is the over-bold son disregarding the warning to “stay the middle course”.

Yet, one decisive image has been curiously overlooked, water, and more specifically the sea. In *The Aesthetics of Dedalus and Bloom*, Harkness (1984) alludes to the sea when she states, “Stephen has failed to see himself as Icarus, although he has seen himself as Daedalus’s son. He has skipped over the dangers to himself. The boys’ shouts “O, cripes, I’m drowned!... suggest that he, like Icarus, will end in the water having tried to fly too high.” Although the boys’ shouts foretell Stephen’s inevitable fall to the sea, the emphasis is on the image of failed flight. Water and the sea, however, are among the most prominent of the foreboding images.

The Sea Tells All

Within the text, the sea, more than any other image, reveals Stephen as Icarus. Indeed, Stephen’s glorious moment of triumph is shadowed by ominous undertones, for Stephen is submerged before his journey even begins. Not only is the action leading to Stephen’s epiphany surrounded by water imagery, so too is his very calling, with his bold flight ultimately landing him in a metaphorical sea. Self-cast in the role of Icarus, Stephen risks falling into the role of the failed poet, but as I will point out, it is a risk that he is willing to take.

Stephen feels that he is called to be an artist. Indeed, it is through the invocation of his own name that his calling or destiny is first revealed. As Stephen walks along the shore of the Irish Sea he hears in music-like tones, “A voice from beyond the world [that] was calling.” This voice becomes the voices of Stephen’s friends. Their cries ring

out “Hello, Stephanos! Here comes The Daedalus”. The playful banter of his friends, the exaggerated attention called to his name, “ Stephanos Daedalos! Bous Stephanoumenus! Bous Stephaneforos!” causes Stephen to hear and see his name in a new light, for as the boys play with his name, he himself is playing with or reflecting over his own identity. Just previous to their call, Stephen had been musing over his recent decision concerning the priesthood. His repetitive walk between Byron’s pub and Clontarf Chapel marks his indecision. Joyce writes:

From the door of Byron’s public-house to the gate of Clontarf Chapel, from the gate of Clontarf Chapel to the door of Byron’s public-house, and then back again to the chapel and then back again to the public-house he had paced slowly at first, planting his steps scrupulously in the spaces of patchwork of the footpath then timing their fall to the verses. (Portrait 333)

Which life shall he choose, the life of the priest or the life of the poet? Throughout his boyhood Stephen felt that he was destined to become a priest, yet at the decisive moment, “he had turned aside, obeying a wayward instinct... He had refused”(334). Then quite ironically, “He turned seaward”(334) to meet his fate.

Stephen, hearing his name thus spoken by his friends, manipulates the imagery it implies and begins to fashion a meaning for himself. For the first time, he truly

identifies with his namesake, and thus adopts the figure of Daedalus as his new father figure. As Harkness states,

Stephen's choice here provides some understanding of his sense of bloodline. If we take seriously Daedalus as the "old father" of the last diary entry, we conclude that Stephen discovers identity through revelation of the father – as though his new father reveals Stephen's true genetic makeup; the young man sees, knows, his end, his telos suddenly; it manifests itself. (Harkness:1990:67)

His new mythological father is a portentous symbol for his calling, and as I will indicate, one indicative of his falling. As Stephen's path is revealed to him, he thinks:

Now, at the name of the fabulous artificer, he seemed to hear and to see a winged form flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air. What did it mean? Was it a quaint device opening a page of some medieval book of prophecies and symbols, a hawklike man flying sunward above the sea, a prophecy of the end he had been born to serve and had been following through the mists of childhood and boyhood, a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being? (Portrait 337)

As Stephen breathes in the fullness of this image, he feels that his soul is uplifted, soaring beyond the world in a new kind of spiritual flight which is wholly different from the religious ecstasy he experienced as a younger child. Harkness (1990:66-67) points out that "Stephen sees in the sign, his name, what he feels is signified, his destiny ("a symbol of the artist")." Stephen identifies with Daedalus, obviously, because he shares his name, but more significantly because he too believes that he has been misled and mistreated, by the church, by God, and by country. The invocation of Daedalus offers a flight to freedom and Stephen now views this imaginary flight as a purging of his soul. Joyce writes:

His soul was soaring in an air beyond the world and the body he knew was purified in a breath and delivered of incertitude and made radiant and commingled with the element of the spirit. An ecstasy of flight made radiant the eyes and wild his breath and tremulous and wild his windswept limbs. (Portrait 337)

Through the symbol of Daedalus, Stephen attempts to free himself from a life of servitude so that he may begin life anew as an artist. Joyce writes, "This was the call of life to his soul not the dull gross voice of the world of duties and despair, not the inhuman voice that called him to the pale service of the altar. An instant of wild flight had delivered him"(Portrait 337). In his essay, "Non Ego - Non Serviam: The problem of Artistic Freedom", James P. Reilly,(1956) links Stephen directly with Daedalus. He

writes, "Here in clear unmistakable language Joyce delineates the nature of his calling. It is to be a creator, the great artificer creating proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul." Yet, is

Stephen truly a Daedalus preparing for flight, or is he but an Icarus doomed to fail?

One cannot dismiss the dangers attached to the image of Daedalus and the "wild flight" of his son Icarus. As Harkness (1984:43) states in "It is Joyce who shows us how the image of Daedalus, the fabulous artificer, in itself undercuts Stephen's perception of his position". The possibility of Stephen as an Icarus figure is immediately cast as the voices continue to issue forth from the sea. With the words of his friend, "O, Cripes, I'm drowned!" all the ominous undertones surface to catch the mind of the reader. Although Stephen identifies himself with Daedalus, the image of Icarus and the idea of the failed poet shadows his flight.

Icarus was warned to stay the middle flight, not to fly too low lest the water weigh his wings down and not to fly too high for the sun would melt them. He was also warned not to fly too far to the north or to the south. The imagery of flames suggests that Stephen, like Icarus, flies too high on excessive boldness. Joyce writes, "He started up nervously from the stoneblock for he could no longer quench the *flame* of his blood. He felt his cheeks were *afame* and his throat throbbing with song. There was a lust of *wandering* in his feet that *burned* to set out for the ends of the earth" (Portrait: 338: my emphasis). Like Icarus, Stephen is so overjoyed with flight that he wanders, leaving the middle way.

If Stephen's imaginary flight, his call to a new destiny is to be successful, he must first confirm his vocation by embracing his soul, and thus come to know his true self. His soul was not there to meet him at the calling to the priesthood. Yet here she greets him in the image of the birdgirl on the beach. Stephen feels that his vision of the girl marks his destiny, that she confirms his calling. Ironically the reflection of his soul comes to him as the image of a seabird standing in the water. The unity of the words *sea* and *bird* is significant, for as one will soon see, Stephen as Icarus the birdboy will soon find himself floating about in a watery metaphor. The reflection of his soul is described as:

A girl [who] stood before him in midstream: alone and still, gazing out to *sea*. She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful *seabird*. Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane's and pure save where the emerald trail of *seaweed* had fashioned itself a *sign* upon the flesh.

(Portrait: 339: my emphasis)

The vision of the girl reflects Stephen in many ways. As she stands alone boldly defiant of conventional behavior so too will Stephen stand, "alone and young and willful and wildhearted"(Portrait 338) when he fully embraces his life as an artist. The seaweed caught on the girl's ankle is a sign of her mortality and it suggests that both

she and Stephen are tied to the earth and sea, to the mundane world. As Suzette Henke (1982:68) asserts, "the vegetation clinging to her flesh suggests a viscous image of entrapment." They are but earthbound creatures wading through the waters of life who may occasionally experience an exulting flight. These flights will, however, be short lived, for the sea will always hold them. Moreover, Stephen remains completely blind to the fact that Icarus fell into the waters, and that he too is destined to undergo a similar fall. Indeed, all Stephen sees is the mark of destiny as an artist.

As Stephen gazes upon the face of "mortal beauty", he feels that he is gazing upon himself. And within his soul lies his art, in the mortal beauty of life itself, for "Her image had passed into his soul for ever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called to him and his soul had leaped to the call. To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life of life!"(Portrait 339). It seems that Stephen accepts all that life entails, failures and triumphs together. Reilly (1956:48) maintains that, "This [the meeting with the birdgirl] is his message of freedom. He is now Dedalus incarnate, a fabricator of universes and a manipulator of destinies." Yet, Stephen does not truly see the girl, this "*mortal* beauty", this vision of his soul and confirmer of his destiny. He sees only, "one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird" (339). Not only is Stephen blind to the Icarian implications undermining his imagined flight, but also his vision of the birdgirl leaves him blind to the reality of the mortal girl. His soul may be soaring, but his soaring is a type of running, a wild dash from all such human encounters.

The epiphany ends with Stephen submerged in a dreamlike sea. This image of drowning is the strongest implication that Stephen is meant to be read as an Icarus figure and not as a Daedalus incarnate. Joyce writes:

He closed his eyes in the languor of sleep. His eye lids trembled as if they felt the vast cycle movement of the earth and her watchers, trembled as if they felt the strange light of some new world. His soul was swooning into some new world, fantastic, dim, uncertain as *under* sea, traversed by cloudy shapes and beings. A world, a glimmer, or a flower? Glimmering and trembling, trembling and unfolding, a breaking light, an opening flower, it spread in endless succession to itself, breaking in full crimson and unfolding and fading to the palest rose, leaf by leaf and wave of light by wave of light, *flooding* all the heavens with its soft flushes, every flush deeper than the other.

(Portrait:164: my emphasis)

It is a paradoxical passage for the image of *breaking light* and that of the *opening flower* suggests that Stephen has reached a new level of awareness. Indeed, on one level, it appears that he has been transformed through the inspirational figures of the imagined Daedalus and the lovely birdgirl. Evans (1956:27) argues that in answering his call to art, Stephen has undergone a kind of Baptism, where he is

ordained a priest of art. Yet has Stephen, then, been reborn? Has he discovered his true destiny with his soul there to meet the call?

Intermixed with these powerful images are still stronger signs which point to Stephen's imminent fall. That "his soul was swooning into some new world, fantastic, dim, uncertain as *under sea*" reveals that Stephen's wild flight has ended in much the same way as the doomed Icarus. If he were newly baptized as a priest of art, then one would see a changed Stephen in chapter V. Instead we see Stephen as he "drained his third cup of watery tea to the dregs and set to chewing the crusts of fried bread that were scattered near him, staring into the dark pool of the jar"(Portrait 341). Here Joyce paints for us a picture of a boy caught in the mundane world of decay and corruption.

Joyce further undercuts Stephen's joy by twice noting that "Evening had fallen"(Portrait: 340). Not only has Stephen's symbolic flight failed, much like that of Icarus', so to has he passed from light to darkness, furthering the satanic implications. The epiphany scene then closes with "the tide flowing in fast to the land with a low whisper of her waves" (Portrait: 340). For the reader, it is this whisper of the waves that will shadow the sense of Stephen's destiny. The image of Stephen as an artist is born from the image of water and this image continues throughout the remainder of the narrative. Indeed, the creative process itself is surrounded by water imagery, and the memory of Icarus lingers.

In chapter V, Stephen awakes from sleep to create the first poem of his new calling. Joyce writes:

Towards dawn he awoke. O what sweet music! His soul was all *dewy*
wet. Over his limbs in sleep pale cool waves of light had passed. He
lay still, as if his soul lay amid *cool waters*, conscious of faint sweet
music. His mind was waking slowly to a tremulous morning knowledge
a morning inspiration. A spirit filled him, pure as the purest *water*,
sweet as dew, moving as music. (Portrait: 379: my emphasis)

Here, Stephen's inspiration to write is closely linked with the image of water,
and as John B. Smith(1987:182) states in the *Imagery and the Mind of Stephen*
Dedalus, "The images *dew, wet, cool, waves, sweet music*, as well as the act of waking
from a dream suggest the epiphanic experience on the beach where the image of the
girl fused with sea and bird in the image of *seabird*". Yet, Stephen is using his art as a
means to escape. Not an escape to artistic freedom and expansion of thought, but as
an escape from his fear of real life sexual encounters. As Buttigieg (1987:67) states,
"Stephen transforms his lust into a villanelle. He escapes and avoids the potential
embarrassment of human sexual encounter by wallowing self-indulgently in the unreal
beauty of words". It is through the beauty of words that Stephen wishes to "recreate life
out of life", yet at this stage, he is merely creating a means to escape his life.

As Stephen composes the stanzas of his villanelle, he imagines E. C. standing
before him. Of this moment Joyce writes, the vision of her "enfolded him like *water* with
a *liquid* life: and like a cloud of vapor or like *waters* circumfluent in space the *liquid*

letters of speech, symbols of the element of mystery, *flowed* forth over his brain.”(Portrait: 384 my emphasis) Surrounded by the comfort of his dreams, he writes. Stephen, however, “forgets, just as Kierkgaard maintains, Fredrich Schelgel forgot, ‘that to live is something different from to dream’”(Buttigieg: 1987:67).

The most beautiful and profoundly telling of these water passages comes after Stephen observes the flight of many birds outside the library. This scene serves as still more reinforcement to remind the reader of Stephen’s connection with Icarus. As he describes their flight pattern, one is struck by the symbolism. “They were flying high and low but ever round and round in straight and curving lines and ever flying from left to right, circling about a temple of air”(Portrait 385). Stephen identifies with the birds for he sees himself forever going and coming, building unlasting homes among men, and forever wandering. Stephen then remembers the following verses from Yeats’ play, “The Countess Cathleen:”⁵

Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel,

I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes

Upon the nest under the eave before

He wanders the loud waters. (Portrait: 386)

⁵ Yeats, W. B. “The Countess Cathleen”. 1892. The story tells of a time of famine where demons, disguised as merchants, offer gold and food to the hungry peasants in exchange for their souls. Countess Cathleen, a generous and pious woman, assumes the role of martyr by offering her soul in exchange for the peasants. In the end both angels and demons battle for he soul and the heavenly powers win.

Stephen once again identifies with soaring birds, yet now, in his reflection, he places himself among the “loud waters”. Perhaps Stephen is beginning to grow aware of the dangers associated with his new devotion and chosen symbol. He has identified with Daedalus, yet now a flicker of doubt seems to haunt him. Indeed, what if he should fail? The countess’ next line in the play may reveal Stephen’s line of thinking. She says, “Do not weep/ Too great a while, for there is many a candle/ On the high altar though one fall” (Yeats[1892]1934:30). By identifying with the Countess, Stephen places himself in the role of the martyr. If he should fail as an artist, if his exile should prove fruitless, then at least, he has tried. One can but strive for greatness. Here Stephen attempts to clip the wings of his fear. He perceives his destiny to be that of an artist, and although uncertainty and trepidation slightly temper his resolve, he knows that he must aim for that “high altar”.

A final water passage illustrates that Stephen’s destiny is set, that he is cast from an Icarian mold.

A soft *liquid* joy like the noise of many *waters flowed* over his memory and he felt in his heart the soft peace of silent spaces of tenuous sky above the *waters*, of *oceanic silence*, of swallows flying through the seadusk over the *flowing waters*.

A soft liquid joy *flowed* through the words where the soft long

vowels hurtled noiselessly and fell away, *lapping* and *flowing*
back and ever shaking the white bells of their waves in mute
chime and mute peal and soft low crooning cry; and he felt that
the augury he had sought in the *wheeling darting birds* and in
the pale space of sky above him had come forth from his heart
like a *bird* from a turret quietly and swiftly. (Portrait: 387)

Here the images of flight and water come together. Again Stephen identifies with *the wheeling darting birds* who foretell his fate. Just as Icarus's flight ended in disaster, so too will Stephen's imaginary flight end with him falling into a soft *liquid joy*, where the *flowing waters*, are forever *lapping*, and *flowing*, drowning him in *oceanic silence*

Conclusion

Stephen, attempting to create a new self-identity and to fashion for himself an image of the ideal artist, chooses the mythological figure of Daedalus to be his symbolic father. Daedalus is to serve as a beacon leading Stephen to a new life as an artist. Yet, by adopting the figure of Daedalus, Stephen inadvertently casts himself in the role of Icarus. Although images of chaotic flight, flames, and falling litter the text, it is the strong undercurrent of water imagery that solidly connects Stephen with the figure of doomed Icarus. As I have shown, Stephen's initial call to be an artist comes forth from the sea as the playful bantering of his friends ignite the spark of his new self-awareness. Moreover, it is within the boundaries of a metaphorical sea, that the entire

epiphany scene is submerged. Here, Stephen meets his soul in the image of the birdgirl, and seemingly confirms his destiny as an artist. Later, however, as he attempts to transmute his life into art through the construction of the lifeless villanelle, Stephen is left swimming within stagnant waves. Thus, just as Icarus's magnificent soaring ended in disaster, so too does Stephen's grand epiphany and creative undertaking end with him drowning in waves of oceanic silence.

It is through his final words written in his journal that Stephen firmly, yet unknowingly, links himself with Icarus. As he writes, "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead,"(411) Stephen seals his fate. On one level, Stephen may understand that he risks failing as an artist, and he is willing to take his chances. Yet I do not think that he sees himself as Icarus. Stephen perceives that his bold attempt at flight involves some danger, but it is his only way to attain the freedom he desires. Thus, Stephen's only concern is his art and the preparing of the necessary conditions to produce his artistic creations.

According to William Blake, "No bird soars to high if he soars with his own wings"([1792] 1968:71). In Stephen's case, however, I don't think this maxim will hold true. Stephen may have high aspirations, and a bold spirit, but he is flying on ill-constructed wings. How can Stephen possibly recreate life out of life if he is trying to escape from it? What power can pretty words have if he hasn't learned how to embrace mortal beauty and the breath of life experiences whether they be good, uplifting, intimidating, desolate, or bleak? Stephen proclaims, "Welcome, O life! I go to

encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race”(411). Yet, Stephen is doomed to fail as a great poet, for his flight to art is but an escape from and not a welcome to life. His will to transcend the human condition, to endure loneliness and exile, is thus self-defeating. As Kenner (1956:18) asserts, “The genuine artist reads signatures, the fake artist forges them.” In an attempt to forge a means of escape, Stephen has constructed a new identity for himself, only, it is not the one he intended. To read Stephen’s fake signature is to see him soaring toward the high altar where all great poets reign immortal. But, if one reads carefully, one can hear the splash.

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