

## Stephen Icarus, the Bird to Fly

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The careful Joycean readers would discover Stephen Dedalus is always depicted in combination with the bird motif from his *début* in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*<sup>1</sup> to his farewell in *Ulysses*.<sup>2</sup> In *Ulysses*, in the whore house scene, whore Florry says that Stephen is “the bird that can sing and won’t sing (*U.* 518)”; at Stephen’s critical moment with the English private, his mind sees the “birds of prey (*U.* 598)” circling. Association of Stephen and a bird is prevailing especially in *A Portrait*. The bird motif runs throughout it.

In *A Portrait* another major factor is the images of Dædalus and Icarus. Stephen’s name bears the association with fabulous artificer Dædalus. Stephen sets out to Paris as Icarus, invoking old father Dædalus.

The careful reader would perceive some anxiety in passionately flaming and flying-off Stephen. In this essay I will illustrate what brings about the anxiety within him from the viewpoint of the combination of the bird motif and the images of Dædalus and Icarus.

### I

*A Portrait* opens with Stephen’s earliest recollection of his childhood. The sentences of the recollection consist almost entirely of monosyllables. As for baby Stephen, sense was mightier than reason, and as a

matter of course, the style of his recollection is sensuous<sup>3</sup>. When he recollects his wet bed<sup>4</sup>, he mentally feels warmth and coldness and his mind smells the queer smell. He remembers his mother has a nicer smell than his father. He mentally sees Dante's brushes with the maroon and green velvet backs. Baby Stephen was, of course, egocentric. He recollects he thought of himself as the center of the world and supposed the Vances had a different father and mother from his.

Stephen remembers a horrible terror of those days. When he says he is going to marry Eileen, the Vances' daughter, he gets scolded and takes cover under the table. Dante, Mrs Riodan, threatens him, saying an eagle comes and pulls out his eyes. The association of Stephen with a bird begins here. His terror becomes an obsession and metamorphoses itself into the cant as follows:

*Pull out his eyes,*  
*Apologise,*  
*Apologise,*  
*Pull out his eyes. (8)*

From the outset of life Stephen had been laid under a terror and threatened, and his terrible remembrance bore a connection with a bird of prey.

In Clongowes Wood College Stephen of nine years old, who is intellectual and imaginative, competes with Jack Lawton to win the head at arithmetic. Fr Arnal's expectation turns out Stephen's burden. He excels intellectually others, to be sure, but he feels his body small and weak and his eyes weak and watery. His bodily weakness is not free

of the law of natural selection.

Small and frail Stephen gets teased by his classmates. He is made fun of, because he kisses his mother every night before going to bed. His friend Wells shouders him into the square ditch or the toilet. The cold slimy feeling caused by it becomes an obsession and sometimes afterwards bothers him. In a footabll game, small and feeble Stephen always pretends to run on the fringe of the line, and he looks on a football as a flying heavy bird. When he gets ill and feels helpless, his mind recollects "a heavy bird flying low through the grey light (22)," which he once saw over the ground, and Wolsey's death. He feels alienated. He is afraid that he will die and he pictures his funeral. He says over a funeral song, which leads his mind to a sweet sad ecstasy, in other words, catharsis:

*Dingdong! The castle bell!*  
*Farewell, my mother!*  
*Bury me in the old churchyard*  
*Beside my eldest brother.*  
*My coffin shall be black,*  
*Six angels at my back,*  
*Two to sing and two to pray*  
*And two to carry my soul away. (24)*

There takes place an awful terror which presses Stephen in Clon-gowes Wood College. One day he gets thrown on the cinder path by the bicycle of a friend of the second grade, and his glasses get broken into pieces. Consequently he becomes exempt from Fr Arnal's Latin class but Fr Dolan, the prefect of studies, mistakes him for an idler and ruthlessly hits him on the hand with the pandybat. The prefect

turns a deaf ear to his apology, and besides Fr Arnal does not help him. The figure of the prefect, at which Stephen's poor eyes glance, has "the baldy head (56)" and "the cruel nocoloured eyes (56)." The prefect's tigure can be superimposed on that of a vulture with a baldy head, which has the association of a greedy, icy and ruthless person.

Stephen's mind sees Mr Gleeson's "terribly long and pointed (46)" and "so long and cruel (46)" nails. His figure is also superimposed on that of a bird of prey, whose sharpened claws capture and tear out mammals and other smaller birds.

Stephen's father calls the Jesuits "gamecocks (73)" in his recollection of Clongowes Wood College. Stephen leads a terrible and helpless life among the heavy birds, gamecocks and birds of prey, and he gets teased and suffers from the sense of the bodily inferiority to them. His threatened life among the formidable birds becomes one of the reasons why he breaks with Catholicism. When he afterwards leaves the office of the Belvedere College director where he is invited to become a Jesuit, he remembers the memory of Clongowes Wood College:

The troubling odour of the long corridors of Clongowes came back to him [Stephen] and he heard the discreet murmur of the burning gasflames. . . . His lungs dilated and sank as if he were inhaling a warm moist unsustaining air and he smelt again the warm moist air which hung in the bath in Clongowes above the sluggish turfcoloured water.

Some instinct, waking at these memories, stronger than education or piety, quickened within him at every near

approach to that life, an instinct subtle and hostile, and armed him against acquiescence. (164)

Stephen's father's bankruptcy makes him experience the severe reality and sudden downfall from comfort. He comes to struggle with the miserable life constricted by poverty, After leaving Clongowes Wood College, he keeps away from the world.

In Belvedere College to which he changes from Clongowes Wood, he excells others in achievement as ever, and wins the head of the whole school instead of being in the second grade. He begins to make light of others. There is no one who violently teases and attacks him unlike Clongowes Wood. His childhood and his innocent and dependent mind becomes more dead and lost, as he becomes arrogant and suspicious artist.

Proud Stephen feels that an "abyss of fortune or of temperament (98)" sunders him from Father. He feels "hopeless discouragement and disgust with his father."<sup>5</sup>

Stephen of sixteen years old becomes sexually mature and his desire for sex act becomes dominant within him. He commits the "sins of impurity (147)" with a whore. The maturity of the generative power does not allow him to remain a boy, because it can biologically allow him to become a father at any moment. Sinner Stephen's mind oscillates because of the instability proper to the adolescent one. He regrets his tempted act. When he listens to the sermon of sins and hell in the retreat in honour of St Francis, the fear of hell pierces and tears out his mind. He feels as though he were plunging headlong through space like the fallen rebellious angel Lucifer. He fears that he dies at a moment notice because of carnal sins. The strong fear makes

him writhe in the bed. He longs for atonement, contriting and shedding tears and then confessing his sins at the Church Street Chapel. He can superficially atone for sins and feels for the time that life is simple and beautiful at all. After his confession he tries to lead an ascetic and continent life. He manages to carry himself over lure of flesh. But he soon learns he cannot be perfectly free from sins. The Luciferian role of the rebellious artist becomes more and more manifest in him. His sexual initiation is the entrance into adulthood and rebellion.

Stephen in the adolescent period rebels against conformity and authority. He never conforms to the opinion of Heron, whose name offers us the biblical suggestion of the abominable bird forbidden to eat, in the debate of the literary superiority between Byron and Tennyson.<sup>6</sup> He never agrees Tennyson is a poet. Stephen wants to become independent, and as a result of it he cannot but alienate himself and become cynical. He cynically repeats the fragmental lines of Shelly's "To the Moon":

*Art thou pale for weariness  
Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth,  
Wandering companionless . . . ? (99)*

His independence is drawing near and near. At this point one must know his steps to independence are not ordinary. Stephen under the menace of the cruel wings of Clongowes Wood College suddenly becomes relieved in the world without enemies of Belvedere and becomes an arrogant and suspicious artist. "Natural selection" of Clongowes Wood stops getting hold of him by halves.

Stephen, whose independence is around the corner, is invited to join the Society of Jesus by the Belvedere College director. The director's face takes on the mirthless appearance which reminds him of the vulture-like prefect of Clongowes Wood College. While the director persuades him to be a Jesuit, he looks afar out of the window of the director's office. His mind and eyes set themselves toward the open sky. He has to choose between two conditions: one the Reverend Stephen Dedalus, S. J., the other free and independent artist Stephen Dedalus.<sup>7</sup> He is not pleased with leading the whole life in the enclosed narrow world where there is "a grave and ordered and passionless life (164)," but he intends to live in the ever-widening world.

His facial image of a Jesuit is "eyeless and sourfavoured and devout, shot with pink tinges of suffocated anger (164-5)." The Jesuit's cruel figure in his mind is superimposed on the image of a bird of prey which had been threatening him in Clongowes Wood College. To his mind, "some instinct, . . . stronger than education or piety, . . . armed him against acquiescence (164)." At length he makes up his mind to refuse the invitation to the Society of Jesus and turns "his eyes coldly for an instant towards the faded blue shrine of the Blessed Virgin which stood fowlwise on a pole (165)." At this point the Society of Jesus is neatly superimposed on the image of a bird, to say nothing of the real shape of the shrine. Stephen leaves the nest of the Society of Jesus where he has been brought up and threatened so far. He rebels "against the Catholic education which had disciplined and maimed his spirit"<sup>8</sup> Lonely and insolent Stephen flies off from the terrible aerie, but he remains the mere frail bird. We cannot know he becomes an heavy bird or a bird of prey.

After the resolution to break with the Society of Jesus, Stephen comes across a girl like a “strange and beautiful seabird (175)” on the strand of the Bull. Her cranelike thighs are exposed owing to her kilted skirt, and her bosom is slight and soft like a dove. Her image tells him “to live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life (176).” She seems a vision of life. His mind hears the call of nature and cries out a “profane joy (176).” Stephen who has left the Jesuits’ aerie is on the point of being reborn in the mortal youth and beauty.<sup>9</sup> When he on the strand of the Bull looks up the dappled and seaborne clouds on the march from Europe, he perceives a wonderous premonition:

He [Stephen] heard a confused music within him as of memories and names which he was almost conscious of but could not capture even for an instant; then the music seemed to recede, to recede, to recede: and from each receding trail of nebulous music there fell always one longdrawn calling note, piercing like a star the dusk of silence. Again! Again! Again! A voice from beyond the world was calling. (172)

He hears his friends banter and cry; “Come along, Dedalus! Bous Stephanoumenos! Bous Stephaneforos! (172).” Their banter flatters “his mild proud sovereignty (173)” and his name seems to him an epiphany. The past of fabulous artificer Dædalus and the future of Stephen as an artist dart into this moment. He all of a sudden identifies himself with fabulous artificer Dædalus. The artificer’s name gets Stephen’s mind to see a “hawklike man flying sunward above the sea (173).” The hawklike man is the symbol of the artist who forges

“anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being (173).” Stephen’s mind trembles with its impression and an ecstasy of flight and soars up into the sky. “His throat ached with a desire to cry aloud, the cry of a hawk or eagle on high (174).” Stephen is full of joy, hope and gleaming presentiment. But at this point one can find the key to the tragedy which would take place in Paris in the future. Stephen flies off from the Jesuits’ terrible aerie, to be sure, but does he become a heavy bird worth flying to the continent?

The epiphany of the name of the fabulous artificer foretells us Stephen’s vocation as an artist. But the epiphany does not guarantee his future. He tries to cry “the cry of a hawk or eagle,” which is the cry of deliverance, but he does not cry factually. He still remains the mere frail bird. He only hears the presentiment, which resembles a promissory note. The note may be dishonoured, and he may not be able to get it cashed because of running short of his honour. I suppose the role of the hawklike man is perhaps too much for him.

After the success of taking off, Stephen enters the university and tries to flee from the net of nationality, language, and religion, in other words, the curse of Ireland.

University student Stephen has changed to a considerable extent. His parents regret his entrance in the university because of his insolence and disobedience. To his parents he seems to sin the sin of intellect through pride. His sense of the family bonds becomes diluted more and more.

Stephen is taken for the able student who keeps away from companionship of the youth, because he indulges himself in brooding over

something philosophical. The dean has a brief discussion about art and beauty with Stephen, because the dean knows the reputation that Stephen is an artist. He is thought of as an exiled superman, because he publicly refuses to sign the petition for the universal peace. Under such estimation he bears the forlorn situation. His girl friend E. C. leaves him out in the coldness. His only comrade is Cranly, who is indeed the only one from *Stephen Hero* to *Ulysses*.

Stephen on the steps of the library looks up the thirteen swallows whirling round the jetting shoulder of a house in Molesworth street. They seem to circle about an ancient temple of air. The "sense of fear of the unknown (229)" steals into his mind. It is fear of the hawklike man and Thoth. The hawklike man is of course fabulous artificer Dædalus and Thoth is the ibis-headed god of wisdom, learning and magic, and Thoth invents writing. Why does Stephen with an intention to be an artist fear them? The passionate young artist should welcome them. The fear perhaps comes out from his subconscious anxiety to take off. I think the sign of the wheeling swallows can be deciphered twofold. One is the sign of departure. The other is the sign of lonely stagnation which converges with the fear felt by Stephen.

At last he sees that he must take a journey without any delay and a flood of pleasure fills him. Prior to the departure he confesses comrade Cranly his loss of the faith and deep gap between him and his mother brought about by it. Cranly advises him to become superficially obedient to her and let her feel easy, and asks if Stephen really exiles himself leaving all relationship behind. Stephen obstinately refuses to follow Cranly's advice and at last refuses Cranly's

arm. Stephen completely become isolated.<sup>10</sup>

Stephen's diary pursues his mental orbit destined to departure. The diary chronicles Cranly's attack of him on the score of love for his mother, discussion about Blessed Virgin with his mother, rumour of his departure, 'tandish' the good old English word and encounter with E. C. On April 27, Stephen sets out to Paris, invoking "old father, old artificer (257)."

From the foregoing analyses and arguments of Stephen's growth, it follows that his growth is described in connection with the bird motif and figure which take place corresponding with each stage of his growth. In the earliest period squab Stephen is egocentric and helpless against such a formidable foe as Dante who is mentally superimposed on an eagle by Stephen. Clongowes Wood College, the aerie of the vulture-like prefect and the Jesuits like the birds of prey, oppresses the infant bird Stephen. The aerie brings him up, to be sure, but there is many a formidable foe-bird to the infant bird. Stephen in Belvedere College is a young bird. Young bird Stephen suddenly becomes free from the foe-birds and solitary and arrogant. He wants to keep away from the fellows and the family. He rebels against the conformity and authority. But young bird Stephen's mind has an agony proper to the adolescent period. He perpetrates the carnal sins and bothers about them. His life at this period corresponds with that of the young bird fluttering in order to take off. Young bird Stephen makes up his mind to break with the dear old Society of Jesus. Stephen who has known the epiphany of the name of fabulous artificer Dædalus is the full-fledged bird. Full-fledged Stephen is for the first time on the wing. His mind sees the hawklike man flying toward the sun and wants to

soar up into the sky. Stephen in the university is the bird on the wing. When he sees the whirling swallows, he thinks that he must set out. He at length takes wing to Paris with the invocation to the old father Dædalus. But I suppose Stephen-bird takes wing concealing some anxiety, because he flies off at the call of "the old father" and he perhaps knows the myth of Dædalus and his lost son Icarus.

## II

The key to bird Stephen lies in his own name. Joyce weaves the Greek word and the Latin traditional name into his name. The given name 'Stephen' no doubt stems from the Greek word *στέφανος* meaning a crown. In *Ulysses*, when he debates Shakespeare's name and its sign in the sky, his mind says; "Stephanos, my crown. (U. 210)" The surname 'Dedalus' derives from fabulous artificer Dædalus. Originally the surname 'Dedalus' is spelled 'Dædalus' in *Stephen Hero*, the ur-portrait of *A Portrait*. The name 'Stephen Dedalus' identifies him as the Dedalus' member whose given name is Stephen. Etymological observation provides a new interpretation that the name 'Stephen Dedalus' means the crown of the Dædalus. The Latin word order supports this interpretation. It can further mean the crown of Dædalus from the viewpoint of the verbal association of Dædalus and Dedalus. Consequently it follows that the name 'Stephen Dedalus' means the man bearing Dædalus' crown, in other words, the successor of Dædalus or his heir and son, who can be no doubt identified with Icarus.<sup>11</sup>

In the epigraph of *A Portrait* Stephen's vocation of an artist is decreed:

*Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes.*

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VIII, 188. (3)

(And he [Dædalus] pours his mind into the unknown art.)

Stephen makes an advent in *A Portrait* as a latter-day Dædalus, and at once he has the lurking role of Dædalus' heir and son Icarus in his own name. The erudite readers would know that the fragmental line is cited from the passages to the effect that Dædalus makes up his mind to make the wings for himself and his son in order to flee from Minos by the sky. The mere one line at the outset decrees his vocation of an artist and predicts his fate of departure and his possible fall into the waves.

As old father Dædalus is the most skillful artificer and full of conceit in his art, so Stephen as a latter-day Dædalus is brilliantly intellectual and arrogant in Clongowes Wood College. As old father Dædalus feels sick for home in Crete, so Stephen feels a terror of punishment in the labyrinth of Clongowes Wood and asks his mother's help. The role of Dædalus is prevailing in Stephen's seek-for-help life in Clongowes Wood College.

When he changes from Clongowes Wood College to Belvedere and comes to treat his father coldly and to rebel against conformity and authority, the role of rebellious Icarus, who ignores father Dædalus and flies up higher and higher, comes out and becomes dominant. The sexually matured Stephen commits the carnal sins. When he listens to the sermon of sins and hell in the retreat in honour of St Francis, he feels as though he plunged headlong through the space like fallen angel Lucifer owing to his guilt. At this point the role of rebellious angel Lucifer neatly converges with that of rebellious Icarus.<sup>12</sup>

There is the role of Icarus whose disobedience brings him to fall headlong into the waves.

After his moral oscillation proper to the adolescent mind, he repudiates the invitation to the Society of Jesus. He escapes from its labyrinth. There happens the epiphany of the name of fabulous artificer Dædalus on the strand of the Bull. He becomes conscious of his call to the vocation of an artist and identifies himself with the great artificer whose name he bears. At this moment the role of Icarus lurks, but from this moment onward, it becomes clear more and more.

In his university life Stephen refuses to write down his name in the autograph album of the universal peace and inclines himself to flee from the mother land. The pattern of exiling himself from home and alienation is the same with that of Icarus' forsaking old father Dædalus and flying sunward higher and higher. University student Stephen bears only the role of Icarus; that of Dædalus dies away. In one morning after the sound sleep which is given to him owing to excitement of seeing E. C., Stephen lying in the bed writes down the *villanelle* in her honour on the torn cigarett packet. It contains the image of fallen seraphim suggesting at once Lucifer and Icarus. It recapitulates his condition:

*Are you no weary of ardent ways,  
Lure of the fallen seraphim?  
Tell no more of enchanted days.*

...

*Our broken cries and mournful lays  
Rise in one eucharistic hymn.  
Are you not weary of ardent ways?*

...

*And still you hold our longing gaze  
 With languorous look and lavish limb!  
 Are you not weary of ardent ways?  
 Tell no more of enchanted days. (227-8)*

When he on the steps of the library looks up the swallows circling, he thinks of them as the symbol of departure:

Then he [Stephen] was to go away for they [swallows] were birds ever going and coming, . . . and ever leaving the homes they had built to wander. (230)

He at once feels a sense of fear of the unknown. It is fear of the hawk-like man and Thoth, in other words, that of destiny which he would face in the future. The hawklike-man-Dædalus has a gloom foreboding of his son's death, when he advises Icarus how to fly, helping him on with the osier-woven wings. Fear of Dædalus means no more than that of losing his son. When he thinks of Dædalus, Stephen, I suppose, conjures up the scene of Icarus' downfall into the waves.

His ardour for art and creation is mightier than fear of Icarus' fate and solitude. It prevails poor his mother's love. His comrade Cranly blamefully asks as follows:

—Alone, quite alone. You have no fear of that. And you know what that word means? Not only to be separate from all others but to have not even one friend. (251)

But Stephen resolutely replies; "I will take the risk (251)." I think we can find Stephen's proud and confident mind like Icarus, who gives no heed to his father's advice to fly neither too high nor too

low. Stephen keeps a dairy as follows:

They [arms] are held out to say: We are alone. Come. And the voices say with them: We are your kinsmen. And the air is thick with their company as they call to me, their kinsman, making ready to go, shaking the wings of their exultant and terrible youth.

...

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. (257)

His mind is too passionate to set out to hear others' advice and opinion,<sup>18</sup> as Icarus was. At length passionately flaming Stephen takes wing to Paris in order to be a European. I suppose he ignores the tragic downfall of Icarus at that point.

Stephen-bird is born with the fate to be a hawklike artist Dædalus. The infant bird leads the threatened life in the aerie of Clongowes Wood College. The infant bird becomes free from it owing to the father-bird's misfortune. The infant bird becomes the young one. The young bird leads Icarus' *Sturm-und-Drang* life in Belvedere College. As a result of it and the pressed Jesuit life, the young bird breaks with Catholicism. The prospective sign of the hawklike man visits the young bird. But the young bird is not competent enough to embody the sign, in other words, to wing mightily its flight. The young bird becomes the full-fledged after knowing the sign, though the bird is not worthy of becoming it. The full-fledged bird takes wing to Paris as Icarus, not Dædalus, concealing anxiety in the future. When he later on

reappears in *Ulysses*, Stephen is the man of disappointment. Life in Paris is not that of skillful Dædalus, but that of fallen rebellious Icarus.

When he reads *A Portrait* all the way through, the careful reader can feel of his falldown. Through foregoing analyses and arguments we know what brings about the foreboding. We know that Stephen halfway escapes from the natural selection as a bird; that he plays the role which is too much for him; that he sets out to Paris, knowing and concealing anxiety of the possible falldown. Stephen's passionate departure is the foreboding of his downfall in Paris.

#### NOTES

- 1 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, The Definitive Text corrected from the Dublin Holograph by Chester G. Anderson and edited by Richard Ellmann (Bungay: Richard Clay, 1968). All the succeeding references to Joyce's passages will be to this edition, hereafter to be referred to *A Portrait*. At the end of the cited passage, there is the paging tag put in parentheses.
- 2 James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Random House, 1961). All the succeeding references to Joyce's passages will be to this edition. At the end of the cited passage, there is the paging tag with *U.* put in parentheses.
- 3 According to Harry Levin, "in the introductory pages of the *Portrait of the Artist* the reader is faced with nothing less than the primary impact of life itself, a presentational continuum of the tastes and smells and sights and sounds of earliest infancy." (*James Joyce*, [revised, augmented edition; New York: New Direction, 1960], p. 50).
- 4 According to Anthony Burgess, "the embryonic soul is surrounded by a sort of amniotic fluid—urine and the sea." (*Re Joyce*, [New York: W. W. Norton, 1968], p. 54).
- 5 Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle* (Glasgow: William Collins, 1976), p. 159.
- 6 According to Burgess, "it was the beginning of his literary martyrdom." (*Re Joyce*, p. 54).
- 7 According to Richard Ellmann, "Stephen has in fact to choose between

- two masks—one Roman, that of the Reverend Stephen Dedalus, S. J., and the other Greek.” (*The Consciousness of Joyce*, [New York: Oxford, 1977], p. 16).
- 8 Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle*, p. 159.
- 9 According to Levin, “a tendency toward abstraction reminds us, again and again, that Joyce came to esthetics by way of theology.” (*James Joyce*, p. 25).
- 10 According to Levin, “Joyce proclaims the isolation of the artist.” (*James Joyce*, p. 23).
- 11 According to Ellmann, “Stephen as son of Dedalus, might be taken for Icarus, who flies so badly and has no future. But Joyce suspended all references to Icarus until *Ulysses*.” (*The Consciousness*, p. 18). But I think we must know the lurking image and role of Icarus in Stephen.
- 12 Burgess does not identify the role of Lucifer with that of Icarus. See *Re-Joyce*, p. 67.
- 13 See Note 10.