Mulligan and Molly: The Beginning and the End

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Mulligan and Molly are clearly the literal beginning and end of Ulysses, as the book presents each in central focus, solus, at the outset and close respectively, no Stephen or Bloom in sight; and yet we are not inclined to see them as an interimplicit alpha and omega because there seems too little connection between them to give their initiating and concluding positions significance. Neither knows or is aware of the other, and by the time Molly looms into view, Mulligan has faded out of the book's awareness.¹ Mulligan, if not Molly, would apparently seem just a piece of contingency drawn into the book from Joyce's real world of bitter memory but then forgotten as the book takes its predominantly Bloomian course. But this apparent authorial lapse, I will claim, is deeply part of the book's design, so that the disconnection of Mulligan and Molly is a manifestation of their differential but structurally interrelated functions within its unity.

The apparent disjunction of the two characters is strikingly manifest in the nearly absolute contrast in their provenience and presentation. Mulligan, we know, is a transcription of Joyce's memory of the very real Oliver St. John Gogarty, as the denomination of Buck as "Malachi Roland St John Mulligan" makes internally clear (U-GP 14:1213). This quasi-identification is the book's most explicit indication of the pervasive interpenetration within it of the real world of the author and the supposedly autonomous realm of fiction, a fact that notably violates both old New Critical and current poststructuralist doctrinal proclamations of the separation of the factual and textual realms.

But Molly, strikingly enough in this connection and in sharp contrast to the factual Mulligan, is unquestionably and totally fictional/textual in that, much as Joyce may have derived her mentality from his observation of Nora,
she can in principle have no true model in the external world, since no person in the real world can experience another person as we experience Molly, wholly from the inside, without any external anchoring perspective. In polar contrast, Mulligan is given wholly in external transcription, as befits his status as deriving from a real memory of the author, who does not presume accordingly to give us any interior view of him. The reader has no access at all to Mulligan's mind, whereas, lost in Molly's mind, he has no access to anything else. The apparently radical inconsistency of technical "point of view" presentation here, considered in the canonical terms of the traditional standard novel, would seem an extraordinary discordance in this most celebrated of all novels. But that there is consistency behind the inconsistency is suggested by Joyce's choice of names for these two characters with transposed initials: Buck (Malachi) Mulligan, Molly (Marion) Bloom.

I have argued elsewhere that Joyce's intention in *Ulysses* is in fact to reconstruct and recompose remembered contingent factualities from his real remembered life into a structure of artistic permanence, or, as Stephen more tersely and beautifully puts it, to build eternity's mansions out of time's ruins. The logic of this constructive process involved Joyce in an extraordinary spiritual journey, in the course of which he sequentially imagines his real remembered self from the outside, projects himself into Bloom's inside from an outside perspective, and then yields up that anchor as he melds fully with Molly's inner otherness, so that the whole book records, as I have put it, his "long creative passage from May Dedalus to Marion Bloom, from the dream of the time-and-tomb-bound body of the real mother from whose womb he came, to incorporation, through his experience of Nora, with the word-borne everliving body of Molly, the woman who never was" ("Exodus" 168).

I suggest now that Mulligan/Gogarty is also to be understood as a reference point, a beginning, of Stephen/Joyce's journey from the pregiven world of the real to its fictional culmination in Molly by way of Bloom. *Ulysses* is centered on the pivotal event of Joyce's life—his seduction by Nora on 16 June 1904—an event that (in his own phrase) made him a man and freed him from the memory of his mother's death and the imprisoning past to which it was connected, and left the future open to new, self-directed development. On that day, as represented in *Ulysses*, Nora is, as I have suggested elsewhere, a strongly implicit offstage presence ("Why Stephen's Hand Hurts"), but during the period of Joyce's life in the Martello tower, he was already involved with her and in fact seems to have asked her to go away with him into exile on the subsequent night (Maddox 43). Before his commitment to Nora, who was to be his psychic center and stay the rest of his life, he had found provisional spiritual support in a series of brothers/male companions—his brother Stanislaus, John F. Byrne, Vincent Cosgrave, and Gogarty, each of whom may be considered as his rival for a mother-figure woman (see Schechner 34ff)—Stanislaus the younger brother literally with their mother and later perhaps with Nora; Byrne
with Mary Sheehy (as suggested by E——. C——.’s attraction to Cranly in Portrait); and Cosgrave with Nora in 1904 (as Joyce was horrifically convinced for a few traumatic days in 1909), with Gogarty a co-conspirator, as Joyce came to believe. In Ulysses, however, Nora is an implicit, impending presence, Mulligan/Gogarty’s rival and replacement, as she was in life.

In Ulysses the literal brother who was Joyce’s companion-confidant, Boswell, and keeper during his youth and the early years of his exile is reduced to a single textual reference in a passage articulating the series just mentioned: “Where is your brother? Apothecaries’ hall. My whetstone. Him, then Cranly, Mulligan” (U-GP 9:977–78). Cranly/Byrne has no place in Ulysses except in Stephen’s memory, as in the passage just quoted and, more importantly, in his earlier thought in “Telemachus,” after Mulligan links arms with him, of “Cranly’s arm. His arm” (U-GP 1:159).

In the remembered scene in Portrait, in which Cranly seizes and presses Stephen’s arm, Stephen is “thrilled” by his touch. Just before this (P64 244–45) Stephen had registered Cranly’s “strange smile,” his “large dark eyes,” “handsome” face, and “strong and hard” body. Stephen nevertheless feels that the “friendship was coming to an end” as he moves toward a solitary creative life of “unfettered freedom” (P64 246). Stephen is subsequently unmoved when Cranly seems to offer an implicitly homosexual friendship as an anodyne against loneliness:

—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.
—I will take the risk, said Stephen.
—And not to have any one person, Cranly said, who would be more than a friend, even more than the noblest and truest friend a man ever had.
His words seemed to have struck some deep chord in his own nature. . . .
—Of whom are you speaking? Stephen asked at length.
Cranly did not answer. (P64 247)

In “Telemachus,” despite Stephen’s association of Mulligan’s linkage of arms with Cranly’s parallel action, there is no suggested consciousness of homosexual feeling, but there is, as with Cranly, a sense of alienation and estrangement. Stephen views the gay and witty Mulligan with disdain as a sacrilegious mocker, a weaver of the wind to whom nothing is truly serious and worthy of commitment. The threadbare Stephen bitterly resents his class inferiority to the well-fed Mulligan, who, despite his seeming to make a common intellectual cause with Stephen, obviously feels social solidarity with Haines, “stinking with money,” who thinks Stephen is “not a gentleman” (U-GP 1:156–57). Mulligan’s alliance with Haines is all the more troubling because of the threat of violence implicit in the latter’s strange conduct of the night before, “raving and moaning to himself about shooting a black panther”
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(U-GP 1:61–62). In this situation Mulligan's insistence on having the key to the tower suggests that he and Haines may plan to lock Stephen out, prompting Stephen's parting epithet, "Usurper" (U-GP 1:744).

But Stephen's further thoughts in "Proteus" are more psychologically complex: "Staunch friend, a brother soul: Wilde's love that dare not speak its name. His arm: Cranly's arm. He now will leave me. And the blame? As I am. As I am. All or not at all" (U-GP 3:451–52). Now the linked arms take on an overt homosexual association in his mind, and Mulligan is seen, at least in possibility, as staunch friend and brother soul; but what will sunder them is ambiguous. "He now will leave me" carries a note almost of lingering regretful attraction, as well as abandonment and betrayal, but assigns responsibility for the break to Mulligan; Stephen, however, has previously himself decided that "he has the key. I will not sleep there when this night comes" (U-GP 3:276). Both the emphasis on the possession of the key and Stephen's insistence on maintaining his absolute spiritual autonomy seem to express a fear—and rejection—of a domination that homosexual attraction would seem to involve for him.6

But Stephen's resistance to such an attraction, which would limit his autonomy while providing companionship, is strengthened by his more urgent current longing for the consoling touch of a woman: "Touch me. Soft eyes. Soft soft soft hand. I am lonely here. O, touch me soon, now. . . . I am quiet here alone. Sad too. Touch, touch me" (U-GP 3:434–36).

Later, in "Scylla and Charybdis," Stephen returns to and hardens his rejection of Mulligan, as he now attributes homosexual orientation and awareness solely to him. "Lovely! Buck Mulligan suspired amorously," as he recalls Edward Dowden's conversation; "I asked him what he thought of the charge of pederasty brought against the bard. He lifted his hands and said: All we can say is that life ran very high in those days. Lovely!" This prompts in Stephen the contemptuous one-word judgment, "Catamite" (U-GP 9:731–34).

Just before this we are given Mulligan's presumptive judgment of Bloom as homosexual: "I found him over in the museum where I went to hail the foam-born Aphrodite. . . . He knows you. He knows your old fellow. O, I fear me, he is Greeker than the Greeks. His pale Galilean eyes were upon her mesial groove" (U-GP 9:609–15). Mulligan renews his tendentious imputation at the end of the episode when, after Bloom passes out between them, he warns Stephen of Bloom's homosexual threat: "He looked upon you to lust after you. I fear thee, ancient mariner. O, Kinch, thou art in peril. Get thee a breechpad" (U-GP 9:1210–11).

Joyce's formal purposes here seem discernible beneath the dramatically compelling presentation: Mulligan's confident assertions appear on inspection insufficiently grounded—how would he know that Bloom knows Stephen's father, and how probable is it that he would leap to his inference about Bloom's lustful designs on the basis of a glance? But the remarks serve to shift
the onus of homosexual preoccupation from Stephen to Mulligan at the same time that they transfer narrative focus from Mulligan's potential homosexual relationship with Stephen to the latter's potential homosexual relationship with Bloom. Further, they foretell developments yet to come this day of which neither Mulligan nor Stephen has any idea but which are foreshadowed here, and connected with Haines' dream of a black panther, by the narrative reference at this point to Bloom's gait as the "step of a pard" (U-GP 9:1214) and to Stephen's thought of his own dream of a "street of harlots" and a "creamfruit melon" to be held out to him (U-GP 9:1207–8).

The latter reference is to be understood, I have elsewhere argued, as prefiguring not Stephen's literal destiny this day but Joyce's self-created artistic destiny as he re-enters his earlier life through Bloom via his memory of the Alfred Hunter who picked him up after a fight and took him home. In this projected identity he could make the quasi-homosexual gesture of offering Molly to Stephen, an offer not accepted in the book but, I have suggested, taken up and realized by Joyce as he passes imaginatively through Bloom's and Molly's melons into full immergence with Molly's body. Thus, Joyce resolves in high androgynous art his ambivalent sexuality, according to the rationale indicated in Stephen's account in "Oxen of the Sun," with a cross-reference to Mulligan/Dowson, of the love arrangements of Beaumont and Fletcher: "they had but the one doxy between them and she of the stews to make shift with in delights amorous for life ran very high in those days and the custom of the country approved with it. Greater love than this, he said, no man hath that a man lay down his wife for his friend" (U-GP 14:358–63).

Immediately after this, however, Stephen gives voice to a bitter denunciation of Mulligan in terms that clearly suggest a homosexual betrayal with Haines that nothing earlier in the book has prepared for: "Bring a stranger within thy tower it will go hard but thou wilt have the secondbest bed... Remember, Erin, thy generations and thy days of old, how thou settedst little by me and by my word and broughtedst in a stranger to my gates to commit fornication in my sight and to wax fat and to kick like Jeshurum... Why hast thou done this abomination before me that thou didst spurn me for a merchant of jalis?"9 Aesthetic objectification of a fiercely projected sexual jealousy is barely achieved here through the comic deployment of the parodic Biblical idiom.

The rejection of Mulligan as imputed homosexual culminates in our last glimpse of his "grey bare hairy buttocks between which a carrot is stuck" (U-GP 15:4705–6). Obviously, this turning back upon Mulligan of the fate he had predicted for Stephen is Joyce's final aggressive rejection of Gogarty's implicit threat to his own masculinity, but this blends in more largely with the treatment of Mulligan's proposed role as "Fertilizer and Incubator," a role somewhat undercut by Mulligan's later humorous assertion that "the supremest object of desire [is] a nice clean old man" (U-GP 14:999–1000). This gratuitous
perversity serves to infuse his identity as “Le Fecondeur” (U-GP 14:778) with suggestions of spiritual sterility—suggestions that lead beyond any narrow sexual issues into larger ones of spiritual fruitfulness and creativity.

Others have noted that Mulligan’s proposal that he and Stephen “do something for the island. Hellenise it” (U-GP 1:158) can be taken as a prediction of the creation of Ulysses. Stephen’s telegram to Mulligan (“The sentimentalist is he who would enjoy without incurring the immense debtorship for a thing done” [U-GP 9:550–51]) implicitly asserts that Mulligan, unlike Stephen/Joyce, does not have the gifts and commitment to “do something”—to conceive and bring to fruition such a regenerative project, whereas Stephen’s dedication to the Shakespearean thought that he shares with Bloom—“Do. But do” (U-GP 9:653, 11:908)—is manifested in the “thing done” of the book that we find ourselves reading.

Similarly, the mass that Mulligan mockingly celebrates at the beginning may be understood as repressed, transposed, and transfigured in a book that is the outcome of the author’s sacrificial eucharistic projection of his life and body in order to redeem the ruins of time. After our last view of Mulligan in “Circe” we have further knowledge of and reference to him only through Bloom, who, as already indicated, is his psychic replacement, as Joyce becomes not only his own father, mother, and son but his own sexually ambiguous brother as well. Joyce seems to mark the Mulligan/Bloom continuity in a number of ways, first in giving a retrospectively colored view of Mulligan’s relationship with Stephen through what seems Bloom’s somewhat improbable knowledge of and insight on the basis of so slight an acquaintance, just as he had given a prospectively colored view of Stephen’s relationship with Bloom improbably to Mulligan. In both cases the seam where fact is welded to fiction is not completely concealed, in a way that clearly reveals Joyce’s constructive intention.

But there seem to be further deliberate signs in the book by which Joyce apparently meant to call attention to the Mulligan/Bloom continuity. Both are referred to as Stephen’s “fidus Achates,” Mulligan by Simon Dedalus, Bloom by the narrator of Eumaeus, while Lenehan in “Wandering Rocks” refers to Bloom as a “cultured allaroundman” (U-GP 10:581–82) in parallel with Bloom in “Eumaeus” referring to Mulligan as a “versatile allround man” (U-GP 6:288). Most salient, perhaps, is the fact that at the end of “Eumaeus” Bloom links arms with Stephen just as Cranly and Stephen had (“Accordingly he [Bloom] passed his left arm in Stephen’s right and led him on accordingly” [U-GP 16:1721–22]), just before Bloom recommends that Stephen “sever his connection with a certain budding practitioner” (U-GP 16:1868).

Finally it may be that the present line of thought illuminates one of the continuing minor mysteries of Ulysses, the “two strong whistles” that, on the first page of the book, answer through the calm to Mulligan’s “long slow whistle of call.” Some see these unexplained whistles as functionally appropriate in
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Mulligan’s mass (see Boyle 127), while one recent commentator takes them as Buck’s interchange with his friends in the forty-foot below, and another, emphasizing their openness to interpretation, suggests that the two answering whistles come from a passing mailboat (Benstock and Benstock 20). Undoubtedly they must have some naturalistic referent in the book, but they may also have a metaphysical echo when in “Eumaeus” Bloom hails a cab for himself and the just-rescued Stephen by “emitting a kind of a whistle, holding his arms arched over his head, twice” (U-GP 16:30).

In any event, we can see from all this that Joyce, in rejecting and leaving behind his contingent friend Gogarty, also managed, willy-nilly, to gather him, along with his creatures Bloom and Molly, into the artifice of his eternity.

NOTES

1. James F. Carens notes that “Mulligan pretty well departs from the novel as an actual presence in Chapter 14; and he figures very little in the more than three hundred pages that follow” (30).

2. In his recent biography, Peter Costello provides substantial evidence that the primary original of E——. C——. was not Mary Sheehy but probably Mary Elizabeth Cleary (185ff). Cleary was (annoyedly) aware of Joyce’s interest in her and confided to her daughter-in-law that he had once been “keen on her,” whereas Sheehy told Richard Ellmann that she had not been at all aware of Joyce’s interest in her (SL 162 n.). Costello’s rejection (191–92) of Stanislaus Joyce’s identification of E——. C——. with Mary Sheehy does not really discredit the account Stanislaus gives of the relationship (149–50), but clearly room is left for the Cleary relationship as the possible basis of some of the E——. C——. episodes in the novels—episodes that Ellmann has to think of, given Mary Sheehy’s ignorance of Joyce’s feelings toward her, as (very uncharacteristically) “invented” (JJII 51). Byrne himself notes, in an obscure and little noted sentence in passing, that one of the four Sheehy sisters “is referred to by Joyce in The Portrait of the Artist” (146). E——. C——. is the only candidate for the reference, which seems to indicate that, in Byrne’s clearly informed view, her original was a Sheehy sister (undoubtedly Mary); but the rigidly chivalrous Byrne does not elaborate on the passing reference or comment on his own represented relationship in the book to this figure.

3. A later reference to Lynch as “Whetstone!” (U-GP 15:2101) seems to acknowledge Cosgrave’s place in the series, but of course the latter’s role as rival for Nora is entirely left out of the book along with Nora herself, though it is forcefully implicit perhaps in Stephen’s assigning him the role of Judas.

4. In Silent Years Byrne notes that, as the time of their college friendship, he was two years older than Joyce, which, he notes, “meant a lot, at least in physical and muscular equipment.” And he continues, “Moreover, I was unusually strong, much stronger than anyone would have thought from my appearance, whereas Joyce was thin, light and weak. Due to this, my attitude toward him became, and to a great degree remained, protective” (40).
5. Richard Ellmann notes the relevance in this connection of Joyce's identification of Gogarty in 'The Holy Office' as "... him whose conduct seems to own / His preference for a man of "tone"" (James Joyce's Tower 19). Despite Simon Dedalus's scornful reference to Mulligan as "a counter-jumper's son" (U-GP 6:70), Gogarty was of course the son of a prominent doctor and member of a prosperous and privileged family, as is suggested by his matriculation at Trinity College and later study at Oxford. Gogarty's preference for the privileged life was marked in later years, as his success as a surgeon brought him Rolls Royces and a country estate (see Ulick O'Connor, Oliver St. John Gogarty).

6. As with Cranly, Stephen may register Mulligan's strong physical presence as covertly attractive and therefore threatening. Joanne Rea calls attention to the activity of cutting consistently associated with Mulligan in "Telemachus" and interrelates several notations of Mulligan's physical self-exposure as constituting implicitly registered sexual aggression ("Joyce's 'Beastly' Bitch Motif"). Bernard Benstock sees the calf-faced Clive Kempthorne, in the ragging scene in which he is vividly visualized by Stephen fleeing Ades of Magdalen's shirttail snipping shears, as standing in parodically as sacrificial calf for Stephen, "the 'Bous Stephanoumenos, Bous Stephaneforos' of A Portrait" ("Telemachus" 11).

7. Joyce, who described himself at the corresponding time of his life as "a strange lonely boy, walking about by myself at night and thinking that some day a girl would love me" (Letters II 161), twice uses the word "touched" in describing Nora's seductive masturbation of him, an action that very possibly occurred on 16 June 1904 (see SL 182). In a letter to James Joyce Quarterly Richard Craig argues against Brenda Maddox's assertion that the seduction took place on the 16th, the day the couple first walked out together, correctly pointing out that Joyce's letter does not specifically refer it to that occasion; but in the same issue of JJQ (in my "Why Stephen's Hand Hurts"), I note that Joyce's description of Nora's act is echoed in his description in Ulysses of both Shakespeare's seduction of Adonis and Molly's of Mulvey—a congruence that suggests that his memory of this "sacrament" (Letters II 49) by which Nora "made him a man" (Letters II 233) was central to his structural sense of the book, which he chose to set on the now famous date of the 16th. Date and act need not have coincided for both to be deployed in the book, but it makes cogent sense to link them.

8. Hunter's original encounter with Joyce would seem to have had the character of a homosexual pickup and may actually have had such coloring. Costello gives new information about Hunter (231).

9. U-GP 14:367-73. We have learned earlier that Haines's "old fellow made his tin by selling jalap to Zulus or some bloody swindle or other" (U-GP 1:156-57). Ellmann notes that the reference to the "secondbest bed" may memorialize the fact that Joyce had to give up his bed to Trench when the latter moved into the tower (Joyce's Tower 17).

10. Under this title Mulligan proposes to set up "a national fertilizing farm to be named Omphalos with an obelisk hewn and erected after the fashion of Egypt and to offer his yeoman services for the fecundation of any female of what grade of life soever who should there direct to him with the desire of fulfilling the functions of her natural" (U-GP 14:684-88).

11. It may be that this is one of those cases where quasi-autonomous character is "endowed with knowledge by his creator" (U-GP 9:470).
12. Kathleen Hancock pointed this double reference out to me.
13. Bloom goes on: "who, he noticed, was prone to disparage and even to a slight extent with some hilarious pretext when not present, deprecate him, or whatever you like to call it which in Bloom's humble opinion threw a nasty sidelight on that side of a person's character, no pun intended" (U-GP 16:1869–73).

WORKS CITED


