

The Joycean Faun

The villanelle that Stephen writes in Chapter V of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is an actual equivalent of Stephen's system of art, as he explains it to Lynch earlier in the same chapter, not in the order of the stages of perception, but following a different sequence, that of the process of creation. The poem at least owes some of its effects to Verlaine and Ben Jonson as well as to Thomas Aquinas, whose name is invoked to support Stephen's aesthetic system, but a comparison of the passages that describe Stephen's composing the poem with Stéphane Mallarmé's "L'après-midi d'un faune" will show that Joyce closely imitated the French poem, which might first have appealed to him because of the similarity of his hero's first name to Mallarmé's. Like much of Joyce's portrayal of Stephen's youthful struggles, his use of Mallarmé is both ironically comic and serious. David Hayman in his study *Joyce et Mallarmé*¹ has shown that Joyce made extensive use of Mallarmé's poetry and criticism especially in *Finnegans Wake*, and he shows also that Stephen's aesthetic system owes something to Mallarmé's poetic theories. But Hayman does not consider *A Portrait of the Artist* at any length, or the parallels with Mallarmé's "faune." Although Joyce's deprecating mention of Mallarmé in his review of Lady Gregory's *Poets and Dreamers*² suggests that he was not an uncritical admirer, his imitation of the musings of Mallarmé's faun in the description of Stephen's creative efforts is one of the means he used to define the romantic artist portrayed through Stephen.

Though the precise facts of the faun's situation, indeed of the entire poem, are not certain, both he and Stephen are shown waking early in the morning. Both have had in sleep, perhaps only in dream, an involuntary and solitary sexual experience. Stephen is in his bedroom and the faun is in the Sicily of Theocritus, but the vocabulary of the situation is remarkably similar.³ Both descriptions of waking associate the sexual experience with light, water, music, and the combined images of artistic inspiration and breath. There is a kind of Adamic awakening. Later the faun's orgasm is "moins tristes vapeurs" and "vagues trépas" (p. 61), which echoes the sexual pun on the scene, "une source en pleurs."

Stephen exclaims, "An enchantment of the heart!" (p. 217) not one strictly speaking of the flesh, although the body is not excluded. This enchantment comes when he feels the beauty of his mood and its associations with female images and of his poem. Stephen begins his poem, combining through the image of Mary and the announcement a rosy ardor with a white purity (like the faun's carnation nymphs and white clouds)—"the white flame" deepens "to a rose and ardent light," which "was her strange wilful heart," which lures the seraphim (p. 217).

Though it is the seductive nymphs who have escaped from his attack, the faun ultimately rejects physical satisfactions and claims: "Alors m'éveillerai-je à la ferveur première/ Droit et seul, sous un flot antique de lumière" (p. 59). Here is the same light reflected from the flowers, the water, the clouds and sky, associated with sexual desire and vaguely with music. He also speaks of his enchanted dream, first literally

¹David Hayman, *Joyce et Mallarmé* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1956).

²"The dwarf-drama . . . is a form of art which is improper and ineffectual, but it is easy to understand why it finds favour with an age which has pictures that are 'nocturnes,' and writers like Mallarmé." Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann, eds., *The Critical Writings of James Joyce* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 104.

³Cf. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 217; Stéphane Mallarmé, *Poésies* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), pp. 58-59. Subsequent references are to these editions and will appear in the text.

a part of night: "Aimai-je un rêve?/ Mon doute, amas de nuit ancienne" (p. 58). Later he speaks of his song as a dream distinguished from, as well as based upon the "songe ordinaire" (p. 60) of female flesh. The faun also remembers paradoxically confused form veiling the afterglow of the light in the well-known image of his looking at the light through the empty grape skins that he has reshaped with his breath—literally and also through inspiration and his song. Like the seraphim lured by Mary, he is "avide d'ivresse" (p. 60). Also he rejects mere fleshly women in favor of "déesses. . . par d'idolâtres peintures" (p. 60), connecting the profane, the religious and art.

Whether Stephen rejects or is rejected by his world is unimportant to the portrayal of him as romantic artist. The required experience at this stage is the failure of the physical world, so that Stephen, like the faun, may integrate himself in his own created aesthetic vision.

The faun calls on the nymphs, much the same way Stephen begins his song, "regonflons des SOUVENIRS divers" (p. 60). His memories are of two nymphs, one ardent and rosy and one innocent and lily white, who are entwined. He separates them, his crime, and loses them both as a result of carnal sexual intoxication. This separation is partly the subject of his song and also its climax.

Stephen's poem is interrupted in precisely the same way. He is associating the world with an altar dedicated to the female identified with Mary, ardent and pure. He refers to the earth as "an ellipsoidal ball," which earlier during a lecture at the university had been part of a coarse joke. This intrusion of an animal association, along with associations of the sterile intellect of the academy and the comic verse of W. S. Gilbert, destroys the harmony of Stephen's perceptions and feelings and reduces his female image luring the seraphim to an ordinary sexual woman. The poem flops until Stephen, first writing down what he has achieved and then murmuring his verses, calls up again his vision of the girl, just as the faun uses his song to recreate the nymphs (p. 60). Stephen, mulling over his experiences with the actual girl and her irritating relationships with priests, arrives at the eucharist, that symbol for Stephen of the transformation of "the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life" (p. 221), and the poem can begin again.

Just before, Stephen's anger against the girl "broke up violently her fair image and flung the fragments on all sides. On all sides distorted reflections of her image started from his memory" (p. 220). The faun also in his anger at the disappearance of his ideal nymph flings away his flute whose song flatters and immortalizes her: "Tâche donc, instrument des fuits, ô maligne/ Syrinx, de refleurir aux lacs où tu m'attends!" (p. 60). The faun addresses the reed (flute) and Syrinx both at once, ironically asking them to consider what life they will have without him and his vision and skill. Syrinx suggests another connection between *A Portrait* and "L'après-midi d'un faune," Ovid. The epigraph to the novel is of course from *The Metamorphoses*, which contains the story of Syrinx, an association Joyce would have appreciated, and the section of the novel under examination here and the poem both deal with transformations.

Stephen and the faun are released by a new synthesis of impressions into continuing their songs. "The radiant image of the eucharist untied again in an instant his bitter and despairing thoughts, their cries arising unbroken in a hymn of thanksgiving (p. 221)." When Stephen's inspiration had died, the actual day intruded: "The dull white light spread itself east and west, covering the world, covering the roselight in his heart" (p. 218). The faun thinks "Inerte, tout brûlé dans l'heure fauve/ Sans marquer par quel art ensemble détal/ Trop d'hymen souhaité de qui cherche le la" (p. 59). He seeks the right note for his song, to detain

and hold the nymphs, to recreate his dream. Stephen plays and sings to the girl, both immediately and in memory, but he is as unsuccessful as the faun. She is portrayed with "a white spray nodding in her hair" (p. 219), associating her with the deathly white light of the real day and again with flowers. She dances toward him and then away from him, and as her actuality recedes, her rosininess is more apparent: "when she was in shadow the glow was deeper on her cheek" (p. 219). The faun sings of the disappearance of the nymphs fleeing or plunging into the water at the sound of his flute (p. 59). Either the naiads, the undulating whiteness in the foliage, run from his animal desire, or the artificial beauty of his song makes fade the animal beauties. In either case, the faun like Stephen must be content with the shadow or ghost or image rather than ordinary reality: "A leur ombre enlever encore des ceintures" (p. 60), their garments, those things that conceal them and those that bind them as well.

For Stephen as well as the faun the satisfactory image of the self in his visionary art is possible only so long as actuality, vulgar, stupid, and inadequate, is kept at bay. But even the success of art is accompanied by conflict. This paradoxical conflict, so clearly portrayed by Mallarmé in the two entwined nymphs, the rosy and white, is imitated by Joyce in the two versions of Stephen's girl. On the one hand, there is the insight based upon reality, sexual desire, and on the other, the vague, undifferentiated yearning for the transcendent truth characteristic of the personality we call romantic.

Mallarmé reconciles this conflict or duality in the reed, *Syrinx*, the desired one, the instrument, and the song. Joyce, again following the pattern of Mallarmé's poem, but in his own peculiar Irish, Catholic context, harmonizes the *insight* with the *feeling* in the Eucharist. This harmony of both *insight* and *feeling* is part of what distinguishes the romantic artist from the mere romantic personality, or the classical artist, for that matter. The faun *dreams* his song; his artifice, his imagination, replacing the ordinary dream, will in turn effect reality. Stephen feels first that if he sent the girl his verses, they would be a source of amusement to her family. Then, affected by his own poem, he recreates her in his own image and sees her responding to his poem in sympathy with him (p. 223). The faun and Stephen dissolve into sleep after the success of their songs: the faun with his thirsty mouth directed to the sun that ripens grapes to wine and Stephen staring at the great scarlet flowers of his bedroom wallpaper. But before they sleep, each imagines an idealized erotic-aesthetic experience. Their wish to effect reality is ironically achieved in themselves. Their songs, precisely because they do not have the freedom and will of life, satisfy their desire for the ideal. Quite clearly their animal sexual need has been fulfilled; their songs retain only the desire itself, ripened into its own fulfillment. Both songs are poems about the source and power of writing poems.

Mallarmé recognizes the shade, the fantasy, the dream, the poem as the only possibility to reconcile that pair separated by the faun: knowledge and innocence. It is the sorrow at the source of his poetry: to attempt the impossibility of perfection, knowing it is impossible and knowing also that the poetry would disappear if it could be achieved. Joyce in the light of his portrayal of Stephen throughout *A Portrait of the Artist*, probably regards with more irony Stephen's poetry, not only as a version of the truth, but also as one more escape from an unsatisfactory reality, one more example of Stephen's flight throughout the book. At the same time that he portrays Stephen's youthful aestheticism, he is making a critical judgment of the limits of the symbolist solution to the dilemma of modern literature.

Yet whatever the quality of the songs of the faun and Stephen may be—and Stephen's is very doubtful—Mallarmé and then Joyce have described the movement of the romantic imagination. The faun and Stephen are largely passive in their

relationship with phenomena; both possess alert and capable sensibilities. Each receives an impression that is partly prompted by an involuntary act of his flesh and partly from without. The romantic imagination may be busily alluring, but it is virginal, awaiting an annunciation or fertilizing inspiration. The imagination deals with these impressions, organizing, analyzing, and generalizing them, by means of past art: the classical songs and myths of Sicily for the faun, religious art and hymns and Renaissance poetry for Stephen.

The dream is obviously of central importance in harmonizing the duality of experience and memory as well as various memories that otherwise have no connections. In its intensity, it dissolves time and is the best evidence of the purely imaginative character of true reality. Romantic perception lies not alone in the object but also in the mind of the perceiver. The artist's experience is not mystical. The dream remains; the song then is necessarily about desire. Stephen and the faun must be content with their songs as objective perception of truth.

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T. S. Pillai's *Chemmeen*: Love, Marxism, and a Hindu Dialectic

*Chemmeen*¹ is set in a small fishing village in Kerala, India. As stated in the "Introduction," poverty of the degree one finds here will be difficult for most in the Western world to imagine. In such regions, the prayer "May my children not know starvation" is literally meant and earnestly uttered. The story is of Karuthamma and Pareekutti, she the daughter of a poor fisherman, and he the son of a fairly successful trader. With adolescence, their friendship turns to love, and Chemban Kunju (Karuthamma's father), preferring not to look too closely into Pareekutti's motivation, asks for and receives substantial help from him. The young man goes bankrupt while Chemban, purchasing his first boat and nets, is on the way to comparative wealth. Karuthamma is given in marriage to a visiting fisherman, Palani, and goes to live in his village. Chemban had bought his first boat from Kandankoran, a man of higher "caste" whom Chemban admired for his wealth, bearing and somewhat extravagant life-style. Chemban's wife dies and so does Kandankoran: thereupon, the aspiring fisherman marries the widow. But the marriage is not a success; Chemban's health and drive falter, and his enterprise declines. His only other child, a daughter, estranged over her father's second marriage, moves out of the house. Chemban, his life now in ruins, without aims and orientation, belatedly repays a small portion of the money he had borrowed from Pareekutti. But the money now has no use to Pareekutti either: he is given to haunting the beach alone, singing, his sanity suspect. Pareekutti walks to Karuthamma's village, presumably to give her the money forced upon him by her father. When he arrives, it is late in the night and Palani is out at sea. Love compounded with great pity overcomes Karuthamma's moral conditioning. "She entered his extended arms and her body became one with his . . . 'My Karuthamma! . . . What am I to you?' She took his face in both her hands and looking at him with half-closed eyes, she said, 'Everything . . .'" Out at sea, Palani struggles with a huge shark he has baited and looks in vain for Arundhati (guiding star of fisherman and symbol of

¹Reference is to the Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) edition, 1978. Translated into English by Narayana Menon.