

PORTRAIT OF THE POET AS JOYCE SCHOLAR

An Approach to A. M. Klein

Lorraine Weir

PERHAPS IT IS A NAIVE QUESTION," Klein wrote in 1946, "but who is our Edmund Wilson, who our T. S. Eliot?" (*CJC*, 1 March 1946)¹ He was responding to a questionnaire from Raymond Souster which asked, among other things, whether he was satisfied with the "standard of reviewing in Canada." Klein's exemplars are carefully chosen for, in one respect at least, his literary career after 1946 is analogous to those of Wilson and Eliot. At a time when, as Marshall McLuhan has written, Joyce was still regarded by many "not as an immediate and relevant source of artistic nutriment but as a monster exhibit to awe the dim of brain" (*Renascence*, IV: 1, 13), Klein ingested what he needed of Joyce's work for his own art and recycled his findings in three critical studies of *Ulysses*.

Like Eliot, Klein found nutriment in the Joycean and Symbolist variations upon the doctrine of the Logos as well as in Joyce's lifelong meditation upon the modality of the visible. Like Wilson, Klein was the first to publish a detailed analysis of a formidable Joyce text. Wilson's essay, "The Dream of H. C. Earwicker" (*New Republic*, 28 June and 12 July 1939), was the first effort by anyone outside the Joyce circle in Paris to elucidate the basic outline of plot and structure in *Finnegans Wake*; Klein's on "The Oxen of the Sun" (*Here and Now*, I: 3, 1949, 28-48) remains the only full textual analysis of that chapter of *Ulysses*. Both essays form part of the critical tradition with which any serious reader of Joyce's works inevitably contends. In the late forties when Klein began his work on *Ulysses*, only Hugh Kenner's early essays approached Joyce in a similarly analytical spirit, and textual criticism of Joyce's last work did not begin to appear until David Hayman published his "From *Finnegans Wake*: A Sentence in Progress" in 1958 (*PMLA*, LXXIII, 136-54). It is only in the last decade that Joyce studies have begun to catch up with Klein's scrupulous methodology.

More than any other chapter of *Ulysses*, the "Oxen of the Sun" provides an opportunity for the exercise upon difficult ground of the skill at disputation, at *pilpul*, which Klein had cultivated as lawyer and as editor of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*. Beginning his essay with the challenge he will take up, Klein quotes from the previously unpublished letter to Frank Budgen in which Joyce set out the basic structure of the chapter (now in Joyce's *Letters*, I: 138). Noting first that the existing commentaries (those of Stuart Gilbert, Harry Levin, and Budgen) are of little help in determining the detailed structure of the whole chapter, Klein proceeds to construct a *catalogue raisonné* of all the complexities which Joyce did not advertise to Budgen and Gilbert, and performed what can now be labelled the first Structuralist analysis of any Joyce text. Embryology manual in hand, Klein followed Joyce's instructions and ferreted out all the stages of human embryonic growth as they are encoded in the chapter. In the process, he discovered independently that the nine sections into which the chapter divides itself correspond to the nine preceding chapters of the book, and that the seventh section of the "Oxen of the Sun" itself consists of mirror images of the six stages which precede it. Finally, Klein demonstrated the correspondence between the nine sections of the chapter and the principal phases of Darwinian evolution — again, an independent discovery. The grand finale is an elaborate chart of the whole "labyrinth."

In all this there are some errors, several the result either of a faulty transcript of Joyce's letter (provided by Ellsworth Mason) or a misreading of it by Klein, and several the result of Klein's difficulties with recognition of the various authors Joyce parodies in the chapter (according to the scheme which Joyce gave to Stuart Gilbert). But Klein was certainly not unique in the latter difficulty and only now, as a result of a study published by J. S. Atherton in 1974, is it possible to account for a number of details which Joyce derived not from the originals but from Peacock's anthology of *English Prose: Mandeville to Ruskin*. As Atherton himself notes,² Klein's study was published long before most of the basic tools of contemporary Joyce scholarship (including Ellman's biography, Joyce's letters, and Phillip Herring's edition of *Joyce's 'Ulysses' Notesheets in the British Museum* — which would greatly have helped Klein) were available. Nevertheless, the essay remains the *locus classicus* for any student of the chapter as well as of Joyce's methodology in general.

And it is equally important for an understanding of Klein's own artistic evolution. For, as McLuhan's comment on the state of Joyce criticism at mid-century indicates, Klein's willingness to take Joyce and his work seriously, particularly in a section of *Ulysses* which has caused as much critical and popular consternation as *Finnegans Wake* itself, was at least unusual if not revolutionary. And it was precisely the revolutionary nature of the material itself, Joyce's first experiment in "Putting Allspace in a Notshall" (*FW* 455.29), which attracted Klein. "The

proper study of mankind is Man — not paysage,” Klein wrote three years before he published this study (*CJC*, 22 February 1946); so in *Ulysses* Joyce uses every aspect of Dublin, June 16, 1904 in order to transcend it,³ and in the “Oxen of the Sun” every phase of the English language from Anglo-Saxon to 1920’s Irish and American slang in order to express not just the birth of Theodore Purefoy’s latest child but also the birth of language itself. Charting Joyce’s labyrinth, Klein not only demonstrated for subsequent readers the order inherent in the “Oxen of the Sun” chapter but also traced for himself the evolution of Joyce’s aesthetic from the *Portrait* to *Finnegans Wake*.

The first published evidence of this study is a brief sketch entitled “Towards an Aesthetic,” part of the “Marginalia” column of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* for June 11, 1948. Klein begins with the first chapter of Genesis, “the original blueprint,” and proceeds to fuse Joyce with the Pentateuch as he was to do again in *The Second Scroll*:

First described is the condition before Creation: Now the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

Whence it is to be deduced that there are three requisites to an artifact: (a) form, (b) content, (c) light. By the last one must understand internal light — radiance; external light is already assumed in the concept of form.

It was from his God, therefore, that the Angelic Doctor learned that *Ad pulchritudinem tria requiruntur: integritas, consonantia, claritas*.

From this Thomist statement Stephen Dedalus constructs his aesthetic in the fifth chapter of the *Portrait*, amplifying it into what he had called the concept of “epiphany” in *Stephen Hero*. To perceive an object in its wholeness, harmony and radiance, to focus upon it until finally the object reveals itself to the “spiritual eye” of the perceiver, is to experience the moment of epiphany. From this proceeds Stephen’s doctrine of art as stasis and the artist “like the God of creation” remaining “within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails” (*P* 219).

Looking ahead to the “Proteus” chapter of *Ulysses*, however, Klein preserves what Joyce was to retain for Stephen and to some extent for himself in the later works, and discards stasis immediately: “Art dynamic, not static; protean, not uniform; self-multiplying, not sterile.” At the beginning of “Proteus,” epiphany is transformed into: “Ineluctable modality of the visible: at least that if no more, thought through my eyes. Signatures of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot” (*U* 45). Klein writes: “The making of man in God’s image: This is the poet’s signature. In his creation, it is He who must be seen. The artist is a creator completely surrounded by mirrors.” The artist’s function, then, is to learn the divine mirror language so that he may render the world visible, and thus create it, for its inhabitants. Walking along Sandymount Strand, Stephen endeavours to read his world, first with eyes open

and then closed. Chased by the dog-God (whom Eliot borrows in "The Burial of the Dead"), Stephen attempts to write a poem but tosses away the scrap of paper in dejection. He must begin to learn "Divine grammar and syntax," as Klein labels the division of the waters in Genesis. And before there can be any possibility of Stephen's writing, he must acquire "The world's vocabulary which does not live unless it come alive, unless it reproduces itself, unless it connotes." Bloom is the agent of this transformation. In *Circe*, Stephen begs the apparition of his mother to "Tell me the word, mother, if you know now. The word known to all men" (*U* 682). But there is no answer until Bloom and Stephen, gazing together into a mirror, see the face of Shakespeare, father and son at/oned, gazing back. The word and the world at last briefly united, the communion ceremony featuring "Epps's mass-product, the creature cocoa" (*U* 791) is celebrated in the "Ithaca" chapter.

LIKE JOYCE, KLEIN USUALLY PROVIDES CLUES where the source of an allusion is significant. In this case he adopts the mask of Leopold Bloom. Writing about a line from a poem by Rilke describing leaves falling, Klein comments "32 ft. per sec. per sec., not more, not less" (*U* 87). Immediately the whole motif of Bloom's pseudo-scientific speculations on gravity, parallax, and so on, is present. Before he encountered this philosophy of language in Joyce, Klein had likely been sensitized to it through his knowledge of Hassidic lore on the same theme. But Joyce was the focus, the hinge between aesthetic and technique. And once again Klein's criticism is the arena where he can be observed acquiring and moulding data for his own artistic use. "The Black Panther (A Study in Technique)" exemplifies this even in its title. Published a year after "The Oxen of the Sun," this essay has been absorbed since then into so many commentaries upon *Ulysses* that one comes upon the original almost with shock. In it Klein undertakes to prove that the "Telemachus" chapter is structurally an *Imitatio Dei* with Stephen as Christ, Mulligan as John the Baptist, and Haines as Satan. The mysterious black panther associated with Stephen is shown to be a symbol of Christ and the chapter a Black Mass parodied by Mulligan. Devoting the greater part of his study to a tabulation of correspondences between the parts of the Mass and sections of "Telemachus," Klein provides his readers with ample evidence of his own knowledge of Roman Catholic ritual and dogma. It is significant also that Klein's perspective on Joyce in both "The Oxen of the Sun" and "The Black Panther" is shaped by his knowledge of Catholic theology, or perhaps his knowledge of theology was initiated by Joyce. The relationship between Joyce and Catholicism is, at any rate, apparently a symbiotic one for Klein.⁴

As early as 1932 in an article entitled "If . . . ?" (*CJC*, 14 October 1932), Klein can be observed preparing himself for subsequent, more extensive use of Joyce. Perhaps attractive initially because of its Talmudic overtones, the catechetical technique which Joyce used in the "Ithaca" chapter of *Ulysses* was the first which Klein was to practice. A much more polished example of the same technique was to be found in the first instalment of the "Notebook of a Journey," and another in *The Second Scroll*. Using such headings as Reportorial, Rhetorical, Sentimental, Ironic, and so on down to "The plain unvarnished fact," Klein involves himself in a series of Joycean stylistic exercises in order to convey the excitement of his own departure for Israel. A sample will best convey the Joycean flavour:

Reportorial. On the 31st day of July, 1949, at 7 p.m., subject prepared to board at La Guardia Airfield a TWA plane, destination, Lydda, Israel. He had with him not more than sixty-six pounds avoirdupois of baggage, a coat flung over his arm, and upon his person various documents of importance. . . .

Rhetorical. Who can describe, what master of language can communicate the emotions which most thrill the heart of a Jew, scion of sixty generations of exiles, when at last, after two millenia of tribal banishment, he turns again his face in expectation of a return, albeit temporary, to the ancestral soil? . . .

Biblic. And it came to pass that the word was spoken unto Abraham, saying, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, which is in Tur Malca, that is to say, Montreal.

In *The Second Scroll*, outgrowth of the "Notebook of a Journey," Klein fuses his borrowings from Joycean technique as well as aesthetic in one of the major turning-points in the quest and in the moment when the object is attained. Here again, as in "Towards an Aesthetic," he carefully labels his borrowing. The catechetical technique is used as the narrator and his guide are said to "slide" into the mellah in Casablanca "literally: for the narrow laneway which gaped through the gateway at the clean world was thick with offal . . . ; metaphorically: for in a moment we knew that the twentieth century . . . had forsaken us . . ." (*TSS* 62). The abrupt disjunction of worlds and the moment of awakening soon to follow echo the experience of Stephen Dedalus in the *Portrait*. Just before his last conversation with Cranly and his renunciation of religion and country, Stephen surveys from the Library steps the scene he will attempt to transform into art. But at this point he can transform in memory only Nashe's line, "Brightness falls from the air," as he catches a louse crawling over the nape of his neck (*P* 238). In the mellah, Klein's narrator encounters for the first time conditions akin to those which Stephen knows well. Looking at the garments of the people around him, he comments: "Brightness, however, fell only from rags; if a garment was whole, it was black, the sombre ghetto gaberdine" (*TSS* 62).

Like Stephen in *Ulysses*, Klein's narrator seeks a surrogate father, an Ahasuerus whom he will meet without knowing it, whose invisibility itself will shape the

quest and finally provoke its unwitting fulfillment. In the absence of a photograph of his uncle, he constructs his own and “as the years went by and I myself changed from year to year, the image of Uncle Melech that I illegally carried in my mind also suffered its transformations” (*TSS* 20). As Stephen does in “Proteus” and “Scylla and Charybdis,” Klein’s narrator constructs a mirror image of himself and pursues it in vain until, just before he enters the mellah, he is given a photograph of his Uncle. But Melech has just departed for Israel and the photograph is “a double, a multiple exposure” (*TSS* 61). Before Melech’s nephew can get his uncle’s image into focus, he must learn to see and understand the suffering of the mellah. Passing this test, he must lose himself again before he can achieve his goal. So when the narrator arrives at last in Israel, Bloom’s fabled “Agendath Netaim,” he gives up hope of finding Melech and devotes himself to the search for a “completely underivative poet” (*TSS* 82). Again like Stephen, he fancies that he will finally be liberated by the written word and its producers, the signatures of all things finally unravelling themselves before the intent perceiver. But Stephen must transcend the wordy introspection of “Proteus” until — having missed Bloom through his own verbosity in “Scylla and Charybdis” — he at last meets him in silence at the end of the “Circe” chapter. Approaching that meeting Stephen, drunk and confused, murmurs the words which encode the lesson of his day: “In the beginning was the word, in the end the world without end” (*U* 626).

Melech’s nephew achieves the same epiphany at the end of his search for an “original” poet. In Tiberias he discovers a neo-Imagist versifier who combines the formulas of Ezra Pound with the composition of one-liners. But although this is clearly the last straw, the narrator has still not learned his lesson thoroughly:

And then — it was after I had returned from Tiberias to Tel Aviv to attend a literary soirée — then the creative activity, archetypical, all-embracing, that hitherto I had sought in vain, at last manifested itself. Not at the soirée. In the streets, in the shops, everywhere about me. I had looked, but had not seen. It was all there all the time — the fashioning folk, anonymous and unobserved, creating word by word, phrase by phrase, the total work that when completed would stand as epic revealed! (*TSS* 84)

This, not Melech’s death, is the centre of Klein’s cyclic epic, the record of the birth in a new generation of the ability to transcend solipsism and recognize the world. In the “Oxen of the Sun” Stephen calls it the “postcreation” (*U* 511), the mystery of the Logos eternally recycled. Descending from high-flown speculation, Stephen summarizes the epiphany shared by Klein’s narrator: “Dublin. I have much, much to learn” (*U* 183).

In their respective epics Melech and Bloom both function as Messianic figures, and Melech’s nephew and Stephen both strive to achieve what Joyce labels “parallax” with these father figures. Just as Stephen encounters Bloom un-

wittingly in *Hamlet* and in theological obscurities, so Melech's nephew encounters his uncle first through his letters and the literary essay published during Melech's Comrade Krule phase. And just as the quest reverses itself and quester in pursuit of Ahasuerus discovers his goal all around him, so both *Ulysses* and *The Second Scroll* refer the reader in search of dénouement back to the web of language itself. In "Ithaca" and in "Penelope," Joyce provides alternate endings for 16 June 1904; in the five books of his second scroll and in the five glosses attending them, Klein does the same thing, providing endings derived from two different traditions — oral and print, Targum and Torah. Joyce borrows from the same system in *Finnegans Wake*.⁵ In each of these works (as well as in *Ulysses* from the "Oxen of the Sun" on), the reader's addiction to character development and plot resolution is deliberately thwarted, and each attempts to engage us actively in a mime of its message as we go about the task of synthesizing. In terms of the Mass, this process is transubstantiation.

Near the end of "The Black Panther," Klein writes that "*Ulysses* was in a sense intended . . . as the body of Christ, rendered literature," and — borrowing from Eugene Jolas — he stresses the significance of Joyce's "jocoserious" fiftieth birthday gesture. Looking at his birthday cake, a replica of the first edition of *Ulysses*, Joyce intoned the words of the consecration of the bread in the Mass: "*Hoc est enim corpus meum.*" Book and cake are both Word made flesh; both must be ingested in literary communion; both manifest the Logos. Thinking of the same words of consecration as he looks at his "limp father of thousands" in the bath (*U* 107), Bloom attains the status of HCE, Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, hero of *Finnegans Wake*, whose initials also encode this formula. And in the "Night Lessons" chapter of the *Wake*, as patient Dolph gives confused Kev a tour of the earth mother's genitalia, it becomes clear that the topography of Dublin is simply an extension of human physiology, the Word in the world once again. Thus all knowledge sacred and profane, all languages public and private, and all scraps of tribal lore from advertisements to popular songs must be recycled in this memory book of our culture. Parallel in many ways to the "Oxen of the Sun," the "Night Lessons" chapter extends itself in stylistic virtuosity into marginal glosses, footnotes and diagrams in order to reveal the mystery quite literally at the centre of the book. Here Klein found a model for the format and theme, though certainly not the style,⁶ of Gloss Gimel.

It is not surprising, then, that Klein should have fused the logos with topography in his great poem, "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape." Just as the word in all senses is made flesh in the "Oxen of the Sun," so Klein's poet traverses the body of language (which is HCE interred in the landscape of the *Wake*) and discovers "the torso verb, the beautiful face of the noun, / and all those shaped and warm auxiliaries!" (*CP* 332) Praising the world part by part, Klein's poet creates it just as Shem/Dolph creates the "geomater" for Shaun/Kev. And

finally the artist's "cruel-fiction" (*FW* 192.19) redounds upon both of them as the flesh which is word is consumed. Shem, the "first till last alchemist wrote over every square inch of the only foolscap available, his own body, till by its corrosive sublimation one continuous present tense integument slowly unfolded all marry-voicing moodmoulded cyclewheeling history . . ." (*FW* 185.35). Imparting his own life to the world he creates, Shem is consumed by it as Klein's poet, "the nth Adam," maps "not the world's, but his own body's chart" and meets the fate of Icarus. But Icarus at least found death. Klein's poet, transfixed in a perpetual state of drowning, is bound to his redemptive mission. Like Shem "self exiled in upon his own ego" (*FW* 184.6), the poet has himself become one of the signatures of the world he sought to mirror and create.

But the poet is also a reflection of the worst aspects of that world, as Shem is. Remembering his youthful passion for language, he rehearses the roles of a culture which respected performance, and wakens to find his art outmoded, his youth vanished. Instead the conjurers, of the sort Melech's nephew met in Tiberias, have assumed control and set aside the bard's long memory, the epic unrolling around them. In the same way, although Shem is "hardset to murmurise more than a word a week" (*FW* 180.29), he is still the penman who sets down earthmother Anna Livia's letter, eventually the *Wake* itself. Accused of madness and mysticism, sexual perversion and egotism, Klein's poet and Shem triumph over "the ape mimesis" and rise out of "stark infelicity" to sing their song as best they can. And both Klein and Joyce sing ironic visions of how their works in turn will be received and not read.

Asked by Raymond Souster in 1946 whether he had been influenced by English or American writers, and which of the two was the "healthiest influence for Canadians," Klein replied:

There are no influences characterized by place of origin which can be deemed either healthy or unhealthy. In the final analysis, a writer gets influenced by those things which do best harmonize with his own temperament. For Milton even Hebrew influence was healthy. (*CJC*, 22 February 1946)

And for Klein, even Joyce.

NOTES

¹ Abbreviations used: *CJC* *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*; *CP* *The Collected Poems of A. M. Klein*, ed. Miriam Waddington (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974); *FW* James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (N.Y.: Viking, 1959); *Letters of James Joyce*, vol. I, ed. Stuart Gilbert (London: Faber, 1957); *P* James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man*, ed. Chester G. Anderson and Richard Ellman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968); *TSS* A. M. Klein, *The Second Scroll*, New Canadian Library edition (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969); *U* James Joyce *Ulysses* (London: The Bodley Head, 1960).

- ² J. S. Atherton, "The Oxen of the Sun," in *James Joyce's 'Ulysses' — Critical Essays*, ed. Clive Hart and David Hayman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 320.
- ³ As Klein indicated: "Note how Joyce has made a secular pattern out of a single day, a spatial universe out of the environs of Dublin . . ." (*CJC*, 1 March 1946). In the same place, Klein called *Ulysses* "the masterpiece of our century" (Klein's italics).
- ⁴ Klein's third critical study, "A Shout in the Street — An Analysis of the Second Chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*" (*New Directions*, 13 [1951], 327-45) should also be noted here. In it Klein attempts to demonstrate a number of correspondences between Vico's *New Science* and the "Nestor" chapter. While Joyce's use of Vico in *FW* is well known, similarly extensive usage in *U* is still to be demonstrated. So while Klein is meticulous as ever in this study, his case often seems over subtle. It remains to be seen why the "Nestor" chapter should have been the occasion for Vico to enter *U*, and whether his influence is equally apparent throughout the book. Attempts by other critics to demonstrate this have been sporadic and the hypothesis has yet to find general favour.
- ⁵ On Joyce's knowledge of Targum and Torah, see my article "The Choreography of Gesture: Marcel Jousse and *Finnegans Wake*," *James Joyce Quarterly*, XIV (Spring 1977), 313-25. Targums were ritual oral responses in Aramaic to the set text of the Hebrew Torah. Klein's interest in oral culture of all kinds is demonstrated frequently throughout his works from his early recycling of Hassidic tales to his celebration of the Montreal *badchan* Shloime Schmulevitz (*CJC*, 15 May 1942, p. 4) and his article, "Riddle Me This Riddle" (*CJC*, 28 October 1932) on the evolution of the riddle. The parallel of the Irish with Jewry was also a favourite with Klein in other contexts. During a stopover at Shannon on his return from Israel, Klein wrote: "Irish very much like Jews. Some day someone should write a volume of parallels, not only the parallels of psychology, but also those of national struggle . . ." (*CJC*, 23 December 1949). In an article on Bialik, Klein noted that "between the Hebrew Renaissance and the Celtic Revival there are many parallels . . ." (*CJC*, 10 July 1942).
- ⁶ Readers dedicated to the traditional belief in Joyce's destructive influence upon Klein might consult Anthony Burgess, *Joysprick: An Introduction to the Language of James Joyce* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1973) for a different approach to Joyce.