

Bisexual Dynamics in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Chapter One

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“Bisexuality is a blanket term covering a great variety of phenomena. It is the silent B in the acronym LGBTQ. If all bisexual people felt free to speak openly about their sexual lives they would perhaps bring about a revolution in our understanding of sexuality even greater than that effected by gay liberation. In the absence of copious autobiographical material, we must turn to literature for light on the dark continent of bisexuality, particularly to modernist authors such as Joyce, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, Woolf, Katherine Mansfield who pioneered sexual exploration in awareness of the contemporary Freudian revolution in psychology. In each of these writers, sexual attraction to their own sex is a significant theme, though all were married and no doubt predominantly heterosexual, with the possible exception of Woolf. Reading them is not a matter of snooping for biographical “facts but of acclimatizing oneself to their sexual sensibility, and thus expanding one’s own sexual imagination.

Joseph Valente argues that *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* reflects and dramatizes a negotiation with same-sex attraction as the protagonist works toward

establishing a mature heterosexual identity.¹⁾ That perhaps excessively normalizes the protagonist's sexuality according to a conventional neo-Freudian schema. Joyce's sexuality was intrinsically perverse; there is no celebration of warm sexual affection anywhere in his work; and to the degree that he insisted on mapping his sexual nature and articulating it he can be seen as a champion of "queer awareness."²⁾

Joyce spent his youth in all-male colleges, and his fiction exploits the homosocial setting that formed the bulk of his Dublin experience. His interest in "the homo-erotic activities supposedly rife in English or Anglo-Saxon boarding schools" is part of his general sexual curiosity (Valente 47), as one of his century's major literary sex researchers, but it could also be an effort to supplement the data he had gleaned in his own schooldays. Valente sees this interest as marked by disavowal: "admitting to consciousness by way of a qualifying refusal, and he finds an "unwonted circumspection in Joyce's euphemistic references to homosexuality (Valente 47). This may be less a matter of Joyce's own closetedness than of his realism in tracking how homosexuality would come to consciousness in his culture. "His critical and epistolary allusions to homosexuality insist upon a disjunctive definition, asserting his heterosexual identity through a professed ignorance of its designated other (Valente 48). This is perhaps true of his essay on Wilde, but not much can be made of it for the study of his fiction, which thoroughly airs "the fundamental imbrication of these erotic tendencies (Valente 48)—an imbrication presumably more conscious for bisexuals while for others

1) Joseph Valente, "'Thrilled by His Touch': The Aestheticizing of Homosexual Panic in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Quare Joyce*, ed. Joseph Valente (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1998) 47-75.

2) See Darcy O'Brien, "Some Psychological Determinants of Joyce's View of Love and Sex," *New Light on Joyce from the Dublin Symposium*, ed. Fritz Senn (Bloomington and London: Indiana UP, 1972) 15-27. O'Brien might seem to draw heavily on the stereotypical virgin/whore complex discussed by Freud, but actually he shows how this takes a specific sadomasochistic twist in Joyce (already, perhaps, in some of Stephen's erotic brooding in *A Portrait*).

psychoanalysis may uncover it in the unconscious.

To be sure, even in the fiction the subtle indications of homosexual awareness are in contrast to the crass forwardness in the heterosexual talk and thoughts of the men in *Ulysses*, not to mention Molly Bloom. There are elements of homo-erotic attraction in Bloom's nervous dealings with the men of Dublin, such as Mr Power (*U* 6.242-44), in his musing on boy servants (*U* 6.619-20), and allegedly in his relation to Stephen (*U* 9.1209-11). Buck Mulligan, whose gay patter contrasts with the prevailing discretion, but only under the guise of inconsequential gossip, is the campy centre of homosexual allusion in the novel, to which Stephen reacts only by uneasy silences, keeping to himself his thoughts on the matter.

To apply the "epistemology of the closet" to Joyce himself is misguided, I think, for though his fictions portray a population that is obscurantist about homosexuality, and though his style multiplies inscrutable enigmas when portraying repressed or mystified sexual awareness, he cannot be seen as "hiding anything (unlike, say, James and Proust), least of all some alleged secret unconfessed homosexuality. Can one say that Joyce belonged to a patriarchal homosocial world that reacted with panic to the compromising emergence of homosexuality within it, and that his novel reflects phobic blind spots of his own? Was he oppressed by the imperative that "the intensity and sufficiency of male bonding needed to be strictly controlled by homophobic mechanisms" (qtd. in Valente 49). It seems to me, rather, that Joyce, both prized homosocial bonding and reacted tolerantly to homosexual interests, and that he also maps well the homophobic nervousness of Stephen Dedalus on some occasions.

Masochism is a more salient characteristic or structure of Joycean sexuality than same-sex feeling, and indeed it is under the aegis of masochism that the most intense of the same-sex elements make their entry. "Circe" exposes at length the masochistic fantasy that thrills to the idea of being beaten or violated by a male, or a female acting as male, or of being turned into a woman. The troilism whereby two males relate erotically through their rivalry for the same woman figures in *Exiles* and *Ulysses*. The classic literary expression of such fantasies is Leopold von

Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, to which Joyce points by giving the non-Jewish name Leopold to the masochistic protagonist of *Ulysses*, reader of the philo-Semitic Sacher-Masoch's *Tales of the Ghetto* (*U* 10.591-93).

An elusive style well suits sexual themes, if it is true that "sexuality is the only drive that is in itself hindered, perverted (qtd. in Leonard 78). The teasings of desire intertwine with linguistic toying to weave an erotic fabric full of gaps and deferrals. This style is already found in "The Sisters, in which the suggestive "gnomonic ellipses and enigmatic gestures indicate the adults' handling of unspoken sexual knowledge and the mixture of fear, puzzlement, and fascination that the allusions kindle in the "Rosicrucian boy who seeks to interpret them.³⁾ Sometimes it is possible to fill in the missing parts of the gnomons in Joyce's texts. For instance, why does the word "goloshes remind Gretta Conroy of "Christy Minstrels? The missing part of the gnomon here is the word "golliwogs. Sometimes the enigma remains unsolved or its meaning remains undecidable. This indeterminacy pervades "The Sisters. If there is a religious dimension in Joyce's fiction, it resides chiefly in the almost Talmudic obsession with interpretation that is set up in the first paragraph of *Dubliners*. In *Ulysses* Stephen recalls the mystic Jacob Boheme; "Signatures of all things I am here to read (*U* 3.2).

The enigmas to be interpreted are sexual, more often than not. It might be thought that such enigmas strike the imagination only from puberty on. The boy in 'The Sisters' would be thirteen if the story can be keyed to Joyce's own age; the date of the priest's death is given as "July 1st, 1895 (*Dubliners* 4), perhaps signaling the story's contemporaneity with the trials of Oscar Wilde (April 3-May 25). The protagonist of the first chapter of *A Portrait* is much younger (six or seven if we key the story of Joyce's biography) and is in what Freud calls the "latency period. Nonetheless, despite his innocence, he is confronted with a string of sexual interpretative tasks, which in this case do not leave him or the reader with unresolved, nagging puzzles. This chapter, paradoxically, is the one that alludes

3) See J. S. O'Leary, "Joyce between Jacques Lacan and Hélène Cixous: Interpreting 'The Sisters,' *English Literature and Language* 33 (1996): 35-51.

most often to homosexuality among the novel's five chapters. The word "queer" is used as a motif in this chapter fifteen times and the homosexual events are at the very centre of its network of the queer sensations that Stephen sensitively registers and seeks to interpret.

I. Queerness at Clongowes, Round One

Valente hears echoes of Wilde in the title, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which recalls *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde is subtly present in the opening pages, in the infant Stephen's transformation of a "wild rose" into a "green wothé" (recalling Wilde's green carnation); the word "wild" is used in the same punning way in Stephen's ecstatic vision of himself as a free artist, devoted to beauty, at the end of chapter 4 (*Portrait* 183-86). Remembering "the song about the wild rose" later (about four years later, which is rather implausible), Stephen is already meditating as a budding artist: "But you could not have a green rose. But perhaps somewhere in the world you could" (*Portrait* 9). Valente sees Stephen as "registering, 'owning' in some sense, the emergent cultural identification of artistry and homosexuality" (Valente 52). This aspect is not pursued in the remainder of chapter one.

The sexual overtones of the first Clongowes episode have little to do with artistry. The space of Clongowes is presented in the first line of the section: "The wide playgrounds were swarming with boys" (*Portrait* 4). The alternation of three styles takes us from such lucid, objective language to passages told from Stephen's point of view ("He kept on the fringe of his line") to direct transcription of Stephen's thoughts ("Rody Kickham was not like that"). Rody seems a potential object of calf-love or hero-worship; his full name is mentioned three times in this inner monologue, in association with piquant details by which Stephen is lovingly fascinated: "Rody Kickham had greaves in his number and a hamper in the refectory" (*Portrait* 4-5). As so often in Joyce erotic fascination is blended with

linguistic novelties—the four items of school jargon in this sentence would have been new and strange to Stephen; the “hamper” also suggests Rody’s social superiority while the quasi-military “greaves” boosts his masculine image. Male power overwhelms the sick Stephen: “He was caught in the whirl of a scrimmage and, fearful of the flashing eyes and muddy boots, bent down to look through the legs. . . . Then Jack Lawton’s yellow boots dodged out the ball and all the other boots and legs ran after (*Portrait* 6). “Yellow” is a key-word in this novel, often erotically themed: “The yellow gasflames arose before his troubled vision (*Portrait* 107) in Nighttown. If “green” links with Wilde’s green carnation, “yellow” can suggest *The Yellow Book*. The metonymic eyes, boots, and legs are suggestive of phallic power, overwhelming the sensitive and rather feminine Stephen.

As a chronicler of sexuality, Joyce focuses on its perverse and “queer” aspects, often associated with obtrusive male bodies, and contrasted with comforting female presences (the mother, Eileen, Emma, the young prostitute at the end of chapter two, the Blessed Virgin, the bird-girl at the end of chapter four). Stephen registers a consciousness of male bodies at many points in the novel. On a first reading it would seem that erotic attraction plays little or no part in this, but as one follows up Joyce’s hints and connects his motifs it begins to appear that Stephen is to some degree erotically responsive to his all-male surroundings.

As they go in, Rody Kickham, “flushed and muddy” like the other players “held the ball by its greasy lace” and when “a fellow” suggests that he give the ball one last kick he “walked on without even answering the fellow” (*Portrait* 7). This should be read as narrated from Stephen’s point of view, as an admirer of Kickham’s masculine power and confidence. The pun between “kick” and “Kickham” tends to make Rody almost a parody of the athletic stud just as Rodolphe in *Madame Bovary* is a parody of the hunky but brutal seducer. Simultaneously, Simon Moonan tells Kickham not to kick the ball, “because the prefect was looking” drawing the angry response from the unnamed fellow: “We all know why you speak. You are McGlade’s suck” (*Portrait* 7). This is the first piece of live dialogue in the Clongowes section and it is charged with implications.

“We all know” expresses the sexual knowingness of the boys, and even if “suck” has an innocuous meaning in schoolboy argot, Joyce knows what it will suggest to his readers.

The name Simon Moonan, meanwhile, recalls the “simony” of “The Sisters” with its suggestion of “sodomy, the missing part of the gnomon formed by the three words that fascinate the boy; one of Joyce’s editors, nervous about a writing so porous to scabrous suggestion, “asked me very narrowly was there sodomy also in *The Sisters* and what was ‘simony’ and if the priest was suspended only for the breaking of the chalice (*Letters* 2 305-06). The illustration of Moonan’s sycophancy—he “used to tie the prefect’s false sleeves behind his back and the prefect used to let on to be angry (*Portrait* 8)—suggests gay flirtatiousness. Later we witness this directly: “The prefect was at the door with some boys and Simon Moonan was knotting his false sleeves. He was telling them something about Tullabeg (*Portrait* 10). Tullabeg refers to a Jesuit novitiate, and the suggestion is that the prefect is preparing the boys for recruitment into the order. The knotting of false sleeves is echoed with the director who attempts to recruit Stephen in chapter four, “slowly dangling and looping the cord of the other blind (*Portrait* 166); when Stephen offers a seemingly positive reply to his invitation he “slowly let the blindcord fall to one side, thinking he has found in Stephen “a companion in the spiritual life (*Portrait* 170, 173). Clerical clothes are presented in this chapter as effeminate: “the swish of a soutane ; “The capuchin dress, he thought, was rather too . . . (a suggestive ellipsis); “*Les jupes* they call them in Belgium (*Portrait* 167). Stephen’s heterosexual memories at this point show up the “false character of priestly dress and alert him to what its softness conceals: “he had imagined the reins by which horses are driven as slender silken bands and it shocked him to feel at Stradbrook the greasy leather of harness (*Portrait* 168). Knotting false sleeves is harmless play—but not quite so harmless, as a later scene will suggest. Stephen will “fly by those nets and knots (*Portrait* 220), elude the harness. There is no particular indication of an interest in Moonan on Stephen’s part, but later on we find Stephen covering a page with “the names and addresses

of certain of his classmates (*Portrait* 73). The names listed are Roderick Kickham, John Lawton, Anthony MacSwiney, Simon Moonan. Has the too ordinary Fleming been forgotten in favour of the dashing masculine Kickham and the seductively effeminate Moonan? The middle names, one not otherwise mentioned, probably represent intellectual soulmates, Lawton being Stephen's chief academic rival.

The word "suck" prompts a shift to the third style, direct transcription of Stephen's thoughts, which turn on that word: "Suck was a queer word . . . the dirty water went down through the hole in the basin . . . the hole in the basin had made a sound like that: suck. . . . There were two cocks that you turned and water came out: cold and hot (*Portrait* 8). Four basic words in the lexicon of homosex thus parade through the boy's mind. The word "queer" made its first appearance on the opening page, referring to the "queer smell of the oilsheet put on by his mother after his bed-wetting. There too it is linked with an alternation of hot and cold liquid: "When you wet the bed first it is warm then it gets cold (*Portrait* 3). "He could see the names printed on the cocks: that was a very queer thing (*Portrait* 8). The queerness makes sense only if we are alert to the sexual connotations, which as so often are linked with words, here the "Hot" and "Cold" printed on taps (this latter a harmless ordinary word that Joyce does not use here).

If Rody Kickham is admired, it is Fleming who most touches Stephen, by his natural empathy and solicitude: "Fleming was very decent to ask him. He wanted to cry (*Portrait* 10). Fleming is the *fidus Achates*, like Cranly in the later palette of male schoolmates in chapter five.

The sick Stephen comes into physical contact with McGlade: "he felt his forehead warm and damp against the prefect's cold damp hand (*Portrait* 19-20); again that "queer" play between liquid cold and warmth. "That was the way a rat felt, slimy and damp and cold (*Portrait* 20)—repulsive, but with an undertow of attraction, as so often in Joyce: "He saw the word *Lotts* on the wall of the lane and breathed slowly the rank heavy air. — That is horse piss and rotted straw, he thought. It is a good odour to breathe. It will calm my heart (*Portrait* 91).

Another man, Brother Michael, has "a queer look. It was queer that he would

always be a brother. It was queer too that you could not call him sir (*Portrait* 21). He banters with Athy, a charming, chatty boy, with whom Stephen shares the room in the infirmary. Athy asks Brother Michael for buttered toast: “—Ah, do! he said. —Butter you up! said Brother Michael ; the brother repeats “you’ll get your walking papers jokingly, waving his poker in a mock-threatening gesture while nodding his head at Athy (*Portrait* 21). Next morning Athy tells Stephen that “Brother Michael was very decent and always told him the news out of the paper they get every day up in the castle (*Portrait* 23). Alert, curious, intelligent, and innocent too, Athy, who is not mentioned by Valente, is an important focus of erotic interest in this chapter. He has a specific style of speech—direct, pellucid, marked by repetitions and balance as in the sentence, “You have a queer name, Dedalus, and I have a queer name too, Athy (*Portrait* 23). His riddle—“Why is the county Kildare like the leg of a fellow’s breeches? . . . Because there is a thigh in it —has erotic appeal and his suggestion that “you can ask that riddle another way carries a further erotic charge: “He looked at Stephen over the bedclothes as he spoke from the other bed in the room (*Portrait* 23-24). He teasingly leaves the riddle unexplained: “There is another way but I won’t tell you what it is. Trying to work out the other way would involve cogitation on thighs and breeches, perhaps to come up with: “Why is the leg of a fellow’s breeches like the county Kildare? or “What Kildare town have you in your breeches? It is the gnomons, the lacunae, that most stimulate the sexual anxiety and imagination of the boy. Here again the sexual intimations turn on the impact of a single enigmatic word.

This chapter often recalls the genre of the boys’ school story, represented by thousands of books, including the 64-pagers of my childhood, products of a segregated all-male world. Girls’ school stories, in similar formats, and novels such as Kate O’Brien’s *The Land of Spices*, were the obverse of this. The pedagogical scenes are few. Fr Arnall is shown as a lively teacher, in jovial form, as he makes the maths class a replay of the War of the Roses: “—Now then, who will win? Go ahead, York! Go ahead, Lancaster! “Father Arnall’s face looked very black, but he was not in a wax: he was laughing (*Portrait* 8). There is a hint here that Fr

Arnall is not always so benign. Laughter and smiles, especially from clerics, carry sinister overtones throughout the novel, in continuation of the syphilitic laughter in “The Sisters : “—Wide-awake and laughing-like to himself. . . . So then, of course, when they saw that, that made them think that there was something gone wrong with him (*Dubliners* 10). Joyce infiltrates the innocent homosocial world of the boys’ school story with a series of disturbing undertones conveyed by light but unmistakable hints.

II. Round Two

The second Clongowes section deepens the themes of the first, repeating in a less harmless and innocent key scenes from the first section. Though the chapter presents only two days of Stephen’s Clongowes life, the boy’s frequent reminiscences, the rhythm of the narration, and the skilful weaving of motives create the impression of a rich, charged duration. The passage of time is suggested by the new motif of the cricket bats, especially as it recurs at the very end, and also by a new ritual deployment of the threefold rhythm, as the progress of the conversation about five older pupils who ran away touches on three progressively deeper scenes of crime—theft, sacrilege, “smuggling—in three different locations—the rector’s room, the sacristy, and the “square.

Each boy offers his “revelation in his personal style, Thunder sententious, Wells blatant, Athy lucid and poised. The conversation is musical, accompanied by the rhythm of the cricket bats and punctuated by Stephen’s inner monologue. In response to Thunder’s item of information he thinks: “But that was stealing. How could they have done that? ; Wells’s revelation provokes the same question, but now accompanied by a quasi-erotic swoon: “A faint sickness of awe made him feel weak, followed by brooding on the sacristy, “a strange and holy place (*Portrait* 40, 41).

After a long pause, Athy quietly speaks up, perhaps posing as more sexually

knowing than the other boys: “You are all wrong. . . . I will tell you but you must not let on you know. . . . They were caught with Simon Moonan and Tusker Boyle in the square one night. . . . Smuggling (*Portrait* 41-42). After his well-timed and sensational revelation he smugly concludes: “And that’s why (*Portrait* 42). Simon Moonan’s earlier flirtatiousness now takes on a lurid glow; Athy points to him “kicking a stone before him his frolicking at an end, ostracized, in disgrace, and facing punishment (*Portrait* 42).

“What did that mean about the smuggling in the square, Stephen wonders (*Portrait* 42). The obscure word “smuggling plays the same stimulating role as the obscure noun “suck earlier. It has been prepared by the words “fucked and “scut used by Thunder and Wells, innocuous schoolboy diction which nonetheless has a jabbing effect. The word “square turns out to be disturbing too, for it names a toilet.

Valente notes “a distinctly libidinal complexion in Stephen’s musing on the “ball of creamy sweets that Simon Moonan showed him, which unconsciously echoes his earlier thought of “a long long chocolate train with cream facings (Valente 54; *Portrait* 42, 18). The other boy, called ‘Lady Boyle because he was always at his nails, paring them’ (*Portrait* 43), can have erotic appeal too. He has such an impact on Stephen’s imagination that he provides an extra touch to the lofty phrase he cribs from Flaubert thirteen years later: “The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.—Trying to refine them also out of existence, said Lynch (*Portrait* 233). One can safely attribute to Tusker Boyle, too, a seductive air of indifference. In real life it would be highly unlikely that the undergraduate would recall such an item from his early childhood, but the temporality of the work of art functions differently.

Stephen swerves from thinking of Lady Boyle to an orthodox heterosexual register: “Eileen had long thin cool white hands too because she was a girl . . . she had put her hand into his pocket (*Portrait* 43). Valente notes that the “homosocial energies in this episode are “indissociable from Stephen’s phobic

denial of them (implying that his shift of thought to Eileen is a defence); Joyce “*stages and thereby transvalues* his own disavowal of the homoerotic (Valente 49-50). “Homosocial is not the right word here, since the object of fascination has become explicitly an erotic one. Homosociality is the normal texture of Stephen’s life, but in the erotic innuendos something forbidden surfaces disturbingly.

Stephen is soon drawn back to homoerotic broodings: “What did that mean about the smuggling in the square? . . . You went there when you wanted to do something . . . there was a queer smell of stale water there (*Portrait* 42-43). Again, sexual interest is both stirred and frustrated by an enigmatic signifier. The toilet drawing of “a bearded man in a Roman dress and the graffito that transforms the virile *De gallico bello* into “*The Calico Belly*” carry a threat to male identity and anticipate Stephen’s nightmare in chapter three: “Goatish creatures with human faces, hornybrowed, lightly bearded and grey as indiarubber (*Portrait* 43, 148-49). Stephen tries to brush away his uneasy feelings and dismiss the activities in the square as “a cod. “But all the same it was queer what Athy said and the way he said it, namely the way he “lowered his voice and the way he “paused for a moment and then spoke “mysteriously (*Portrait* 43, 42). Sexual awareness is seeping in, as in his joking conversation with Athy in the earlier Clongowes section. Athy’s words “you must not let on that you know can be read as an imperative of the closet (*Portrait* 41), sealing the fascinating quality of the forbidden knowledge.

The erotic climax of the chapter is prepared as the boys discuss how the offenders will be punished. Athy again knows the details: “Simon Moonan and Tusker are going to be flogged, Athy said, and the fellows in the higher line got their choice of flogging or being expelled. . . . All are taking expulsion except Corrigan (*Portrait* 44). Cecil Thunder now outbids Athy in the knowledge competition, first with a piece of precocious worldly wisdom: “I know why He is right and the other fellows are wrong because a flogging wears off after a bit but a fellow that has been expelled from college is known all his life on account of it, and then with a remark that carries suggestive overtones: “Besides Gleeson

won't flog him hard. — It's best of his play not to, Fleming said (*Portrait* 44). Erotic play and cruel punishment conjoin in this enigmatic exchange.

Athy relieves the tense atmosphere with his ditty as he simulates the flogging: “*So down with your breeches/ And out with your bum* (*Portrait* 45). These words excite Stephen's imagination: “A long thin cane would have a high whistling sound and he wondered what was the pain like. It made him shivery to think of it and cold: and what Athy said too (*Portrait* 45). Again it is Athy's words that have most erotic bite. The sexual throb becomes more marked as the style shifts to inner monologue: “but that was because you always felt like a shiver when you let down your trousers. It was the same in the bath when you undressed yourself (*Portrait* 45). This is a rationalization of his shiver, which is due not to the thought of cold, but to a fear mixed with fascination, straying into sexual speculation: “He wondered who had to let them down, the master or the boy himself (*Portrait* 45).

His thoughts move from Athy's “knuckly inky hands to Mr Gleeson who has “clean white wrists and fattish white hands and the nails of them were long and pointed. Perhaps he pared them too like Lady Boyle (*Portrait* 45-46). The boys perceive Gleeson as homosexual, as Fleming's “his play indicates. Stephen's fear of his “cruel long nails is already sexually tinged, and it is mixed with attraction to the gentle hands: “the white fattish hands were not cruel but gentle. And though he trembled with cold and fright to think of the cruel long nails and of the high whistling sound of the cane and of the chill you felt at the end of your shirt when you undressed yourself yet he felt a feeling of queer quiet pleasure inside him to think of the white fattish hands, clean and strong and gentle (*Portrait* 46). Here is Stephen's most intense erotic feeling in the chapter, well reflecting “the ambivalent, uncanny impact of the homoerotic upon Stephen, his mixture of fear and fascination, attraction and repulsion (Valente 55). His thought returns to the enigmatic exchange between Thunder and Fleming: “And Fleming had said he would not because it was the best of his play not to. But that was not why (*Portrait* 46), which heaps one enigma on another, again suggesting obscure sexual undercurrents.

The pandybat scene that follows takes on an erotic overtone from its context. The teachers, faced with an epidemic of profligacy involving five older and two younger boys, have installed a general punitive regime. Stephen is punished for the sexual crime of others; only in chapter three will he be arraigned as a sexual criminal himself.

Fr Arnall's role is no longer benign. In meek response to question of the prefect of studies whether "any boys wants flogging, he surrenders the kneeling Fleming: "— He wrote a bad Latin theme, Father Amall said, and he missed all the questions in grammar (*Portrait* 49). Treacherously, he fails to intervene when the prefect queries Stephen's story of having broken his glasses. The actual punishment scene has a masochistic quality, first in Stephen's acute perception of the strange physical presence of the punisher: "Stephen lifted his eyes in wonder and saw for a moment Father Dolan's whitegrey not young face, his baldy whitegrey head with fluff at the sides of it, the steel rims of his spectacles and his nocoloured eyes looking through the glasses (*Portrait* 51). There is a mirror effect as they look at each other for a moment eye to eye; Dolan's spectacles are the only ones other than Stephen's mentioned in the novel apart from one reference to a student with gold spectacles (*Portrait* 209). There is a similar moment between the boy and the "queer old jossler in "An Encounter: "I was surprised at this sentiment and involuntarily glanced up at his face. As I did so I met the gaze of a pair of bottle-green eyes peering at me from under a twitching forehead (*Dubliners* 18-19).

The two paragraphs describing the pain have a masochistic intensity, from the suspense of "the swish of the sleeve of the soutane as the pandybat was lifted to strike to the sharp sting of the "hot burning stinging tingling blow like the loud crack of a broken stick (*Portrait* 51). Intensity is jacked up by the line: "— Other hand! shouted the prefect of studies (*Portrait* 51), and the second paragraph outdoes the first: "The soutane swished again as the pandybat was lifted and a loud crashing sound and a fierce maddening tingling burning pain made his hand shrink together with the palms and fingers in a livid quivering mass (*Portrait* 52). A sort of reciprocity between sadist and victim is again caught in Stephen's recall of "the

firm touch of the prefect of studies when he had steadied the shaking fingers (*Portrait* 52); “the touch of the prefect’s fingers as they had steadied his hand and at first he had thought he was going to shake hands with him because the fingers were soft and firm (*Portrait* 53). Note the curious reference to metonymic fingers, Stephen’s in the first quote, Dolan’s in the second, as if representing a kind of sadomasochistic dynamic that proceed independently of the identity and distinction of the persons to whom they belong.

Fleming is once again the stalwart friend; “— It’s a stinking mean thing . . . to pandy a fellow for what is not his fault. . . . Stephen felt his heart filled by Fleming’s words (*Portrait* 53-54). Tender emotion of this kind is directed only to Fleming among the schoolmates, as toward a protective elder brother.

The connection between the punishment and the sexual crackdown surfaces when Stephen observes Corrigan, the only named senior malfeator in the smuggling episode along with Rody Kickham’s brother: “That was why the prefect of studies had called him a schemer and pandied him for nothing, whereas Corrigan “had done something and besides Mr Gleeson would not flog him hard (*Portrait* 40, 55). Note the echo here of the elliptical euphemism earlier: “You went there when you wanted to so something (*Portrait* 43). Then his thoughts veer to Corrigan’s body: “he remembered how Corrigan had looked in the bath. He had skin the same colour as the turfcoloured bogwater . . . at every step his thighs shook a little because he was fat (*Portrait* 55-56). The bath in its likeness to the ditch “indicates how profoundly this desire interfuses with dread (Valente 57). Attraction and repulsion intertwine in Stephen’s attention to other male bodies. This accords with a masochistic psychology that finds a nucleus of pleasure in what is at first sight painful and repellent. Of Joycean sexuality generally one might say that it is never merely pleasurable. The smuttiness, clandestinity, betrayal, deception, grossness, and perversity that attach to so many sexual behaviours in *Ulysses* are inseparable from sexual desire as Joyce conceives it, not mere accidents. This dynamic can already be found in the first chapter of *A Portrait* in a muted and subtly shaded form.

III. Conclusion

To fully appreciate the texture of Joyce's writing and to assess its spiritual bearings, one has to examine closely the erotic allusions so pervasive in his texts. Close reading reveals how packed they are with precise observation, economically conveyed in sharply delineated "epiphanies. Those of Chapter One yield their meaning fairly transparently, and are good practice for deciphering the implications of the murkier material of Chapter Two, when the "dusk of adolescent invades Stephen's soul.

If Joyce's works scrutinize the meaning of life, the starting-point for this interpretative quest is an interrogation of the enigmas of sexuality, often linked with strange or opaque linguistic items. The sexual drama knit into the story of Stephen's days at Clongowes presents in its simplest form this shared growth of linguistic and sexual awareness, which will culminate in the saturated erotico-linguistic density of *Ulysses*.

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Abstract

Bisexual Dynamics in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*,
Chapter One

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Stephen Dedalus struggles at Clongowes with linguistic enigmas and sexual enigmas, which are intimately connected in potent key-words such as “suck and “smuggling. Through a close study of the unfolding of this sexual plot in the two structurally matching Clongowes sections, this essay shows that Joyce was a clear-sighted phenomenologist of sexuality, who shed light on the psychology of the “latency period. The interplay of linguistic and sexual enigmas would remain fundamental to his art. While the material of *A Portrait*, chapter one, is ordinary schoolboy experience, its self-conscious literary handling, centred on a few charged signifiers, encases this experience in highly reflexive aesthetic recreation, in which luminous form goes hand in hand with psychological penetration.

■ **Key words** : homosexuality, masochism, queerness, latency period, language, narrative technique

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