

## “Scylla and Charybdis” and Joyce’s Mourning for His Mother\*

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### I

For Joyce, the year 1904 was a turbulent period in his life. He must have been in emotional trouble in the aftermath of the death of his mother, May Joyce, on 13 August 1903. His drinking sprees, frequent quarrels, and sleeping outside home were certainly the marks of his emotional disturbance following his mother’s death. His occupancy of the Martello tower at Sandycove with Oliver Gorgarty, his bully Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses*, occurred in the period. Before her death, during his stay in Paris as a would-be medical student (1902-03), his letters to May Joyce show his tremendous emotional dependency on her. His mother was the only domestic resource for him to lean on for financial succor and emotional comfort. May

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Joyce's maternal dedication to the first-born is illustrated in his autobiographical fictions, *Stephen Hero*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses*.

Admittedly, Joyce has been known as a writer who artistically recreated his family life in his fictions. In *Stephen Hero*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses*, the Dedalus family evidently illustrates his family process in his real life. In the fictional accounts of Joyce's real family, what captures the reader's attention is the way in which his relationship with his mother is fictionally reformed. In *A Portrait*, Stephen aligns himself as historic figures such as Pascal, Aloysius Gonzaga and Jesus, all of whom are considered by him to revolt against emotionally demanding mothers (242). His letters from Paris to May Joyce before her death show that he heavily relied on her emotional support to relieve internal anguish from his stranded and indigent life. May Joyce's maternal sacrifice for the first-born is well documented in his autobiographical fictions. It is a great wonder that Joycean criticism has not sufficiently explored the riddle of Joyce's want of pity for his dead mother and paid attention to what might be like his lamentation for his loss of the maternal love in interpretations of his novels.

The purpose of this paper is to read the "Scylla and Charybdis" episode of *Ulysses* as a thinly disguised recount of Joyce's mourning for his dead mother. In this paper, I argue that Joyce's grief over his deceased mother is overlaid on Stephen's view of *Hamlet* as Shakespeare's autobiography in "Scylla and Charybdis." Critics such as Edward Duncan, William Schutte, and Richard Ellmann pick up the motif of betrayal in Stephen's (or Joyce's) reception of *Hamlet* as an autobiographical representation of cuckolded Shakespeare. Associating the demanding mother of Stephen with the image of the betrayer dragging down his aspiration for artistic freedom, they see that Stephen is betrayed by his religious mother, whose ailment brings him back to the net of religion, in the same way in which King Hamlet is betrayed by Gertrude and Shakespeare by Ann (Duncan 130; Schutte 90; Ellmann *Consciousness* 59). All of these criticisms assume Stephen's hostility to Mary Dedalus. Differing from these criticisms, on the contrary, I will argue that Stephen's *Hamlet* lecture in "Scylla and Charybdis" is an artistic

manifestation of Joyce’s repressed grief over his dead mother and his yearning to retrieve her. A reference point in tracking down Joyce’s sorrow for the loss of his mother is Joyce’s 1904 essay “A Portrait of the Artist”—his artistic manifesto presenting the themes and motifs running through his subsequent fictions. “Scylla and Charybdis” certainly carries Joyce’s emotional grains in the 1904 essay in light of his mourning for his loved mother.

## II

It is clearly Stephen’s rancor against Irish Catholicism that causes him to dismiss the caring and protective motherhood on behalf of him. In *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*, Catholic religion is a main reason for the jarring relationship between the mother and the son: the more demanding Mary Dedalus is in exacting religious duties on him, the more rebellious Stephen Dedalus is in rejecting them. In reading both *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*, what puzzles the readers the most is Stephen’s inability to love his mother fully devoted to his care. In *A Portrait*, Cranly poignantly points out the certainty of maternal love in the uncertain world, obliquely attacking Stephen’s egoistic coldness towards his loving mother: “Whatever else is unsure in this stinking dunghill of a world a mother’s love is not. Your mother brings you into the world, carries you first in in her body” (241-42). On the contrary, Stephen reveals his nonchalance towards her:

—Let me [Cranly] ask you a question. Do you love your mother?

Stephen shook his head slowly.

—I don’t know what your words mean, he said simply.

—Have you never loved anyone? Cranly asked.

—Do you mean women?

—I am not speaking of that, Cranly said in a colder tone. I ask you if you ever felt love towards anyone or anything.

...

–I tried to love God, he said at length. It seems now I failed. It is very difficult. I tried to unite my will with the will of God instant by instant. In that I did not always fail. I could perhaps do that still . . .

Cranly cut him short by asking:

–Has your mother had a happy life?

–How do I know? Stephen said. (*A Portrait* 240-41)

Afterwards, Cranly admonishes Stephen to do whatever his mother wishes him to do as regards religious duties, affected as it looks, in order to “set her mind at rest” (241). It is, though, Stephen’s invidiousness about Catholicism that causes him to depreciate the caring and protective motherhood. Rejecting the Catholic mother deemed a Catholic accomplice, Stephen proclaims, “I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church” (246-47). What is notable in the fictional recreation of Joyce himself in his relationship with his mother (May Joyce) is that he is muted about his emotional dependence on his mother. Joyce’s attachment to his mother is evinced by the correspondence between them during his stay in Paris from December 1902 to April 1903. Joyce went over to Paris and took medical courses at École de Médecine to become a physician. In conjunction with his lack of fluency in French for taking the medical classes (Ellmann, *James Joyce* 111), yet, his financial difficulty was too much to fulfill his goal in Paris.

At the very beginning of his stay in Paris, Joyce was very sanguine about his future in Paris, expecting certain earnings from writing to some magazines, producing book reviews, and giving English tutoring, some of his earnings insured to be spent on buying his mother a set of teeth: “Dear Mother . . . M Douce will give me 10s/, the ‘Express’ £ 1-1-0, and the Academy, I daresay, £ 1-0-0: that is £ 2-11-0. Could you get a set of teeth for that? Do not be offended please because I cannot write” (15 December 1902, *Letters II* 22). Joyce was, later on, made hopeless by being penniless with no such job as he hoped to get. He turned into a demanding son, asking Mary to send some money to him so that he could not starve, which made her increasingly anxious about her struggling son. She felt very

sorry about the wretched condition of her son in Paris: “I am sorry to hear your funds are so low[.] Your Pappie is not home yet so I cannot reply to this question” (\*\*December 1902, *Letters II* 22). Hoping to see her son back home during Christmas holidays, she wrote:

I only wish I was near you to look after and comfort you but we will be united very soon again thank God for home you must come if only for a week.

My dear Jim if you are disappointed in my letter and if as usual I fail to understand what you would wish to explain, believe me it is not from any want of a longing desire to do so and speak the words you want but as you so often said I am stupid and cannot grasp the great thoughts which are yours much as I desire to do so. Do not wear your soul out with tears but be as usually brave and look hopefully to the future[.] (\*\*December 1902, *Letters II* 22).

Joyce returned to Paris after spending Christmas and New Year holidays back in home, but he kept appealing to her for more money as his indigence went on: “With the utmost stretching your last [money] order will keep me Monday midday (postage half a franc probably)—then, I suppose, I must do another fast. I regret this as Monday and Tuesday are carnival days and I shall probably be the only one starving in Paris” (21 February 1903, *Letters II* 29-30); “Dear Mother Your order for 3s/4d of Tuesday last was very welcome as I had been without food for 42 hours” (*Letters II* 29). To ongoing requests by her son for money, May Joyce did try her best to meet her son’s demand: “My dearest Jim, Your Pappie has given me the enclosed to send to you (£ 1-12-0) which will make you safe with yr [your] landlady until the end of this month he [your father] was very pleased you wrote to him and I hope you will do so frequently” (2 March 1903, *Letters II* 32).

Curiously enough, Joyce gave away nothing of his attachment to his mother in any of his fictions autobiographically mirroring his own family in his real life. In his conscious life, the solicitous mother completely vanishes into oblivion and only a Catholic mother remains. In Paris, Joyce never expected her mother’s untimely death soon to happen. May Joyce died of liver cancer on 13 August 1903. Joyce did not pray for his dying mother in her death bed. In *My Brother s Keeper*,

Stanislaus Joyce reproduced his mother's death-bed scene in which Joyce was recalcitrant to praying for her:

When my mother lapsed into unconsciousness and it became apparent that her last moments had come, Uncle John [May Joyce's brother John Murray] knelt down with all the others and began to pray in a loud voice. Then seeing that neither my brother nor I was praying, he made an angry, peremptory gesture to us to kneel down. Neither of us paid any attention to him. (234)

Both Stanislaus Joyce and James Joyce disdained to pray at the death bed of the Catholic mother: "Religion, either as consolation or remorse, was so completely eliminated from my system [and my brother's system] that the refusal to pray had no part in the confused pain of loss then or later" (234). Ten months after his mother's death, Joyce initiated courtship with Nora Barnacle, his wife in the near future. Implying his flight from Ireland, in the letter to her, he confessed that his mother's death was caused by a dysfunctional family system:

My mother was slowly killed, I think, by my father's ill-treatment, by years of trouble, and by my cynical frankness of conduct. When I looked on her face as she lay in her coffin—a face grey and wasted with cancer—I understood that I was looking on the face of a victim and I cursed the system which had made her a victim. (*Letters II* 48)

It is a great wonder that Joyce's response to the loss of the maternal love was too much placid to reckon him to be the bereaved left behind by the mother who was always a buffer for him against the harsh world and an emotional supporter for his internal needs.

In his journal, Stanislaus Joyce portrays May Joyce as "Mother [who] kept the house together at the cost of her life" (*Dublin Diary* 15). May Joyce was one of the ordinary Irish mothers in the nineteenth-century Ireland, who used to play the role of a pivot for family integration but to have to compromise herself for the sake of family. She was bullied by her husband, who was "the only child of an only

child (his father) and the spoiled son of a spoiled son” (*Dublin Diary* 15). John Joyce, Joyce’s father, was “a household bully.” His habitual inebriation may have amplified his egoistic “vanity,” which made him curse his home and abuse his children. His dissatisfaction with the destitute economy of his household may have led him to treat his children as “wasters” (17) and call them “bastards.” She had “an ever-watchful anxiety for her children” (18), rendering her to gird herself for committing “herself to them utterly.” Stanislaus Joyce testifies that “It is understanding and not love that makes the confidence between Mother and children so natural” and “it is understanding that makes the love [in family] so enduring.” For John Joyce, Stanislaus Joyce says, “she was a selfish drunkard’s unselfish wife” (19). She was very pious by her own ideas of Christian virtues such as “acquiescence,” which “deceived herself to make her life submissive to that Priest-worship in which she was reared” (20). For Joyce, his mother must have been a loving but repulsive figure who occasioned him to love and hate her. His contradictory and ambivalent feelings about her mother were not easily reconciled in his emotional system.

How should Joyce have mourned for his mother if he did? How should—if he did—he have repressed his sympathy for the Irish woman who concerned herself only for the family by costing her own life? The first vital clues to the maternal loss’s impact on Joyce as a bereaved son are found in his enigmatic depiction of himself in the narrative essay made shortly after his mother’s death. During the span of ten months after the demise of his mother until encountering Nora in early June of 1904, Joyce fell into drinking sprees as he aimlessly drifted away. During this period, he produced a significant piece of writing, which is a note for himself about his budding life as a writer. The essay presenting himself as a protagonist, entitled “A Portrait of the Artist,” is his contemplation on his past and future, whose main focus is on his artistic purpose as a writer. “A Portrait of the Artist” is basically a kind of writer’s journal as well, functioning as an introductory compendium laconically adumbrating his main ideas, motifs, and symbols to be dealt with in his novels down the road. Joyce’s conceptions of his Irish life for his

upcoming fictions in the essay were materialized in *Ulysses* as well as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* whose primordial version was *Stephen Hero*. On the one hand, the tone of the essay is predominantly bold as well as heroic. It assumes the revolting voice of the protagonist who does justice to his artistic egoism in which “he had annihilated and rebuilt experience” (Scholes and Kain 64) against “natural pieties—social limitations, inherited apathy of race, an adoring mother, the Christian fable” (64). The “adoring mother” the protagonist is about to turn his back on is made into May Dedalus whose religiosity is rebutted by Stephen in *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*. He envisions “a fervent moment [for] the necessity for action” by artistic appeals for “the extremes of heterodoxy, reason of an imaginative determinant in ethics, of anarchy (the folk).”

On the other hand, the essay conveys, quite remarkably, the very opposite of the proclamatory exhibitionism his artistic heroism displays when it betrays his depressive voice—the still conceited but fairly dejected voice self-critically countering his willingness for artistic flight from constraining reality:

In calmer mood the critic in him could not but remark a strange prelude to the new crowning era in a season of melancholy and unrest. He made up his tale of losses—a dispiriting tale enough even were there no comments. The air of false Christ was manifestly the mask of a physical decrepitude, itself the brand and sign of vulgar ardours; whence ingenuousness, forbearance, sweet amiability and the whole tribe of domestic virtues. Sadly mindful of the worst[,] the vision of his dead, the vision (far more pitiful) of congenital lives shuffling onwards between yawn and howl, starvelings in mind and body, visions of which came as temporary failure of his olden, sustained manner, darkly beset him. (66-67)

It is noteworthy that the protagonist brings his grief over the “losses” by envisaging the dead into his repugnance against the old Catholic Church. He assumes the Church to preach still “acquiescence” that is clearly a sign of “the general paralysis of an insane society” (68). Clearly, the anti-Church sentiment of the protagonist in the essay reverberates through Stephen in *Stephen Hero* condemning “the farce of



Irish Catholicism” to which the Irish people commit “their wills and minds” [so] “that they may ensure for themselves a life of spiritual paralysis” (146). Joyce fully developed the idea of “paralysis” as a motif showcasing a Dublin life in the seminal essay when he registered Stephen’s artistic rebellion against the Church and his mother as its proxy in *Stephen Hero* and its final version *A Portrait*. The mysterious melancholy of the protagonist was, though, never detailed in either *Stephen Hero* or *A Portrait*. The undefined grief of the protagonist in the essay is fully illuminated in *Ulysses* depicting Stephen’s Dublin life in the days of post maternal care.

Joyce made a list of characters and notes about plots and themes of main chapters in the pages following his essay “A Portrait of the Artist.” Out of the notes he made for Chapter X of *Stephen Hero* (later *A Portrait*), one note draws our attention: “Man of Grief: ‘Cause of our sorrow’” (Scholes and Kain 72). The note comes with his mention of Hamlet as well as holy men such as Christ, Buddha, and “Muhammed.” During his days in Trieste, Joyce delivered twelve lectures on *Hamlet* at the Università Popolare. For Joyce, as an exile who fled from his native land, his Dublin life was turned into a nostalgic moment over which he was compelled to repeatedly brood. In particular, the “Scylla and Charybdis” episode of *Ulysses* retrospectively revisits his life around February 1904 in which he wrote the essay “A Portrait of the Artist.” Joyce’s *Hamlet* lectures from November 1912 through February 1913 were fictionally recreated in “Scylla and Charybdis.”

None of his actual lectures survives today, but his notes on *Hamlet* remain—the notes enabling the readers to estimate what his main concerns were in his *Hamlet* lectures. In his notes on *Hamlet*, which was retrieved by William H. Quillian in the Fall 1974 and Winter 1975 issue of *James Joyce Quarterly*, Joyce ran quotations taken from printed materials by a variety of authors about the Elizabethan era and Shakespeare’s life. What the quotations address ranges from English drama in the Elizabethan era to hunting, Queen Elizabeth, metropolitan life in London, women’s frailty, Elizabethan dandyism, travel, sun rising, Christmas day, some passages from Shakespeare’s plays, and so on. Moreover, Joyce keyed forty-seven quotations to

specific scenes in *Hamlet*. Quite oddly, Joyce never explains why a quotation should be keyed to a specific scene when there seems to be no relevance between quotations he singled out and the *Hamlet* scenes to which he keyed them. Nevertheless, Joyce must have made use of his notes to elucidate his views on the life of Shakespeare and *Hamlet* before his audiences at the Università Popolare. And Joyce brought the sources he used for his *Hamlet* lectures into “Scylla and Charybdis,” which features Stephen’s *Hamlet* theory presented to John Eglinton (William K. Magee), A. E. (George Russell), and Lyster (the Quaker Librarian) chatting away their time in the Dublin National Library.

“Scylla and Charybdis” written around 1918-19 (*Letters II* 442) is a fictional reproduction of Joyce’s Dublin life in 1904, whose substantial part is Joyce’s autobiography. Joyce contributed his essay “A Portrait of the Artist” to *Dana*, a literary journal, but its founder and editor John Eglinton rejected it, saying to him “I can’t print what I can’t understand” (*Irish Literary Portraits* 136, rpt. in Ellmann, *James Joyce* 147). Stanislaus Joyce gives a detailed account of it: “The paper [for the February 1904 issue of *Dana*]—the title of which was ‘A Portrait of the Artist’—was rejected by the editors Magee (‘John Eglinton’) and F. Ryan because of the sexual experiences narrated therein—at least this was the one reason they gave” (*Dublin Diary* 25). One of Joyce’s poems was later published in the August 1904 issue of *Dana*. Joyce reproduces his experience with *Dana* in “Scylla and Charybdis,” as Eglinton tells Stephen that “You [Stephen] are the only contributor to *Dana* who asks for pieces of silver [to be paid for the contribution]. Then I don’t know about the next number. Fred Ryan wants space for an article on economics” (*Ulysses* 9.1081-83).

In “Scylla and Charybdis,” Joyce brings to light the melancholy of Hamlet. Conceiving of Shakespeare as a most downcast man, in “Scylla and Charybdis,” Stephen says, “Man delights him [Shakespeare] not nor woman neither” (*Ulysses* 9.1030). The grief made to be Shakespeare’s by Stephen is originally Hamlet’s—“Man delights not me; no, nor woman neither” (Shakespeare II.ii. 321-22; Gifford and Seidman 250). It discerns Hamlet’s traumatic experience of the loss of the

father and dramatizes his mourning for his dead father who is doubly betrayed by both his wife and his brother. It must be Joyce the “Man of Grief” that sees the despondent Shakespeare in the grieving Hamlet. Stephen’s *Hamlet* theory is concerned with the way in which Joyce mourns for his wretched mother (May Joyce) by projecting his sorrow onto Hamlet’s grief that is assumed to be Shakespeare’s: May Joyce (May Dedalus) is to Joyce (Stephen) what William Shakespeare (King Hamlet) is to Hamnet Shakespeare (Prince Hamlet). Joyce, the displaced man wandering through the Continent, ever remembers his dying mother at her deathbed and mourns for the terrible loss: “Mother’s deathbed. Candle. The sheeted mirror. Who brought me into this world lies there, bronzelidded, under few cheap flowers. *Liliata rutilantium*. I wept alone” (*Ulysses* 9.221-24). In “Scylla and Charybdis,” Joyce consumes his Shakespeare sources—Sidney Lee’s *Life of William Shakespeare* (1898), Frank Harris’s *The Man Shakespeare and His Tragic Life-Story* (1909) (*Ulysses* 9.418, 419, 440)—and recreates them into the way of channeling into artistic vision his emotional distress from his traumatic loss.

Joyce turns himself into Shakespeare who is both factually and imaginatively held to experience terrible losses. In “Scylla and Charybdis,” Mr Best, a librarian at the National Library, raises a question about taking *Hamlet* as “a kind of private paper . . . of his [Shakespeare’s] private life” (*Ulysses* 9.362-63). Joyce knew about critical objections to taking Shakespeare’s plays to be revelations of his private life, yet he may have desired to read *Hamlet* as Shakespeare’s family trauma illuminating his unresolved attachment to his mother who is long dead but ever living in his memory. Stephen’s *Hamlet* theory is a projection of Joyce’s longing to make Shakespeare’s losses into his own when he assumes Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* or his other plays to be allusions to his family tragedy: “Her [Shakespeare’s mother, Mary Arden Shakespeare’s] death brought from him [Shakespeare] the scene with Volumnia in *Coriolanus*. His boyson’s [Hamnet Shakespeare’s] death is the deathscene of young Arthur in *King John*. Hamlet, the black prince, is Hamnet Shakespeare” (*Ulysses* 9.880-82). The “man of grief” in the 1904 essay “A Portrait of the Artist” is expanded into everyman who is subjected to traumatic loss in

“Scylla and Charybdis”: Joyce’s loss of his mother, Hamlet’s loss of his father King Hamlet, and Shakespeare’s loss of his son Hamnet. And Joyce’s grief is sublimated into everyman’s grief—the Dubliner Joyce’s grief turns into the Danish Hamlet’s through the Londoner Shakespeare’s: “Gravediggers bury Hamlet *père* [father] and Hamlet *fils* [son]. A king and a prince at last in death, with incidental music. And, what though murdered and betrayed, bewept by all frail tender hearts for, Dane or Dubliner, sorrow for the dead is the only husband from they refuse to be divorced” (*Ulysses* 9.1034-37).

The undefined sorrow of the man in the 1904 essay “A Portrait of the Artist” betokens Joyce’s unresolved attachment to his beloved mother, whose psycho-emotional aspect is fully displayed in his 1919 narrative “Scylla and Charybdis.” The “sorrow for the dead” who are “murdered and betrayed” takes its full meaning in the context of Joyce’s guilt over the death of his mother—“My mother was slowly killed, I think, by my father’s ill-treatment, by years of trouble, and by my cynical frankness of conduct” (*Letters II* 48). Joyce’s self-reproach regarding the deceased mother is a psychopathological symptom belated mourning gives rise to. In the study of “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud discovered a very special kind of mourning to be ‘melancholia.’ Freud saw that a “melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning”—an individual overwhelmed by too much painful sadness sees himself “as worthless . . . and morally despicable,” and “reproaches himself, vilifies himself” (246). Joyce’s self-reproach has its origin in his remorse for having had no chance to make his gratitude known to May Joyce for her maternal commitment to him. It can be said that Joyce’s self-accusation setting off his dejection is very personal and private, not that kind of shame made to be conscientiously conscious of others when moral faults are committed. Joyce’s dejection is, to use Freud’s words (247), ascribed to discontent with himself.

The undefined grief of the protagonist in the essay “A Portrait of the Artist” is linked to Stephen’s Theosophical pondering of the dead in “Scylla and Charybdis.” Joyce was intimate with the members of the Hermetic Society, “a

group of middle-class mystics, led by George Russell” (Ellmann, *James Joyce* 174), who held conferences on Theosophy every Thursday evening around 1904. Accompanied by Oliver Gogarty (Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses*), in August 1904, Joyce raided the venue for their assembly to see what they were doing, but his too early appearance there ended up with no chance for him to observe their practices (174). In “Scylla and Charybdis,” Joyce portrays George Russell leaving Stephen for his Hermetic Society meeting: “Thursday, We have our meeting” (*Ulysses* 9.278). Stephen envisages George Russell and his members in their meeting room: “The faithful hermetists await the light, ripe for chelaship, ringroundabout him [George Russell]” (*Ulysses* 9.281-82). In the ensuing thoughts, Stephen calls to mind weeping souls: “Gulfer of souls, engulfer. Hesouls, shesouls, shoals of souls. Engulfed with wailing creecries, whirled, whirling, they bewail” (*Ulysses* 9.285-86). Strikingly, Stephen’s Theosophical speculation of the wailing souls in migration follows his query about what a ghost is:

What is a ghost? Stephen said with tingling energy. One who has faded into impalpability through death, through absence, through change of manners. Elizabethan London lay as far from Stratford as corrupt Paris lies from virgin Dublin. Who is the ghost from *limbo patrum*, returning to the world that has forgotten him? Who is King Hamlet? (*Ulysses* 9.147-51)

It is remarkable that Joyce parallels Shakespeare’s return to his Stratford home in 1613 with his return to Dublin to see his cancer-stricken mother from Paris in 1903. Stephen’s puzzling over the hovering spirit of King Hamlet is a signal sign of Joyce’s unrelinquished attachment to his lost mother haunting his mind. It clearly witnesses his depressing life in 1904 without May Joyce.

### III

A psychologist John Bowlby compares grief to a disease. Borrowing George L.

Engel's words, Bowlby says, "If the experience of loss is likened to the experience of being wounded or being burned, the processes of mourning that follow loss can be likened to the processes of healing that follow a wound or a burn" (Bowlby 501). Joyce must have had a troubled process in restoration of his emotional equilibrium after his distressing loss. Joyce's obsession with his mother in "Scylla and Charybdis," which is intimated in Stephen's *Hamlet* presentation, emanates from his ambivalent feelings over her. In the 1904 essay "A Portrait of the Artist," the protagonist is emboldened to counter the Church enforcing "spiritual obligations at the expense of what is called 'common sense'" (60). The "adoring mother" (64) abetted by the Church to assist "the Christian fable" is the object he has to overcome. In "Scylla and Charybdis," the "adoring mother" certainly represents the maternal love the protagonist longs to regain as the backbone of human emotional bond secured against the troubled world: "Upon incertitude, upon unlikelihood. *Amor matris* [maternal love], subjective and objective genitive, may be the only true thing in life" (*Ulysses* 9.842-43) to rely on. Bowlby remarks on dysfunctional attachment correlated with pathological mourning whose symptoms are lingering "anxiety and depression" (501). Pathological mourning is, according to him, a sign of "a persistent and unconscious yearning to recover the lost object." The yearning to see the lost object back is, Bowlby says, difficult to be observed because it is latent and "deeply repressed." In "Scylla and Charybdis," Stephen's *Hamlet* lecture is an allusive indication of Joyce's prolonged mourning for his dead mother, which exhibits his buried yearning to get her back. In "Circe," Stephen sees in his hallucination of his mother addressing him: "I pray for you in my other world. Get Dilly to make you that boiled rice every night after your brainwork. Years and years I loved you, O, my son, my firstborn, when you lay in my womb" (*Ulysses* 15.4202-04). The mother in Stephen's hallucination is Joyce's *Agenbite of inwit* ever reminding him of his ill-treatment of his mother.

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**Abstract**

## “Scylla and Charybdis” and Joyce’s Mourning for His Mother

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This essay is on the trail for the traces of Joyce’s mourning for his dead mother in Stephen’s disquisition on *Hamlet* in the “Scylla and Charybdis” episode of *Ulysses*. Joyce’s emotional distress arising from May Joyce’s death in 1903 has attracted little critical attention. Joyce’s antipathy against Catholicism has been a frame of reference expounding Stephen’s recoiling at his Catholic mother and, therefore, Joyce’s nonchalance about the loss of his supportive mother. Diverging from the socio-political view of Joyce’s coldness towards his mother, this essay argues that Stephen’s *Hamlet* lecture in “Scylla and Charybdis” is no less than Joyce’s mourning for his long-dead mother by way of projecting his melancholy onto Hamlet’s sorrow for his deceased father. Joyce’s grief over his deceased mother is further traced back to his 1904 narrative essay “A Portrait of the Artist” written a year after his mother’s death. The 1904 essay mainly predicates his rationales for his will to artistic freedom, but his odd reference to an unidentified man’s sorrow in the essay alludes to his unresolved attachment to his dead mother. In “Scylla and Charybdis,” Stephen’s grieving memory of his dead mother is certainly a psychopathological symptom of Joyce as the “Man of Sorrow” mentioned in his 1904 essay, which signifies his unresolved attachment to his bygone mother.

■ **Key words:** *Ulysses*, Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist, mourning, maternal love

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