

## The Penman and Postman Dynamic in Joyce\*

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### ABSTRACT

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Since Gabriel's announcement that "Here I am as right as the mail," Joyce has been preoccupied with the dynamic polyvalence contained in Gabriel's statement. The right/write and mail/male interchange and permutation present themselves in Joyce's engaging portraits of such writing-and-righting males as Stephen Dedalus, of the righting males such as Blazes Boylan and the Citizen, of the problematic (thus not right?) males such as Bloom, and of the mail-writing, philandering Bloom, alias Henry Flower. Joyce is keen on exploring and exploiting the readily transgressed boundaries in these two dyads. Especially prominent in the symbolic patrilineage building of the self-styled artist of Stephen Dedalus and the plotting, letter-writing Bloom, there emerges the complicated affiliation between the writing pen-man and the not-so-right post-man in *Ulysses*. Foreshadowing the sibling rivalry between Shem and Shaun in *Finnegans Wake*, the penman-postman affiliation in *Ulysses* is imbricated with serious dialectics.

My paper proposes to examine how the penman and postman roles get identified in the first place (for this purpose, I need to go back to *A Portrait*) and what is involved and at stake in their responsibilities, with a purpose to enact the dialectics in these two roles. I would like to demonstrate that while having a penman as vocation in mind, Stephen must settle with being a postman first, literally hand-carrying Deasy's letter on his behalf. Assuming this role entails surrendering the authorship (e.g. "The letter is not mine" U7.530) which he has been struggling to consolidate, making it inevitable that he becomes the "Bullockbefriending bard." This suggests that carrying someone else's letter threatens his own integrity as the penman proper. Also carrying

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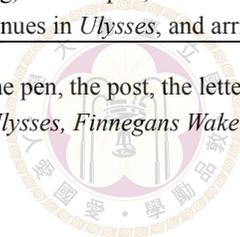
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a letter (addressed to Henry Flower by Martha) around Dublin, Bloom is arguably not author-/writ-ing his own letter, rendering himself the status of a mere postman, instead of a (writ-/right-ing) pen-man. On the other hand, his being (mis-)named variously and owning aliases—in mock-Odyssean manner—throughout the text (L.Boom being the ultimate misnomer) concur with his ability to freely create and coin new words, exercising the ability of a potential penman. It is then demonstrated in *Ulysses* that between the two roles of a penman and a postman, it is easy for one to slip into the other and these two roles are more often than not reinscribed with each other. That is to say, there is always an “other” to one. The process of searching for the symbolic father in *Ulysses* affiliates the father-son pair of Bloom and Stephen, and thereby configuring and consolidating the entanglement of the postman and the penman. The postman-penman affiliation and all the desire and tension that are involved therewith will constitute the odyssey (home-departing, wandering, and home-returning) of the pen, the letter, and the post, a journey which began in *A Portrait*, continues in *Ulysses*, and arrives at in *Finnegans Wake*.

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Keywords : the pen, the post, the letter(s), affiliation, dialectics, *A Portrait*,  
*Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake*



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## 喬伊斯作品裡書寫者與郵差的動態關係

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### 摘 要

本文擬追溯喬伊斯作品裡「書寫者」與「郵差」這二個後來在《芬尼根守靈記》極為突顯的角色形成之源起。於《畫像》裡就已身懷作家夢的史蒂芬，於《尤利西斯》裡小說安排他先擔任信差的任務，由於替狄西校長致報社的信擔任遞送差役，史蒂芬必得先犧牲其身為作家的天職，此舉似暗示身上懷有他人信件與成為作家這回事互為齟齬。而布魯姆成天身上藏有與筆友通信的信件，此舉亦推翻他有可能成為作家的身份，因為他與筆友的通信使用假名，他的作者權可說已被剝奪，充其量是個名符其實的信差而已。但另一方面，布魯姆在《尤》裡又具有多重的身份，連名字也有許多變化，這又與他擅於創造新字的能力相通，證明他也有成為作家的潛力。在《尤》裡，這二種角色常遊移於小說二位男主角身上，布魯姆、史蒂芬二人在小說裡最後具有象徵的父子關係，這也暗示寫作者與郵差二種角色身份密切的聯繫，也就是說，在《芬尼根守靈記》裡這二者緊密的關係早已在《畫像》與《尤》裡就已鋪陳完畢。

關鍵詞：書寫之筆、郵件、聯繫、辯證、《畫像》、《尤利西斯》、《芬尼根守靈記》

## The Penman and Postman Dynamic in Joyce

Li-ling Tseng

The debut of Gabriel, Joyce's early artist-avatar, in "The Dead" teems with, and, in effect, ushers in the complexity and dialectics forthcoming in all of Joyce's subsequent major fiction. His announcement that "Here I am as right as the mail" has been dissected most incisively in Vincent Cheng's ground-breaking political reading in 1995 to be complicit in the "masculist/imperialist ideology formation" (*pace* Spivak) to which this declaration issued from his putative subaltern position seems to turn a blind eye (1995, 134-37). What is to ensue from this statement is not only the colonial scenario of the subjecting as well as co-implication of the Irish subaltern to/with the British imperialist ideology, but the intertwining aesthetic-philosophic right-/writ-ing, the gender-performing mail/male, and finally the vocational pen-/post-man interchange.

The right-/writ-ing interchange is soon established with the birth and portraiture of Joyce's next artist proper, Stephen Dedalus. *A Portrait* records the progress as well as vacillation of the artist figure, Stephen, on his way to emergent artistry. The climactic villanelle writing, a real product the readers are about to witness in front of their eyes, first takes shape in "small neat letters" which Stephen tries to write out on the "rough cardboard surface" of a cigarette packet (*P* 219). Though the roughness and the narrow torn end of the cardboard packet might contribute to the flimsiness (e.g. smallness) of his writing and perhaps even proof of talent, the ensuing creative process nonetheless is overpowering and literally overflowing: "the liquid letters of speech... flowed forth over his brain" (*P* 223). And indeed with the progress of the novel, the readers bear witness to the maturation in perspective and literary muscle of a burgeoning artist. It is self-righteous on Stephen's part to take upon the prophetic self-imposed route of "silence, exile, and cunning" (*P* 247) out of the "nets" of "nationality, language, religion" (*P* 203) which he sees ensnare him by the then separatist-conscious Ireland under British colonization and Roman ecclesiastic rule. And indeed, continued in *Ulysses*, Stephen makes his "literary labour" (*U*16.1153) known to his fellow Dublin citizens and even earns Bloom's earnest praise in the

episode of “Eumaeus” where they finally sit together to exchange views on life and experience in the cabman’s shelter.

While Stephen carries this vocation of becoming a serious writer, or a penman, over from *A Portrait* to *Ulysses*, Bloom, the protagonist of *Ulysses*, marks his debut in “Calypso,” a chapter following and ending Stephen’s section, as distinctively a letter-carrier, a postman. Somehow echoing the reference to (albeit colonial British) postal delivery system in Gabriel’s “Here I am as right as the mail,” Bloom’s gathering two letters and a card from the floor and handing them, excluding the one letter for himself from Milly, to the addressee “Mrs. Molly Bloom,” though obviously too bold for his etiquette, prescribes for him the opening role of a dutiful (cf. he dutifully answers Molly’s question “Who are the letters for?” *U* 4.249) and punctual (i.e. right) postman. Such a letter-deliverer role, however, predisposes his forthcoming cuckoldry, because the letter which he personally bears to his legal spouse turns out to be an invitation for adultery made to his wife from a man in the most male or masculine sense of the word and thus to take away his male and husbandly “right.” Thus, his self-imposed postman role, a vocation growing out of and necessitated by his uxorious temperament, renders Bloom not so “right” a husband, let alone a man. His predicament will actually echo the celebrated “first riddle of the universe” which Shem asks—“when is a man not a man?” (FW 170.05).<sup>1</sup>

Seeing from the way the three major characters make their entrance in the short story “The Dead” and the two novels of *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*, one can observe a distinct polarization of two major roles available to the main male characters: whereas the penman’s vocation which Gabriel and Stephen share marks itself as self-righteous and impregnated with Joyce’s own aesthetic announcements for the modern times (as a break away from the older nets of nationality, language, religion), the postman’s one which Bloom assumes must prescribe the forsaking of the rights as proper to the man himself. Even furthering his postman dilemma, Bloom’s subsequent appearance as the philanderer carrying on a clandestine correspondence with Martha ironically proves again the not so “right” status of Bloom, this time in the context of being a (late Victorian) gentle-man proper. It is much the precondition for Bloom to write in disguise when writing to Martha.

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to the anonymous reviewers of this paper for making this connection with Bloom’s disputable manhood and Shem’s famous riddle.

However, this tricky alias of “Flower”—though preserving the synonym of blooming in itself and thus arguably being not dissimilar to Bloom’s real name—fundamentally annuls the presumed name, hence identity and, worse still, authorship, by which he is known to Martha. This can be borne out by the fact that while Martha makes a great deal about the “lovely name” which Bloom’s pseudonymous identity puts forth, Bloom keeps bearing or carrying the guilt of not being the same person as he makes out to be in his secret letters, so much so that he consciously must renounce his own identification with the pseudonym under which he corresponds to Martha: “Henry. I never signed it” (*U* 11.1077).

Bloom’s guilt of forging false identity and authorship continues to evolve in various forms in “Circe” when Bloom’s repressed psyche during the day gets released. In the form of a court trial, Bloom stands accused of similar crimes related to writing obscene postal “letters” which he has sent to other gentlemen in Dublin. In these alleged correspondences, Bloom commits two crimes—pretending to be still someone else (James Lovebirch (*U* 15.1018) being still another of Henry Flower’s and then Leopold Bloom’s derivative) and talking and even acting “improper” (*U* 15.1079) (much in the same vein as Martha’s complaint of Bloom’s “that other world”). That is to say, that which Shaun will later accuse his brother Shem of committing “public impostures” (*FW* 182.1-2) is also Bloom’s crime here. Then, another of his perversities gets publicized by the “Honorable Mrs. Mervyn Talboys”: “He implored me to soil his letter in an unspeakable manner” (*U* 15.1071-2)—Bloom thereby begging to literally spoil the letter which he wrote. Hence, concurrent with the portrayal of Bloom the alleged letter writer is Joyce’s questioning of the authorship and propriety of Bloom’s penmanship.

In fact, even during the daylight world of Dublin, observers have reported such not-being-with-oneself of Bloom’s behavior and existence. It is required that Bloom practice and perfect splitting into two in front of his companion when writing the envelope to Martha in Ormond’s hotel. Pretending to murmur a business address, Bloom actually writes out something different. He is busy blotting “over the other so he [Richard Goulding] can’t read” (*U* 11.901). This virtual double writing may look new to Bloom’s companion and even an impressive feat in itself to the readers; however, his spouse Molly has spotted and frowned upon his devious

practice: “the day before yesterday he was scribbling something a letter...he covered it up with the blottingpaper pretending to be thinking about business” (*U* 18.46-9). This hiding of oneself in another’s pen, in the view of other respectable Dubliners as well as Bloom himself (as can be seen in his guilty conscience acted out in “Circe”), perpetrates the crime similar to Shem’s making “penmarks used out in sinscript” (*FW* 421.24), which will be ruthlessly accused by his brother Shaun later in *Finnegans Wake*.<sup>2</sup> In real terms, such “sin-writing” as Bloom’s is furthermore accused of committing plagiarism. Bloom’s admirable prize-winning writer, Philip Beaufoy, in “Circe” zeroes in on Bloom’s questionable penmanship that “he is a plagiarist. A soapy sneak masquerading as a *littérateur*...with the most inherent baseness he has cribbed some of my bestselling copy” (*U* 15.822-27). Indeed, by imitating the Don Juanian peccadillo in real life or private fantasy, Bloom can be said to plagiarize the stock in trade of saucy romance writers such as Philip Beaufoy. From the court trial scene in “Circe,” we know that Bloom is actually aware of and guilty about this petty crime of his. Like the later development in *Finnegans Wake*, as of Shem, Bloom is openly accused of wielding a “pelagiarist pen” (*FW* 182.3). Thus, pen-wielding as he is, in his real or fantasized correspondence with other women, Bloom’s penmanship is dubiously exercised and challenged to be not “right” when it comes to the domain of intellectual property rights. In other words, when what matters most to penmanship is genuineness, Bloom violates the rule of authenticity, defaulting the righteousness and cunning in which Stephen the self-styled and-proclaimed artist, for one, prides himself.

Indeed, echoing such criminal mentality, much true to the consistent behavior of Bloom in the public, daytime Dublin is his habitual resort to “quotations” or citations as a way to comprehend the world around him. Throughout *Ulysses*, the readers are familiarized with his fondness for and entrenchment in cliché, though sometimes original and personalized pastiche of cliché. His reveries in “Sirens” happen to present examples of these two kinds. Much influenced by the music that he heard in Ormond hotel, Bloom

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<sup>2</sup> Shem’s name implies “sham,” or “forgery,” which in David Spurr’s brilliant analysis encapsulates Joyce’s keen interest in “the scenes of violence and oppression surrounding it” (104; see his Chapter 6: “Fatal Signatures: Forgery and Colonization in *Finnegans Wake*” 104-18). From a psychoanalytic perspective, Kimberly J. Devlin’s *James Joyce’s “Fraudstuff”* diagnoses similar “fraud” and “fraudulence” which Bloom is adept at staging and performing to appease the surveillance-camera-like eye or gaze (see esp. 45-59).

gives an afterthought that “Too poetical that about the sad. Music did that. Music hath charms. Shakespeare said. Quotation every day in the year. To be or not to be. Wisdom while you wait” (*U* 11.904-6). The so-called “wisdom” by which he craves to win him the “prize titbit” (*U* 11.902) the way Beaufoy has and in which he somehow glories himself turns out to be rather cliché-like here. The routine nature implied in “Quotation every day in the year” ironically discounts not only the subsequently quoted wisdom of Shakespeare, but Bloom who maintains to be wise, “right,” and original. However, Bloom’s other more original, playful handling of cliché quotation occurs at the end of the episode, when Bloom’s farting concurs with and punctuates Robert Emmet’s patriotism-loaded last words. Granted Bloom’s unique humor as demonstrated in this final scene, the dangerous nearness of citation to plagiarism as can be seen in the first less intelligent example occurring to Bloom will be underscored and rephrased by Shaun who implies his brother’s “sinscript” is composed with “HeCitEncy!” (*FW* 421.24). Shaun will continue to defame his brother on account that his “Every dimmed letter in it is a copy and not a few of silbis” (*FW* 424.32-3). Bloom in “Sirens” has in effect entrenched Shem’s ground: he also has committed similar violation of invading other genius’s intellectual property rights and contained in his, albeit much Bloomian, stream of consciousness are literally “not a few of syllables” from others’ more genuine and “right” words.

Divergent from the philanthropic role for which Bloom is known to the *Ulysses* readers, these two roles of a letter carrier and a bogus letter writer stand out most prominently early in the novel. They in fact constitute the fundamentals of his existence. The second role of the questionable penmanship virtually levels him with his first role of a postman, because by not authoring his own letters or thoughts, Bloom is arguably carrying somebody else’s letters instead, as does he to his wife in the opening scene of “Calypso.” Stephen’s embarrassed statement to the press room in “Aeolus” that “The letter is not mine” (*U* 7.530) can be argued to already have been experienced by Bloom earlier in the day. Neither does the love letter which his lawful wife receives come from her lawful husband who has every legal “right” to court her, nor does his unlawful secret correspondent Martha receive his love letters properly, for they bear the signature of a pseudo Don Juan figure, that is, someone other than Bloom himself. As a

consequence, the letter-carrying role prescribes his being other than he is (i.e. Molly's husband) or wants to be (i.e. a macho philanderer). Such precondition turns out, as just pointed out, to converge with Stephen's not so "right" a position in the newsroom in "Aeolus."

There are clearly more divergent than similar points about Bloom and Stephen. "Ithaca" itemizes their points of difference, ranging from vision, age, race, education, and finally temperaments. As "Ithaca" zeroes in on their differences, Bloom represents the scientific and Stephen the artistic temperaments (*U* 17.560). Molly's view of Stephen can summarize the self-styled image which he presents to other people: "an author and going to be a university professor of Italian" (*U* 18.1301-2). That is to say, without begging too many questions, Stephen is already considered a full-fledged author, that is a penman, in *Ulysses*, if not yet in *A Portrait*.

After the appearance and rehearsal of his artistic profile in the first three episodes in the "Telemachia," Stephen reappears in the "Aeolus" episode. However, he reappears sadly to hand-carry his superior, Deasey's letter to the press office in "Aeolus" and this virtual postman role marks the fundamental instability inherent in his taken-for-granted vocation of penmanship. It is predictable in *A Portrait* that Stephen must vacillate between his emergent artistry and the adverse factors surrounding him which he calls "nets" toward the end of the novel. The writing vocation was struggling to shape itself clearly as Stephen's physical and mental journey moved on. Still a young pupil at Clongowes, already attracted to the rhythm of verse lines, when copying the lines from the textbook, Stephen, however, experienced a strange sense of dislocation of "the lines of the letters" which were "like fine invisible threads" (*P* 46), presumably appearing evanescent and pulling in diverse directions which the young artist-to-be found hard to track and follow. Another of Stephen's experience can also be argued to result in similar dislocation of "the lines of the letters." These are the literal postal "letters" which he oftentimes had an urge to write; this occurs whenever he felt like writing something down—a quasi-vocation, albeit often unawares. Since early on, whenever Stephen felt lonely at school, he had an urge to write a letter for help to his mother (*P* 23). However, the imaginary letters never got delivered, for he was denied the maternal protection after being sent away from home to Clongowes. Another batch of letters he wrote, this time secretly, did not arrive, either. These refer to his

shame-ridden letters—"the foul long letter" which "stank under his very nostrils" (*P* 115)—jotting down his lusts but "discarded in the corner" un/intended for secret reading by girls (*P* 116). It is significant to note that in this secret correspondence to the unknown addressees (anticipating Bloom's saucy ones, Martha for real and other respectable Dublin ladies for imagination?) Stephen must resort to becoming a postman, first, because "the foul long letters he had written in the joy of guilty confession" were "carried secretly for days and days" (*P* 116). Here almost foreshadowing Bloom's and his own ironic condition of being a mail carrier in *Ulysses*, Stephen, the presumed penman-to-be, also settled with being a postman. There thus vacillates in Stephen's existence a distinct penman-postman dialectic.

Implicit in this dialectic is the questionable "arrival" or "reaching the destination" of the intended letter, i.e. signification, to the intended reader, otherwise completing a successful and ideal(istic) meaning-making process and route. Jacques Derrida analyzes that the logocentric signification process is one of self-sending: the message sent out from the sender him/herself is automatically guaranteed to reach its intended receiver, who is the self-same sender him/herself. It is a self-enclosed circuit of meaning. However, Derrida dissects the internal rupture registered inside this supposed closure. As Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (or "La lettre volée" in French) demonstrates, the letter flies (as in the French pun of "volée" meaning both "stolen" and "flying") in the face of the intended addressee. Derrida explains, "the message no longer has any chances of reaching any determinable person, in any (determinable) place whatever" (51). That is, to use Barbara Johnson's elucidation of Derrida's point on "the carte of adestation" (35), "The reflexivity between receiver and sender is ... not an expression of symmetry in itself, but only an evocation of the interdependence of the two terms, of the *question* of symmetry as a *problem* in the transferential structure of reading" (Johnson 248-9). She specifies that actually "'Otherness' becomes in a way the letter's sender" rather than the self-proclaimed sender (249). As a result, "The message I am sending may be either my own (narcissistic) message backward or the way in which that message is always traversed by its own otherness to itself or by the narcissistic message of the other" (249). Derrida summarizes this "differential relay" between the sender and the addressee as "the Postal

Principle” (54). It has for its specificity that it “regularly prevents, delays, endispatches the depositing of the thesis, forbidding rest and ceaselessly causing the run, deposing or deporting the movement of speculation” (54).

Likewise, aspiring to be a penman as he is, Stephen must either imagine or execute writing undeliverable letters. The intended receivers of his imaginary or secretive letters must be absent (i.e. his denying mother) or unknown (chanced women passersby). The fact that he “had carried the letters secretly for days and days only to throw them under cover of night among the grass in the corner of a field or beneath some hingeless door in some niche in the hedges where a girl might come upon them as she walked by and read them secretly” (P116) reflects the “interdependence” of the penman and postman roles, especially in their mutually depriving effects. One hampers and debilitates the other. What Derrida terms as the “Postal Principle” is operative when writing takes on an effect similar to an unauthorized postal money order which denies cash to the receiver in debt. Stephen has experienced his writing being incapacitated by the lack of monetary balance in the postal account (a pun having another meaning of verbal retelling). This is one of his early trials on exercising the artist vocation. He once felt an urge to write a poem (this time, a proper literary effort) about Parnell “on the back of his father’s second moiety notice” (P 70), but failed. It seems that the fact of his father’s bankruptcy had greatly to do with this failed attempt to execute and materialize his literary effort. Attempting to write on the back of a piece of document recording his family account in debt can literally render his own account/writing deficit, short of the capital (in this case, inspiration needed for literary spending) it could have withdrawn from the family reserve. As such, his father’s and the young son’s literal indebtedness to Parnell (after all, there being an undeniable lineage, as in the case of Joyce and his father) ironically deprives the young artist’s expected literary muscle-growing and -flexing. This works against him not unlike one of those nets as he later perceives to ensnare him.

In *Ulysses*, Stephen continues to be subject to similar experience of dependency, deprivation or indebtedness as can a meager postal order sent from one’s family make one feel. This time it is real physical hunger and debt he suffers. “Proteus” describes the humiliating feeling of Stephen’s being “dispossessed”: “Forget: a dispossessed. With mother’s money order, eight shillings, the banging door of the post office slammed in your face by

the usher. Hunger toothache" (*U* 3.184-6). It is significant that the meagerness of the maternal comfort and support travels by way of the postal money order via the post office from Ireland to France where Stephen has taken on a form of bohemian self-exile.

The sense of debt Stephen experiences can be financial and literary. Like the deficit writing on the back of his father's document of debt literally and emotionally owed to Parnell in *A Portrait*, Stephen experiences both financial debt and debt in writing. His dealings with Deasey early morning have reminded him of his own impoverishment. When later in the National Library scene when he is trying to propose his own theory of Shakespeare, he debates with other librarians and literary figures in Dublin over the relevance of the biographical background of the poet. He is conducting an argument with Russel who disagrees with Stephen's prying into "how the poet lived" (*U* 9.184), including "the poet's drinking, the poet's debts" (*U* 9.186-7). Piqued by this disagreement, Stephen starts to reflect on "that pound he lent you when you were hungry?" (*U* 9.192) and continues to remember Deasey's condescending injunction to "pay his way" (*U* 9.202). The two of them form a self-righteous pair, demanding due payment of his debt. Stephen fails to stand on the "right" ground and suffers from bad conscience—hence the rehearsal of his famous "Agenbite of inwit" in the episode of "Telemachus" (*U* 1.481; 9.196)—because he has spent the money he owes to A. E. on "Georgina Johnson's bed" (*U* 9.195). His stream of thought thus runs from the money he owes to A. E. finally to the literary debt he owes to A. E. as well. His play on "A. E. I. O. U." (*U* 9.213) suggests both these two forms of debts. The latter form, however, suggests his feeling overshadowed by his superior, this time, of the literary nature, not unlike by his social superior of Deasey earlier this morning. Not to mention that this occurs in the chapter in which Stephen expounds on his individualistic reading of Shakespeare to whom he must be indebted, or in debt, as a late-coming artist, Irish or English alike.

The proximity among the post (in the form of meager postal money order), debt (physical hunger), and finally the pen (literary indebtedness) is thus established for the case of Stephen, the self-proclaimed artist, in a span from *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*. In effect, the reminder of the post actually appears early in both *A Portrait* and *Ulysses*, as if to set the undercurrent of the entire novels. Sent away from home, deprived of maternal protection,

Stephen was studying in Clongowes. He noticed that “the telegraph poles passed on the way from Clongowes to his father’s home” (*P* 20). Though this mention is naturalistic, the fact that telegraph poles lined on the way shows not only the modernization of ways of communication (hence, Ireland being also one of the modern places in Europe<sup>3</sup>), but, more important, presents a scenario in which distance is necessarily expanded due to people’s new needs of travel; the countering need of the messages (of love) arises, on the other hand, which travel to conquer such a debilitating distance in especially the love ones’ communication. However, the correlation between these two is problematic when it comes to Stephen in *A Portrait*. As seen, his being sent away from home necessitated his urge to write to his mother asking for help out of his loneliness. His unwritten and unsent letters symbolize the inability of tele-writing, the way tele-coded messages sent by telegraphs<sup>4</sup>, to bridge the fundamental and necessary gap between the supposedly intimate familial communication.

While presences of telegraph poles remind of the absence of love and communication the young Stephen was subject to in *A Portrait*, the beginning of *Ulysses* features more subtle but nonetheless persistent presences of the post which are going to frame the novel. These are the two times the presence of the mailboat sailing and literally traveling between England and Ireland is registered by Stephen’s observation ken (*U* 1.83-4; 574-5). Observing from the Martello Tower, Stephen looks over the Dublin bay on the mail boat which is then clearing Kingstown Harbor for delivering mail from England to Ireland; that is, England and Ireland were “linked” “through this port” which was “two and a half hours by boat from the railroad terminal at Holyhead in northwest Wales” (Gifford 15). Bearing in

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<sup>3</sup> See Legg for discussion on the correlation of modernity and telegraph in Ireland.

<sup>4</sup> The feat as well as problematics of transcoding and decoding telegraph messages are dramatized in “Aeolus” where the editor shows his audience the admirable feat of the journalist Gallaher in sending, almost impromptu, to the American press the Phoenix Park murders. While he demonstrates Gallaher’s ingenious idea of superimposing his news report on a piece of coffee advertisement, problematics abound in such celebrated doing. For one thing, while he appears so impressed by Gallaher’s feat, his mis-placing the date of the murders for “eightyone, sixth of May” (*U* 7.633) virtually points to Joyce’s tongue-in-cheek stroke of satirizing the new privileged group of journalists’ confidence in telegraphing. Roy Gottfried then suggests the incredibility in Crawford’s recounting of Gallaher’s feat by questioning the probability of letters of “k” and “x” in a “Bransome” coffee advertisement; consequently, “The letters as markers are not only of questionable meaning but also of questionable presence” (48-9) and “Crawford’s audience—and Joyce’s—is misled and made to misread” (49).

mind Stephen's last and climactic proclamation of artistic independence and exile that "the shortest way to Tara was via Holyhead" (*P* 250) in *A Portrait*, now the reminder of the mail boat from Holyhead probably suggests the lack of satisfaction in Stephen's earlier self-imposed literary-political agenda of disengagement. The mail boat traversing the Irish Sea suggests the irreducibility of the traveling post—the disseminating principle which unsettles the firm hold to any self-assuming, self-containing center, be it the imperial England or the emergent nationalist Ireland—hence the irreducibility of "links" between them. The unruly interconnection between the two lands, separated by sea water, as implied in the daily traveling mail boat should evoke for Stephen and the readers, albeit in a low-key manner, all that inherent in their histories, religions, and then literatures. Joyce has used the metaphor of an interwoven fabric to explain Ireland's ethnic history, the English-Celtic relation of course being one major thread among many in it ("Island of Saints and Sages"). Therefore, one can argue that the beginning of *Ulysses* accentuates this postal factor which has for its nature the specificity of traversing and overstepping any hierarchal principles operative in Dublin, Ireland in 1904 and the personal ones operative on Stephen's route of becoming an artist, a penman, too<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, it is not surprising that when the real (anti-)hero of the novel, Bloom, appears, he also assumes the role of a postman. I have demonstrated the traversing of integrity in Bloom as the proper husband and lover, as fundamentally necessitated by his postman role. Then an explicit postal echo in character and role between Stephen and Bloom emerges in the night town episode. Lamenting his loss of youth, Bloom confesses to Bella's fan, significantly using a postal image: "I am ... no longer young. I stand, so to speak, with an unposted letter bearing the extra regulation fee before the too late box of the general post office of human life" (*U* 15.2778-80). This metaphor expressing the by-gones of golden youth takes on surprisingly a

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<sup>5</sup> The most celebrated example *Ulysses* is going to feature about the postal traversing principle at work in Dublin of Joyce's time are the five sandwichmen hired by Hely's Stationary to literally traverse Dublin in the form of in fact disparate, floating letters. Annie Tardis draws our attention to the inevitable dissolution of the advertising message by "having us follow the movements of letter-men." Should one or the other of them "halt, 'jaded,' or change places, the passer-by or the reader... can read ELY'S or HEL'SY," among other possibilities (238). Similar kind of "transposition of the letters" (238) to Gallaher's as in "Aeolus" (discussed in footnote 4) thus becomes problem-ridden.

similar tone to Stephen's humiliation at the post office. Both of them feel a sense of deprivation as a result of being subject to debt separately in family income and biological income, as it were. Besides, the image of Bloom's carrying an "unposted letter" around with his unfulfilled life once again echoes Bloom's postman role as set down in the beginning of his section, "The Wanderings of Ulysses." The fact that this image is a letter which cannot be delivered bears out Derrida's "Postal Principle" which unsettles the communication or signifying route of letter delivery from the sender to the receiver, to which, we have witnessed, Stephen the penman has been subject in *A Portrait*.

Even though it is rather far-fetched to see Bloom as in any way a self-righteous artist, or a penman, Bloom's partaking of the postal, or self-differentiating, principle as of part and parcel (another of postal pun!) of Stephen's existence, can be argued to prepare him to converge with Stephen in a more subtle way than commonly thought to have taken place in the chapter of "Ithaca." The convergence between Bloom and Stephen has well been hinted throughout the novel. John S. Rickard has traced the "shared memory" between them since "Proteus" (92-100) until the climactic convergence of the trinitarian identification of Bloom, Stephen, and Shakespeare in the mirror in the beginning of "Circe." This "complex network of correspondences and suggestions" (Rickard 96) involved in their trinity may render many possible interpretations<sup>6</sup>; however, Rickard affirms "a strong, albeit murky, sense of a common destiny or fate shared by Stephen and Bloom" (96). I would like to argue that their shared destiny or fate is entrenched in the penman-postman dialectic.

It has been demonstrated that Stephen's undisputable penmanship or literary vocation is in fact overshadowed by his intermittent and inadvertent postman role. On the contrary, while Bloom marks his debut in the novel distinctly as a postman, his literary talent is oftentimes hinted, albeit, more often than not, mocked, throughout the novel. In his debut chapter, Bloom impresses the readers with his literary ambition, albeit this done in a laughable setting of the outhouse. Reading the prize-winning writing of Mr. Beaufoy, Bloom thinks he can do likewise<sup>7</sup>; he can "manage a sketch" and

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<sup>6</sup> Rickard attempts to identify four points of shared ground among Bloom, Stephen, and Shakespeare (95-6).

<sup>7</sup> Characteristically feeling inspired in the ludicrous setting of the outhouse, Bloom does to the

“Invent a story for some proverb” (*U* 4.518). His memory informs the reader of his proclivity for penmanship: “Time I used to try jotting down on my cuff what she said dressing” (*U* 4.520). Vincent Cheng affirms that this act of Bloom’s does “constitute a creative act” “Like Stephen’s scribbling poems on his library-slip ‘tablets’” (1992, 90). Cheng even goes as far as affirming Bloom’s “effecting his own masterstroke” by wiping himself with the prize story (1992, 90). Lindsey Tucker also affirms this “creative act” which Bloom imagines for himself and Molly, perhaps to compensate “the loss of the coauthorship he feels after the death of Rudy” (52). Thus, it is important that Molly recognizes this talent in Bloom and his intention to prove himself through penmanship is related to his hoping to redress and “right” his lost manhood. Indeed, Molly is also impressed by his productivity and ingenuity of being a potential penman. She was flattered by Bloom’s courting her through writing love letters, an authorship which he unfortunately abandons later in their married life only to settle with a postman role: “[Bloom] writing every morning a letter sometimes twice a day” (*U* 18.327-8); “if I only could remember the 1 half of the things and write a book out of it the works of Master Poldy” (*U* 18.578-9). It seems to Molly that Bloom always has ingenious ideas about many things, milking her into the tea when she was breastfeeding Milly for one. Molly lauds this “feat” of Bloom’s in an obviously impressed manner: “hes beyond everything I declare somebody ought to put him in the budget” (*U* 18.579-80). We witness this bit of Bloom’s fondness of and adeptness in writing ladies letters in his correspondence with Martha. This in fact has precedents. When he was courting Molly, according to her, he also “wrote me that letter with all those words in it” (*U* 18.318-9). Therefore, when Molly discovers more recently that Bloom scribbled a letter and covered it up with a blotting paper, he was simply being consistent with this letter-writing practice. In a way it can be said that he also shares with Stephen the insidious urge to write letters. I have shown above that Bloom enacts a “not-being-with-himself” in his writing (especially letters to ladies), arguably forfeiting his lawful authorship. Thus, when a *suis generis* literary

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prize-winning story in print—he wipes his behind with it—what Shem will do to his writing—Shem writes with a pen dipped in excrement. This passage of *Ulysses* forebodes the scatology which will be the notorious scenario from which Shem establishes his penman’s identity. I am indebted to this paper’s anonymous reviewers for this valuable comment.

vocation (one to do with *belles lettres*) can be associated with Bloom after all<sup>8</sup>, the self-disseminating “Postal Principle” implicated in his postman role (one to do with postal letters) gets to destabilize it.

It is then interesting to note the dialectics involved in the nature of “letters” blatantly at work both in Stephen’s and Bloom’s fate and destiny. The erratic movement of “letters” is certainly one major concern of *Ulysses*. “Letters” can refer to alphabetical letters, as the literally floating five men-carrying boards of HELY’S have shown. Then, *Ulysses* demonstrates the easy transmutation of alphabetical letters in a person’s “proper” name. Bloom’s name has undergone several dramatic changes, Henry Flower, Ruby Cohn, and L. Boom being three most outstanding of his many name mutations. His consenting comment in “Eumaeus” to Stephen’s observation of sounds being impostures is “Our name was changed too” (U 16 365), seemingly to comment on his protean namesakes throughout *Ulysses*. “Eumaeus” is the specific chapter in which correspondence of appearance to being is constantly made problematic. D. B. Murphy, the sailor’s producing a postcard is the highlight of the chapter. This is one of many examples in *Ulysses* about errant postal letters, postcards included. Questions concerning the sailor’s true identity abound in this chapter, not to mention that the postcard bears an addressee not in the least corresponding to the sailor himself who claims as a proof his adventure in South America. Here we have the literal enactment of the post going “astray” as Derrida prescribes the destiny of all letters (66). The anonymous postcard, bearing no addressees at all except for the ambiguous letter message of “Up: up,” which Dennis Breen receives and which he insists is addressed to him, and because of which he is proposing a ludicrous libel case, also bears out this going astray of postal letters. The anonymity of this printed matter, as in the postcard which the sailor produces, levels out the “propriety” (i.e. “rightness”) and singularity of a proper signature as a genuine authorship or penmanship would prescribe. In fact, Derrida proposes that all letters are, like postcards, open letters, bearing open and unfixed addressees. Thus, the route by which they are sent must go divergently from where and who their

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<sup>8</sup> Chapter 16 of “Eumaeus” can very well be what Bloom’s writing would have been, as Senn agrees (173). Bloom consciously toys with the idea of writing down his experience in a cabman’s shelter, after which he is contemplating to entitle his would-be writing. He has in mind the competition with Mr. Philip Beaufoy in luck and confidence that he can “pen something out of the common groove” (U 16. 1227-31).

senders intend—rather like what the erratic (alphabetical and postal) letters in *Ulysses* have dramatized: they go their disparate ways and toward undetermined destinations, thus astray.

Hence, the widely agreed father-son relationship or a pseudo-filiation which is prepared in “Circe” and finally established in “Ithaca,”<sup>9</sup> the home-returning chapter and the logical climax of the novel, is in effect embroiled with this penman-postman dialectic. It essentially involves the right/write and mail/male interchange and permutation. In these two dyads their boundaries are easily transgressed. Both letter-writing males, Bloom and Stephen’s fate and destiny go separate ways and yet cross each other. Stephen starts out being a writing-and-righting male.<sup>10</sup> He aimed at possessing the “rights” of a writing male of *belles lettres*, but is set off balance by deprivation as a result of debt in his postal account leading to deficit in his writing/account (i.e. the postal letters he wrote or intended to write). This poverty in his financial and familial accounts shows itself most in his servility away from which he was trying to strip himself since *A Portrait*; he ends up serving as a mere mail carrier for his superior Deasey in *Ulysses*. On the other hand, Bloom marks his appearance as a subservient letter carrier for his wife and continues to bear secrete letters (inclusive of another very secretive set of French letters) around Dublin on Bloomsday. The readers and especially his companion Goulding see him in action writing mail, but in disguise. Seemingly, like Stephen, Bloom is also a letter-writing male. However, unlike the (w)righting pen-man of Stephen’s stature, Bloom is after all the not-so-(w)right a male—a post-man rather. However, Bloom’s being (albeit mis-)named variously and owning aliases—in mock-Odyssean manner—throughout *Ulysses* concur with his ability to freely create and coin new words, and conjure up creative ideas concerning daily life, as Molly approves of him, thus exercising the ability of a protean penman virtually. This “being a bit of an artist in his spare time”

<sup>9</sup> Even so, critics still have doubts on this supposed filiation between Bloom and Stephen. Jean-Francois Lyotard, for example, sees a “rupture” essentially constituting “the bond that links the father to the son” (203). Whereas Dan Schwarz agrees that a “shared vision” and “a moment of fusion of consciousness” are achieved for Stephen and Bloom (215), Christy L. Burns examines the trinitarian association among Bloom, Stephen, and Shakespeare in the mirror in “Circe” and detects that “Rather than a symbolic fusion of Bloom and Stephen, the reader witnesses, in the mirror scene, the looseness of associations” (48).

<sup>10</sup> In *Ulysses* permutation of these “righting” males abounds: Blazes Boylan and the Citizen quickly come to mind as being the self-righteous, masculine types.

(U 16.1448) makes Bloom's plebian postman role cross Stephen's more glamorous penmanship. This may be Joyce's tribute to the everyman type whose amateur penmanship lifts the miraculous (cf. the epical) out of the mundane and avoids the inflated self-image which the righteous writing-righting male artist's penman vocation inevitably imposes on himself. Thus, foreshadowing the "twosome twiminds" (*FW* 188.14) of the penman-postman Shem-Shaun sibling rivalry as well as complicity in *Finnegans Wake*, co-implication has come to surface in Bloom's and Stephen's two divergent roles, as born out in the penultimate "Ithaca" chapter, the home-returning chapter, in which Bloom and Stephen contemplate each other "in both mirrors of the reciprocal flesh of theirhis not his fellowfaces" (U 17.1183-4). The complexity and dynamic revolve around the unwieldy identification vacillating between dialectics of "his"/"not his," "their"/ "his," "reciprocal"/disparate identities. In the tripartite structure of *Ulysses*, there also lies the meandering and dynamic odyssey of the pen, the letter, and the post, a journey which began in *A Portrait*, developed in *Ulysses*, and arrived at in *Finnegans Wake*.

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