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The spirit of Buddha

James Joyce [penned down] his magnum Opus *Ulysses* in an era where the sick old man of Europe the Ottoman Empire - was gasping for its last breaths; its Columns of culture were crumbling and its colonization complete. While there are more than one hundred and fifty references to the orient, the portrayal of the orient from its gendering as a sterile old woman 'an old woman's: the grey sunken cunt of the world' (U 5.225), to romantic 'The far east. Lovely spot it must be: the garden of the world.' (U 5.10), to the commercialization 'Ceylon brands ', 'Indian Ink', 'Turkish slippers', to sensuous clichés 'Opulent curves fill out her scarlet trousers and jacket, slashed with gold. A wide yellow cummerbund girdles' (U 15.10), to wondering about its reality 'Wonder is it like that' (U 5.31), represents a mosaic of divergent, overlapping and often conflicting images - A great catalogue of oriental clichés. One personality that has contributed immensely to eastern thought and is mentioned in *Ulysses* is the Buddha. He is mentioned only three times in *Ulysses*, but his spirit and influence pervades *Ulysses* through Bloom and Stephen. In this paper I will analyze the references to Buddha in *Ulysses* and demonstrate that while certain inaccuracies exist in the portrayal of Buddha, there is a Buddha in Bloom and Stephen. This paper will be restricted to the Stephen-Buddha similarities.

The story of the Buddha's begins with his pregnant mother Queen Maha Maya dreaming of a white elephant entering her womb. The soothsayers called in to interpret the dream prophesized that the unborn prince would rule men either as a prince or a pauper mendicant. Upon his birth he was named Siddhartha Gautama. His father king Suddhodana, concerned about prophesy removed every eye-sore from his palace and its

surroundings and cocooned Siddhartha in a life of luxuries. In his youth, on his excursions outside the palace he experienced four sights that disturbed him deeply. He saw an Old man, a sick man, dead man and an ascetic. Bubbled in an ivory palace, he was unaware of the miseries (sickness, old age and death) of life. These experiences shattered Siddhartha's sheltered and myopic view of life and a restless Siddhartha determined to find a solution for the suffering he had seen.

In a similar vein we see Stephen struggle with the eternal questions of life, death, decay and immortality. His mother's death from cancer forces Stephen to confront his own mortality uncomfortably. While saddened at the demise of his mother, Stephen finds Mulligan's observation that all born perish and end up beastly dead personally offensive and harbors the grudge a year since her death. Though the "beastly dead" jibe offends his mother's memory, Stephen is personally offended "Of the offence to me," (U 1.220) realizing that he too will suffer old age, dodder and die. But the rational Mulligan stoically refers to death and disease in raw terms as "I see them pop off every day in the Mater and Richmond and cut up into tripes in the dissecting room. It's a beastly thing and nothing elseTo me it's all a mockery and beastly. .." (U 1.210)

Thus forced to face his mortality, Stephen contemplates of his conception, life and death. His parent's lawful embraces conceived him, the comfort of her womb protected and developed him, her selfless love despite his "sloping shoulders, this gracelessness" (U 2.168) "saved him from being trampled underfoot" (U 2.140), he shares few physical traits with them, but he is a distinct individual separate from his parents with his unique spirit and personality. "Wombed in sin darkness I was too, made not begotten. By them, the man with my voice and my eyes and a ghostwoman with ashes on her breath. They

clasped and sundered, did the coupler's will.” But he is not just the body but is the soul that was willed by God eons before the embraces “Creation from nothing” (U 3.34) and cannot be un-willed. “From before the ages He willed me and now may not will me away or ever” (U 3.48). So his soul will live to eternity. Time will wither and scatter all bodies and things so vainly grabbed and heaped, but the soul is everlasting will not die and is what matters most. “Vain patience to heap and hoard. Time surely would scatter all” (U 2.278). The Soul - the essence of man cannot be withered or staled by time. “The soul is in a manner all that is: the soul is the form of forms” (U 2.70)

Similarly we find Siddhartha, on gaining enlightenment become the Buddha, realize that he is more than a mere body and in his second discourse after gaining enlightenment (*buddhi*) instructs his students as “The body, monks, is not self. If the body were the self, this body would not lend itself to disease. .. Feeling is not self.... Consciousness is not self. ...Thus, monks, anybody whatsoever--past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle, common or sublime, far or near: everybody--is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: "This is not mine. This is not myself. This is not what I am.". (*Anattalakkhana Sutta*) Buddha uses negative dialectic to negate all descriptions of the soul/self, but not the soul/self itself. Stephen too describes the soul not as a form but “form of forms” the essence of essence. Like Buddha’s story, Ulysses is the story of Stephen discovering his self beyond the corporeal confines of his consciousness and body.

Examining himself in the mirror, Stephens is shocked at the mind-body dichotomy “Hair on end. As he and others see me.” (U 1. 138). The world sees him as the physical body reflected in the mirror, but his true self is not revealed or realized. His

body is physical and foreign to his true identity. Confused he asks “Who chose this face for me?” The conscious “I” versus the physical “me” further highlights his alienation with the body which he considers as vermin infested mass of meat. “This dogsbody to rid of vermin.” (U 1. 138). The physical “it” asks “It asks me too.” (U 1. 138) the physical “me” not the conscious “I” for the conscious is not physical. The physical restrains while the mental releases the artist. Stephen struggles with dichotomies of physical and spiritual existences, with the current intellectual culture that confines his creativity and his self that seeks to soar. “Books you were going to write with letters for titles. Remember your epiphanies written on green oval leaves, deeply deep, copies to be sent if you died to all the great libraries of the world, including Alexandria? ...” (U 3.140)

In the story of Siddhartha one can see a similar struggle between Siddhartha – the physical and Buddha – the spiritual, between the allures of his palace-bubble and his shaken spirit struggling to grasp the meaning of four visions (Old, sick, dead man and an ascetic). The shaken Siddhartha stealthily leaves his sleeping wife Yashodhara and only son in search answers, the scene so poignantly portrayed in the Hindi poem “*Sakhi Ve Mujhse Keh Kar Jaate*” in which an anguished Yashodhara suggests she would not have stopped Siddhartha, had he confided in her. “For aren’t we the ones who readily prepare and send our beloved husbands for wars, when it is required? So why would I have said no to him, if he had just told me?” (Maithili Sharan Gupta). Siddhartha upon becoming the Buddha, realized that man is more than a body and taught the same. Buddha identified the body as bondage, a source of suffering and discovered a path to liberate oneself of this bondage and suffering. “How do you construe thus, monks--Is the body constant or inconstant?’ ‘Inconstant, Lord.’ ‘And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?’

'Stressful, Lord.' 'And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: "This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am"?' 'No, Lord.' (*Anattalakkhana Sutta, Samyutta Nikaya XXII, 59*)

Visions of a sick mother gradually decimated by malignant cancer haunt a helpless Stephen. His mother once a radiant maiden was reduced to a rot near her death and is dead now. "I was once the beautiful May Goulding. I am dead." (U 15. 4170). Stephen recollects her in the deathbed groaning in pain, puking bile from her rotting liver and slowly descending into death. Rubbing salt into the wound, Buck Mulligan reminds him that she had lost her senility too. "She calls the doctor sir Peter Teazle and picks buttercups off the quilt" (U 1. 210). The picture of a drowning man plagues a Hydrophobic Stephen who wishes but could not save the man. Water the symbol of life and regeneration serves to remind Stephen of the impending death. He is helpless against time that will drown everything. "I could not save her. Waters: bitter death: lost" (U 3. 330) "She is drowning. Agenbite. Save her. ... She will drown me with her, eyes and hair" (U 10.874). The images of decay, drowning, death and destruction horrify Stephen who recognizes that a similar fate in death awaits his body, mind, time and space. "You too. Time will come" (U 15.4180). Stephen visualizes women and by extension all living forms progressively march to their death in time. "Bridebed, childbed, bed of death, ghostcandle. *Omnis caro ad te veniet* (U 3. 394). He is distressed that all physical structures, all art, all culture, all civilization and indeed all space-time will eventually collapse into nullity. "I hear the ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry, and time one livid final flame. What's left us then?" U (2.10). And if death the "great goal" (U 3.350) then what's left, he ponders.

Siddhartha too was haunted by the sights of disease, decrepitude and death. The first of his “four visions” narrates him seeing an old man and asking* “O Charioteer, who is this weak and lean man? His flesh has been withered away, his bones and arteries are visible under the covering of his skin, his hair is white, his teeth are gone, he goes tottering bent on his stick?” The Charioteer replied “Sire, this is an old man. ..” Siddhartha then said in great sorrow “O Charioteer, tell me truly, is this state his own individual occurrence, or is it the universal law?” The charioteer replied “Sire, it is a universal law if Nature. Every man, woman or child would come into this state. You parents, your relations, you yourself, all must come to it”. “Shame then to life” anguished Siddhartha. (BHL, 12)

The second vision relates to Siddhartha seeing a sick man. He enquired “Charioteer, who is this man, who is a mere skeleton, in appearance lying in his own excreta, groaning so in pain?” The Charioteer replied “Sire this man is ill; he is at the point of death and is now in great sufferings. There is no cure for him... he will soon die”. (BHL, 13)

On his third vision he saw a large body of men carrying a dead body and asked “Charioteer, what is this? Why are they carrying a man on cot? Why are they weeping and crying striking their breast?” The charioteer replied “Sire, this man is dead. He will never again see his parents, sons, friends and relations. He is gone forever from this world”. Siddhartha sighed “Shame to youth which will end in old age. Shame to health which is surrounded by innumerable diseases! Shame to the learned man who plunges in pleasure” (BHL, 15).

*Tranalsted from the *Lalita Vistara*. Conversations of Buddha and Charioteer.

So we see both Stephen and Siddhartha struggle over the temporality of the life, its endless sufferings, its end in the great goal – death, but to what purpose? Both yearn to unravel and defeat the mystery of the dissolution that surrounds us.

We see Stephen perplexed by thoughts of the universe, its objective and subjective reality. Passing a clockmaker's shop he marvels on the vastness of the universe and the precision of the planetary movements. "A look around. Yes, quite true. Very large and wonderful and keeps famous time. You say right, sir." But he wonders if the universe as we perceive with our limited faculties is the reality. The most comprehensive faculty to perceive and marvel at the universe is vision. "Ineluctable modality of the visible" (U 3. 1) But it is limited to the combinations of the fundamental colors that the human eye can perceive. "Snotgreen, bluesilver, rust: coloured signs" (U 3. 3) The Auditory faculty helps us appreciate another dimension of the universe. "ineluctable modality of the audible" (U 3. 12). And this too is limited to the few decibels, wavelengths of sounds we can hear. The tactile sometimes helps when the ocular and auditory fail. "By knocking his scone against them, sure" (U 3.4) Similarly the olfactory, gustatory and tactile perceptions add additional details to our perception of the universe. All these limited faculties construe a diaphanous veil through which we observe the universe. "Limits of the diaphane" (U 3.3) This diaphane, like a burkha that blankets, like a chador that covers, presents Stephen with a sheer silhouette of the reality: A mystery to be unraveled, "take upon 's the mystery of things" (King Lear 5-3. 17). Like the blind men describing an elephant, we attempt to describe reality as perceived by our limited faculties, using our limited language and imagination. Shutting his eyes, he takes few strides on Sandymount beach and traverses it spatially and temporally "very short

space of time through very short times of space” (U 3.12), he perceives time flowing, moments follow more moments one after another - “*Nacheinander*. The sands and shells encountering his boots side by side present a spatial view of the landscape - *Nebeneinander*. Opening his eyes he realizes that the infinite space-time continuum exists independent of an observer. It was there, is there and will be there. “There all the time without you: and ever shall be, world without end”. (U 3.25)

The Buddha recognized that our perceptions of the physical are but a veneer of the reality. He concluded that the physical existence is marked by the three characteristics - *trilakshana* (Sanskrit. *Tri* = *Three*; *Lakshana* = *Characteristics*). These are Impermanence (*Anitya* in Sanskrit, *Anicca* in Pali), Sorrow (*Dukha* in Sanskrit) and no-Self (*anatman* in Sanskrit, *Annata* in Pali). *Anitya* implies that everything in nature is in a state of flux constantly changing. Change and decay is inherent in everything and existence remains forever in flux, continuously becoming, like a flowing river. A flowing river appears same to the common eye, but the wise know that it is never the same because its waters change every moment. “No man ever steps in the same river twice” says Heraclitus. Every perception is a static snapshot in time and a series of such snapshots give us the illusion of continuity. The world around us lives and dies in a rapid progression of cause-effects events from one state of existence to another deluding us into taking the rope for a snake. Like aboriginals we mistake a photograph for the real thing. *Anitya* does not deny the existence of physical reality; it denies the diuturnity of that reality. “*Sabbe sankhara anicca* “ (*Majjhima Nikaya*. All things are impermanent) says the Buddha. In *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (AN 7:62/IV 100ff.), Buddha teaches “Impermanent, monks, are (all) saṅkhāras, unstable (not constant), monks, are [al]

saṅkhāras, [hence] not a cause for comfort and satisfaction are [all] saṅkhāras, so much so that one must get tired of all these saṅkhāras, be disgusted with them, and be completely free of them.”. The term saṅkhāra (*or Samskara in Sanskrit*) is an all inclusive term that includes all forms in the universe bounded in causality. In Saṃyutta Nikāya (SN 12:31/S II 49) Buddha teaches “Whatever has become is of the nature of passing away “. The five faculties of perception too are faulty and impermanent. is: " Bhikkhus, the eye is impermanent..... The ear is impermanent.. . . The nose is impermanent.. . . The tongue is impermanent.. . . The body is impermanent.. . . The mind is impermanent. What is impermanent is suffering. What is suffering is nonself. What is nonself should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom.

Stephen and Buddha realize that our faulty faculties present us with a façade of the reality. Both realize the ever changing characteristic of nature. “Five months. Molecules all change. I am other I now.” (U 9.206).

Stephen is overwhelmed at his mortality realizing that the God that made him is not only a creator but a destroyer, a “Hangman God” (U 9.1049) and a “Chewer of Corpses” (U 1. 278). He blames God for the death of his mother. “Someone killed her” (U 1. 90). For these reasons he refused to pray for his dying mother or ask for redemption. His mother a “ghostwoman with ashes on her breath” (U 3. 44) and her womb an “allwombing tomb” (U 5. 401) reminds him of his impending death. Amidst the stifling remembrances of death and decay, Stephens want to overcome his mortality “No, mother! Let me be and let me live” (U 1. 280). Bitter over his mortality, he refuses to live a traditional life and walk away empty handed from the show. “For through that tube

he saw that he was in the land of Phenomenon where he must for a certain one day die as he was like the rest too a passing show. And would he not accept to die like the rest and pass away?" (U 14. 430) He realizes that art is his salvation and path to immortality. Agreeing with Russell's contention that "We have King Lear: and it is immortal" (U 9. 188) he adds Hamnet Shakespeare died but "his namesake may live forever." (U 9 .175) referring to Hamlet – the work of art that lives. The artist is reborn when a connoisseur contemplates the art "When one reads these strange pages of one long gone one feels that one is at one with one who once .." (U 3. 144). A similar theme echoes in Stephen's mind in the "Nestor" episode where the students don't recall the site of the battle or the death of Pyrrhus, but remember his words "Another victory like that and we are done for" (U 2.3). Stephen ponders on the power of such rhetoric. "That phrase the world had remembered. ... Any general to any officers. They lend ear" (U 3.15). He understands that great words or works will remain alive entrenched in the memory of humanity for ages to come. And if any general could create such memorable phrases, he too can. Through creation an artist can transcend from temporal to eternal existence. "In woman's womb word is made flesh but in the spirit of the maker all flesh that passes becomes the word that shall not pass away. This is the postcreation." (U 14. 293). Throughout his life Stephen has seen the great literature survive, the artist remembered and honored, Aristotle, Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, Aquinas, Blake, Homer to name a few. Stephen vows to create a great work of art in ten years. He looks to Shakespeare for inspiration because "After God Shakespeare has created most" (U 9. 1032) and lives immortally in his creation "all in all in all" (U 9.1050). We thus see Stephen sees his salvation in his art, as Lowell says "Is not a scholastic athanasy better than none?"

Siddhartha's struggle began with the "four visions" and ended up in his becoming the enlightened one "Buddha" having discovered the path to his salvation. He discovered the four noble truths (*arya satya in Sanskrit; arya = Noble; Satya = truth*) which are Suffering (*Dukha in Sanskrit*), its cause (*Samudaya in Sanskrit*), its cessation (*Nirodha in Sanskrit*) and the path leading to its cessation (*marga in Sanskrit*). Having analyzed the root cause of suffering, he found the path to escape suffering. Ignorance of reality (*Avidya in Sanskrit*), Forms (*Samakara*), individual Consciousness (*vignana*), psycho-physical organism (*nama-rupa*), sense-organs (*Sadayatana*), sense-form contact (*sparsha*), sensation (*Vedana*), craving for the sensation (*trishna*), clinging to the sense of enjoyment (*upadana*), will to be born to experience the sense of enjoyment (*bhava*), birth (*janma*), decay and death (*Marana*) together are the twelve spokes of the causal wheel that sets man in perpetual cycle of life-suffering-death. Buddha does not deny the plethora of pleasures in life, he cautions us of the ephemeral nature of these enjoyables. Salvation (*nirvana*) - the release from this endless cycle can be achieved when its root cause – the ignorance (*Avidya*) is destroyed. Siddhartha achieved his salvation following the noble eightfold path (*Ariya-Ashtanga Marga*) and taught the same. Describing Nirvana he says "There is that dimension, monks, where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind; neither dimension of the infinitude of space, nor dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, nor dimension of nothingness, nor dimension of neither perception nor non-perception; neither this world, nor the next world, nor sun, nor moon. And there, I say, there is neither coming, nor going, nor staying; neither passing away nor arising: un-established, un-evolving, without support this, just this, is the end of stress." (SN 22:53).

One can thus see that both Stephen and Siddhartha yearned and earned salvation, aspired and achieved immortality, created and consecrated art “embalmed in spice of words“ (U 9.355), meditated on the true meaning of forms “Shut your eyes and see” (U 3.10). Stephen found his salvation in art and Siddhartha in the *Ariya-Ashtanga Marga*. Every person has to find his own salvation. The lives of Stephen and Siddhartha illustrate this. The Buddha’s last words were "Disciples, this I declare to you: All conditioned things are subject to disintegration – strive on untiringly for your liberation." (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*)

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