Bridging Disappointment: Pak T’aewŏn’s *Kubo* and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

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Oh, a mother’s love, how infinitely deep and infinitely sad.
—Pak T’aewŏn, *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist*

Tell me the word, mother, if you know now. The word known to all men.
—James Joyce, *Ulysses*

Although Pak T’aewŏn expressed his appreciation for *Ulysses* and the “experimental nature of James Joyce’s writing” in a 1934 article, there have been relatively few critical attempts to bridge his 1934 novella, *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist* (*Sosŏlga Kubo Ssi ūi iril*), and Joyce’s 1922 epic modernist novel. And most of these have been limited to discussions of their diurnal structures and the motif of the urban wanderer, or *flâneur*, in the modern colonial city. So while Pak does not emulate *Ulysses*’s radical formal experiments, I argue that his *Kubo* does reveal a kindred sensibility in its portrait of the artist as a young man struggling to find, amidst a seemingly infertile 1930s Seoul, “happiness,” or, in Stephen Dedalus’s terms, something like “the word known to all men.” To varying degrees, the search for it remains inconclusive in both modernist texts; nevertheless, much as Joyce does in *Ulysses*, Pak offers an affirmative vision in the tentative moment of his intelligent and sensitive hero from excessive solipsism towards authentic empathy for others. And in both texts, the development of a greater capacity to respect and affirm the other in her or his singularity is intimately allied with a reconceived relationship to the mother. Kubo’s odyssey thus reaches its apparently hopeful conclusion when he understands, as if for the first time, sadness and suffering in


2. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 15.4192-93. Following the accepted convention in Joyce studies, citations from *Ulysses* will indicate the episode number (15) and the line number(s) (4192-93).

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a lonely widow and “ignorant” barmaids. Unlike Stephen, who continues to grieve for his dead mother, paralyzed to a great extent by his guilt, Kubo realizes the opportunity to return home and comfort the mother who, with her “infinite love,” waits for him, night after night, sleepless and worried. And as he hastens home, determined to “write a truly good novel,” it seems that Kubo may have found a means to revitalize his life and his art. That is, much as Stephen Dedalus is an ironized, literary portrait of a younger James Joyce, Pak suggests that Kubo the novelist, equipped with the (self-)awareness and empathy lacking for much of the day, will now be able to write a story much like the one he has been the principle character of.

Keywords: Pak T’aewôn – A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist, James Joyce – Ulysses, empathy, maternal love, happiness

In Pak T’aewôn’s 1934 novella, A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist (Sosôlga Kubo Ssi üi iril), the eponymous young artist, after reluctantly listening to a friend’s “oration on Ulysses”3 in a Seoul teahouse, sharply interrupts: “one should of course admire this new experiment by James Joyce. Still, novelty alone is not a just cause for praising it.”4 While Pak, for whom Ulysses was an important influence,5 does not “praise” Joyce’s epic novel by emulating its radical formal experiments, his Kubo does evince a kindred sensibility in its portrait of the artist as a young man struggling to find, amidst the seemingly infertile and paralyzed colonial city, “happiness” (haengbok)6 – or, in Stephen

3. Pak, Kubo, 171.
4. Ibid., 172.
5. Sunyoung Park, in her introduction, writes that “Among [Pak’s] defining intellectual experiences,” while a student of English Literature at Hôsei University, “was the reading of Tô Sei’s Japanese translation of James Joyce’s Ulysses.” Pak, Kubo, 141. In a 1934 article appearing in the Chosôn Central Daily, Pak writes of having read Ulysses: “Recently, after reading Ulysses, I realized the experimental nature of James Joyce’s writing. . . .” Pak T’aewôn, “Pyohyon, myosa, kigyo,” Chosôn chungang ilbo, 1934.12.17-31, in Kim Yunsik, Han’guk byöndae modónijin pip’yöng sónip [Critical selection of modernism in modern Korea] (Seoul: Sool taehekkyo ch’ulp’anbu, 1995), 61. Ch’ông Han’ui, however, says that the Ulysses read by Pak was, in fact, a “pirated” version. Ch’ông Han’ui, “Pak T’aewôn üi ‘Ch’önbyôn p’unggyöng’ kwa Jeimsû Joisû üi Dŏbudun saramd’il üi ‘tosi’” [The city of Pak T’aewôn’s Ch’önggye Stream and James Joyce’s Dubliners], in Pak T’aewôn munbak yôn’gu üi chaensik [A new understanding of the study of Pak T’aewôn’s literature], ed. Pang Minho (Seoul: Yeok, 2010), 201-33, quotation on 202. This was confirmed by Mr. Daniel Pak, a son of Pak T’aewôn still living in Seoul, who told me that his father read an “unauthorized abridgment” of Joyce’s novel while in Japan. Due, in part, to the uncertainty regarding the depth of Pak’s familiarity with Joyce’s novel, my arguments pertaining to the points of convergence between Kubo and Ulysses will be derived from formalist analyses of the two texts.
6. The word “happiness,” by my count, appears nearly two dozen times in the novella. Cho Sŏnsuk, in her study of Ulysses’s influence on Kubo, emphasizes Kubo’s “obsession with the single
Dedalus’s terms, something like “the word known to all men.” The search for it, as we might expect, remains inconclusive in both modernist texts; nevertheless, much as Joyce does in *Ulysses*, Pak provides an affirmative vision in the tentative movement of his intelligent and sensitive hero from excessive solipsism towards authentic empathy for others. And in both texts, the development of a greater capacity to respect and affirm the other in her or his singularity is intimately allied with a reconceived relationship to the mother. For Stephen, whose mother has been dead one year, this evolution will have to be Janus-shaped: he must learn to appreciate the unconditional love she gave him — perhaps “The only true thing in life” — while finding a way to escape from his compulsive guilt, letting go of her ghost and allowing it to let go of him.


7. According to Chŏng Han’u, “Even though Pak himself mentioned the influence of Joyce, there are not many attempts to compare the works of Pak and Joyce.” And the connections that critics have made between *Ulysses* and *Kubo*, Chŏng continues, have been limited to their diurnal structures and the fact that “Mr. Kubo and Mr. Bloom leave their homes in the morning and wander through Seoul and Dublin.” Chŏng, “Pak Taewŏn ŭi Ch’ŏnhyŏn p’unggyŏng,” 205. It does seem clear, however, that Kubo, the twenty-six-year-old novelist, most resembles the twenty-two-year-old poet, Stephen Dedalus (who is a fictionalized version of Joyce as a young man). Leopold Bloom, the thirty-eight-year-old Irish Jew, is a newspaper canvasser with a wife and daughter.

8. Cho Sŏn suk conceptualizes the “journeys” of both *Kubo* and *Ulysses* as a movement “starting from alienation (tanjŏl)” and “ending in a positive conclusion of harmony (hwabap).” Cho, “‘Sosŏla Kubossi ŭi iril’ ŭi pigyo yŏn’gu,” 116. While I agree that both Kubo and Stephen begin their respective days mired in alienation, the conclusion of *Ulysses*, at least as far as Stephen is concerned, is much too ambiguous to support the claim that he has found harmony in his life or his art. In fact, when we last see Stephen, he is without a home to go to, estranged from his family and many of his friends, and nothing is said about what the future might hold in terms of his aesthetic sensibility. Cho also writes that “Kubo and *Ulysses* are similar because in both the main characters leave home and then return home late in the evening.” Ibid., 112. However, she does not specify to which main character from *Ulysses* she is referring. While Bloom returns home, Stephen (who most resembles Kubo) does not. In this regard, *Kubo* would seem to end on a more positive and hopeful note than *Ulysses*.


10. Among the many critics who have explored the role of maternal love and Stephen’s relationship to his dead mother in *Ulysses* are Marylu Hill and Jean Kimball. For Hill, Stephen’s paralysis, malaise, and overriding melancholy are a result of his unresolved “relationship with his mother, both the real mother who nurtured him and now is dead, and an imagined symbolic mother who is a product of Stephen’s fearful and anxious consciousness.” Marylu Hill, “Amor Matris: Mother and Self in the Telemachiad Episode of *Ulysses*,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 39, no. 3 (1993): 329-43, quotation on 329. Kimball, who examines this evolving relationship in
Kubo, whose mother waits for him, night after night, sleepless and worried, his odyssey nears its apparently hopeful conclusion when we see him returning home late in the evening with a new appreciation for her “infinite” love.\(^{11}\) After all the aimless wandering, he decides: “Maybe, now, he wants to think more of his mother’s happiness than of his own.”\(^{12}\)

For Stephen and Kubo, reconfiguring how they see their mothers and how they see others is a peripatetic endeavor; it requires an odyssey away from home, one which, passing through disappointment and self-recrimination, ends with a return of greater humility and (self-)understanding.\(^{13}\) To the extent that this return constitutes a reconciliation, “there must,” as Stephen says, speaking of Shakespeare’s late romances, “have been first a sundering.”\(^{14}\) And this sundering, in both texts, has myriad manifestations: it includes estrangement between the son and mother, lovers, and friends;\(^{15}\) an ambivalent attitude towards the colonial city; as well as a persistent sense of alienation and isolation. With both texts foregrounding the interdependence of art and life, reconciliation in each realm depends upon Kubo and Stephen overcoming their congenital myopia and learning to see, and not simply with their eyes, more broadly and kindly. In “Proteus,” as he walks along the strand, lost in melancholic reverie and (over-) intellectualizing, Stephen gazes at the “seaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot,” and considers the “Ineluctable modality of the visible: at last that if no more, thought through my eyes.”\(^{16}\)

\(^{11}\) Here, I agree with Cho’s argument that Kubo’s negative attitude towards his mother prevents him from finding happiness, and that his apparent “reconciliation with the mother” marks a “movement towards harmony.” Cho, “Sosölga Kubossi u iril’ üi pigyo yön’gu,” 116.

\(^{12}\) Pak, *Kubo*, 194. While Cho sees in *Kubo*’s conclusion an “epiphany,” a “positive realization that he will write again and reconcile with his mother,” she does not explicitly connect Kubo’s newfound appreciation of his mother’s love and what I argue will be his more expansive and empathic aesthetic. Cho, “Sosölga Kubossi u iril’ üi pigyo yön’gu,” 118. Instead of seeing these as separate, isolated phenomena, my contention is that maternal love and Kubo’s artistic capabilities are intimately allied.

\(^{13}\) See note 8. Stephen’s return remains much more ambiguous and open-ended than Kubo’s.


\(^{15}\) In *Ulysses*, Stephen is also estranged from his underemployed, alcoholic father. Kubo’s father is never mentioned in the novella, but the fact that he lives alone with his mother – and that Pak T’aeëwôn’s own father died when he was nineteen – makes it safe to assume that his father is deceased.

\(^{16}\) Joyce, *Ulysses*, 3.1-3.
problem with thinking through the eyes, in Stephen’s case, is that it tends to yield the external and inessential.\textsuperscript{17} Kubo, too, for much of his day, ineluctably takes in modalities, unable to see more than visible, external phenomena, which are filtered through preexisting expectations and formulations. If either of them is to be capable of writing texts resembling the ones in which they appear as protagonists,\textsuperscript{18} they must come to see not only “what you damn well have to see,”\textsuperscript{19} but also the manifold points of connection, impalpable to the eye, existing between any one human being and another.

Idealizing certain notions of aesthetic detachment, Kubo and Stephen tend to distance themselves from the individuals they encounter, something which, to a significant extent, stunts their creative abilities. While some degree of detachment is essential for the artist, the danger, Pak and Joyce suggest, lies in seeing what is different from oneself as foreign to that self. As Marjorie Howes and Derek Attridge have written, one of the marvels of Joyce’s art lies in his ability to reveal how differences indicate not only separation, but also connection: “To identify points of difference, for Joyce, is to articulate a kind of connection.”\textsuperscript{20} In Ulysses, the most profound examples of affirming connection-in-difference come from Leopold Bloom, who, advocating “Love” or “the opposite of hatred,”\textsuperscript{21} empathizes with the “Woman’s woe” of prostitutes and

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\item \textsuperscript{17} As Sara K. Crangle points out, Stephen, at this juncture of Ulysses, largely relies on his eyesight, his subjective vision, to make sense of the modalities of what he sees. Crangle, quite perceptively, draws attention to the fact that “Modalities are the direct opposite of epiphanic essences: distinct from substance and identity, ‘modality,’ according to the OED, refers to the ‘non-essential aspect or attributes of a concept or entity.’ In ‘Proteus,’ the external, the physical begins to define Stephen and his legacy.” Sara K. Crangle, “Stephen’s Handles,” \textit{James Joyce Quarterly} 47, no. 1 (2009): 51-69, quotation on 56.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Both Kubo and Stephen are, to a large extent, literary self-portraits of Pak and Joyce (in the case of Joyce, who quit work on Ulysses just before his fortieth birthday, himself as a younger man). It is, however, essential to keep in mind the self-conscious and ironic distance both authors establish between themselves and their characters.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Joyce, Ulysses, 9.86.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes, eds., \textit{Semicolonial Joyce} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2. In this essay, I am by no means suggesting that we read Kubo through Joyce (or Joycean criticism), nor that Pak’s profound and nuanced treatment of empathy and the relationship between oneself and others was somehow a result of his engagement with Ulysses. Instead, I believe that the evolution of Kubo’s sensibility in the novella reflects an immediate concern with the \textit{Lebenswelt}, or lived reality, of the modern individual and artist in 1930s colonial Seoul. However, because both Joyce and Pak, independently and from within two different colonial modernities, cultivated such discerning and vital empathic aesthetics, there are compelling stakes for “world literature” in marking their convergences, articulating, despite their many obvious “points of difference,” the connections existing between two eminent modernists of world literature.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Joyce, Ulysses, 12.1485.
\end{itemize}
women in labor, \(^{22}\) demonstrates fatherly concern for a drunken, brooding Stephen, and even identifies sympathetically with his wife, Molly, who has an affair in their bed on this day. Stephen, at times, shows glimpses of this capacity, most conspicuously in his engagement with the weakling student Sargent and his gracious acceptance of Bloom's solicitude and hospitality. \(^{23}\) For Kubo, in his erratic and myopic quest for happiness, his failures come from conceiving of Seoul's barmaids, prostitutes, and laborers (and, especially, his mother) as antagonistic type-characters who share little or nothing in common with him. But as his evening revels wind down, Kubo understands, as if for the first time, sadness and suffering in a lonely widow and exploited barmaids, and realizes the opportunity – of which Stephen is irrevocably dispossessed – to return home and comfort his mother. Equipped with a finer, more compassionate sensibility, it seems that Kubo may have found a means to revitalize his life and his art, to bridge his disappointments, and, perhaps, to find some measure of that elusive “happiness” – by getting married.

Stephen Dedalus:

“Amor matris: subjective and objective genitive”

The Stephen Dedalus of Ulysses, especially for readers of Joyce's Künstlerroman, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, is markedly chastened, deep in mourning, and plagued by an inability to make use of his talent and fulfill his promise as an artist. \(^{24}\) The young man, who, at the conclusion of Portrait, left for Paris with the intent “to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race,” \(^{25}\) has, in returning to Dublin, had his “wings clipped.” This metaphor is particularly apt if we think of Stephen’s claim that the majority of his countrymen, due to the prevailing conditions of colonial Ireland, are ensnared in nets:

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 14.186.

\(^{23}\) These instances will be addressed below.

\(^{24}\) Mark Morrision, for instance, describes Stephen thus: “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man ends with a hopeful Stephen Dedalus preparing to embark on a career as a poet, excited by life. . . . But in Ulysses, we find a very different Stephen – a brooding, mourning young man whose paternal muse seems to have let him down – a poet who cannot write poetry.” Mark Morrision, “Stephen Dedalus and the Ghost of the Mother,” Modern Fiction Studies 39, no. 2 (1993): 345-68, quotation on 345.

\(^{25}\) James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, in Dubliners, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Chamber Music (New York: Gramercy Books, 1992), 179-390, quotation on 390.
– The soul is born, he said vaguely, first in those moments I told you of. It has a slow and dark birth, more mysterious than the birth of the body. When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.\(^{26}\)

For Stephen, such things as his schoolmate’s testimonial for universal peace, Catholicism, and the Irish nationalist and Irish-language revival movements are ideological formations that ossify the mind and spirit.\(^{27}\) In Stephen’s mind, the unhindered development of the soul is essential to the full development of the aesthetic which, he claims, is “life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination.”\(^{28}\) In Ulysses, the single-minded determination to transcend these nets has resulted in a wearisome net of its own, largely paralyzing him within his own mind. The youthful refusal to be contained by them reaches its apotheosis in Ulysses’s “Circe” episode, where a heavily inebriated Stephen, reproached by a hallucination of his dead mother, screams, just before striking at the chandelier of Bella Cohen’s brothel: “The intellectual imagination! With me or not at all. Non serviam!”\(^{29}\) Just as the ashpunt causes little damage to the chandelier,\(^{30}\) we see that Stephen’s attempt to lash out at his debilitating guilt and serve no master – focalized in the refusal to pray at his mother’s deathbed – only succeeds in further entangling him. Early in Ulysses, Buck Mulligan, with a mocking and cruel perceptiveness, articulates how Stephen’s myopic insistence upon flying past these nets has, ironically, made him just as intractable as the most devout Catholic: “You wouldn’t kneel down to pray for your mother on her deathbed when she asked you. Why? Because you have the cursed jesuit strain in you, only it's injected the wrong way.”\(^{31}\) Because “Art,” in Stephen’s conception, “is the human disposition of sensible or intelligible matter for an esthetic end,”\(^{32}\) it is clear from Ulysses that he must overcome his visceral and pedantic attachment to the “non serviam!” and learn to apprehend of sensible and intelligible matter in new ways, ceasing to mediate the stuff of life through

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 348.

\(^{27}\) In the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century, the Irish nationalist and Gaelic revival movements were closely allied. Joyce, as is well known, held an ambivalent attitude towards both; in particular, he was angered by the Catholic Church’s complicity in the downfall of the Irish Protestant political leader Charles Stewart Parnell.

\(^{28}\) Joyce, Portrait, 358.

\(^{29}\) Joyce, Ulysses, 15.4227-28.

\(^{30}\) An ashpunt is a walking stick. It should be noted that both Stephen and Kubo carry around such an appendage on their respective days.

\(^{31}\) Joyce, Ulysses, 1.207-09.

\(^{32}\) James Joyce, Portrait, 351.
his own solipsism and self-pity. He must, as Stephen describes in Portrait, move past a “lyrical” approach to the world, one in which “the artist presents his image in immediate relation to himself.”

If Stephen comes to believe, after his mother’s death, that love is “The only true thing in life” and “The word known to all men,” then clearly her loss effects a transformation in him, a movement from suspicion of – and even revolt against – maternal love to a more affirmative conception of it. In Portrait, Stephen, shortly before he leaves for Paris, meets up with his friend Cranly and recounts to him a quarrel he has just had with his mother about religion:

– What age is your mother?
– Not old, Stephen said. She wishes me to make my Easter duty.
– And will you?
– I will not, Stephen said.
– Why not? Cranly said.
– I will not serve, answered Stephen.

Stephen’s intellectual pride, his refusal to “serve” his mother and her beliefs, is interrogated by Cranly, who remarks it “curious... how your mind is supersaturated with the religion in which you say you disbelieve.” Cranly, who quickly recognizes the futility of questioning Stephen’s “no” in terms of theology, turns to the matter of love:

– Let me 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 ever loved anyone? Cranly asked.

33. Ibid., 356-57. In Stephen’s aesthetic theory, the three forms of art are the lyrical, “the epical form, the form wherein he presents his image in mediate relation to himself and others; the dramatic form, the form wherein he presents his image in immediate relation to others.” Ibid., 357. Both the Stephen of Ulysses and Kubo, as far as their aesthetic vision is concerned, seem to be mired in the lyrical form. Their task, my argument goes, is to effect a transformation from an aesthetic of solipsism to one of imaginative empathy – with the latter seeming to correlate with what Stephen calls the “dramatic form.”

34. Joyce, Ulysses, 2.143.
35. Ibid., 15.4192-93. We should note that it is never clear whether Stephen believes love to possess such a transcendent capacity, as both of these quotes are framed in the interrogative: “Was that then real? The only true thing in life;” “Tell me the word, mother, if you know now. The word known to all men.”

37. Ibid., 379.
38. Ibid., 379.
Stephen is noticeably discomfited by this line of questioning, touching, as it does, upon a nerve that will become increasingly raw – namely what he believes to be the irreconcilable demands of love and art. Cranly, employing a rhetorical strategy based in human sympathy, the love of a mother for her child, counsels Stephen: “Do as she wishes you to do. What is it for you? You disbelieve in it. It is a form, nothing else. And you will set her mind at rest.” Stephen, we know, does not heed the advice; nevertheless, he is given a piece of wisdom that he will eventually come to appreciate:

– Whatever else is unsure in this stinking dunghill of a world a mother’s love is nor. Your mother brings you into the world, carries you first in her body. What do we know about what she feels? But whatever she feels, it, at least, must be real. It must be. What are our ideas or ambitions? Play. Ideas! Why, that bloody bleating goat Temple has ideas. MacCann has ideas too. Every jackass going the roads thinks he has ideas.40

For Stephen, who, at this point in his life, over-privileges artistic creation – the mysterious development of the (male) artist’s soul – at the expense of maternal, bodily creation, the notion of such an inarticulate, immanent truth lies beyond his capacity for understanding. But Cranly’s simple poignancy brings to light a concern absolutely fundamental to both Stephen and Kubo: the difficult search to adequately appreciate and meaningfully evoke this “real” thing, these silent thoughts and feelings. Cranly’s stance is imminently ethical; he does not try to domesticate, abstract, or intellectualize what this thing is. Instead, he affirms the power and singularity of these maternal feelings by asserting “it must be” true. The painful irony of it all, again, is that the power and force of “love’s bitter mystery” comes to Stephen too late for entelechy.41

_Ulysses_ opens on the morning of June 16, 1904, about a year after the death of Mrs. Dedalus, with Stephen, Mulligan, and the Englishman Haines, temporarily occupying a Martello tower in the Dublin suburb of Sandycove. Having fallen out with his father and living with Mulligan’s mockery and Haine’s colonialist obtuseness and condescension, Stephen feels alone and alienated – a feeling exacerbated by the fact that his companions lack the

39. Ibid., 380.
40. Ibid., 381.
41. The phrase “love’s bitter mystery” comes from W.B. Yeats’s poem “Who Goes with Fergus?,” which Stephen sang for his mother on her deathbed, and which he references several times during his day. “Entelechy,” for Aristotle (with whom, as opposed to Plato, Stephen feels an intellectual kinship), is the actuality of something as opposed to its potentiality. Stephen, at several junctures in _Ulysses_, thinks of this word in his interior monologues.
willingness or ability to empathize with his grief. Mulligan cynically externalizes the pain by placing a “cracked lookingglass” in front of Stephen’s face, forcing him to contemplate a disfigured image of that pain: “Look at yourself,” Mulligan says, “you dreadful bard.” Dressed in his black, Hamletic mourning garb, Stephen faces the realization that this is “As he and others see me.” Holding so tightly to his pain, his external appearance refracts the loss of his mother, while his vision ineluctably imbues the external world with it:

Pain, that was not yet the pain of love, fretted his heart. Silently, in a dream she had come to him after her death, her wasted body within its loose brown graveclothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, that had bent upon him, mute, reproachful, a faint odour of wetted ashes. Across the threadbare cuffed edge he saw the sea hailed as a great sweet mother by the wellfed voice beside him. The ring of bay and skyline held a dull green mass of liquid. A bowl of white china had stood beside her deathbed holding the green sluggish bile which she had torn up from her rotting liver by fits of loud groaning vomiting.

This present pain is incredibly poignant, evoking, as it does, his dream with its wax and rosewood and wetted ashes, and then transforming Mulligan’s “great sweet mother[,] The snotgreen sea. The scrotumtightening sea.” into an image of his own mother and her green bile filling a white bowl. Dead, she is everywhere about him, and he cannot sever the chords that connect him to her. It is not, Ulysses suggests, a matter of cutting these threads; there is, however, the necessity that Stephen find a more livable and aesthetically fertile manner of grieving, of coexisting with the loss such that it ceases to be everything for him. Mulligan’s blunt advice to “Give up the moody brooding” expresses his frustration with Stephen’s grief-fueled self-absorption and gloominess, but it inadvertently “plucks,” as it were, an overly-taught string binding Stephen to his mother. It hastens Stephen’s decision to renounce his temporary home – “I

42. Joyce, Ulysses, 1.146.
43. Ibid., 1.134.
44. Ibid., 1.136.
45. Ibid., 1.102-110.
46. Ibid., 1.77-78.
47. Ibid., 1.235-36.
48. The metaphor is Joyce’s. After Mulligan tells Stephen to “Give up the moody brooding,” the former makes his way upstairs, reciting lines from the same Yeats poem that Stephen sang to his mother on her deathbed: “And no more turn aside and brood / Upon love’s bitter mystery / For Fergus rules the brazen cars.” Ibid., 1.239-41. Stephen’s gaze then returns to the sea, his mind linking the lines of verse to memories of his mother: “White breast of the dim sea. The twining stresses, two by two. A hand plucking the harpstrings, merging their twining chords.” Ibid.,
will not sleep here tonight. Home also I cannot go” 49 – and, like a modern Telemachus, to wander the streets of Dublin in search of the spiritual fulfillment and human connection that now eludes him. 50

In Ulysses's second episode, “Nestor,” Cranly's sensibility does help Stephen to engage kindly and empathetically with his dyslexic pupil, Sargent, who has been required to stay after class and work on his arithmetic problems. At first, Stephen, still somewhat morose from his exchange with Mulligan, expresses revulsion for the student, whom he likens to a snail. When Sargent timidly says that he cannot figure out the problems, Stephen nears the point of exasperation; however, at precisely this moment, he has a sudden epiphany, 51 revealing a heretofore hidden connection between grieving teacher and weakling pupil:

Ugly and futile: lean neck and thick hair and a stain of ink, a snail’s bed. Yet someone had loved him, borne him in her arms and in her heart. But for her the race of the world would have trampled him underfoot, a squashed boneless snail. She had loved his weak watery blood drained from her own. Was that then real? The only true thing in life? 52

Motherly love, here, is a positive force, one that allows Stephen to transform his lingering pain into human warmth and patience, to move outside himself and see that “Like him was I.”

In long shaky strokes Sargent copied the data. Waiting always for a word of help his hand moved faithfully the unsteady symbols, a faint hue of shame flickering

1.244-46.

49. Ibid., 1.739-40.

50. The first episode of Ulysses, as with Homer’s The Odyssey, is entitled “Telemachus.” The mythical parallels are, of course, intentional on the part of Joyce.

51. An epiphany, for Joyce, is the revelation of an essence that has been previously concealed. Drawn from Catholic theology, where it refers to the sudden and transitory manifestation of a deity, Joyce uses the term to “designate . . . a moment of spiritual revelation or showing forth of one’s true nature.” Nicholas A. Fargnoli and Michael Patrick Gillespie, Critical Companion to James Joyce: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work (New York: Facts On File, 2006), 273.

52. Joyce, Ulysses, 2.139-43. Marian Eide spends a significant portion of her chapter “Ethical Knowledge and Errant Pedagogy” on this specific interaction between Stephen and Sargent. Of this “ethical encounter,” she writes: “In Stephen’s encounter with Sargent, Joyce indicates that the other to whom we are called to respond ethically is not always obviously desirable. He may be the moist, snail-like child at the back of the class whose ineffectual work evokes irritation. Yet the ethical subject is called to a sympathetic encounter with that other in his or her nakedness. Joyce indicates through Stephen’s associative processes the means through which repulsion can transform into ethical treatment based on sympathy and even desire . . . If he responded brutally to the child, Stephen would align himself with an unethical world rather than with this true thing: a mother’s love.” Marian Eide, Ethical Joyce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 67.
behind his dull skin. *Amor matris*: subjective and objective genitive. With her weak blood and wheysour milke she had fed him and hid from sight of others his swaddlingbands.

Like him was I, these sloping shoulders, this gracelessness. My childhood bends beside me. Too far for me to lay a hand there once or lightly. Mine is far and his secret as our eyes. Secrets, silent, stony sit in the dark palaces of both our hearts: secrets weary of their tyranny: tyrants, willing to be dethroned.\(^{53}\)

Recognizing "*Amor matris*" as "subjective and objective genitive" – as both "mother’s love" and "love of the mother" – Stephen, albeit belatedly, illuminates the reciprocal relation, and how this force can help to redeem the world’s brutality by engendering empathy. This marks a significant departure from *Portrait*, where Stephen told Cranly “I don’t know what your words mean.”\(^{54}\) Prior to his mother’s death, Stephen saw love, and especially love for his mother, as an abstraction, as a word people say as a matter of form. Now, faced with the real, existential pain of her death, Stephen has a more immediate, immanent understanding of “love’s bitter mystery” and its potentially transcendent power. But while this appreciation of maternal love has an affirmative face, as we see with Sargent, Stephen, in large part, remains bogged down by his guilt. *Amor matris*, for Stephen, is a source both of empathy and oppression.

**Kubo: Not Saying “Yes”**

*Kubo*, in revealing the profound interrelations of maternal love and artistic creation, happiness and empathy, provides an inverse figure of *Ulysses*: whereas Stephen Dedalus makes an ambiguous odyssey towards reinventing his relationship to his dead mother, Kubo, in his errant quest for happiness, seems to near his goal when he embraces the fecund and humane force of his mother’s love.\(^{55}\) Much as, geographically, *Kubo* ends near where it began, with Kubo “hastening home,”\(^{56}\) thematically, it opens and closes with reflections on

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55. See notes 11 and 12. In the case of *Ulysses*, Stephen’s odyssey, like that of Telemachus, has most often been conceived as the search for a spiritual father – who may or may not be Leopold Bloom. While there is a great deal in the text to support this interpretation, my argument is that Stephen’s quest to reinvent his relationship with his dead mother is also of great importance for Joyce.
maternal love. The novella, composed of thirty-one sections, devotes the first two to the mother and her thoughts and feelings, while the remainder chronicles the young novelist’s diurnal and nocturnal perambulations. In absolute terms, though, the narrative represents the mother and Kubo for almost identical durations: Pak’s novella, despite its title, actually covers two days. And this formal asymmetry is reflective of Kubo’s blindness towards his mother, his habit of treating her as an afterthought or, in Stephen’s term, a “net.” The paucity of her presence in the text also accentuates the lack of verbal communication between mother and son. In fact, at no point in the narrative-present does Kubo actually speak to his mother; each attempt, on her part, to engage Kubo in conversation is met by silence.\(^{57}\)

*Kubo* opens with the novelist leaving for the day, giving “No answer” to his mother’s questions and entreaties: “Are you going out?” and “Come back early!”\(^{58}\) After hearing the door shut, “The mother tries to console herself, as she is feeling a bit frustrated. If only the door had not creaked so loud, she might have heard the son’s ‘Yes!’ . . .”\(^{59}\) It appears that this “yes” is the mother’s hopeful invention, but this yet-to-be-articulated “yes” – which may resonate with Molly Bloom’s “Yes”\(^{60}\) concluding *Ulysses* – we come to understand, is integral to Kubo’s present sense of disenchantment. The mother’s frustration is reiterated on the second day, when Kubo, after eating his “meal without a word”\(^{61}\) sets off again. Here, though, the narrative places us inside Kubo’s mind, and we learn that he “regrets not having said a simple ‘yes’ to his mother. In fact, the word had been on the tip of his tongue at the gate. . . . he should have answered. Kubo imagines the lonely look on his mother’s face.”\(^{62}\) This sense of unease and guilt is subsequently embodied in “an acute headache” and

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57. Kubo thinks of his mother in “On the Streetcar,” when he sees the woman that he may marry, 152-53; in “Still,” where he ponders the joys of receiving postcards and letters from friends, 184; and, in “At Two a.m.,” when he makes the decision to return home, focus on writing, and, likely, accede to his mother’s wishes and proceed with his engagement, 193-94.
59. Ibid., 145.
60. Joyce, *Ulysses*, 18.1609. In *Ulysses*’s celebrated conclusion, Molly Bloom, despite having committed adultery with Blazes Boylan earlier in the day, seems to reaffirm her decision to marry Bloom: “then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes.” Ibid., 18.1605-09.
62. Ibid., 149.
thoughts of “a nervous breakdown” as he approaches the Kwanggyo Bridge. The suggestion that there is a correlation between Kubo’s (predominately latent) guilt and his tendency to pathologize himself and others, impels us to consider just how integral her absence is to Kubo’s failure to find “happiness,” how his detachment from her ensures that it remains an abstract, unattainable ideal.

Kubo’s pangs of guilt, as he sets off throughout Seoul, seem to resemble those of Stephen, to the extent that he recognizes his refusal to comfort her and consider her wishes fills her with anxiety and sadness. The significant difference, of course, is that Kubo still has an opportunity to break free from the inertia of “his obstinacy,” and, in Cranly’s words, “set her mind at rest.” While we can certainly understand why Kubo would chafe at his mother’s devaluation of his art, her insistence that he get married and “look . . . for a regular job” instead of “always just reading and writing, and wandering aimlessly in the dead of the night,” the fact remains that she is sincerely worried, and she believes, based upon her knowledge of the world, that these conventions will assure his happiness. He needs to understand what his mother has sacrificed for him during his twenty-six years, and, above all, to empathize with her concerns, treating them as valid as his own. To return to Cranly once more: Kubo, like Stephen, needs to appreciate that a mother’s love is a sure and precious thing, that these maternal feelings are real, if impossible to fully articulate. For instance, during the mother’s day, we see the strength of her love and devotion when she thinks of the time Kubo “earned some money by selling his writings” and insisted upon buying something special for her: “the more stubbornly he insisted, the more satisfied she grew. A mother’s love does not seek reward, and yet when her child shows his love, it gladdens her heart.” After receiving money to buy two skirts – one for her, one for his sister-in-law – Kubo’s mother made sure to let everyone know of her son’s generosity: “She took such pride in her son. When boasting of her son, she lost all inhibitions.” What Kubo suggests, then, is that there must be negotiation, warmth, and compromise on the part of Kubo. For if he does not learn to open himself to her love, to see happiness as something derived from the giving of it, his solipsistic search for it will continue to lead where it has – to isolation and disappointment. As it is,

63. Ibid., 149.
64. Ibid., 147.
65. Ibid., 147.
66. Ibid., 147.
67. Ibid., 148.
68. My argument that Kubo’s inability to find “happiness” during his day is largely due to his
his stubborn refusal to engage with his mother means that he is always saying “no” to her. What remains is for Kubo to say “yes”: “yes” to his mother, “yes” to life as it presents itself as possibility and actuality, and, ultimately, “yes” to an aesthetic based in openness and empathy.

Disappointed Bridges

Both Stephen and Kubo, on their respective summer days, find themselves mired in self-doubt and disappointment. The twenty-two-year-old Stephen, as we have seen, is tormented by the death of his mother, estranged from the rest of his family, and acutely aware of his inability to live up to his artistic and intellectual promise. As he walks alone on the strand, in “Proteus,” for instance, he thinks, with sharp self-recremimation, of his younger hubris:

Reading two pages apiece of seven books every night, eh? I was young. You bowed to yourself in the mirror, stepping forward to applause earnestly, striking face. Hurray for the Goddamned idiot! Hray! . . . Books you were going to write with letters for titles. Have you read his P? O yes, but I prefer Q. Yes, but W is wonderful. O yes, W. 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? Someone was to read them there after a few thousand years, a mahamantavantara. Pico della Mirandola like. 69

Embarrassed by the discrepancy between his youthful, grandiose visions for his future and his current state, Stephen is equally frustrated by the lack of esteem he receives from the Dublin literary establishment. This is most evident in “Scylla and Charybdis,” where Stephen, at the National Library of Ireland, propounds his theories on Hamlet. At this impromptu gathering of members of the Dublin intelligentsia, Stephen feels a bitter sting when they discuss a literary soirée that evening with a group of promising young Irish poets to which he has

solipsism, his lack of openness towards other people, has also been suggested by Oh Saeng-Keun: “[K]ubo’s disappointment appears to be rather self-centered. Because the idea of losing one’s loneliness amidst a city crowd or the masses is idealistic and superficial, such disillusionment could well have been foreseen. Instead of expecting others to automatically show human concern for him, he should himself have had a more open attitude toward them.” “Seoul and ‘Seoulites’ as Portrayed in Literature,” in Anthology of Korean Studies. Volume IV, Korean Literature: Its Classical Heritage and Modern Breakthroughs (Seoul: Hollym Corporation; Publishers, 2003), 347-64, quotation on 351. What Oh does not mention, however, is the fundamental role Kubo’s (absent) mother plays in his continual sense of disappointment.

69. Joyce, Ulysses, 3.136-44.
not been invited. “See this. Remember,”70 he thinks to himself, leading to a self-pitying comparison with “Cordelia. Cordoglio. Lit’s loneliest daughter.”71 This exclusion is yet another small blow to his wounded pride, an accretion that helps to crystallize his overriding sense of failure and disappointment. And the self-pity that results, the novel repeatedly suggests, is not tenable if Stephen is ever going to live up to his potential as an artist and a man. It thus remains for him to break free from his morbid and severe self-reflections and invent a more affirmative and empathetic manner to bridge his disappointment.

Much as Stephen has gone to the European continent to study, Kubo has been to the center of the Japanese Empire, Tokyo, for university. Despite the fact that, unlike Stephen, he has already had several pieces of literature published, Kubo is afflicted by a general sense of dissatisfaction, which psychosomatically manifests itself in bouts of self-doubt and hypochondria: “Neurasthenia. Of course, it’s not just his nerves breaking down. With this head of mine, with this body, how much work will I ever accomplish.”72 What exactly he desires is rather nebulous, and thus his quest is for an abstract and idealized state he repeatedly denotes as “happiness.”73 Looking everywhere for it, he remains detached from the Seoulites he observes, and from the images of happiness they project. And this lack of imaginative connection with them, it seems, is at the root of his frustrated search for happiness.74 Early in his peregrinations, Kubo enters the Hwasin Department store and sets his eyes upon “A young married couple with a four- or five-year-old boy” waiting for the elevator.75 This couple fascinates Kubo because, to his eyes, they evince “A desire to show off their happiness”;76 that is, a socially-sanctioned image of it. On the verge of “cursing them,” Kubo

70. Ibid., 9.294.
71. Ibid., 9.314.
73. See note 6.
74. See note 68.
75. Ibid., 151. The Hwasin department store, owned by the wealthy Korean businessman Pak Hünksik, was a major Seoul landmark at this time. See Bruce Cumings, Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 171-72 and Andrei Lankov, The Dawn of Modern Korea: The Transformation in Life and Cityscape (Seoul: EunHaeng NaMu, 2007), 202-05. In Pak Taeón’s 1937 novel, Scenes from Ch’ŏnggye Stream (Ch’ŏnbyŏn p’anggyŏng), trans. Ok Young Kim Chang (Singapore: Stallion Press, 2010), the Hwasin functions as a focal point in the landscape of Seoul, with a variety of characters visiting it at different points in the text.
76. Pak, Kubo, 151.
changes his mind and instead gives them his blessing. In fact, he may be envying
the couple who are enjoying this day out together, renewing their sense of
happiness, despite several years already of married life together. They clearly have
a home, where they must be happy. 77

What we see here is an interpretive desire to represent the family as possessors
of happiness. But somewhat perversely, Kubo, the self-fashioned flâneur and
literary observer, believes in their happiness because he is certain that it is, and
will remain, completely foreign to him. And so, with “A walking stick in one
hand and a notebook in the other – Kubo, of course, cannot find his happiness
in them.” 78

Standing outside the Hwasin, in what becomes a repetitive pattern, Kubo
finds himself surrounded by a crowd waiting for a streetcar, and jumps on for
the sole reason that “he feels sad and lonely at the thought of being left
behind.” 79 Much like Poe’s man of the crowd who “refuses to be alone,” 80
Kubo is simultaneously alienated from and drawn to the crowd – wanting
company he is repulsed by the humanity surrounding him. This contradictory
temperament carries over to his subsequent contemplations on solitude, which,
nowadays, “he fears:” “He had loved it once,” “Perhaps he had never really
loved it,” “Maybe he’d always dreaded it,” “Kubo might have just let himself
become lost in it at times and pretended to be in love with it.” 81 Lost in these
circuitous reflections, Kubo is startled to see the woman his mother wishes him
to marry enter the streetcar. Surprise quickly turns to paralysis. “Afraid of
meeting her eyes,” 82 he exhaustively considers the consequences of acknowledging
or not acknowledging her: “Kubo racks his brain. Maybe I should greet her. But
then maybe it’s more polite to pretend not to have noticed her. I wish I knew
which of the two she wants.” 83 And then, as if to justify his inaction, he “recalls
that he has never once seen her in his dreams since their meeting last year, [and]

77. Ibid., 151.
78. Ibid., 151.
79. Ibid., 152. Another example of this occurs when Kubo goes to Kyōngsŏng Station: “Feeling
lonely, Kubo thinks he wants to go where people are, where crowds are lively. . . . There would
certainly be life there,” 162. However, once he enters the third-class waiting room, his search for
life and an escape from loneliness is disappointed: “Although the place is so packed with people
that Kubo can’t even find a seat to squeeze into, there’s no human warmth,” 163.
81. Pak, Kubo, 152.
82. Ibid., 153.
83. Ibid., 154.
it dawns on him that he was probably never in love with her.”

Kubo then reconsiders: “But what if she did long for him –.”

Just as this reflex emerges, though, she picks up her umbrella and descends from the streetcar. In another convulsion of indecision and revision, Kubo considers getting off, thinks of the consequences of doing so, and ultimately does nothing: “Finally, she is completely out of sight, and only then, all of a sudden, damn, Kubo regrets.”

With this lost encounter, Kubo, employing no small amount of hyperbole, recoils on himself and succumbs to self-pity:

Happiness – that happiness for which he so yearns – might have departed forever with her. A bearer of happiness for him, she may have longed for him to open his heart. Why can’t I be more daring? Kubo lists all her merits one by one. Will there ever be someone else who could offer me some promise of happiness?

Insisting that “he is bound to make whomever he marries unhappy” – and suggesting that there is no woman capable of making him happy – Kubo preceptively spares himself one kind of disappointment while making sure that he continues to be disappointed.

Like Stephen, Kubo obsessively rehearses things undone and unaccomplished, yet he is unable or unwilling to be proactive and do something about them. This passivity is further emphasized when he thinks of an old woman from the girl’s family who visited Kubo and his mother to tell them that they were “observing the moves on his side.” “[I]f this were true,” he fancies, “then it’s not a comedy, but rather a tragedy. Still, he was not willing to take any action to save them both from tragedy.”

Here, we see another habit of Kubo’s, that of framing his “real” life in terms of literary models; the proposed marriage thus becomes a tragicomedy in which he, with his quasi-Hamletic disposition, refuses to be an active participant. In place of real life, then, Kubo exhibits the troubling tendency to craft substitutive fictions that necessitate and justify continual deferrals.

Kubo’s paralysis in matters of the heart is also reflected in his current aesthetic blockage. At the heart of Kubo’s quarrel with romantic love, as we

84. Ibid., 154.
85. Ibid., 154.
86. Ibid., 154.
87. Ibid., 155. In the text, the bold typeface indicates the title of a particular section.
88. Ibid., 156.
89. Ibid., 155.
90. Ibid., 155.
shall see, is his failure to seize the opportunity for happiness with a young woman he had been involved with in Tokyo. Before getting to that failure, and as a means of setting it up, we should take a closer look at Kubo’s particular mode of aesthetic detachment, his need to mediate real life through the narrative form of the novel(la). As we have seen, Kubo carries his notebook with him throughout the day, pulling it out at times to record his observations. After leaving the teahouse, Kubo looks at the bustle on the street, watching “people come and go,” and “suddenly thinks of going somewhere, maybe even just to the Sōsomun area, for the sake of his writing. For so long he’s been lazy in his modernology.”91 This “modernology,” which Chŏng Hanŭi describes as a multi-layered, modernist-realist technique for revealing the reality of the colonial experience,92 nevertheless seems to lack something essential and vital—as we see in Kubo’s “acute headache and general fatigue.”93 Stephen defines art as “the human disposition of sensible or intelligible matter for an esthetic end.”94 Kubo’s modernology does provide sensible and intelligible matter, but there is a certain malaise or spleen hindering him from transmuting the raw materials into art; and this, as Kubo repeatedly suggests, can be traced back to an inability to meaningfully and imaginatively connect to others. To this extent, the quality of his art and his life are inextricable. Kubo’s problem, then, lies in conceiving of his life as if it were a novel instead of more richly engaging with real life in order to produce more discerning art. “It’s only proper that an urban novelist should be well acquainted with the gates of the city,”95 Kubo says at another point, but as the gates mark an erstwhile periphery to the city, it seems that he needs to establish a more dynamic and empathic vantage point, one that allows him to penetrate the exterior appearances created by the city’s rapidly changing social relations. As it is, simply going through the motions of being the urban novelist is simply not productive.

In playing the role of detached literary observer, Kubo has a marked tendency to first fix people into types, and then to unflatteringly judge them according the mold he has prefabricated for them. For example, when he sees an old classmate who has apparently gained some wealth in gold, Kubo decides, based

91. Ibid., 160. Kubo visits this teahouse on three separate occasions during his day. This quote follows his first visit there.
93. Pak, Kubo, 160.
94. Joyce, Portrait, 351.
95. Pak, Kubo, 163.
upon the man’s “vulgar face” that he is a bald-faced materialist with a gold-digger for a wife. Despising the man for ordering a Calpis, which “Kubo is not fond of” because of its taste and “obscene color,” he wonders if it’s “possible to figure out a person’s character, taste, and education level from the drinks they order at a teahouse?” This idle curiosity, while seemingly harmless, is indicative of Kubo’s need to establish a superiority over those he meets, to judge and diminish whatever version of happiness they appear to have. Nauseated by the thought of the two copulating, Kubo initially thinks: “That woman, she certainly was pretty. She may well be more attractive than all the women Kubo has so far found beautiful.” He then “wonders why such a woman would want to love that kind of man,” deciding, in the end: “It must be the gold, of course. Women easily find happiness in gold.” This is also an instance of Kubo’s rather parochial view of women, his belief that they are simple, materialistic creatures – something, here, which seemingly helps him to deflect his sense of inadequacy. Nevertheless, Kubo suddenly feels “envy for the man’s wealth” and, “For a brief moment, Kubo smacks his lips, imagining that the money the man throws about is actually his. But he immediately rebukes himself. Since when have I been so obsessed with money. . . .” Working through this envy, and then the self-recrimination for that envy, Kubo revises his view of the woman’s looks: “On second thought, something in her reeks of indecency. Her figure has no grace. Only somewhat pretty.” But he ultimately decides that “her easy smiles for the man need not cause Kubo to underestimate him. The man enjoys her body, the woman consumes his gold, and both might be happy enough. Happiness is very subjective.” While the vicissitudes of Kubo’s feelings towards the couple seem to end on a magnanimous note, we still see a severe, judgmental eye, one that situates the two within a superficial and banal narrative: if they do possess happiness, he assumes, it must be a product of their limited intelligence, and it must be of an inferior quality to that which he seeks. And we come to understand that this concatenation of envy and scorn, characteristic of Kubo’s penchant for essentializing and minimizing all that he perceives as foreign to him and his worldview, is profoundly limiting.

96. Ibid., 165.
97. Ibid., 165-66.
98. Ibid., 166.
99. Ibid., 166.
100. Ibid., 166.
101. Ibid., 167.
102. Ibid., 167.
and destructive. It ensures that he remains disenchanted.

In Kubo, then, we have someone troubled by the distance between what he is and what he would like to be. Like Stephen, he fashions an idealized image of himself – the bohemian, anti-conformist artist-hero – someone who, with an abundant dose of romantic fervor, demands the ideal, yet consistently falls short of achieving it. The consequent self-pity and melancholy, as we have seen, have a deleterious effect on how Kubo understands other people; but even more significantly, they (over-)determine how he treats these people, especially his friends. After a near-breakdown outside the Chosŏn Bank, Kubo calls a friend (based on the poet Kim Kirim) and “begs him to come to the teahouse.”103 Eventually the friend arrives, a young man “who works as a journalist in the local news section of a newspaper” and who “has a great passion for the development of Korean literature.”104 While feeling “somewhat lighter at heart” now that he has a friend with him, Kubo’s mind quickly focuses on the friend’s shortcomings, even as this friend attempts to lavish him with praise:

Today’s talk is mostly about Kubo’s last novel. He is one of Kubo’s regular readers. Also, one of his supporters, someone who gives enthusiastic reviews of his works. Nevertheless, despite the friend’s good will, Kubo does not trust his opinion much. Once, the friend, after reading only a mediocre piece, presumed that he knew everything about Kubo.105

Kubo’s satisfaction is imminently fleeting. Having the kind companionship of his friend, he rapidly succumbs to irritation, and even slight contempt: “Today, however, Kubo has no choice but to listen to him.”106 For a paragraph, Kubo appears interested in what the friend has to say about his latest novel; abruptly, though, “Kubo finds the topic boring, and without realizing it, turns to the question of the ‘five apples,’” 107 which turns out to be a Beckettian-like exercise in irreverence, rehearsing all the possible orders in which to eat the apples. While Kubo finds this interruption humorous, it does reiterate a disturbing element of his personality, a need to control and dominate interpersonal engagements:

103. Ibid., 167. For the friend being based on Kim Kirim, see Chŏng Hanŭi, “Pak T’aewŏn ŭi Ch’ŏnbyŏn p’unggyŏng’,” 204. Mr. Daniel Pak also confirmed that this friend is based on Kim Kirim.
104. Ibid., 169.
105. Ibid., 169.
106. Ibid., 170.
107. Ibid., 170.
By bringing up this irrelevant, playful question, Kubo baffles the friend sitting across from him, who’s been busy quoting André Gide to back up his ideas on literature. The friend, wondering what kind of connection the five apples could possibly have with literature, says that he has never thought of such a problem before.

While the friend’s ideas on literature are apparently derivative, this summary closing-down of his discourse seems particularly distasteful when we remember that Kubo, in a paroxysm of near-despair, begged this friend to come spend time with him. Instead of seeing a responsibility to listen, to respect his friend’s singularity, Kubo, out of a somewhat vicious boredom, cuts off communication, something repeated when he interrupts “his friend’s discussion of Ulysses:” “one should of course admire this new experiment by James Joyce. Still, novelty alone is not a just cause for praising it. Just as the friend is about to mount a protest, Kubo rises from his chair, touches the friend’s shoulder, well – let’s go now.” This suggests not only that Kubo has been an inattentive reader of Ulysses, but also that the dismissiveness of Joyce is symptomatic of his blindness and insensitivity towards others – especially those closest to him. While novelty alone, certainly, is not a just cause for praising the epic novel, the loving and imaginative ways in which it seeks to counterbalance alienation and isolation are praiseworthy; in fact, they illuminate ways in which Kubo, himself, might find the key to unlocking his own prisons. And this blindness towards

108. Ibid., 170.
109. Ibid., 172. Cho uses this quote, despite its dismissive tenor, to suggest that Kubo was influenced by Ulysses. Cho, “Sošõga Kubossi ū iiri’ ū pigyo yon’gu,” 111.
110. I understand that this interpretation may be contentious, implying, as it does, that Pak was a sympathetic reader of Joyce, one who was receptive to Ulysses’s thematic concerns with love, empathy, and affirmation. Some scholars, understandably, may see in Kubo’s curt dismissal of Ulysses a rejection, on the part of Pak, of the privileging of Western (high modernist) literature; in the context of Kubo itself, however, Kubo’s refusal to meaningfully engage with his friend’s discourse on Joyce’s novel fits into a larger pattern (which I have endeavored to articulate in this essay) of superficially minimizing the thoughts, concerns, and capabilities of others (Kubo, we should keep in mind, barely listens to anything his friend says). As a Korean living in a colonized nation, Pak likely had reservations about what we now call, after Gramsci, the “cultural hegemony” of Western literature, but his art, standing on its own extraordinary merits, is much too intelligent, discerning, and empathetic for him not to have appreciated Joyce’s thematic, if not aesthetic, sensibilities. For this reason, among others, I maintain that Pak and Kubo – just as with Joyce and Stephen – are not identical entities, and that Pak masterfully exploits this ironic distance to highlight Kubo’s need for greater empathy, openness, and kindness in his life and art. Joyce’s oeuvre, for its part, is acutely and self-consciously aware of the servitude to which cultural hegemony has subjected the Irish colonial subject; for example: “I am a servant of two masters, Stephen said, an English and an Italian. . . . The imperial British state . . . and the holy Roman Catholic and apostolic church.” Joyce, Ulysses, 1.638–44.
Joyce is characteristic of the interaction here: Kubo doesn’t stop to think that his own behavior might be his friend’s “just cause” for returning home. Instead, with no small amount of self-pity, he assumes that this friend will “now enjoy some quiet hours alone after dinner, reading and writing. Kubo, Kubo can’t share in this pleasure.”

From this failure to derive happiness from the friend, Kubo looks into the twilight of Chongno, and fixes his gaze on “the loose women who appear at this time on the streets. Today again, they are out in force, in all their indiscretion.” Kubo disapproves of their “clumsy and unnatural fashions,” calling them “the precarious.” This judgment, which involves the uncritical assumption of dominant, phallocentric stereotypes, is ironically undercut by Kubo’s voyeurism, his “stealing glances at various splendid and not so splendid legs.” The hypocrisy is clear, but what ought to be reiterated is his lack of compassion for the socioeconomic realities – especially the endless supply of male desire, from which Kubo is not to be exempted – that have driven these women to the street in pursuit of an existence. Instead, the interpretation is closed, and Kubo abrogates the right to speak for them: “They, but of course, they themselves aren’t aware of this. They’re not aware of how unsteady their footsteps are in the world. Not a single one of them has a firm goal in life, but ignorance blinds them to their common instability.” Kubo’s totalizing impulse, his need to impose a monolithic narrative upon these women, robs them of a voice, while determining their self-knowledge for them. Opposed to this narrative closure, Pak suggests, if only elliptically, would be an aesthetics of openness, an attempt to identify with the women, while not suppressing their singularity – as someone like Ulysses’s Leopold Bloom evinces a strong capacity to do.

The disappointment that most strongly affects Kubo, then, is his failure with the young woman he courted in Japan. But this missed opportunity does effect

111. Ibid., 173.
112. Ibid., 173.
113. Ibid., 173.
114. Ibid., 173.
115. Ibid., 173.
116. In Pak’s Scenes from Ch’ônggye Stream, the narrator more than makes up for Kubo’s tendency to speak for the women he gazes upon, determining for them who they are and what their “limited” dreams are. Instead, the “precarious” of Ch’ônggye Stream, the bargirls, concubines, and kisaengs, are given a complex and nuanced interiority. These women are shown to be all-too-aware of their tenuous foothold in life, their susceptibility to the fickleness of health, beauty, and youth.
a positive change in Kubo’s sensibility. The point at which he asks himself, “Just whatever became of her?” (even if it is followed by an empty platitude, “A memory, however good or bad, calms one’s heart, inspires joy”117), Kubo begins the process of mentally moving outward towards greater empathy and awareness. To begin with, Kubo recounts the affair to himself as if it were literature, idealizing her beauty in comparison to a passing bargirl: “she must have been more beautiful than this barmaid.”118 On the day they first met, we learn, Kubo spontaneously asked her to take a walk with him; this natural impulse, though, was quickly translated into literary form:

The day was Sunday, and she had her Sunday dress on, apparently about to go somewhere. A popular novel should have a quick pace. The day before, when he had picked up the ethics notebook, Kubo had already become the hero – as well as the writer – of a popular novel.119

Kubo’s erstwhile desire to make their courtship resemble fiction, however, is now mocked by the regret and pain its memories inflict upon him. The girl, we learn, was already engaged to another man – who happened to be one of Kubo’s junior high classmates – when she met him; and, out of an abstract sense of loyalty to the other man, he refused to pursue their love. Alone with his retrospections, walking aimlessly, Kubo now considers that “When she blamed him through her sobs, saying that his sense of loyalty and his fear of reproach, all these derived from a lack of love, passion, she was evidently right . . . right.”120 He realizes that he “may have acted like a coward” and that he “should have felt more elated to have her love all to myself.”121 And though he attempts to abstract and generalize his indecisiveness – “Ah, all the evils caused by the frailty of men, all the misfortunes”122 – he does seem to understand that he, himself, chose not to act. Filled with self-reproach, he then remembers her walking away for the last time:

Should have run after her. Should have rushed and seized her slender shoulders, should have said that all my words till now have been lies, that I can never give up our love, that we must fight for our love against all obstacles, and then should

117. Pak, Kubo, 175.
118. Ibid., 176.
119. Ibid., 177.
120. Ibid., 179.
121. Ibid., 178-79.
122. Ibid., 179.
have cried together with her in a heart-wrenching lament on that rainy street in Tokyo.123

While he knows that rehearsing this what-might-have-been is a masochistic exercise, it does have a transformative effect, providing Kubo with a self-awareness that, heretofore, has been glaringly lacking:

Kubo, with all his might, kicks a pebble at his foot. Maybe he had wanted to derive some worthless pride from his ability to restrain his ardor, his true desire. Wanted to think that the tragedy was the natural finale to their love. Wanted to believe, again remembering the friend’s gentle eyes, that his well-rounded personality and wealth would make her happy. In the end, this misguided sentiment had obscured the true calling of his heart. And that’s not as it should be. What right had he to toy with her feelings, or his own. He would never be able to make her happy, despite his true love for her – hadn’t that sense of his own imperfection driven everyone, especially her, his poor love, into misery? Scattering the myriad pebbles on the road with his strenuous kicks, Kubo, Oh, I was wrong, so wrong.124

Kubo’s “that’s not as it should be” marks an epiphany, an awareness that one cannot find happiness by “playing” at real life, treating the people in it as stock characters in a novel. And, above all, he cannot find happiness while trying to convince himself that he is incapable of providing happiness for others. He has started to understand that the barriers existing between himself and others are of his own construction, and that his putative aesthetic detachment is not a tenable approach to happiness. Although he is filled with pain, Kubo begins to look outward with empathy and warmth, giving his blessing to a young couple walking by: “Dear lovers, let there always shine a ray of light on your love. Like an old benevolent father, Kubo, with his heart full of generosity and love, bestows on the couple his wholehearted blessing.”125 This effusion may simply stem from a moment of surfeit emotion; nevertheless, we do seem to be witnessing progress. Having brooded upon “love’s bitter mystery,” there is now the potential that he will learn to share love and, perhaps, find happiness.

123. Ibid., 179-80.
124. Ibid., 180.
125. Ibid., 180.
Bridging Disappointment

In a letter to his future wife, Nora Barnacle, James Joyce wrote of the distressing experience gazing upon his mother’s corpse at her funeral: “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 made her a victim.”126 The “system” Joyce refers to includes increasing poverty, the large family she had to care for, an alcoholic husband, and Joyce’s own “cynical frankness of conduct.”127 Marian Eide has convincingly shown that this experience precipitated Joyce’s self-conscious formation of an ethical aesthetic, one forged in empathy and compassion:

Responding to his mother’s untimely death and acknowledging the systems that had caused it . . . he indicated the necessity of experiencing sympathy with another, and from the core of that sympathy rejecting any system that would make the other a victim. For Joyce, then, the first ethical obligation is to experience and express sympathy while preserving the differences between oneself and another. Even in the alienated encounter with his mother’s corpse described in this letter, he emphasized that the ethical subject is responsible for that other no matter how incommensurable the differences between them. Joyce elaborated the ethics reflected in this encounter throughout his literary career.128

This ethics, a refusal to dominate or be dominated, receives its most concise formulation in “Proteus,” where Stephen thinks, “You will not be the master of others or their slave.”129 We have already seen an example of this ethics in “Nestor,” where Stephen imaginatively and empathetically engages with the weakling Sargent. Equally significant is the concern Leopold Bloom shows for Mina Purefoy, the wife of an acquaintance who, on this evening, is suffering through her third day of labor. Sitting in the hospital waiting room, Bloom anxiously asks a nurse for news of Mina and her baby: “The man hearkened to her words for he felt with wonder women’s woe in the travail that they have of motherhood and he wondered to look on her face that was a fair face for any

126. Quoted in Eide, Ethical Joyce, 1.
127. Eide, Ethical Joyce, 2. Mary Joyce, James’s mother, gave birth to twelve children, two of which died in infancy. Pak’s Scenes from Ch’ŏnggye Stream, I would argue, explicitly elucidates the ways in which the “system” – which, in this context, would include colonization, class and gender inequality, domestic violence, poverty, underemployment, etc. – victimizes lower-class Koreans, and especially Korean women, in 1930s Seoul.
128. Ibid., 2.
man to see but yet was she left after long years a handmaid.”\textsuperscript{130} While a group of drunken young men – one of whom is Stephen – proffers vulgar accounts of procreation, contraception, and sexual desire, Bloom remains apart with his thoughts of Mina’s plight: “Woman’s woe with wonder pondering.”\textsuperscript{131} It becomes clear that Bloom’s empathy for Mina, in large part, stems from the fact that his wife, Molly, gave birth to a son who died after only eleven days: “he still had pity of the terrorcausing shrieking of shrill women in their labour and as he was minded of his good lady Marion that had borne him an only manchild which on his eleventh day on live had died and no man of art could save so dark is destiny.”\textsuperscript{132} Bloom thus takes personal tragedy, the death of his only son in infancy, and transforms it into something positive – he empathizes with Mina and assumes a fatherly concern for Stephen, who has clearly had too much to drink:

and now sir Leopold that had of his body no manchild for an heir looked upon him his friend’s son and was shut up in sorrow for his forepassed happiness and as sad as he was that him failed a son of such gentle courage (for all accounted him of real parts) so grieved he also in no less measure for young Stephen for that he lived riotously with those wastrels and murdered his goods with whores.\textsuperscript{133}

Still grieving for the loss of his own son, Bloom assumes the role of Stephen’s surrogate father for the rest of this evening, shepherding him through the lurid dangers of “nighthtown” in “Circe,” sobering him up in “Eumaeus,” and finally taking him to his own home in “Ithaca.” While the fate of Stephen remains ambiguous at the conclusion of Ulysses, with the still-homeless young man refusing Bloom’s “proposal of asylum” – “Promptly, inexplicably, with amicability, gratefulness it was declined”\textsuperscript{134} – Stephen and Bloom make plans to see each other again, and it is clear that the younger has enjoyed and appreciated the elder’s hospitality.\textsuperscript{135} Bloom, not an artist, offers an example of a human kindness and empathy that, we hope, will become an ascendant sensibility in Stephen, allowing him to move beyond the limits of his solipsistic engagement

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 14.118-21. Ulysses’s fourteenth episode, “Oxen of the Sun,” constitutes a sort of stylistic survey of the development of the English language, which is the reason for the archaic prose of these quotes. See, for instance, Fargnoli and Gillespie, James Joyce, 195-98.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 14.186.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 14.264-68.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 14.271-76.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 17.954-55.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 17.962-72.
with the world, and, more imaginatively, set himself where the other stands. While *Ulysses* never tells us what “the word known to all men” actually is, we might assume that its meaning is embodied in the acts of Leopold Bloom.

The emphasis upon kindly imagining another’s thoughts and feelings, while not subsuming them to one’s own personal predilections, seems to provide the most profound and indelible connection between *Ulysses* and *Kubo*, one that transcends any simple binaries of West and East, colonizer and colonized. Just as Joyce’s novel constitutes a sort of ethical odyssey, however ambiguous, from Stephen’s tortured solipsism towards a more hopeful, human empathy, so too does Kubo’s day have its own ethical trajectory. For much of the novella, Kubo is mired in a recurrent pattern of disappointment; in seeking happiness or “A Little joy” amongst the citizens of Seoul, he inevitably vacillates between longing, self-pity, and scorn. However, following his bitter recollections of the girl from Japan, Kubo exhibits a new ethical awareness with a group of hostesses entertaining him and his friend at a bar. Instead of representing them as types, Kubo actually attempts to place himself in their shoes: “one shouldn’t ridicule their ignorance, perhaps, a necessity for these girls?” For once, Kubo seems to understand the ways in which social, economic, and political forces come to shape an individual, oftentimes necessitating difficult choices for survival. While he maintains the posture of a novelist, dictating his characters and their thoughts, Kubo does grant them a modicum of happiness: “Were they more intelligent, they would suffer more from things like pain, sorrow, and resentment. [. . .] The blissful, ephemeral delights that they enjoy, no matter how worthless they may appear, are made possible only by ignorance . . . as truths are.” The “delights” these women “enjoy” may be undervalued by Kubo, but his recognition of the relativity of perceptions, and the subjective nature of happiness, does seem significant. But furthermore, if truths are made possible by ignorance, by the exclusion of other alternatives, Kubo draws into question his own narrative authority – a gesture, we might also suggest, that functions to delegitimize any one, univocal truth produced by a dominant system or discourse. The sadness he subsequently feels, along with the “soft” and “gentle rain,” now appears to be forged by an identification with the bargirls and what he imagines the pressing exigencies of their lives to be: “each of them worries about her only dress, as well as about her shoes and socks

137. This friend is based on the poet Yi Sang.
139. Ibid., 191.
getting wet in the rain.”

When a cry for “Miss Yuki” breaks through this epiphany – “Yuki” being “the Japanese word for snow” – Kubo’s mind attaches itself to the memory of a poor widow, dressed in “snowy white mourning clothes,” he encountered “in front of a Kwanggyo café.” Motioning toward a sign on the café window reading “Barmaid Wanted / Barmaid Wanted,” this apparently illiterate, middle-aged woman asked Kubo: “What does it say the place needs?” Feeling compassion for her, Kubo responded with great sensitivity, knowing that his words would likely contribute to her anguish and pain:

Kubo studied her anew, and felt a pang in his heart. She was destitute, that much was clear. But she apparently had been able to keep off the street, not needing to look for a job. Then an unforeseeable misfortune had struck, and she was left with no alternative but to take to the streets, her grief still raw.

What is striking about this memory is that Kubo was and is able to imaginatively respect her otherness, without trying to subsume her into a totalizing narrative. He does give her a narrative, but this one, in remaining open to multiple possibilities and truths, is qualitatively superior to his earlier representations, which tended to yield superficial types instead of singular human beings:

She might have a son, all but grown-up. Maybe it was not a son but a daughter, and that was why this poor woman now had to struggle to make ends meet on her own. Before she was married, she might have lived well, been lovingly cared for. Her pale face had grace, even a sort of dignity.

In this encounter, Kubo showed respect and sympathy, while successfully allowing her to maintain her grief and dignity: after “Kubo cautiously explained the advertisement for barmaid,” the woman “bowed to him in silence and calmly left the spot.” In connecting this memory to his present reflections on the barmaid, Kubo demonstrates the awareness that everyone has her or his quotient of disappointment – and that everyone struggles for an elusive “happiness:” “Kubo turns to look at the barmaid. Who’s more unhappy, that

140. Ibid., 191.
141. Ibid., 191.
142. Ibid., 191. The bold face is Pak’s.
143. Ibid., 192.
144. Ibid., 192.
145. Ibid., 192.
widow or these girls? Whose suffering, whose misery in life is greater?" While he decides not "to dwell on such a thought in a place like this," Kubo has asked the question – and not, for once, taken himself as the central point of reference.

Ultimately, this empathetic affirmation of the singularity of each of these women brings Kubo to reconceive of his mother and her love:

At this late hour his mother would still be awake, waiting for him. The fact that he didn’t take an umbrella might have caused her added worry. Kubo thinks of her small, sad, lonely face. And he himself cannot help feeling sad and lonely. Kubo had forced his lonely mother almost entirely out of his thoughts. But his mother must have thought, worried, in anguish, about her son, all day long. Oh, a mother’s love, how infinitely deep and infinitely sad. From the parents to the husband, and then on to the son, shifts a woman’s love – yet, is it not the stage of motherhood that renders a woman’s love so powerful, so sacred?

What has largely been missing from the text, the mother, is what, in the end, seems to open the possibility for Kubo to find a new happiness, one that was entirely unsuspected when he stepped out the door of their home. Along with dissipating his solipsism, this empathetic imagining of his mother and her love seems to re-enchant Kubo’s aesthetic sensibility, perhaps unveiling his future path as an artist:

Though the friend said, see you again tomorrow, Kubo hardly hears him. Now I’ll have a life. A life for myself, and comfort and rest for my mother –. Good night, the friend says again. Kubo at last turns to him, and silently nods. See you again tomorrow night. But, Kubo, after a slight hesitation, tomorrow, from tomorrow, I will stay at home, will write –.

“Write a good novel.”

Says the friend in good faith, and they part. I will write a truly good novel. Finding happiness in the thought, Kubo takes no offense when a patrolling policeman casts a disparaging look at him.

In this rediscovery of his literary vocation, it is suggested that Kubo will now be able to write a story like the one he has been the principle character of: he, the artist, will possess the (self-) awareness and empathy that he, the subject of Pak T’aewón’s novella, has not had. And if his reaction to the policeman is any

146. Ibid., 192.
147. Ibid., 192.
148. Ibid., 193.
149. Ibid., 193.
indication, we may find that Shelley’s sacred spark, which Kubo appears ready
to bear, offers an affirmative counterbalance to naked (political) coercion, one
that renounces both domination and subjugation. ¹⁵⁰ Whatever the political
implications, Kubo realizes that “Maybe, now, he wants to think more of his
mother’s happiness than of his own. He is preoccupied, perhaps with that
alone.”¹⁵¹ Nearing the end of his journey, returning home to the mother who
bore him, Kubo’s thoughts are no longer concentrated on his own unhappiness,
on what the world refuses to give him. He is now ready to consider the
happiness of others, and, maybe, take the biggest risk of all: “Perhaps, now, if
his mother broaches the subject of marriage, Kubo may not flatly reject her
wishes.”¹⁵²

From Piers to Bridges

During “Nestor,” in the midst of an uninspired lesson on ancient Greek history,
Stephen asks the student Armstrong: “What was the end of Pyrrhus?”¹⁵³ Unable
to provide a substantive response, and flustered by the “Mirthless high
malicious laughter” of his classmates, the pupil eventually comes out with an
alliterative wordplay: “Pyrrhus, sir? Pyrrhus, a pier... A pier, sir,” Armstrong
said. ‘A thing out of water. A kind of a bridge. Kingstown pier, sir.”¹⁵⁴ Instead

¹⁵⁰. P.B. Shelley, in “A Defence of Poetry,” writes that “a single word even may be a spark of
inextinguishable thought;” and, in speaking of Dante, that “His very words are instinct with
spirit; each is as a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought; and many yet lie covered
in the ashes of their birth, and pregnant with the lightning which has yet found no conductor.”
Shelley’s Poetry and Prose, eds., Ronald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: W. W. Norton
& Company, 2002), 509-38, quotations on 515, 528. Shelley also famously argued: “The great
secret of morals is Love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with
the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good,
must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of
many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of
moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause.”
Ibid., 517. Shelley’s emphasis upon love and empathy – and the power of poetry to attune and
strengthen the human capacity for them – I would argue, is strikingly similar to Joyce’s and Pak’s
aesthetic and ethical sensibilities. Unfortunately, I have not been able discover whether Pak was
familiar with Shelley’s poetry or prose. For a discussion of Shelley’s influence upon Joyce, see
Michael Schandorf, “Romantic ‘Ghoststory:’ Lingering Shades of Shelley in Ulysses,” Texas
¹⁵¹. Pak, Kubo, 194.
¹⁵². Ibid., 194.
¹⁵³. Joyce, Ulysses, 2.18.
¹⁵⁴. Ibid., 2.26-33.
of humiliating the boy, though, Stephen transforms Armstrong’s lack of knowledge into a figure for his own sense of isolation:

– Kingstown pier, Stephen said. Yes, a disappointed bridge.
The words troubled their gaze.
– How, sir? Comyn asked. A bridge is across a river.

The students, with their petty delight in Armstrong’s struggles, are confused because Stephen has made an imaginative, if transient, bridge between himself and the struggling student. So while there is a certain amount of solipsism in this, Stephen’s simple act of empathy points to what is most affirmative and humane in the visions of Pak and Joyce. It may be as “simple” as Donne’s “No man is an island entire of itself,” but both writers insist that the quality of art and life is profoundly related to the capacity to imaginatively, and repeatedly, conceive of bridges between oneself and another – and, to speak more broadly, between one’s own nation, people, and literature and those of another and many others. For without these bridges, the examples of Kubo and Stephen reveal, the artist and the man will remain dissatisfied piers.

The particular bridges suggested by Kubo and Ulysses are not simple. They demand that the man and artist continually remain open to the other, using the empathetic imagination to forge connections which, oftentimes, do not reveal themselves at first glance. For this, Pak and Joyce tell us, is the true measure of the artist – as well as the human being. And if we allow ourselves, momentarily, to make a bridge between fiction and biography, we might note the auspicious connections between the writers’ lives and their works: June 16, 1904 was the day Joyce first took a walk with his future wife, while the very same day that the last installment of Kubo appeared, Pak became engaged to his first wife. So while Kubo and Stephen are literary creations, there was a great deal of personal material that Pak and Joyce drew upon in forming them. This testifies to the fact that the two writers succeeded in developing more imaginative and empathetic sensibilities than their young artist-heroes, but it also shows their remarkable ability to lovingly and forgivingly engage with their former selves. Unfortunately, the Irishman and the Korean never met in the flesh, but in

155. For an extended discussion of the ethical ramifications of this encounter between Stephen and Sargent, see Eide, Ethical Joyce, 65-66.
156. Ibid., 2.39-41.
157. For the significance of June 16, 1904, see Fargnoli and Gillespie, James Joyce, 245. According to Mr. Daniel Pak, his father and mother were married on October 27, 1934, some months after the final installment of Kubo appeared in the Chungang Ilbo.
attempting to bridge their marvelous and singular masterpieces, we may find that the search for a word known to all men – and all women – ought to be the most universal thing of all.