

# Stephen Dedalus Meets the Office of Student Life

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## FALL 2008 ROOMMATE QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME: Stephen Augustine Aloysius Dedalus

GENDER: A man of genius

YEAR: Freshman

STATE: Ireland, the benumbed motherland

CITY: Dear Dirty Dublin

PREFERRED NAME (IF DIFFERENT FROM BIRTH NAME):

Kinch

*Do you wish to live in a substance-free dorm?*

He moans and mewls over the question, torn between the salubrious image of a virgin's fresh-peeled thighs and the intonations of Father Arnall. The moon a swatch of sky cut away by a thin knife; the smell of flesh, pulchritudinous, arising from his sheets. *Ad augusta per angusta*—Aquinas's translation: "To high places by narrow roads." He convinces himself he has found the mode of life or art whereby his spirit can express itself in unfettered freedom; he responds with a resounding yes.

*At what time do you usually go to bed? Early (10:00 p.m.–11:00 p.m.), Average (12:00 a.m.), Late (1:00 a.m.–2:00 a.m.), Other (please specify)*

Unable to fight the breakwater that has for so long kept his blood from his mother's, Stephen cares little for cumbrous imps like sleep. Shakespeare's ape of death, the mute scoundrel who confiscated Epictetus's lamp. *Corpus domini nostri in vitam aeternam*. . Could Christ with his boneshot arms catch one ghostlight spirit—one more valiant than Stephen's—and right it before it plunged headward into eternity? The Trinity next to him, strangely illuminated by a naked lamp. Stephen stares at each member, neglecting to bow his head as he meets the eyes of the Father.

*On a scale of one to ten, one being highly organized and ten being highly disorganized, how neat are you?*

A sixteen: shambolic since the death of Parnell. All of Dublin moans the passing of its political father into a bright blaze. Men cannot be bothered with hair creams and socks, nor women with aprons and dresses. Parnell is dead, Parnell is dead; loins afire from that tart Kitty O'Shea (the name given her by the Jesuits). Was it she who put him out with a creeping disease of lust? Or did he die in the grip of some greater passion—itself a

distant cousin of mortal love and fear and anger—flesh rent between the teeth of English wolves? Welcome to heaven, poor, unheralded Moses! You were Ireland's uncrowned king!

*Do you smoke? If not, are you sensitive or allergic to smoke?*

Ah, fire-fumes. To be one of Plato's cavemen, a shrunken artificer in the dark! Stephen, frail from eight nights without food, manages the reins by which his lust is driven. Father Macaulay touches with shaking hands dabs of oil to the prone foreheads of choirboys. All is silent and silently unfolding: Look now! *Bous Stephaneforos! Bous Stephaneforos!* Glorious God! Existence is impermanent above this pungent shell of an earth!

*Describe yourself in one paragraph. What do you want your future roommate to know about you?*

The true artist cannot describe himself, much less pick apart his character and place upon a page—like lintpieces—the qualities that make his soul immortal. Stephen Dedalus: abashed Jesuit, bullock-befriending bard, lecher, genius, oarsman, lover, historian, interpreter, snake, drunkard, Aquinas's Aristotle, a fetal Robespierre, a blind radical, his Father's son, his son's Father; Fortuna's bedfellow, believer en route to Damascus, Milton's fallen angel, a shortsighted Apollo, now Scylla and then Charybdis.

Proceed, dearest Kinch, a *bene placito*—the murmurous thunder of that godawful bloodywelldeahellhole Dublin scouring your ears in the background. A couple of pints under his belt and he will prove by algebra that Hamlet's grandson was Shakespeare's grandfather and that he is the ghost of his own father. Simple, really: *An nescis, mi fili, quantilla sapientia mundus regatur?* The appeal is to our *publicus*—blackbearded, blackhearted, blackguttred Dubliners—who will believe that Ophelia's skull was Yorick's if you tell them with panache. But then that scarcely solves the problem of this inopportune inquiry. Who is Stephen Dedalus? He cannot believe the question nor its beldam asker; he cannot answer for fear that he shall meet the same fate as Pyrrhus, vulnerable at Argos, unequivocally primed for a tile to the head. No, best

Stephen remains crouched in the penumbral realms of mind, exposed to none but admired by all, using for defense the only arms he allows himself: silence, exile, and cunning.

*What do you expect of your roommate? What can he or she expect of you?*

The roommate—never again another cognac-carrying cocksure Mulligan screaming, "Give us another fecking rendition of 'The Miller's Tale,' Kinch"—will be privy to every meditation on life and art, the sacristy and vestments of the artist's intellectual temple, and the empyrean visions that haunt a great man's mind. Stephen, weak once again with knowledge of his near-penitent blood, specifies only that he cannot room with a Protestant. He has been forbidden this all his life and thus longs for that sweet neighbor girl, little Eileen Vance, hidden away from litanies and Jesuit eyes. Our Father who art in heaven has a neat view of her then, doesn't he? Stephen's tongue has too long danced with rites; exhausted, he slumps at the Father's pulpit and dreams that Eileen's face is his dead mother's. His mother's love—the one thing he can depend upon in this dungheap of a world. That and the hellbegotten church. And still he stood over her rotted face and whispered like a madman cured of his sickness, "Non serviam."

*What extracurricular activities would you most like to participate in? Please check all that apply:*

- Speech and debate club*
- Campus newspaper/literary magazine*
- Student government*
- Social service projects*
- Sports teams*
- Other (please specify and number)*

1. Being an artist, like the God of the creation, who remains within or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.
2. Forging in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.
3. Chess club

FOR PARENTS ONLY

*Is there anything you feel we should know about (e.g., familial concerns, health problems) to ensure your child's well-being at college?*

I am his mother in spirit only a queer thing to think that he's that dead woman's boy when she didn't have a thought in her head and he's forgotten more than I'll ever know a young man like that walking around with a cane like he's lame like the boy I once knew the Greek or the Arab who told me his leg was eaten by a whale and we all called him half-Jonah a funny thing that was because he'd never learned about the Bible but I still remember his mean little face how he looked at me and told me maybe he loved me I think of it when I can't sleep and the mattress rocks and shakes it's all a woman needs after she's been thrown about by Blazes Boylan and the college admissions process the others won't hear about schools in Ireland a boy with Stephen's marks should go to the mainland and I can scarcely imagine all he's done the extracurricular activities and feeding soup to homeless men what thanks does he get for that then I'd just as soon feed Parnell's ghost for all the thanks they give him near-dead old men who needn't worry about standardized test scores or competition from homeschooled students the upstarts with their flutes and violins they fancy they can go ahead and change the world because they've got saucer eyes and big souls O no thank you no then I'd rather rot here in Dublin and Stephen asks me will I make him eggs in the morning before he goes off to take his standardized test they're food for the brain it's what I used to make first for Father then for Poldy when I was still a young girl with Andalusian flowers in my hair when yes when Poldy filled my lungs those glorious eighteen years ago I did not tell him I was thinking about what I was thinking about all those queer little houses in Gibraltar as a girl standing on the window's ledge counting one two three waiting for a man to take away my balance and I near lost my breath yes for his hands round my back and he said we'd climb the mountain he in his gray tweed suit and I in my mother's dress his heart going like mad yes and I his darling his Flower of the Mountain yes and Stephen in the kitchen smelling of ink and soot and women yes and asking me can he go to a college with small class sizes yes and a great study abroad program yes and will I sign this form yes and yes I said yes I will Yes.

*Thank you! You will be informed of your roommate assignment in late July. ◆*