A Contemporary Interpretation of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

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INTRODUCTION

James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is one of the landmark works of the twentieth century. It is one of those literary creations that has been regarded as ushering in the Modernist Age in the literature world. The book displays all the modernist characteristics of experimentation with form, new use of language, interest in the human psyche, influence of industrialization and its subsequent disillusionment and alienation; and re-using of old myths and legends in a new context, rejection or re-assessment of religious values, a re-interpretation of old political theories, and open-endedness, are to be found here in one way or the other. That is why the book has continued to be the source of various critical commentaries from all possible points of view over more than a century, using literary theories both pre-existing the publication of the book, and subsequent theories that have evolved over the years. It has become one of the most common books for discussion in academic circles and in coffee houses all over the world. It has also influenced subsequent literary writing in a big way, and it is common to find comparative studies between Joyce's *Portrait* and works of other modernist writers like Beckett or Rushdie. Critics like Thomas F. Staley (in his 1976 essay "Strings in the Labyrinth") have acknowledged the centrality of *A Portrait of the Artist* in Joyce's canon, and have maintained that no discussion of Joyce's art can be undertaken without a reference to this novel.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916), is James Joyce's first published novel, though he did write an unfinished autobiographical novel *Stephen Hero*, which was never published in his lifetime. The first draft notes of the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, however, is an essay called "A Portrait of the Artist", which he wrote in 1904, which Joyce submitted to the Dublin literary magazine *Dana*, and was rejected. It was first published by Robert Scholes & Richard Kain, eds., in *The Workshop of Daedalus* (Northwestern UP, 1965), which corresponds to the typescript commissioned by Stanislaus Joyce in 1928 and is now in Cornell University Library, with corrections from the MS held in the Lockwood Library of Buffalo University. In this essay, he gives us an early picture of himself, which is extended in a far more detailed manner in *Stephen Hero*. The very first paragraph of this essay gives us these very significant lines, which

anticipates the method he will make famous later in his novel *A Portrait of the Artist* –

> "The features of infancy are not commonly reproduced in the adolescent portrait for, so capricious are we, that we cannot or will not conceive the past in any other than its iron memorial aspect. Yet the past assuredly implies a fluid succession of presents, the development of an entity of which our actual present is a phase only"[1].

Begun in 1904, and abandoned in 1905, the manuscript of *Stephen Hero* came up to 914 pages before the author decided to give it up. It was his first attempt at writing an autobiographical novel, and it was written in an ordinary narrative style, and not the stream-of-consciousness method which *A Portrait* experimented with. Whatever its literary merit, it introduces us to many of the themes and characters that have been used later in *A Portrait of the Artist*. In fact, we can go so far as to assert that it assists the reader in the understanding of several vague aspects that confuse the reader in the later novel. For example, the name of Stephen's sweetheart is merely represented as "E—C" in *A Portrait*, and only once in the entire novel is she called "Emma". But the full meaning of "E—C" would have been unknown without the robust woman called Emma Clery, who has been represented in *Stephen Hero*. In the same way, in *A Portrait of the Artist,* Stephen's brother Maurice (a fictional representation of James Joyce's brother Stanislaus) is inexplicably introduced only once in the entire novel, as accompanying Stephen to Belvedere College for his education. He does not play any role at all in the plot, and one may conjecture that he has been brought in only because he has been represented in a far more meaningful role in *Stephen Hero*. In many cases *Stephen Hero* gives the reader an opportunity to compare various points of view and manners of representation in the two novels, pointing to the change in attitude and form that occurred in the author in the process of his writing. For example, the character of Stephen himself has been depicted with far greater irony in *A Portrait of the Artist* than in *Stephen Hero*, and the theory of art section in *Stephen Hero* is much more detailed. All these elements have been discussed in various chapters of this book. The difference between the two representations of Stephen's early life in the two books is illustrated by the fact that *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is brought down to one third of the length of *Stephen Hero*, and the style is completely changed from direct realism to interior monologue. History, politics, literary theory, character, and personal development are all filtered through the mind of the protagonist in *A Portrait of the Artist*. Characteristically, Joyce was not satisfied with *Stephen Hero*, and attempted to destroy it after it was rejected by the

publishers, by putting it into the fire. It was fished out of the fire by his soulmate Nora, and what is left of it for posterity is the latter part. As Hugh Kenner has so aptly remarked –

> "*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which in its definitive form initiates the second cycle, was some ten years in the writing. A 1000-page draft was written around 1904-1906, about the same time as the bulk of *Dubliners*. This was scrapped and a more compressed version undertaken in 1908; the third and final text was being composed in 1911, and was finished early in 1914. About one-third of the first draft (the *Stephen Hero* fragment) survives to show us what was going on during the gestation of this book, the only one which it cost Joyce far more trouble to focus than to execute".[2]

The final version of the novel, therefore, remains immortal not only for the story of Stephen Dedalus, but also for the manner in which it is told. Merely to maintain that the novel initiates a new technique into the realm of English literature would be too facile. The stream-of-consciousness technique certainly delves deep into the mind of the protagonist, but it also has the ability to play with time and space, for these parameters are often merged together in the human mind. The form of the novel, therefore, will call for detailed analysis in the chapters to come.

The merit of *A Portrait of the Artist* was first recognized by the eminent modernist poet and critic Ezra Pound, who serialized it in the magazine *The Egoist* in 1914 to 1915. It was published in book form in 1916. The modernist novel was thus born through the hands of James Joyce.

One of the most meaningful and symbolic aspects of the novel is the epigraph with which it begins –

> *Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes*[3]

which is taken from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (VIII, 188), and may be translated thus – "Dedalus abandoned his mind to obscure arts". The reference is to the mythical Dedalus who began concentrating on creating wings as a mode of escape from his exile with his son Icarus. Dedalus is a creator, and he is yearning for freedom. Freedom to him lies in flying like a bird away from captivity. The reason that Ovid gives for Dedalus abandoning his mind to obscure arts is not quoted by Joyce, but is given below –

> *... longumque perosus exsilium, tracturque soli natalis amore ...*

meaning – "the artificer was weary of his long exile and lured by the love of his natal soil". This is connected with the patriotic theme of the novel,

the theme of Stephen's native land, Ireland. The difference is that the mythical Dedalus flies to his native land, while Stephen, at the end of the novel flies away from it to France. Stephen, however, can never escape Dublin, for Dublin is in him – as is illustrated late in *Ulysses* – and Stephen, like Joyce, aims at expressing his country through his writing, even if he is away from it physically. As such, the epigraph is significant not just for the quotation from Ovid, that links it to the theme of the novel, but also for the part that has been omitted by Joyce.

The mythical Dedalus is one of the most enduring symbols in the novel, being even represented in Stephen's name, and it is quite fitting that the novel should begin with him through the epigraph. Dedalus is the epitome of the artist, the rebel, and the man who flies away to freedom from captivity. Stephen aspires to be all these. Later in the novel, he even mentally disowns his own father Simon Dedalus, and chooses the mythical Dedalus as his true mentor, the one he will follow in his life. The moment he rejects priesthood and accepts his vocation to be that of an artist, he becomes the follower of Dedalus. Moreover, he rebels against conventions, against the politics and narrow-mindedness of his own country, and against his family and friends. Like Dedalus, he escapes from what he sees as captivity and moves to the continent to express himself through art. Whether he actually manages to be the true follower of Dedalus, or falls intellectually and morally like Icarus, Dedalus's son, because he chose to fly too high, is another question altogether; which we shall attempt to answer in the course of the essays included in this book. That is probably why Joyce keeps only the first part of the sentence in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, for it is that part which pertains to the theme of the artist. In the second part of the sentence, Dedalus is seen to be yearning for his homeland, whereas Stephen rejects his country and flies away to another land altogether, without ever losing touch with it. This is his ultimate irony – his relationship with his homeland never actually ends, even though he characterizes Ireland as "the old sow that eats her farrow"[4]. As his friend Davin tells him in the novel, "In your heart you are an Irishman, but your pride is too powerful"[5].

The novel is divided into five chapters, in the form of the five acts of the traditional tragedy. This cannot be regarded as a coincidence, as Stephen tells us in the *Portrait* that he believes that the highest form of literary art is the dramatic form, where the author "refines himself out of existence". Even though the novel is a narrative form, the essence of the dramatic form is aspired to, and though Stephen is in many ways modelled on Joyce himself, the author maintains an objectivity and distance from his creation throughout the novel. Each chapter moves round one phase in the development of Stephen to maturity, both in mind and in purpose. In this

respect, it is a typical *Kunstlerroman* (a novel which shows the development of an artist), which is a form of the *Bildungsroman* (the coming-of-age novel, which traces the development of the hero from childhood to maturity). In *A Portrait of the Artist*, the first chapter moves round Stephen in Clongowes Wood College, and projects Stephen as a rebel from a very young age (witness the pandybat incident). In the second chapter Stephen's family moves to Dublin after his father loses his job, and after a period of idleness, he is admitted to Belvedere College, where he shines as a scholar, and is known to be a good essay-writer. This chapter also marks the beginning of his moral fall. The third chapter traces his moral fall, and attempt at redemption later, after a college retreat. This also marks the beginning of his movement towards religion, which is carried on in the Fourth chapter. Here he is offered priesthood as a vocation, but rejects it, and finally chooses art as his future purpose in life. He also decides to be admitted to the University, thereby choosing the secular life over the religious one. The fifth chapter shows his life in the University, his friends, his adversaries, and his opinions and theories of art. At the end of the chapter, he decides to leave Ireland, and move to the continent, in spite of the disapproval of his mother. He sees his life in Ireland as enmeshed in nets – the nets of nation, religion, family, friends and love, which he consciously decides to break free from, and fly away like the mythical Dedalus to freedom. However, he is quite alone in his escape, and that is what he chooses for himself.

The novel is a portrait of Stephen aspiring to be an artist while he is a young man. By the end of the novel, we find that he has all the requirements of being an artist, but actually has not truly become one. The story of Stephen will be carried on later in Joyce's masterpiece, *Ulysses*.

The following chapters will be discussing various themes and characters of the novel, as I have seen and interpreted them. The broad areas of the novel have been chosen for discussion, and there are, of course, various other themes that may come to mind. But any other themes are in one way or the other, connected with the ones I have chosen for analysis. The novel is one of the most open-ended books of the twentieth century, and can be (and has been) interpreted from various points of view. I have tried to record my own reading of the text, taking into account various postmodern literary theories into account. In the process I have often devoted more attention to various characters and themes that have so far been either ignored by previous analysts, or been perfunctorily mentioned by them. A case in point is the character of the Dean of Studies, who, I believe, is a key person in the final chapter of the novel. Stephen's friends Cranly and Davin have always been mentioned as Stephen's friends in college, but I have devoted entire

chapters to them both, because I have observed that they play a more definitive role in Stephen's development than is generally assumed. Certain themes, too, have been given more importance in this book. For example, the Crime and Punishment theme has been discussed in more detail than has previously been done by others, and so has Stephen's search of a vocation.

In this respect, I do hope that this book will provide some new insights in appreciating *A Portrait of the Artist*, and will also introduce some new approaches, taking into account contemporary literary theories.

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A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man – The Very Interesting Title

The title of a novel is usually chosen after the book is completed by the author, and the significance of this title is also made clear to the reader after the novel has been read. As such, even though it is the title of a work that first catches the attention, the complete meaning of the title can only be understood at the end. In Joyce's case, however, it is fairly evident that he had been playing with the title of this novel ever since he wrote the narrative essay *A Portrait of the Artist* in January 1904, which he submitted to the magazine *Dana*, and was rejected. He then started the autobiographical novel *Stephen Hero*, and continued with it for twenty-five chapters and 915 pages, till he abandoned it in 1905. The same plot is begun in a different way in the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, from that year, though the manner of writing now is completely different and experimental. What is to be noticed here is that the title of *Stephen Hero* is linear, and highlights the main character, but does nothing else. Joyce prefers to return to the original title of the essay of 1904, but adds to it, making it complete from the point of view of both character and theme.

Titles of literary works can be analysed on their own merit, particularly because the title is the first thing that catches the attention. In the case of fiction, the title most often reveals the essence of the novels. It can even be maintained that the title expresses whether the novel gives prominence to character, or to theme, or to a particular location, which sets the novel in a particular space-time position. There are titles which merely give us the name of the main character, such as *David Copperfield* or *Jane Eyre* or *Huckleberry Finn*, showing that the character is supreme in those books. Other titles are thematic in their choice, such as *Pride and Prejudice* or *Lord of the Flies* or *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Some titles afford a crisp summary of the novel, such as *Gulliver's Travels* or *The Pickwick Papers* or *The Old Man and the Sea*. Others give precedence to place, and as such, this is depicted in the title, such as *Wuthering Heights*, or *A Tale of Two Cities*, or *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. But whether the title is informative or thematic, it always gives us a clue to the understanding of the primary thrust of the novel. However, there are some titles which show none of the individual traits mentioned above, yet become indispensable in the analysis of the

novels. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is one such title. It is a title that includes in the importance of character (the artist), the importance of time (*young* man), and the importance of theme (it is a portrait, indicating that it provides an aspect of that character). From that standpoint this title is eminently modernist, particularly because of its open-endedness. It must be remembered that the original title of the first version of the novel was *Stephen Hero* – a title that emphasized the character above everything else. No doubt, the final version, being a psychological novel, written in the stream-of-consciousness technique, is a character-based novel, but the very fact that the final title *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* includes many more aspects of analysis, shows that several themes and nuances are woven into the study of character that makes up the crux of the novel.

The title of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* has aroused a lot of speculation – almost as much as the novel itself, and remains open-ended, true to its modernist nature. Critics over the years have been baffled by its lack of a definite meaning. Referring to Joyce's previous attempt at an autobiographical novel, David G. Wright remarks about the title thus: "The title *Stephen Hero* must have come to appear too unequivocal; the new title *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* introduces greater neutrality, some qualification ('as a young man', a phrase Joyce stressed in conversation) and hints of an autobiographical association between author and character – hints which are never insisted on or directly supported in the text even though all readers must now know the connection to exist"[1].

The theme of this novel concerns the development of the artist from that point in infancy, which he is conscious of, albeit in a hazy way, to the time when he attains maturity, and sets out towards achieving his vocation in life, which he has defined for himself during the course of the novel. Since the author draws a portrait of THE artist, the choice of the general article "a" becomes important, pointing to the fact that it is only one of many portraits that can be painted, and that the author is concentrating on one point of view only, leaving the reader to attempt any other portrait if he so wishes. The novel provides all the ingredients for various portraits of the artist, and the reader can use them as he will. The definite article "the" before "artist", however, poses a greater problem. It may refer to the autobiographical element in the novel, or it may refer to the type of the artist, or even to the form of expression through art, that he proposes to use. The phrase "portrait of the artist" is generally used in regard to self-portraits, and this fact is hinted at in a comment which Joyce had made to Frank Budgen, who has quoted it in his book "James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses" – "I have not let this young man off very lightly, have I? Many writers have written about themselves. I wonder if any of them has been as candid as I have"[2].

However, though the primary evidence points to Stephen Dedalus being a portrait of Joyce, the artist, one cannot be too sure about this. The novel remains autobiographical in all the incidents recorded in it, and also in most of the peripheral characters around Stephen. But the character of the hero himself is very far from that of the author, as far as we know about his life. As such, James Joyce is Stephen Dedalus in all the incidents of his life as a young man, but is not the hero of the novel where the character is concerned. The hero of the novel is a humourless, self-centred person, who takes himself too seriously, while James in real life has been described as "Sunny Jim", who liked the outdoors, and had a bright, cheerful temperament. The incidents, moreover, are a combination of what happened to Stanislaus, James's brother, and those experienced by the author himself as a young man. The refusal to do his Easter duty, for example, was actually his brother's revolt against what he did not believe, not Joyce's own. Stephen's dark personality, too, parallels Stanislaus more than James.

As such, the phrase, "portrait of THE artist" is somewhat misleading. It would be more relevant to evaluate the second argument in this connection – that the phrase "the artist" refers to a particular kind of artist. In the novel, we find, the word "artist" specifically refers to a literary artist, and not an artist of any other form of art. In fact, other forms of art, like painting or sculpture, are regarded with a certain amount of disrespect by Stephen in the fifth chapter of the novel, while talking to Lynch. Stephen had just completed explaining the three essential aspects of a work of art – *integritas* (wholeness), *consonantia* (harmony), and *claritas* (radiance) to Lynch. Indeed, while explaining *integritas*, he uses almost verbatim the definition given by Ephraim Gotthold Lessing's lengthy essay *Laocoon* (1766), which, in analysing the famous ancient Greek sculpture *Laocoon and his sons*, gives us one of the landmarks of eighteenth-century literary theory, that discusses the relative merits of sculpture, painting, and literature –

> "An aesthetic image is presented to us either in space or in time. What is audible is presented in time, what is visible is presented in space" – etc.[3]

After defining *integritas, consonantia*, and *claritas*, Stephen tells Lynch that "Lessing … should not have taken a group of statues to write of. The art, being inferior, does not present the forms I spoke of distinguished clearly one from another"[4]. According to him, the highest kind of art is the literary art, which, too, can be divided into the lyrical, the epical, and the dramatic, of which, again, the dramatic form is the highest form.

As such, Stephen passes through a process of elimination of all other vocations, and finally chooses the vocation of a literary artist to be his own. In the process, he mentally begins to recognize the mythical Dedalus as his

spiritual father, and explicitly regards his relationship with his biological father, Simon Dedalus, as that of fosterage.

There is also, in this regard, a duality, or even irony, about the word "artist", as well. There is no doubt that Stephen aspires to becoming an artist; there is also no doubt that he has in him almost all the qualities that an artist should have. For example, he is in love with words from infanthood, and often turns to words – their sounds and associations – for comfort and enjoyment when his spirits are down (such as the meaningless words in Doctor Cornwell's Spelling Book, referred to during his early years in Clongowes in the First Chapter). He has a vivid imagination, and is always attempting to create something which is otherwise unattainable – a green rose, for instance (which he imagines after thinking about the various colours of roses in the world, apart from the red and the white roses that symbolize the House of Lancaster and the House of York, the two houses in Clongowes). He is also an avid reader, and is proficient enough in word-usage, as is illustrated by the fact that he wins cash prizes in essay competitions, and that his best subject in school is essay-writing. Yet, when the word "artist" is mentioned in the title, we cannot but regard it with a pinch of salt, because Stephen, at least, in this novel, never does become the artist he wants to be – mostly because of his extreme self-centredness and rejection of everything that human society regards with emotion, such as nation, language, religion, family, and friends. In the entire novel the only creative work that he manages to complete, after long lectures on art and poetry, is a villanelle which he professes to have written in a moment of wild inspiration – a stiff, stilted, artificial, unpleasing work, that he dedicates to his sweetheart Emma. By the time he is ready to leave his country, we have genuine reservations about this young man, for it is a mystery how a person as "wrapped up in himself"[5] (according to his rival Mc Cann) as he, can ever aspire to great art. This young man loves nobody and nothing but himself, and rejects anyone who comes anywhere closer than arm's length – his parents, his friends Cranly and Davin, and even Emma at the end. Stephen, moreover, is extremely confident about his ideas and views, disdainfully shaking off the good advice of the Dean of Studies, and expounding his theory of art to the most unlikely and unappreciative person, Lynch.

The reference to the artist also points to the form of Joyce's novel. It is not only a *bildungsroman* – a novel which shows the coming of age of the protagonist from childhood to maturity; it is actually a *kunstlerroman* – the development of an artist from childhood to maturity. In showing the development of Stephen, who aspires to becoming an artist, this novel is a classic example of this type of novel. Usually, a *kunstlerroman* ends with

the protagonist's arrogant rejection of the commonplace life. At the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, we find Stephen rejecting all the ties that bind him to his homeland Ireland. As he tells his friend Cranly at the end – "I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church"[6]. As such, he rejects his family, his nation, and his religion, and decides to exile himself from his motherland Ireland to the continent.

Regarding the latter part of the title, it was Joyce himself who thought it important enough to advise his readers not to forget the four last words, "as a Young Man", as many of his early critics had done. That is why we are shown Stephen as a potential artist, striving towards maturity and fulfilment, but this maturity is not shown to be attained in the course of the novel. It is because Stephen is a young man here, that the interest of this novel goes beyond its plot, for speculation remains even after the novel is over, whether, in spite of all his potentiality, he does become the artist he aspires to be. It also paves the way for the expression of the mature Stephen Dedalus in the loose sequel to this novel – Joyce's masterpiece, "Ulysses". The latter half of the title becomes significant, therefore, in the fact that its meaning becomes evident after the novel is over.

The fact that the title points to a particular time frame in Stephen's life – the period of his youth – also emphasizes the form of the *bildungsroman* referred to earlier. The *bildungsroman* is often described as a "coming of age" novel – a novel which depicts the *process* of development, and not merely the end-product. This novel concentrates on showing that Stephen is a person who chooses literary art as his vocation, and the process by which he is led to choose this, after traversing other options that are attractive to him, such as the vocation of being a priest. Indeed, the novel stands on these two main pillars – religion and art. The subject of Irish politics is always there in the background, but Stephen never does consider it as a prospect. Almost half the novel deals with Stephen's mental debate regarding acceptance of priesthood, and then finally deciding to reject it as a vocation. He finally chooses literary art as his life's direction, and also proves that he has the makings of an artist in him. The rest is open-ended. For Joyce leaves it to the reader to decide whether Stephen will finally achieve what he sets out to do, and also whether, as in a true *bildungsroman*, he will attain maturity through experience.

In this respect, the title also points to another aspect of the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as a link in the chain of Joyce's novels encompassing an autobiographical development from childhood to maturity, or a thematic development of the artist from gestation to completion. Sisir Chatterjee has described this aspect perfectly: "The four

major books of Joyce – *Dubliners*, the *Portrait*, *Ulysses*, and *Finnegan's Wake* – together represent the entire career of the writer"[7]. The series of these four books show the childhood-adolescence-maturity pattern of the development of the protagonist (who is the author himself in various persona). It is therefore a clear and steady line of development of the artist protagonist from *Dubliners* to *Finnegan's Wake*. The very phrase "as a Young Man" in the latter half of the title, places this novel in this chain, and projects the artist as a youth, still in the process of development to maturity.

The fact that the title is character-centric, and not theme- or place-centric, brings us to the manner in which character is dealt with in the beginning of the twentieth century – that is, the modernist era – in relation to nature or religion. In various phases of history, character is dealt with in relation to God or His Word, and the protagonist is shown to be rewarded or punished as an outcome of his/her moral actions. One may refer to certain novels in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, such as Richardson's *Pamela* or *Clarissa*, or even Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. In *A Portrait of the Artist*, one of the major themes is religion, but there is more mockery of deo-centrism than an acceptance of it, in keeping with the more uninhibited attitude of this century. Again, this is a novel that is not just anthropocentric, it is positively androcentric – as is hinted at in the title. Women play a nominal role in the novel, and even then, she is either a saint or a sinner, either an angel or a whore. Stephen's mother is the only person who remains with him at the end, but she is also rejected by him, like all others, and Stephen chooses to leave his country totally alone, in all senses of the term. Nature has almost no role in this novel, except for symbolic purposes. Nature, for instance, is connected with Stephen's fenian friend Davin, and when Stephen, the "young man" of the title, comes into contact with nature, such as in the second chapter, when he visits the cow yard in autumn with his friend Aubrey Mills, he is filled with disgust – "…. the first sight of the filthy cow yard at Stradbrook with its foul green puddles and clots of liquid dung and steaming bran troughs sickened Stephen's heart. The cattle which had seemed so beautiful in the country on sunny days revolted him and he could not even look at the milk they yielded"[8]. That is why this novel has always been the target of feminist or eco-critical theories, that have emerged at the end of the twentieth century.

For example, there is the wonderful collection of essays called *Eco-Joyce: The Environmental Imagination of James Joyce*, which has been aptly reviewed by Maureen O'Connor in *The Irish Review (Cork)*, where she quotes James Joyce, and comments thus:

"In a conversation about the writing of *Ulysses*, Joyce describes his own realist methods as that 'which smashes romanticism into a pulp', and goes on to

dissociate the natural from the realm of the romantic: 'Nature is quite unromantic. It is we who put romance into her. Which is a false attitude, an egotism, absurd like all egotisms. As ever with Joyce, in this assertion, he appears to anticipate this new critical approach, reflecting the latest 'wave' of ecocritical theory, a deconstructionist re-evaluation of the possibility of something understood as 'nature', the ways in which what we call 'nature' is at once culturally, discursively constructed and inextricably constitutive of the very act of this construction"[9].

That is why, a great part of Joyce's environment consciousness constitutes of "waste, detritus, excrement" – as Maureen O'Connor suggests.

The novel is a reflection of the mind of Stephen, and Stephen only, and Nature does not hold an important place in this mind. It is a Portrait of the would-be artist as a young man, and of how the mind of this young man is developed with time.

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A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN: BILDUNGSROMAN, AUTOBIOGRAPHY, FICTION

A history of the modern realistic novel shows an increasing trend towards autobiography, because only a writer's own experience can satisfy the increasing demands for social and psychological detail. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is one of such novels, and falls into the category of the "Kunstlerroman", (a specialized form of the "Bildungsroman" – a type of novel which traces the development of the hero from childhood to maturity), which confines its theme to the development of an artist – as in Goethe's "Wilhelm Meister" or Samuel Butler's "The Way of all Flesh", both of which were influential in James Joyce's search for a form. The "Kunstlerroman" enabled writers to apply the methods of realism to the world of art, and combined with autobiographical truth, it provided an opportunity for a fuller and subtler treatment of psychological reality.

The form of the *Bildungsroman* first appeared in eighteenth century Germany, and over the next couple of centuries became common in most of the countries of Europe. Though loosely translated as "novel of development", it grew into a definite form with specific characteristics, almost all of which are used in *A Portrait of the Artist*. First, the author generally concentrates on the spiritual development of the hero in question, and traces this development to the time that he is mature and ready to take on the world. *Bildung* is a German word which translates approximately to "education" or "formation". It involves the personal, cultural, and moral development of an individual, aiming for a well-rounded personality, involving aesthetic appreciation, cultural awareness, ethical education, and emotional development. The young hero is formed and changed by his environment and the people around him. However, the *Bildungsroman* is almost always open-ended, as the novel only shows how much the hero has developed into maturity, but does not show his success or failure after he is moves out into the world outside to encounter life. Normally, the young man so shown, is naïve, good-hearted and innocent, and he is hardened and sharpened by circumstances as he grows older. Therefore, as it appears to be, the form of *A Portrait of the Artist* is basically conventional. It is only in the character of the protagonist, and in his treatment, that this novel becomes different from all others before it.

If we look closer, however, Joyce's novel is not merely the ordinary, conventional *Bildungsroman*. There are actually three separate developmental processes that can be noticed in the "education" or "formation" of Stephen Dedalus. The first is, of course, as has been discussed, the conventional manner of *bildung* – the development of the protagonist in relation to his environment; in this case, the backdrop of the colonial society of Ireland in the nineteenth century. In this case, *bildung* takes place in specific institutions – family, school, university, and church, and also in relation to cultural parameters like literature, language, discourse, habits, etc.

Secondly, we may refer to what Thamas Mann referred to as the opposite of *bildung* – the *Entbildung*, which means "the coming apart or disintegration of established institutions and ideas". The process of Stephen's growth is also a process of unlearning what he has learnt at home, in school, and in the Church. The story of *A Portrait of the Artist* is also the story of breaking away from established norms, ideas and politics. That is why from the beginning Stephen is shown in specific institutions learning the norms, and then rejecting them, until, at the end he can tell Davin his friend –

> "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"[1].

The third process is what we may call a new *bildung* – what has been called a counter-formation by Andrew Gibson in his analysis of James Joyce. This is the end-result of the *Entbildung* – a new approach to those very things he had rejected, a new view of the world and of his place in it. In *A Portrait of the Artist,* he discovers his vocation, and decides to express himself through art – therefore, moving towards the *Kunstlerroman*. Family, religion, and education now work in different ways on Stephen's consciousness, making him think independently, and against the norm. That is why it is important for him to leave the country, for now his country cannot accommodate his worldview in its current state, and he must express the "consciousness of his race" from elsewhere.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the *Bildungsroman* is formed around a character who is based, to a great extent, on the author himself. James Joyce once said that he lacked imagination, and that he could not create new material, which is why he draws on existing material in his writings. What we find, however, is his extraordinary ability to take existing material and rearrange it for his own purposes. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, this existing material is taken from his own life, and the lives

of the people around him, in the wider environment of nineteenth century Ireland.

The subject-matter of *A Portrait of the Artist* – a psychological study of certain aspects of his own journey towards being a writer -- had been in Joyce's mind for a very long time. The first time that he had written about it was in an essay called "A Portrait of the Artist", which he wrote in 1904, and which Joyce submitted to the Dublin literary magazine *Dana*. Unfortunately, it was rejected. It was first published by Robert Scholes & Richard Kain, eds., in *The Workshop of Daedalus* (Northwestern UP, 1965), which corresponds to the typescript commissioned by Stanislaus Joyce in 1928 and is now in Cornell University Library, with corrections from the MS held in the Lockwood Library of Buffalo University. In this essay he gives us an early picture of himself, which is extended in a far more detailed manner in *Stephen Hero*. In the very first paragraph of this essay the following lines anticipate the method that he will make famous later in his novel *A Portrait of the Artist* –

> "The features of infancy are not commonly reproduced in the adolescent portrait for, so capricious are we, that we cannot or will not conceive the past in any other than its iron memorial aspect. Yet the past assuredly implies a fluid succession of presents, the development of an entity of which our actual present is a phase only."[2]

A Portrait of the Artist, as we have it, is a refinement of *Stephen Hero*, Joyce's early version of his autobiographical story. Frustrated by finding no publisher for this novel, Joyce had flung the manuscript of *Stephen Hero* into the fire, from which it had been retrieved, badly mutilated, by Nora his soulmate. This half-burnt novel is now immensely useful in the understanding of *A Portrait of the Artist*. *Stephen Hero* was a naturalistic novel related in realistic detail, a work which the author himself later called "a schoolboy composition". Whatever is explicitly stated in *Stephen Hero*, is obliquely implied in *A Portrait of the Artist*. Also, the importance of *Stephen Hero* lies in the fact that it shows how much Joyce initially wanted to project of his own life, and how much he finally rejected. For example, the numerous shifting of houses described conscientiously in the earlier novel, is brought down to a string of moving vans in one scene of *A Portrait of the Artist*, and a reporting of another shifting by Stephen's brothers and sisters. Even then, the news is not put in plain English, but in an evasive pidgin English – "Goneboro toboro lookboro atboro aboro houseboro", because "theboro landboro lordboro willboro putboro usboro outboro"[3] – which shows the casual way in which the siblings have learnt to treat such events. Again, in *Stephen Hero* Stephen's spiritual sweetheart Emma is a

vibrant, plump young girl, well characterized and delineated, whereas in *A Portrait of the Artist* we neither know her full name, nor what she actually looks like. In *A Portrait of the Artist,* moreover, there is no mention of the death of Stephen's sister Isabel, though in *Stephen Hero* that event is dealt with in detail, and it is during her illness that Stephen refuses to make his Easter duty, where his mother wanted to offer up communion in the name of his sister. If we consider Joyce's actual life, we find that even *Stephen Hero* changes it somewhat, for it is actually Joyce's brother George who dies. As such, Joyce is found to go through several experiments in the projection of his life in novel form. In *A Portrait of the Artist*, Stephen is found to be so indifferent to his family, that, in his conversation with Cranly (who is based on the only real friend that Joyce had in real life – John Byrne) in the final chapter, he is even shown to be unsure about how many brothers and sisters he has –

> "Cranly cut him short by asking:
> --Has your mother had a happy life?
> --How do I know? Stephen said.
> --How many children had she?
> --Nine or ten, Stephen answered. Some died."[4]

There is every reason for Stephen's story to be called "autobiographical", though the novel is far from being a photographic representation of the life of the author. Except for the thin incognito of the characters, it is based on almost a literal transcript of the first twenty years of Joyce's life. Joyce and Stephen both lived in the same places (Blackrock and Dublin), attended more or less the same schools (Clongowes and Belvedere), left Ireland at the same time (1902), knew the same people, had sexual experiences at the same age (fifteen) and in the same way, attended the school retreat at the same time, were both offered priesthood as a vocation and rejected it, and regarded religion in much the same way. Their fathers were similar in character, and their home lives were almost the same. Many of the characters of *A Portrait* are taken from real life – Dante or Mrs. Riordan (whose name has not been changed), Mr. Casey (real name: John Kelly, the nationalist), Davin (Joyce's friend George Clancy, who was later murdered by the Blacks and Tans), Mc Cann (Francis Sheehy Skeffington in real life, who was later killed by the British in the Easter Rebellion of 1916), the Dean of Studies (Father Darlington in real life), Father Arnall (based on Father James A. Cullen who also conducted the Retreat at Belvedere), Father Conmee (the rector, whose name has not been changed), and several actual nationalist fighters against the British, who have been

mentioned several times in the narrative, such as Wolfe Tone, Parnell, Michael Cusack, or W.B. Yeats.

In fact, the Irish nationalist movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is a representation of actual history filtered through the mind of the protagonist. At various moments throughout the text, the history of Irish nationalism is brought into the narrative, precisely because it was uppermost in the mind of Stephen at that moment. The section on the Christmas dinner party is a case in point. We also have various references to Irish nationalists in the Fifth Chapter of the novel, and Stephen's friend, Davin, based on Joyce's friend George Clancy, is a fenian, who does his utmost to make Stephen more politically involved in the nationalist movement. Instead of doing that, Stephen chooses rather to reject Davin's friendship, and exile himself from his own country for the rest of his life. He also succinctly tries to explain the reason for doing this –

> "Try to be one of us, repeated Davin. In your heart you are an Irishman but your pride is too powerful.
> --My ancestors threw off their language and took another, Stephen said. They allowed a handful of foreigners to subject them. Do you fancy I am going to pay in my own life and person debts they made? What for?"[5]

The response of Stephen towards Irish nationalism parallels almost completely Joyce's own attitude regarding this issue.

However, the discussion on how far the character of Stephen Dedalus corresponds to Joyce himself continues in one way or the other, though, according to the purist method of assessing literature, the character should not be associated with the author, because of the artistic necessity of objectivity and distancing. Vladimir Nabokov has remarked that "critics tend to identify Stephen with young Joyce himself, but that is neither here nor there"[6]. However, the same critic, in his essay on *Ulysses*, turns around and says that both Stephen and Bloom are "wanderers and exiles, and …. in both runs the singing blood of James Joyce, their maker"[7]. This contradiction is actually quite common among critics. Hugh Kenner goes so far as to suggest that Joyce has based all his characters on himself!

Taking everything into consideration, it must be asserted that Stephen is not Joyce. Probably the greatest deviation in the novel from Joyce's own life is the character of Stephen himself, and just as the whole novel is centred on Stephen and Stephen alone, so all the other minor deviations from reality are also centred around Stephen's character. For example, in real life, Joyce's relations with his brothers and sisters were not as indifferent as Stephen's. In fact, Stanislaus, Joyce's next brother, who was especially close to him, is given quite an important place in *Stephen Hero* as the

character of Maurice. Maurice is almost entirely omitted from *A Portrait of the Artist*, in order to place even greater emphasis on the loneliness of Stephen and his search for a vocation. He is mentioned only once by Stephen's father, who proposes to send both Stephen and Maurice to Belvedere College. In the subsequent sections on Belvedere College, however, we neither see, nor hear of Maurice at all. It can be believed that the single mention of Maurice in *A Portrait* was a slip of Joyce's pen. There can be no other explanation for it. In the rest of the novel Stephen at best has a rather indifferent relationship with his siblings. Stephen is always given preferential treatment by his entire family because he is the eldest, and a boy. Two incidents in the novel may be referred to here in this regard. Towards the end of the fourth chapter, Stephen, after some debate, decides to reject the offer of priesthood, and having so decided, he enters the poverty and squalor of his house, to find that his parents had gone out to look for a house, and his brothers and sisters are still sitting round the table, finishing tea. Jars and jampots had done service for teacups, and all that they had had to eat was bread dipped in watered tea. Stephen sits down at the table, and his siblings begin to sing carols together one after another. The scene brings to Stephen's mind the one and only instance of regret for the life that had been given to him, but one that they had never been allowed to enjoy:

> "The sad quiet grey-blue glow of the dying day came through the window and the open door, covering over and allaying quietly a sudden instinct of remorse in Stephen's heart. All that had been denied them had been freely given to him, the eldest; but the quiet glow of evening showed him in their faces no sign of rancour…. He waited for some moments, listening, before he too took up the air with them. He was listening with pain of spirit to the overtone of weariness behind their frail fresh innocent voices. Even before they set out on life's journey, they seemed weary already of the way."[8]

We must also remember here that it was actually Stanislaus who was far more estranged from his family than James Joyce, and it was Stanislaus who refused to make his Easter duty, not James. Actually, as we see in *A Portrait*, Joyce combined in Stephen certain aspects of his brother's character along with his own, and thus gave Stephen the strength of both the young Joyces. To achieve artistic perfection, therefore, Joyce even goes to the extent of distorting reality.

This is true also where the individual character of Stephen is concerned. Frank Budgen in his book, *James Joyce and the Making of "Ulysses"* reports that Joyce had himself remarked about his hero, "I have not let this young man off very lightly, have I? Many writers have written about themselves. I wonder if any of them has been as candid as I have?" And then he says of Stephen -- "That simile of yours, 'a young cat sharpening his claws on the

tree of life,' seems to me to be very justly applied to young Stephen."[9]. In fact, Joyce has been so candid, that the question arises whether Stephen is James Joyce at all. In fact, Stephen seems to be a far more disagreeable person than James Joyce seems to have been. According to Stanislaus, James was a fairly good athlete, a good swimmer, and so good-natured as a child, that he earned the nickname "Sunny Jim". Stephen, on the contrary, shuns the playing field, is afraid of the water, and it is quite impossible to call him sunny of temperament. It is clear that the author has made him so with the explicit purpose of depicting the estrangement of Stephen from everyone and everything around him – which cannot be done if the person in question is good-natured and popular. The fact remains that Stephen is not Joyce, and should not be seen as so – a mistake which most readers are in danger of making.

The same is true of the theory of art that this novel is so famous for. It is true that in the university Joyce studied Aristotle and Aquinas deeply, and made them the pillars of his aesthetic theory, just as the entire gamut of European aesthetics begins from them. However, the difference lies in the way the aesthetic theory is presented in *A Portrait of the Artist.* In Chapter 18 of *Stephen Hero* Stephen is shown to write out his aesthetic opinions in an essay called "Drama and Life", which forms a framework for his own literary purposes. He first tries to convince his friends like Cranly and Madden (a variation of Davin's character in *A Portrait*), and then presents the paper to the Literary and Historical Society in Chapter 19. The President has very grave objections to Stephen's views, and his fellow students have mixed responses. In *A Portrait*, however, the entire focus is on Stephen alone, and Stephen is shown to expound his theory to Lynch, a below-the-standard character, who does not have the brains or the inclination to understand Stephen's theory. The criticism of Stephen's opinions is shown in a previous section, where the Dean of Studies effectively puts Stephen in his place, leading him to avoid the Dean in all later interactions. Stephen's other friends are not brought into the picture. The entire purpose of Joyce seems to be to show Stephen as avoiding criticism, and framing a theory which he unilaterally endorses. The outcome is a theory of art that is specifically Stephen's own, and not Joyce's at all.

Though Stephen's character, as presented in *A Portrait of the Artist*, is far from being a representation of Joyce himself, there are several responses to various incidents in the novel, that mirror the actual responses that Joyce had in his own life. That is why these responses are shown to be so vivid and immediate. Some of such incidents are the pandybat incident, the Christmas dinner party, the retreat conducted by Father Arnall, and the rejection of priesthood. There are other smaller incidents strewn throughout

the novel, but these are some of the major instances in which the novel can be regarded as truly autobiographical. The reaction of the child Stephen to the pandybat is so vivid, that it cannot but be a description of what Joyce really experienced. When the pandybat slashes across his hand, the pain is described thus –

> "A hot burning stinging tingling blow like the loud crack of a broken stick made his trembling hand crumple together like a leaf in the fire: and at the sound and the pain scalding tears were driven into his eyes. His whole body was shaking with fright, his arm was shaking and his crumpled burning livid hand shook like a loose leaf in the air"[10].

Joyce certainly went through the pandying in Clongowes himself, and the description given above can only be given by one to whom the experience was vivid enough to be remembered throughout his life. In *A Portrait*, however, the incident is not merely shown as a painful incident that actually happened to him. It is brought in as a link in the chain of images connected with the Crime and Punishment theme that runs from the very first section, and culminates in the concept of hell presented in the third chapter of the novel. In the same way, the retreat conducted by Father Cullen (represented as Father Arnall in the novel) actually happened in Joyce's life, and caused him to rethink his attitude to religion and to choose art as an alternative vocation. In the novel it is the climax of the Crime and Punishment theme, and is shown as the turning point in Stephen's search for a vocation.

One of the longest sections of the novel is devoted to the Christmas dinner party – the first Christmas dinner that Stephen (and also Joyce) attended at the same table with the grown-ups of the family. In real life, the quarrel had been so violent and loud, that it had been heard in the next street, according to the description given by some of Joyce's neighbours, after the novel became famous. The entire section is narrated in an ordinary narrative style, and not in the stream-of-consciousness method, as the quarrel was so vivid in Stephen's mind, that he did not have any concentration for any other train of thought. In the novel it is brought in, not only as an incident that shook the child Stephen, and catapulted him into the adult world, but also as a part of the strong political theme running throughout the novel. The conflict between politics and religion that is emphasized throughout the novel, is initiated in this incident.

A Portrait of the Artist, in fact, is an autobiographical novel, with equal emphasis on both these words, for it is neither straight autobiography, nor pure fiction. As Stanislaus Joyce put it, "Joyce drew very largely upon his own life and his own experience ..... But *A Portrait* is not an autobiography:

it is an artistic creation". The writer maintains the exact balance between autobiographical involvement and artistic detachment. The picture of Stephen is depicted from an objective point of view, where the aim is neither self-glorification, nor self-attack. As the writer tells us in the title, Stephen is supposed to be THE archetypal artist, who aspires to becoming one, but does not yet quite succeed. Joyce's artistic objectivity makes critical censure or praise be directed at Stephen only, and not at his maker. However much Joyce claims to be candid about himself, we cannot but regard Stephen as an individual, and not a tame shadow of the novelist. By the time the novel ends, we get to know Stephen Dedalus better than almost any other male character in fiction – something we cannot at all say about the author himself.

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FIRST SECTION OF THE NOVEL

The best novels in the world are characterized by strong opening sections, which aim at most or all of the following:

a. They instil curiosity in the reader regarding the rest of the novel, and make the reader want to know more.
b. They introduce the most important themes that the novel will deal with.
c. They introduce some actions that will be followed up in the rest of the novel. It must be remembered that the main characters do not necessarily come in at the beginning, but the action given in the first part throws light on the characters who will follow.
d. The opening almost always sets the tone or mood of the novel. This is one of the most important effects that the author aims at in the beginning.
e. The narrative context is set at the beginning of the novel – what the plot will revolve on. Many novels play with the time line at the beginning, as they may not necessarily begin at the beginning. However, in *bildungromans*, normally the novel begins with the protagonist as a child.
f. This point is essential. The first section of a novel sets the narrative voice that will continue throughout the novel. In some cases, the novel may have more than one narrative voice. But the predominant voice is established in the very beginning.

It will be found that the first section of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is one of the strongest opening sections that we find in the entire gamut of fiction, and it has almost all the above qualities in some way or another.

The novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is divided into five broad chapters. Each chapter is further divided into a number of sections, which are clearly separated by either a space or a row of stars. The opening section of the first chapter is only about a page and a half long, the shortest section in the novel. But it is in every way an extremely important section, as it introduces almost all the important themes and symbols of the novel, making it an excellent introduction to the rest of the narrative. Every word

of this section is meaningful in the context of the novel as a whole, and of the chain of symbolism that ties it together.

Being a *bildungsroman*, the novel shows the "processes by which maturity is achieved through the various ups and downs of life", and gives "an account of the youthful development of a hero or heroine"[1]. As such, it begins with the protagonist as a child, and ends with him graduating from college. *A Portrait of the Artist*, however, is different from other *bildungsroman* novels, because it is written in the stream-of-consciousness style, and it records everything through the *mind* of the hero, Stephen Dedalus. As such, the novel begins from the earliest age which is remembered by the hero – an age so young, that he is still wetting the bed at that time. It is understandable that he does not remember too much about that age, which explains the shortness of this section. Also, the stream-of-consciousness style ensures that the language changes its vocabulary and quality as Stephen grows – which means that the first section, being concerned with Stephen as a baby, uses baby language in its narration. In the next section, when he is a junior in Clongowes Wood College, the language is that of a small boy, full of slang and colloquialisms. The language thus develops and reaches its maturity when Stephen is in Belvedere. The first section, in tune with the desired effect of hazy flashes of memory, is, therefore, related not as a connected story, but as un-coordinated pictures of infancy.

The Stanford Medicine Children's Health website, for example, lists the basic modes of language use by children below two years of age:

- Vocabulary of 50 words, pronunciation is often unclear
- Asks for common foods by name
- Makes animal sounds, such as "moo"
- Starting to combine words, such as "more milk"
- Begins to use pronouns, such as "mine"
- Uses 2-word phrases[2]

The very first paragraph, as such, uses the language that a parent employs while telling a story to his baby boy, using those very parameters of language that his little son uses while still learning to speak. Stephen's father is telling him a story, and it runs like this –

> "Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo …."[3]