

**Questioning The Legacy: Stephen Dedalus an Audacious Nonconformist in
*A Portrait of The Artist As A Young Man***

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Abstract:

Reckoning with majority does not substantiate the objective of life; however, what substantiates is an exertion of emancipation from being counted among the ranks of insane. Therefore, by reasonably escaping from the mainstream, the audacious humans can recognize the shackles and the superfluous limitations that control their creative capacity and constructive thinking. Consequently, focusing on that underlying certainty, that beckons the nonconformist attitude, it proves evidence to the force that bestows legitimacy towards the exactness of life. Through a close reading of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), this research paper spotlights on how Stephen Dedalus relinquishes the obligatory submission, desired by the existing institutions, emerging out of his overwhelming anguished self-consciousness. Moreover, it accentuates on how he detects the gleam of light that allows him to reject the unconstructive legacy of the dead institutions, rooted with socially constructed impositions, to embark upon the mysteries of life.

Keywords: Conformity, Institutions, James Joyce, Mystery, Self-Reliance, Stephen Dedalus

Introduction:

Nonconformists must develop self-confidence to differentiate themselves from the mainstream to avoid giving false testimony favouring the opinion of the masses. Nonconformity at its beginning is a challenging task, however, proves a prized virtue in shaping them as an epitome of intellect. Stephen Dedalus, the Joycean hero "groping painfully toward some understanding of himself" (Waith 256) undergoes a metamorphic journey by denying the established opinion to represent the "superhuman courage to face the world alone" (Waith 256). Such attitude transpires when Stephen answers Cranly's question "What then is your point of view?" "I will tell you what I will do and what I would not do. I will not serve that, in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church" (Joyce 219). Therefore, manifesting such conviction, it develops an audacity to overcome the obstacles constructed in the name of goodness. He, however, taking himself, his art and moreover his rebellion too seriously therefore, expressing in the lyrical quality "Welcome, O life! I go 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" (Joyce 253).

"Apologise" and "Never peach on a fellow", the paradoxical legacy entrenched by his parents guides him to an unanticipated destination foregrounding elements like brutality, discrimination, and double standards eventually results in isolation and then yearning for his home. The homesickness overwhelms Stephen emotionally concluding to compensate the anxiety through Christmas holidays. Nevertheless, the home exemplifying harmonious haven, corrupted, demonstrates its flawed nature.

Further, the narrative recounts the financial deterioration that leads to The withdrawal from “Clongowes”, The transfer to “Belvedere” The traversing into the violent world of adolescence, The lascivious urgency, The Red Light area, and finally The “Hell-Fire Sermons” (Boyd 561) delivered by Father Arnall eventually abstain him from performing the abhorrent actions. However, the religious understanding results in the subtle distortion of this institution suggesting his moral flaws and the imperfections within the people around compelling him to abandon the vocation of priesthood and to pursue an art career. Therefore, Stephen shuns everything to chase the delight of life through art that demands the close association of body, mind and spirit. He asserts that “You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets. Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow” (Joyce 180). Through this communion, Stephen decides his future by adapting a quasi-divine stance in opposition to the time-honoured traditions of the Dublin Society. He methodically interacts with people and dissociates himself by possessing a provisional hope embodying “The Quest, The Escape and The Refuge”.

Rejecting Socially Imposed Bonds Towards Achieving Self-reliance

Bending towards an obscurity one must understand that this tendency of traversing to the unfamiliar demands the alteration of the nature itself. The Greek mythical figure (the architect of the labyrinth of Crete) Daedalus and his son Icarus did it, the self-aggrandizing renaissance man Doctor Faustus did it, Satan the unsung hero of Milton’s epic in a different way did it and Stephen Dedalus, the Joycean hero “laughable, pathetic and nearly always difficult” (emphasis added, Waith 256) is in pursuit of doing so. The unswerving reader senses out rightly the becoming of an artist possessing the ability for language. The straight forward introduction and the direct focus on Stephen’s naive yet defiant attitude demonstrate the theoretical fervour toward his own course. Kim Gleed states that “the seeds of the artist are germinating from the first line (136)”. Likewise, Hugh Kenner asserts that the first couple of pages “enact the entire action in microcosm” (Kenner 362) ascertaining how Stephen’s identity is fundamentally shaped of his earliest childhood memories. Stephen’s musings about the world in his childhood asserts a tinge of development of his aesthetic vision by understanding the importance of education in developing self-reliance. Jacqueline Belanger analysing the character of Joycean hero opines “by appropriating the language of texts such as *The Count of Monte Cristo*... attempts to use literature to understand the world and ... many of his experiences are filtered almost entirely through his reading” (Belanger x). Unquestionable belief to something even when it is unreasonable is nothing more but a notion of blind faith. The adherence to conventionality without appropriate observation embodies the same commencement. Therefore, to comprise better understanding of the world one must possess courage to reach to a certain truth by breaking with the practices being practised as Ralph Waldo Emerson asserts that “God will not have his work made manifest by cowards” (Emerson 02). Therefore, “Art for Stephen becomes a way of rewriting his experiences” (Henke 2) by realising the true freedom in art that offers the window to conquer all barriers holding the humans back from flight.

The Irish Education System represented in *A Portrait* predominated by religion, “Confess! He has to confess every sin... Confess! O he would indeed to be free and sinless again! (Joyce 122) situates Stephen in the real world of inequality at Clongowes Wood School and any attempt to adapt headed for such circumstances ends in difficulty. The first embarrassing situation occurs at Clongowes when a bully named Wells “shoulder him into the square ditch” (Joyce 05) ends up in school “infirmery” (20) for recovery from having caught fever. Another uncomfortable situation occurs when Father Dolan “pandybat” (47) the “lazy idle little loafer” (54) and Stephen becomes victim of Father Dolan’s wrath who wreaks his havoc on Stephen beating him up by “flogging” (55). Deserted, enraged and feeling disgusted, Stephen is infuriated by the beating eventually escort him to report the unfairness to the rector. The situation leaves Stephen anxious nevertheless bold, insecure nevertheless proud, afraid nevertheless courageous enough to complaint. Mustering courage to question the authority under such

circumstances at such a tender age anticipates Stephen with the characteristics of confrontational attitude to resolve the unjust and to liberate the authoritative constraints enforced unnecessarily to maintain the system of dominance. Moreover, at Belvedere College the poor status and the sexual urgency to a large extent shatter him inside, nonetheless, seeking refuge in “performing on the stage” and “reading Romantic Literature”. Therefore, being a product of the convoluted educational system Stephen derails at times to immoral deeds and to compensate his wrongdoings religion plays a critical role in his life. His affiliation towards religion refrain him from performing such lustful acts. After his first sexual act and thereafter the continuous visiting to the Red Light Area, Stephen becomes addicted to the warmth of the Dublin prostitutes. However, the “Hell-Fire Sermons” delivered by Father Arnall prompts in him the “intense feelings of sin and guilt and a desire for confession and redemption” (Belanger xi). Continuous visits to Dublin brothel centres apprehended him as a sinful person but the religious retreats echoing develops a tinge of spirituality creating something aesthetic in his mind.

The satisfaction derived from Father Arnall’s sermons turned into the habitual adherence to spiritual exercises to atone his sins. Nonetheless, the audacity characterising Stephen’s inclination to piousness rapidly degenerates resulting in passionless exercises emphasising nothing more but “a mortified will no more responsive to the thrill of its obedience” (Joyce 216). However, Stephen’s rejection of institutions like Family, Church and the Country do not come to him unreasonably, it is the dinner table scene witnessed in his childhood the words of which proves a catalyst for such an action. The supporters of the Catholic Church and of Charles Stewart Parnell respectively dissent with each other by out breaking bitter arguments for their validation nonetheless creating confusion in Stephens’s mind without offering a clear sense of what to adhere and what not to. The disagreeing ends paradoxically reversing the stereotypical roles with Mr. Simon and Mr. Casey bursting in tears and Mrs. Riordan screaming intensely creating bewilderment in Stephen which organisation to get associated with. Dante (Mrs. Riordan), an enthusiastic nationalist who nevertheless believes in the order of the Church justifies the juxtaposing of religion and the politics by asserting:

It is religion. They are doing their duty in warning the people. They are right, they must direct their flocks, and a priest would not be a priest if he did not tell his flock what is right and what is wrong. (Joyce 26-27)

However, the fundamental supporters of politics admiring Charles Stewart Parnell completely reject the close association by asserting to “cease turning the house of God into a polling booth” (29). They scream:

Didn’t the bishops of Ireland betray us in the time of the union when Bishop Lanigan presented an address of loyalty to the Marquess Cornwallis?

Didn’t the bishop and priests sell the aspiration of their country in 1829 in return for Catholic emancipation?

Didn’t they denounce the Fenian movement from the pulpit and in the confession box? And didn’t they dishonour the ashes of Terence Bellew MacManus? (Joyce 33)

The rivalry between religious and political fundamentalists respectively witnessed in boyhood by Stephen reverberate in his mind, when he enters into adulthood, compels him to question the past. Dante (Mrs. Riordan) manifests that religion is a matter of fact and expresses her curiosity of the affect on young Stephen by yelling at Mr. Casey and Mr. Simon Dedalus:

O, he’ll remember all this when he grows up, – the language he heard against God and religion and priests in his own home. (Joyce 29)

On the other hand, the devoted Parnellite sharing an appetite for their dead king ending in cruel words and shedding tears shout painstakingly:

Let him remember too, the language with which the priests and the priests’ pawns broke Parnell’s heart and hounded him into his grave. Let him remember that too when he grows up. (Joyce 29)

Pondering over the situation that goes from uncomfortable and embarrassing to argumentative, Stephen develops a dissatisfaction towards past and leaves no trace to the people for computing his orbit by accessing his earlier interests. He disappoints them by rejecting the existing dogmas perpetuated by the Janus-faced institutions that are hugely corrupt.

Stephen while questioning the past indulges into the sphere of the present believing in writing rather than being written. His experience with religion both matures him and progressively makes him more individualistic as he grows. This individualistic stance in Stephen offers him a sense of resurrection and eventually his declaration of guilt develops within him the loathing of the causal routine of religious observances followed by the inclination keen on earthly realities. "I tried to love God". "It seems now I failed" (Joyce 284). The daily routine of crossing the threshold of Church for saving himself from further sinning is "predictably short-lived and ends with Stephen's realization that his acts of piety are intellectual and superficial, without substance or feeling" (Belanger xii). The intuitions he approaches with towards the life day by day enhances the experiences to break off the manacles that Ireland imposes through different apparatuses to curtail his flight. He represents himself as self-dependent human possessing the ability to hold an immaculate manifestation to surmount the rhetoric of deliverance through art. "Art, therefore, becomes for Stephen a way of rewriting his experiences and anesthetising his encounters with women, who become, in both poems, the depersonalised products of Stephen's creative processes" (Henke 62). This attitude of Stephen engulfs within his personality the power to stand upright for the sake of humanity that has been so far exploited by the inconspicuous faces running the dead institutions who does not add towards prospect but deterioration of the humanity.

To merge his life in the common tide of other lives was harder for him than any fasting or prayer and it was his constant failure to do this to his own satisfaction which caused in his soul at last a sensation of spiritual dryness together with a growth of doubts and scruples. His soul traversed with a period of desolation in which the sacraments themselves seemed to have turned into dried-up sources. (Joyce 116)

His consciousness of spiritual parchedness attained through religion and widely practised Roman Catholicism ironically is seen as an element of impediment that inculcates a horrid and disgust of satisfaction of a bodily desire therefore leading Stephen to refuse the visualization of the vocation of priesthood. "The wisdom of the priest's did not touch him to the quick. He was destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others or to learn the wisdom of others himself wandering among the snares of the world" (Belanger xii) offering a sound "call of life to his soul" (Joyce 130) signifying "freedom to be oneself...freedom to develop emotionally and intellectually" (MacCarthy 39) that goes together with the disclosure of his artistic career to traverse into the different ways of the world yet not taken. Such an attitude can lead to ones misunderstanding amid the masses; however, there is no harm in being misunderstood. As Emerson writes, "Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Lucifer, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood" (Emerson 07). Stephen detaches himself to move on a metaphorical journey of good stead singly to justify the benefits of acting singly in substantiating the belief that greatness comes to those who dare to live courageously by overcoming the anticipated and apologetic nature.

Overcoming the moments of excitement the final chapter marks his break with Ireland therefore depicts Stephen's trials and tribulations to articulate the responsibility of an artist. The tinge towards the nature of art proves a catalyst to exorcize the required allegiance demanded by the long-established institutions that stops him in understanding the importance of being a nonconformist. Desiring to break away from the authority enforced upon Stephen by the conventional institutions he asserts with a significant declaration "that I will not serve" (Joyce 184). His breaking up of the relationship with his family members and country is important for his artistic creation that unquestionably emphasises for detachment in Jacqueline Belanger's terms:

Stephen takes on the role not only of Lucifer, but also of God the Father and of Jesus. For Stephen, the artist is thus both the rebellious intellect refusing to serve any master and the betrayed victim sacrificed by those who place worldly interest above any higher concerns. (Belanger xiii)

Stephen stands straight and gathers together the courage in denying the impossibility to be a nonconformist. The fitful journey of Stephen represented in *A Portrait* “traces the shift from Stephen as a passive receiver to the author” (Belanger ix) at the closure of the novel indicating the spiritual and the emotional formation of the artist. William York Tindall states “*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* ends with the artists beginning” (Tindall 59). Therefore, Stephen reprimands the mediocrity of the Janus-faced people whose squalid contentment towards the dull institutions is shaken by his responsible thinking. His validation proves that a true man speaking against the hollowness is always at the centre of the things. This daring stature is an indication towards the realization of his destiny as an artist by switching from third person to the first person narrative voice, taking the form of the diary, at the closure of the novel. His “personal unconscious together with his collective unconscious” (Karim 12) improve Stephen to become a completely formed artist because his diary records chronicling the following spring reveal the independent individual and artist he has developed for art’s sake.

Conclusion:

James Joyce portrays Stephen Dedalus possessing a nonconformist attitude, who rejects the accepted belief, to search for the specific meaning of life advancing on chaos and darkness. This profound conviction with desired predilection helps him in achieving a soaring scale of intellect for valuable overhauling. Nevertheless, the nonconformist audacity giving rise to an artistic formation dissociates him from the institutions embodying the perception of fostering human beings entirely. Yet, the rejection of these institutions eventually sensitizes in him the characteristics of individuality to understand Ireland as a labyrinth that needs to be escaped. He understands Irish society as an unwitting oppressor that always formulates conspiracies against the intellectuals and admirable political figures. However, what is mandatory is that they must be nurtured continuously to prevent the Irish nation from dwelling on its unproductive past and being devoured by the politics of the nation's own devising.

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