Theme of the Novel A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTISTAS A YOUNG MAN

 The novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was completed in three phases.

This novel covers the childhood and adolescence of Stephen Dedalus, the protagonist. Over the course of the novel the hero grows from a little boy to a young man of eighteen who decides to leave his country for Europe, in order to be an artist. Both in style and content the novel was extraordinary for its time. Stream of consciousness technique which Joyce made popular with this work is the method of narrating the thought process of a character. Thus the novel moves forward through the path of Stephen‟s consciousness.

.Joyce‟s novel is divided into five chapters. At the start of the novel, Stephen is a young boy, probably about five-years-old. He is one of the younger students at Clongowes Wood College for boys. It is an elementary school run by Jesuit priests. Stephen is an extremely sensitive child, and his athletic incompetence makes him nervous and fearful. In all his interactions with the other boys, he is practically silent. If he disagrees with their judgments, he keeps his thoughts to himself. Also he is an easy target for bullies because of his sensitive nature, small size, and social awkwardness. One day, he is pushed into out house drainage by a student named Wells. As a result he finds himself sick when he wakes up the following day and is taken to the infirmary. While in the infirmary, Stephen dreams of going home for the Christmas holidays. The next narration is about the Dedalus family at Christmas dinner, and a heated argument

erupts between Stephen‟s father and Dante, Stephen‟s governess, about Parnell and the

Catholic Church. The Irish political and religious scenario is a major part of the novel.

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*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*details events which closely correspond with those of Joyce's first twenty years. According to Joyce's celebrated biographer, Richard Ellman, Joyce hoped that his *Portrait*would be an autobiographical novel, "turning his life into fiction." While scholars disagree on the extent to which Joyce's life affected his fictional narrative in the novel, most of them concur that Stephen Dedalus is both the protagonist of the novel, as well as the persona (Latin, meaning "mask") behind which Joyce paints his fictional "portrait" of the "artist" and of the "young man."

A close examination of these obvious clues in the title reveals to readers that the novel can be classified as both a Kunstlerroman (German, meaning a novel about an artist) and a Bildungsroman (German, meaning a novel of development or education). If we understand these terms, we can more clearly understand Joyce's primary purpose for writing the novel.

We must keep in mind, however, that many of the people and the situations of the novel have been presented in the form of satire. We must also be aware that the author selected this technique to emphasize how the life of an artist differs from that of others who share his world.

In *A Portrait,*the reader learns through the particular experiences of Stephen Dedalus how an artist perceives his surroundings, as well as his views on faith, family, and country, and how these perceptions often conflict with those prescribed for him by society. As a result, the artist feels distanced from the world. Unfortunately, this feeling of distance and detachment is misconstrued by others to be the prideful attitude of an egoist. Thus the artist, already feeling isolated, is increasingly aware of a certain growing, painful social alienation.

In addition, Stephen's natural, maturing sexual urges confuse him even further. Stephen is a keenly intelligent, sensitive, and eloquent young man, but he also possesses the feelings of urgent sexuality, selfdoubt, and insecurity — all universal emotions which are experienced during the development of the average adolescent male. Joyce reveals these tumultuous adolescent feelings through a narrative technique called stream-of-consciousness. He takes the reader into both the conscious mind and the subconscious mind, showing him the subjective and the objective realities of a situation. Using Stephen Dedalus, he explores the depths of the human heart.

This novel is narrated, for the most part, in the limited omniscient point of view; at the same time, it progresses in form from the lyrical and epical modes of expression and moves finally into the dramatic mode of expression. (These "modes of expression" are Stephen's own terms, defining the various kinds of literature; when we encounter them in the novel, we should write down Stephen's definitions and attempt to chart the course of this novel according to its evolving lyrical, epical, and dramatic levels.)

Stephen's thoughts, associations, feelings, and language (both cerebral and verbal) serve as the primary vehicles by which the reader shares with Stephen the pain and pleasures of adolescence, as well as the exhilarating experiences of intellectual, sexual, and spiritual discoveries.

In order to highlight the importance of Stephen's aesthetic experiences, Joyce borrowed a word from the Catholic faith in order to create a literary term of his own. When Stephen suddenly understands "the essential nature of a thing" — whether it is the understanding of a person, an idea, a word, or a situation — he has a moment of profound revelation. Joyce called these moments epiphanies.

Some of Stephen's earliest epiphanies come from his acute sensory awareness and are recorded through Joyce's masterful use of imagery. In the novel, repeated patterns of sounds and remembrances of tastes, touches, and smells are all emphasized. Stephen's eyesight (like Joyce's) is weak; therefore, Joyce emphasizes other senses, and in doing so, he employs the valuable motif method of narration, wherein he records recurrent images of hot/cold, wet/dry, and light/dark images, as well as recurring symbols. He also uses dramatic irony to identify Stephen's basic conflicts and emphasize significant events in his life.

Although several themes such as alienation and betrayal exist in the novel, Ellman states that Joyce originally recognized the work's main theme as "the portrait of the renegade Catholic artist as hero." Certainly, evidence from Joyce's life mirrors Stephen's need to escape the bonds of Irish nationalism and Catholicism, both of which seemed to threaten his pursuit of a literary career.

The most obvious clue that the author's life is related to the novel's thematic development exists in the hero's name — Stephen Dedalus, which combines significant elements of both Greek and Christian myths. "Stephen" is the name of the first Christian martyr who was persecuted for reasons of faith. Joyce's hero identifies with his patron's martyrdom by recalling an early reprimand against marrying a Protestant, the unjust pandying incident, and a variety of instances wherein he was ostracized or made to feel guilty by his peers and older people.

It is, however, the author's choice of his character's family name — Dedalus — which reveals to readers the source of the novel's greatest thematic parallel. The myth of Dedalus and Icarus, the story of the cunning Greek inventor and his ill-fated, impetuous son, is the framework responsible for the major imagery and symbolism which pervade the novel.

Dedalus, an architect commissioned by King Minos, designed an elaborate labyrinth in which the king planned to confine the monstrous Minotaur. However, ill-fortune soon caused Dedalus and Icarus to be imprisoned in the labyrinth, from which they were forced to contrive a daring and ingenious escape.

Symbolically, Stephen, like Dedalus, feels compelled to find a means of escape from the labyrinth of Dublin, which threatens him with spiritual, cultural, and artistic restraints. Similarly, Stephen can also be compared with Icarus, who flew too close to the sun, melted his fabricated wings, and plunged to his death in the sea. Like Icarus, Stephen ignores the warnings of family and clergy and is symbolically drawn toward a philosophical illumination which ultimately casts him into sin (spiritual death) and leads him to renounce his Catholic faith.

The final and most dramatic parallel associates Stephen with his mythic namesake Dedalus — the "great artificer." Like Dedalus, Stephen succeeds in escaping the labyrinth of cultural restraints. At the end of the novel, Stephen is imaginatively soaring — in flight away from Ireland toward a future of unfettered artistic freedom.