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# Between “The Artist” and “a Young Man”: Stephen Dedalus and the dialectics of exception in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

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## Introduction

- 1 As Benoît Tadié argued, modernist authors constructed their characters in opposition to classical notions of literary “heroes” and protagonists, and to the underlying myths that these notions conveyed<sup>1</sup>. This is particularly true of artistic figures. As modernism probed the depths of psychology and sociology, questioning the idea of free will and the conscious intentionality of actions, the possibility of demiurgic individual creation naturally came into question. Furthermore, new trends in production, such as Fordism, as well as mass communications and mass warfare, undermined the notion of individual agency, both in action and in *poiesis*. The trope of the exceptional Hero, as well as the genius Craftsman, revealed their ties with a romantic vision of personal transcendence, which jarred with the experience of everyday life and even with the workings of the artistic world. For instance, the painter Lily, in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, is depicted as trying to reach for a more refined perspective, free from self-doubt and the censure of others, only to realize that her existence in context, with all its anxieties and fragilities, is what gives her works meaning, enabling her to reclaim the memory of the past and of the deceased Mrs Ramsay. In a social world which places evident emphasis on abstraction, represented in the novel by the philosopher Mr Ramsay, this realisation is presented as going counter to standards—a certain form of inner rebellion, or at the very least a liberation from cultural stereotypes.
- 2 I will argue that this confrontation between the materiality of everyday life, the cultural stereotype of the inspired artist, and the search for a new stance as a creator in

the modern world, shapes the personality and evolution of Stephen Dedalus. This is particularly visible in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which eschews the notion of "hero" present in the first iteration of the narrative ("Stephen Hero"), while making a case for Stephen's evolution as an artist in the making. The novel presents its protagonist as defined, in his attitudes and ideas, by his family, his social class, his Irishness, and vying to find a path for his individuality to liberate itself and find expression. Yet by the end of the story, he has come to terms with none of these determinisms, and is still caught in their contradictions, still struggling in search for his own voice. The story centres on his negotiation with these outside pressures, rather than on his achievements as an individual.

- 3 In this respect, the title of the novel is very telling. On the one hand, this portrait "as a Young man" hints at the teleological romantic trope of the artistic vocation. It carries the expectation of a certain kind of unfolding, showing how a young man fulfils his destiny and becomes an artist. However, it also carries more complex implications. It may refer to a sort of posturing: the artist presenting himself as "a young man". In this case, the change from the definite to the indefinite article, from "*the* artist" to "a young man" begs another question: is an artist so different that he can pose as a typical young man? Or is he indeed just a young man when his portrait is seen from without? Conversely, as Jean-Marie Schaeffer points out, wanting to become "*the* artist" is also "a dream of one's youth", something which Stephen aspires to because, unlike Joyce, he is not one yet. The mere idea of a "portrait of the artist" integrates the figure within a cultural norm, as an object of external desire and evaluation rather than a personal identity (Schaeffer 102). In other words, the question of exception, of what it means to be, or not to be, "the artist" when one is "a young man", haunts the novel. Stephen, throughout his youth, finds himself confronted with two stereotypes representing two different sets of forces. On the one hand, he is compelled to respond to the expectations that bear upon young men in Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century: to take a stance in the rise of nationalist movements, to take up his father's heritage and become the new head of his family, and to defend Catholicism. On the other, he is also subjected to a certain ideology of what exceptional men are supposed to be, caught in the trappings of a hero-worshipping culture, which imposes its own demands. The artist and the typical young man are two nets which Stephen tries to fly by, and, in literary terms, two "*topoi*", which Joyce the author plays against each other.
- 4 Indeed, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* both plays with and ultimately deflates the expectations of the artistic *Bildungsroman*. Stephen's attempts to rise to the status of artist, or any other exceptional status, are short-lived and disappointing. They serve to underline the weight of expectations and prejudices that surround him, in a society built both on hero-worship and on a certain hypocrisy regarding "great men". Faced with the abstractions and myths that surround these figures, Stephen has to devise another way of expressing his originality, which he accomplishes not by confronting the challenges head-on, but by stepping aside. As such, instead of being acknowledged as exceptional in the traditional sense of "great", I think that he highlights another meaning of exception: the process of excepting oneself, of eluding the straight path towards public recognition in favour of a more personal, and therefore perhaps more original path towards self-expression. Finally, this particular path leads not to a decisive action, a resolution in terms of plot, but to a more subtle and much more momentous transformation in the narrative. Stephen comes into himself by imposing his own voice, stuttering and indecisive though it be, within the textuality of the novel.

In that sense, the final pages, where his own diary replaces the third person narrative, play a central role in his development. In a text haunted by discursive forces—voices of reason, of power, of competing ideologies—even if he stumbles and rambles, Stephen is exceptional, in that he manages to make his own voice heard. And he does so not by leaving aside his status as just another young Irishman, but by embracing the ambivalence of his life, in a process which I will construe using the notions of “imposture” and “counter-interpellation”, as developed by Jean-Jacques Lecercle. To the end, he remains caught in the fertile dialectic between being “the Artist” and “a young man”, deploying his individuality in the folds and cracks of this unresolved duality.

## Artistic ambitions in a hero-worshipping culture

- 5 Throughout the *Portrait*, Stephen feels the weight of external pressures and expectations. At first, the main locus of this pressure is his family, and more specifically his father. When Simon Dedalus’s money problems start to pressure the family, forcing them to move into increasingly small and dingy lodgings, his bitterness imposes itself on Stephen as a form of imperative: “He felt that he was being enlisted for the fight, that some duty was being lain on his shoulders” (55). However, this personal relationship between father and son is soon revealed to be embedded within broader and more impersonal social expectations. In his adolescence, these manifest as a set of “voices”, demanding of him “to raise up his father’s fallen estate” but also to defend the creed of his Church, to uphold Irish nationalism and even to be a “decent fellow” with his schoolmates (70). Certainly these utterances betray their origins, and it is quite easy to imagine who may utter them. However, the narration separates them from any individual source, and even seems to merge them together, presenting them as so many voices in a same impersonal discourse. As Cheryl Herr argues, taking up a concept from Althusser, the central question for Stephen is that of “subjecting” himself, and being subjected, to pressures and cultural oppressions (Herr 25). These voices, whatever their origins, interpellate him and force him to respond, shaping his identity through this interaction<sup>2</sup>. As a matter of fact, his very name—which, as Althusser also remarks, identifies the individual even before they are born (Althusser 115)—informs his development, to the point that it “seem[s] to him a prophesy” (141). His first name links him to Saint Stephen the protomartyr, which he remembers when passing “Stephen’s, that is, my green” in Dublin (210), while his last name evokes the “old artificer” of the Ancient Greek myths, Dedalus, evoking both the cunning engineer and the demise of Icarus. In the end, both names highlight the proximity between heroism and tragedy, adding a subtle undercurrent of danger to Stephen’s dream of grandeur.
- 6 Indeed, Stephen is exposed in his childhood to the myths surrounding “great men” in a hero-worshipping culture. In school, he rises against the injustice of a custodian brandishing the image of Roman heroes: “the Senate and the Roman people always declared that the people who [resisted injustice] had been wrongly punished [...]. Those were the great men whose names were in Richmall Magnal’s *Questions*” (45). However, he soon realises the hypocrisy of these textbook models. They are to be worshipped, perhaps, but not imitated. His sense of rightful indignation only fosters indifference, and later mockery, on the part of the rector of his school. This abstraction, whereby heroism is extolled in theory but brought down in practice, ties in with the

ambivalences of colonial Ireland. The disputes in Stephen's own household surrounding Parnell constitute a form of childhood trauma, bringing out the ambivalences behind the nationalist sentiment, in the form of the violent opposition between Mr Casey and his nurse "Dante". The entire novel reveals an underlying criticism of the socially accepted conception of "great men". As Jean-Michel Rabaté puts it: "Joyce hated Romanticism with a passion, and his writings contain among many other things a scathing indictment of heroworship" (Rabaté 2001, 14). Stephen experiences the contradictions of this abstracted perspective, which divides the inspiration of artists and the actions of men from the materiality of concrete life. Step by step, he is made to realise that it underlies a certain social order, which superficially praises but in the end controls and devalues individuality.

- 7 As a matter of consequence, Stephen's ambitions are shaped by these outside pressures, and by the stereotypes that they bring forth. As Kershner argues, he is often "*performing* the role of the artist", in acts of "falsification" that play into the tropes of hero-worship (Kershner 186). This highlights the interaction and participation that underly interpellation, or what Jean-Jacques Lecercle calls the process of "ritualised submission" that it entails (Lecercle 1999, 155). In trying to cement his claim to this status, Stephen finds himself responding to a certain stereotype of artistic behaviour, aping the gestures and styles of others. His first attempt at a poem, which stems from his repressed desires in front of his childhood darling Emma Clery, is caught in abstractions and rituals which he merely mimics. Being a schoolboy from a religious college, he starts by writing "A.M.D.G." (*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*) at the top of his page. Then he adds a dedication, "to E- C-", using only the first letters of her name, in order to copy the style of Byron. And even at the very end of the novel, when he has realised his reliance on these cultural tropes, he still finds himself "Turn[ing] off that valve at once and open[ing] the spiritual-heroic refrigerating apparatus, invented and patented in all countries by Dante Alighieri" (213), when he talks to Emma. His irony in this final passage shows how powerful a grip artistic tropes have on him, so that he uses them even when he wants to mock them; but it also expresses the banality of a certain artistic posture, how it abides by an old "patent".
- 8 Furthermore, the stereotype of the Artist is not the only "career" that tempts Stephen during his youth: he also takes up the posture of the Saint for a while. The irony of the narrative voice during this episode highlights the underlying hypocrisy in the narratives around sainthood. His good actions in Church make him "feel his soul in devotion pressing like fingers the keyboard of a great cash register and to see the amount of his purchase start forth immediately in heaven" (124). The venal implications of such a metaphor, linking worship to a kind of exchange, underline how the social appraisal of faith is always ultimately based on calculations. The dedication of "great men" in religion, as in other fields, seems to be valued in terms of quantifiable, and possibly redeemable, results<sup>3</sup>. When trying to reach for transcendence, Stephen always ends up caught in the structures of the social world and under the weight of materiality.
- 9 This is the reason why his attempts are short-lived, and his ideals constantly deflated. Sooner or later, the aporias are made manifest. His poems in particular always betray the passions that they are supposed to cover. In his younger years, he seems only confusedly aware of this, drawing the irony of a more distant narrative voice. His first poem to the girl is fraught with narcissism and pride in front of his own ability. After

writing it, Stephen's focus seems to shift entirely on himself: "he went into his mother's bedroom and gazed at his face for a long time in the mirror of her dressingtable" (59). But as he matures, he becomes more self-conscious, as his vision clashes with a social appraisal. He must contend with how people see him. While writing a Villanelle to another girl he likes, he imagines its reception and the reactions it would lead to:

If he sent her the verses? They would be read out at breakfast amid the tapping of egg-shells. [...] The suave priest, her uncle, seated in his arm-chair, would hold the page at arm's length, read it smiling and approve of the literary form. (187)

- 10 The parallel between the music of verses and the tapping of egg-shells highlights the materiality of speech, which clashes with its claims to transcendence. Moreover, the priest's attitude emphasises the cultural context and social pressure surrounding "literary form[s]". If they are "approved of" by a priest, who is at the same time a social, spiritual and cultural authority, they are just another cultural artefact. This moment illustrates the paradox that surrounds Stephen's endeavours: how can one be exceptional in an accepted manner? Although it may free him from certain expectations that bear on young Irish men, the status of the Church-and-State-approved "great artist" is in the end nearly as banal, and as constricting.

## Excepting oneself as a process

- 11 Faced with these competing perspectives and with their constraints, Stephen rejects them all. One of the most distinctive features of his development as a character is his ability to linger, to meander and distance himself from interpellations, creating a sort of spatial dialectic between response and escape. From his youth, Stephen seeks a mental space away from the voices that he hears: "He gave them ear only for a time but he was happy only when he was far from them, beyond their call" (71). This habit of evading institutional pressures has an impact on his entire life, leading him to steer clear of the straight roads towards glory and social affirmation. His rejection of priesthood is depicted with the same spatial metaphor: "he wondered at the vagueness of his wonder, at the remoteness of his own soul from what he had hitherto imagined her sanctuary" (137). When the possibility appears of a place where he could fit in, a "sanctuary" against the tumult of his existence, he finds himself always "remote", already following another direction, often manifesting as a wayward stream of music: "It seemed to him that he heard notes of fitful music" (139). This sheds light on Stephen's flirtation with another type of figure: that of the *flâneur*. As Boscagli and Duffy remark, Stephen's "greatest moments of insight" are linked to meandering (Boscagli and Duffy, 18). However, far from being a posture of "hero" ("the *flâneur* will always be the hero", *ibid.*), as they assert, it seems to me that Stephen's *flânerie* is described, at least in the *Portrait*, as merely an escape, tethered to an ultimately untenable dream of free roaming and lack of constraint, when his indecision has very concrete consequences for him and his relatives. Just after hearing the proposal to enter the seminary, he returns home and finds his siblings alone, preparing tea in broken jars and jam-pots. His decision not to become a priest means that he is leaving them stranded: he remains unable to care for his family in his father's stead. As Naomi Toth remarks, the *Portrait* tells the story of Stephen alternately being or feeling betrayed by people and institutions, and in turn betraying others. As such, its structure posits "betrayal as the necessary birthplace of the subject" (Toth 144). Stephen asserts his own existence first and foremost by reneging on the debts and imperatives brought

upon him by older generations ("Do you fancy I am going to pay in my own life and person debts they made?" 170), sometimes with dramatic effects.

- 12 Instead of choosing a stance or following a certain path, Stephen then meanders, going back and forth between different roles and potentialities. His entire *bildung*, in the sense of coming into his own, is based on a process of wandering, which echoes Marian Eide's remarks on Joyce's "errant politics" as a response to the call of Erin, poetically tying Irishness to the notion of "erring" (Eide 64). Even his own plans seem to be defined as negatives: his reliance on "silence, exile and cunning" (208) could be viewed as a sort of "photographic" negative of three tropes: that of the eloquent poet, the nationalist figure and the pure saint. Rather than trying to delineate another figure, he seems content to avoid falling into any of these stereotypes. Yet paradoxically, this elusiveness does translate into a certain mode of behaviour, which comes to define Stephen's personality. He is constantly stepping aside, excepting himself from the social order. As he foregoes the path of the seminary, the realisation dawns upon him, taking on the form of a new prophecy: "his destiny was to be elusive of social or religious order [...]. 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" (138). Indeed, elusiveness carries a certain number of concrete consequences, first among which is the inability to rely on the established "wisdom" of institutions, requiring a more direct and empirical approach to the world. If he cannot view the world as a priest, he must face it as any other: as a young man.
- 13 Behind the negativity of Stephen's refusals, the novel stresses the positivity of escape. Failure, meandering and elusiveness may seem to be simply rejections, but in practice, they open up new vistas and lead to new experiences. Here as in *Ulysses*, Joyce subverts the traditional value judgement on art to assert that the anonymity of the "young man", the baseness of everyday life in Dublin, may bear more poetic fruit than the abstract heights of idealism. From his early years, Stephen discovers the attractions of the uncouth. This starts with the humiliation that stems from his family's social downfall: "He chronicled with patience what he saw, detaching himself from it and tasting its mortifying flavour in secret" (56). Likewise, as a student, he always seems ready to weigh the refinement of classical education against the mundane and the squalid. The narration stresses the contrast between his facade of erudition and the actual objects of his interest:
- The lore which he was believed to pass his days brooding upon [...] was only a garner of slender sentences from Aristotle's poetics and psychology [...] he was glad to find himself still in the midst of common lives, passing on his way amid the squalor and noise (148)
- 14 His posturing as an idealist and a scholar hides a much more direct knowledge, which he gathers from his own experience, "chronicling" the world around him.
- 15 As a matter of fact, this experience of the world is always translating into forms of texts or language<sup>4</sup>. The narration makes it clear that a certain vision of poetics derives from anonymity and wandering. As Kershner asserts, "Stephen not only think, but perceives in phrases and sentences. His consciousness, we might say, is narratized" (Kershner 160). Stephen's discovery of new places is always paralleled with his encounter with different forms of textuality, expressing other emotions and ideas. His stepping aside comes with a form of reading aside, outside of the textbooks and the missals of his colleges. As he explores the "narrow and dirty streets" of Dublin, his desires are

awoken by the "echo of an obscene scrawl which he had read on the oozing wall of a urinal" (83). As Catherine Flynn justly argues, this is a form of "physical interpellation", wherein his agency as an individual is bypassed and "he becomes a conduit for the lowest language of the city" (Flynn, 79). Furthermore, Flynn asserts the artistic genealogy of this rebellious escapism, drawing parallels with Rimbaud's use of uncouth bodily excretion to break down norms in the poem "Voyelles". However, in both cases (and this is perhaps a criticism which applies to Flynn's entire book and to her concept of "sentient thinking") this materiality is indissociable from the fabric of language. To take up Lecerle once again, though interpellation passes through the body and cannot do without it, its shape is that of "collective arrangements" as kept in the structures and formulas of language (Lecerle, *De L'interpellation*, 38-39). The materiality of the letters, their connection with the body and its impulses, open Stephen's mind not just to new words and contents (it is probably not his first encounter with profanity) but more importantly to new relations between the written word and its material reference. Conversely, his emotional and sensual experiences become enmeshed with language. His interaction with a prostitute is framed as a somehow linguistic experience: "[her lips] pressed upon his brain [...] as though they were the vehicle of some vague speech" (*ibid.*). In these moments, his discovery of what it is to be a young Dubliner, of the streets he can roam and the people he can meet, becomes the very fabric of another kind of artistic perspective, a certain relation with reading and writing. The status of artist and that of "young man" reveal their complementary roles in his development.

## Authorizing oneself: making Stephen's voice heard

- 16 What Stephen gains from this process of excepting himself, of discovering other perspectives and experimenting with other relations between language and lived experience, is a certain posture of response. As the novel progresses his encounters with other types of discourse start to involve more back-and-forth, and become more central to the story. For instance, his verbal jousting with the dean at the university is presented as a realisation: he understands that he is trying to fight using the very language of his colonial masters ("His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech", 159). Indeed, as Vicki Mahaffey notes in *Re-Authorizing Joyce* (from which the notion of "authorizing oneself" is also borrowed), a central conflict in the novel revolves around Stephen's subjectivity in language versus his subjection to other discourses. The narrative structure of the text highlights this struggle. As Mahaffey argues, Stephen is born into a language which surrounds and imprisons him, starting with the very first words: "Once upon a time and a very good time it was" (1), which represent Simon Dedalus's memory of happier times before the family's social descent. Hence his evolution in the linguistic field is not about creation or mastery, but about taking up a language that is already laden with meaning (Mahaffey 70). Stephen's *Bildung* is in a way primarily linguistic. With each new persona he takes on and every decision he makes, his style changes and matures. His own voice develops as a set of responses to external discourses, pitting them one against the other, in an instance of what Jean-Jacques Lecerle calls "counter-interpellations". For instance, as a student, his internal struggle informs his diction: his outbursts are presented as the "violent or luxurious language in which [he] escaped from the cold silence of intellectual revolt" (152). Though neither posture is in itself very personal,

the way that violent language and cold silence interact within him creates a certain conjuncture: a space wherein, as Lecercle puts it, he can "make do with" ("se débrouiller de") different interpellations, and elaborate a response (Lecercle 2019, 98). Finally, Stephen comes into himself in the story not through any specific action (his departure is still only a project at the end of the novel), but by asserting the desire for a new form of expression. This aspect of his project is sometimes overlooked, but very explicit: "I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning." (208) Silence, exile and cunning may be negative as actions, but they are in fact framed as means of *expression*. Refusing to act according to standards liberates Stephen's power to deploy his own speech.

- 17 This underlies the dramatic impact on the narrative of one of the *Portrait*'s most salient stylistic features. A few pages after Stephen's statement of intent, the narrative voice disappears, and the text is presented entirely as excerpts from his personal journal. This structural shift is particularly abrupt: a conversation ends "Cranly did not answer" (209) and the next paragraph starts with a date "20 March". There is neither a change in chapter nor any preparation: no mention of the journal in question in the preceding pages, for instance. It is easy to view it as just a modernist trick or metatextual play on Joyce's part, but such an attitude leaves aside the actual impact that such a move has on the story structure. Suddenly, without any type of transition, the narrative voice abdicates its perspective and disappears entirely.
- 18 The change is all the more momentous as the struggle between competing voices and discourses is central to the novel. As Kershner argues, the *Portrait* recounts "Stephen's possession by the languages that surround him, and his attempts to appropriate them" (Kershner 151). Not only do books and manuals, like "Richmall Magnal's *Questions*", influence Stephen's own speech and thoughts. Not only does he speak pig-Latin half-learned from books with his classmates and model his poems on Byron's or Dante's, but the very fabric of the literary text is shaped and sometimes appropriated by other characters. Father Arnall's sermon, when Stephen is at school, is a dramatic example of how the very style of the *Portrait* can be taken over:

The hoarse voice of the preacher blew death into his soul. He suffered its agony. [...] And while the friends were still standing in tears by the bedside the soul of the sinner was judged. [...] At the last blast the souls of universal humanity throng towards the valley of Jehosaphat, rich and poor, gentle and simple, wise and foolish, good and wicked. [...] And lo, the supreme judge is coming! [...] O you hypocrites!  
(95-6)

- 19 For a moment, the third person narrative voice jumps from a description to free indirect speech ("the soul of the sinner was judged" is a transposition of father Arnall's sermon). Then the narrative past tense gives way to the present tense. Finally, the present progressive ("the supreme judge is coming") and exclamation points create a phatic tension, a call towards the receiver, while vocative forms such as "Lo" and "O" and the second person ("you hypocrites!") constitute direct injunctions. Within the narration, without any signs of direct speech, the sermon's words impose themselves upon the text, just as they terrify the young Stephen. This is why the final recourse to Stephen's journal is so important: it contrasts with earlier scenes, where the boy seemed to be prey to other discourses, at the mercy of the intervention of other voices that broke all distance and impeded any kind of reflexivity. The text, which contained

and sometimes bowed to the words of others, ends up becoming the very locus of expression which Stephen sought: the final words of the *Portrait* are his own.

- 20 Thus, Joyce's structural choice regarding the novel's ending highlights a certain position on the notion of authority. This ties in with Colin MacCabe's remarks on the construction of Joycean texts: "We can locate Joyce's position in the arrangement of discourses, in the montage. This, however, is not a position but an articulation"; there is then "no moment of dominance from which the reader's discourses are invited to a complacent and suppressed entry" (MacCabe 68). Just because his diary takes over the final pages doesn't mean that Stephen's voice aligns with Joyce's, or that he has become the authoritative Artist who creates his own texts. It simply places his words at the forefront of the "articulation" between discourses, as the privileged filter through which he is shown to appropriate and express his life-experiences.
- 21 Indeed, even as his own writing takes centre stage, Stephen is never construed as an authoritative or overarching voice. He never entirely becomes "the Artist", taking control of the narrative of his life. This highlights what Stephen Heath calls the "ambiviolences" within Joycean texts. As Heath affirms, Joyce's irony manifests itself primarily as "hesitancy", in discourses that "lack any kind of centre" and effect "a perpetual displacement of sense". In the *Portrait*, this means that Stephen's challenge to the doxa of his contemporaries does not end in a singular commitment (*in* Attridge and Ferrer 36). As a matter of fact, even in his own diary, Stephen is visibly as oscillating, reflexive and ironic as the narrative voice is towards him in the rest of the novel, which goes to show the proximity between these two instances. His self-criticism is constant: "1<sup>st</sup> April: Disapprove of this last phrase"; "Read what I wrote last night. Vague words for a vague emotion" (212). Just as Stephen always resisted the discourse of others, he reads his own words with a certain suspiciousness, seeking to distance himself from his own fragilities.
- 22 Furthermore, even in his own writing, Stephen remains acutely aware of the world around him, of the compromises he is making with society, both as an individual and as a writer. In doing so, he illustrates the proximity that Lecercle posits between the two concepts of "counter-interpellation" and "imposture" (Lecercle 1999, 110). Stephen never fully takes up a new status, but only starts to grasp the ability to negotiate his position, accepting the multiplicity of masks and performances—or impostures—that are necessary to respond to a multiplicity of interpellations. Cheryl Herr sees this as the cultural lesson that he has learned from the Church: he understands that there is no saviour to be found in solipsism, and that spiritual reform has to be communal, to encompass the "conscience of [the] race", simply because the oppression is itself a communal force (Herr 251). For instance, he understands the vanity of his posturing as a rebel, and sees his own gestures from the outside:
- Talked rapidly of myself and my plans. In the midst of it unluckily I made a sudden gesture of a revolutionary nature. I must have looked like a fellow throwing a handful of peas into the air. People began to look at us. (213)
- 23 Even as he entertains rebellious thoughts, he is still "chronicling" his own ridiculousness, and keenly aware of the way he looks to the "people" around him. Although he succeeds in getting the young woman's approval, his own opinion of himself is much more delicate, and his diary never really depicts him as rising above the posture of an unruly youth.

- 24 This is why, even to the last words of the *Portrait*, Stephen is still caught in negotiation, still posing as a young man. In this regard, it is important to contextualise one of the most famous statements of the novel, whose lyrical power has led certain critics to focus on Stephen's romanticism, without taking into account the ever-present and eminently modernist duality in his writing:

*April 26.* Mother is putting my new secondhand clothes in order. She prays now, she says, that I may learn in my own life and away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels. Amen. So be it. 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. (213)

- 25 His own declaration, which is certainly made to sound like a great artistic mantra, convoking such notions as that of the "soul" and the "race", is also a response to his mother's anxieties. Here as always, his outburst is caught in the middle of other words, relating to other people's pressures and expectations. The ironic "Amen" with which he concludes on his mother's advice, presenting it as a form of preaching, highlights the fact that he is still bound by old tropes and formulations, even if he is trying to overcome them. And I would argue that it is this ambivalence, the fact that his speech is still responding to other discourses, all the while pushing, tearing at the seams to escape them, which makes it so artistically fertile and rhetorically powerful. It may aspire to be a cry of victory, but it remains a mere statement of intent: the promise, without definite proof of commitment, of an artist-to-be. Christine Froula makes the argument that Joyce and Stephen's methods coincide in that, rather than "representing" lives under colonial rule, "the artist stages in his mind dialectical contests of values: dangers that call out different kinds of courage, battles against perils physical and metaphysical" (in Reynier and Ganteau 70). In this sense, Stephen's utterance can be read as a battle-cry, for a struggle that is visibly far from over. His words may be taken at face-value, as the first stone in the self-construction of the Artist, but they remain within this dialectic, still always reflecting the struggles of a young man trying to escape his father's and his mother's world.

## Conclusion

- 26 In the *Portrait*, Stephen does not merely rise to the status of artist, because such a story would be banal in its abstraction. It would only serve to reinforce a cultural stereotype and a practice of artist- and hero-worship which Joyce opposed. His heroes, and to some extent all modernist protagonists, are not the ones who step up and accomplish exceptional feats, but the ones who step aside, excepting themselves and veering from the beaten paths, especially those that supposedly lead to greatness. Indeed, what Joyce places in the forefront is the originality of a certain perspective and voice, a point of view that counter-interpellates the socially accepted narratives. Instead of stylising and synthesising the experience of the modern world into an expected, linear mould, Stephen accepts his own ramblings, his meandering thoughts, haunted as they are by the Daedalic streets of Dublin, by the words scribbled on the walls of urinals. Seeking a voice for these experiences, for the world that he sees and roams as a young man, is what makes him exceptional, and what enables him to create his own frame of artistic development.

27 As such, I would argue that Stephen's life-story carries a form of lesson, an ethical statement of intent which is never made explicit, but appears in the "articulation" of the story. As Jean-Michel Rabaté argues, the *Portrait* in its meandering and undecidability leads its readers to question their own outlook on narratives and on meaning. It is up to the reader to decide whether to believe in Stephen's ideals or to side with his self-defeating ironic statements, or perhaps rather to balance out these two competing voices, in order to form a certain picture of this "artist as a young man". This is how, to quote Rabaté still, the novel "leads to our self-portrait as readers", making us take part in Stephen's oscillations, and thus enables us to "learn the strategies of hesitation and undecidability" and to "internalize the parries that Stephen opposes to totalising and totalitarian nets: silence, exile and cunning" (Rabaté 1984, 40). By choosing to focus on the struggle of the artist rather than on its resolution, and on his continued process of evasion and self-doubt rather than on self-creation and assertion, Joyce propounds a certain vision of art, as a process of excepting oneself from the consensus. He gives his readers permission, and even some tools, to stray from the linear progress of the *Bildung*, looking for more meandering, more personal and intimate by-paths to appropriate the text and relate to Stephen's own, ever-elusive figure.

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## NOTES

1. See in particular the opposition that he proposes between individual heroes and a "mass of extras" each following uneventful scenarios (Tadié 194) and his insistence on the social function of classical hero myths (*ibid.* 138).
2. Althusser expands on the notion of interpellation and its relation to subjection in "Idéologie et Appareils Idéologiques d'Etat", and specifically mentions the family, school-system and the Church as prominent sources of interpellation (Althusser 92).
3. This question of quantifiable spirituality also refers back to Joyce's questioning of "simony" in the short-story "The Sisters", as analysed by Hélène Cixous (in Attridge and Ferrer 27). In Joycean narratives, forms of exchange haunt the sacred and constantly threaten its integrity.
4. To return to the notion of flânerie, David Frisby remarked in his interpretation of Walter Benjamin's essays on Baudelaire: "Flânerie [...] can be associated with a form of *looking*, observing (of people, social types, social contexts and constellations) a form of *reading the city* and its population (its spatial images, its architecture, its human configurations) and a form of *reading written texts*" (in Tester 94).

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## ABSTRACTS

In this article, I will argue that, far from trying to prove or actualize Stephen's exceptional status, Joyce's narrative in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* focuses instead on the process which this character undergoes, his intimate and complex drive to "except himself" from those around him, and the challenges which he faces in his endeavour. Through this progression, Joyce delineates a specific dialectics between the individuals and the powers that surround them, which ties in with his conceptions of literary authority as a whole. Against the worshippers of the Artist and the Author as a demiurgic character, he offers up a figure of elusiveness, always caught in a productive dialectics between the desire for transcendence and the irreducible multiplicity of common experience.

Dans cet article, je propose la thèse selon laquelle, loin de tenter de prouver ou d'actualiser le statut exceptionnel de Stephen, le récit joycien dans *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* s'attache avant tout au processus par lequel son personnage principal met en œuvre son désir de « s'excepter » de son propre monde, et met en scène les obstacles qu'il rencontre dans cette entreprise. Ce choix narratif permet à Joyce d'esquisser les contours d'une dialectique spécifique entre l'individu et les forces qui l'entourent, et de remettre en question les conceptions classiques de l'autorité littéraire. Face aux adorateurs de l'Artiste et de l'Auteur en tant que personnages démiurges, il dépeint en Stephen une figure évasive, toujours prise dans la dialectique fertile entre le désir de transcender sa condition et la multiplicité irréductible de l'expérience du quotidien.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Modernism, James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus, Author-theory, Exception, Ideology, Dialectics, Jean-Jacques Lecercle

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