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CREATING STEPHEN, THE ARTIST: Reinterpreting Joyce's
Portrait through Analysis of the Narrator

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Abstract

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man is viewed traditionally by many critics and scholars alike more or less, if not entirely, as Joyce's autobiographical novel. The identity of the narrator and its relationship to the focalizer and the narrative text are aspects that have thus not been sufficiently examined and explored.

An analysis of the passage when Stephen clarifies to himself his relationship to words which makes possible the revelation of his calling as an artist will reveal the intimacy of the narrator and Stephen, indicating they are one and the same. But it will also disclose the structure of the narration of *Portrait* to be the result of Stephen's very discovery of the meaning of words to him. And the view of Stephen as a narrator, as well as the main focalizer, turns *Portrait* into a work of fictional autobiography. His thoughts and contemplations monopolize the narration granting him exclusive authority over the presentation of his story. Furthermore, the suggestion in the title that he is also the writer begs the question of reliability. Can Stephen's story be trusted, or is *Portrait* a fabrication of his childhood in order to convince the world that he really was born to be an artist?

The opening and ending of the novel suggest that the narrative is not based on a true story of Stephen's life but instead that it is composed in the fantasy world which Stephen withdraws into as his meagre output does not meet his expectations. Thus Stephen writes his first novel entitled *A Portrait* with which he hopes to achieve the fame and receive the recognition he desires. But Stephen is still a struggling artist when the narrative finishes, hence the ambiguous ending as Stephen *is* the novel itself, its inconclusive narrative. Stephen's *A Portrait* is a glorious act of self-creation.

Keywords: A Portrait of the Artist, Narratology, Narrator, Stephen, Fantasy, Fabrication, Self-creation.

Amongst the great range of topics which are discussed in the many critical studies of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (*Portrait*), that of the narrator is barely given any attention at all. The general lack of interest is likely to originate in the novel's many autobiographical details taken from Joyce's real life which makes it easy to assume that it is simply the author himself who is the narrator. But the real person Joyce has been found by scholars to differ substantially from the fictional character Stephen and therefore the novel cannot be seen as 'based on a literal transcript of the first twenty years of Joyce's life' (Levin 45). This though has merely resulted in a slight modification in the view of the novel as being more or less autobiographical (Tindall 52) but has not fundamentally changed anything in regards to the identity of the narrator. However, the alteration from viewing *Portrait* as an autobiography by Joyce to it being semi-autobiographical entails also a difference in the identity of the narrator as a result of the ensuing distance between Joyce and Stephen. And although scholars and critics alike have shown that their names and personalities are not interchangeable in a straightforward way, *Portrait* still remains an intimately narrated story of Stephen's life. Hence, there is indeed justification in bringing the issue of who the narrator is and the consequences that this may have for interpretation to the forefront in an analysis of the novel.

The function of the narrator in a narrative text is crucial as not only is it in possession of the power to decide how characters and events are presented but its role also bears on interpretation of the work as a whole. The esteemed narratologist Mieke Bal defines the importance of the narrator thus in *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* 3rd ed.:

The identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the manner in which that identity is indicated in the text, and the choices that are implied lend the text its specific character. This topic is closely related to the notion of focalization, with which it has, traditionally, been identified. Narrator and focalization together determine the narrative situation. (18)

It is of greatest importance then to identify the narrator and examine the focalization of events in order to be able to determine the narrative situation in a text. In other words, to find out who speaks, and about what and whom. This poses a particularly complex problem in *Portrait* as the novel's several and intricate modes of narration preclude an ultimate and definite identification of the narrator. The critics who have discussed the topic of the narrator in their essays have approached the problem of its obscure identity in various ways.

R. B. Kershner Jr., for instance, in "Time and Language in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*" focuses on "Joyce's portrait of a consciousness" (604) and applies the impersonal term "the narrator" when referring to the teller of the story. But at the same time Kershner is aware that it is necessary to view the narrator as someone who knows Stephen's mind intimately. And Brian Finney in the essay "Suture in Literary Analysis" analyses narrative gaps and focalization in literature. Finney's close reading of the opening section of *Portrait* finds the adult Stephen to be "the actual storyteller" and "the narrating subject" (135). But John Paul Riquelme, the editor of the edition of *Portrait* used for the present essay, launches the brilliant suggestion in "Dedalus and Joyce Writing the Book of Themselves" that the narrative text of the novel is written by Stephen and Joyce together. Thus in collaboration they write the story of their respective lives: "A *Portrait* is both the author's biographical fiction and the autobiography of the fictional character" (368). But although each study in its own way successfully analyse the complexly interwoven relationships between the narrator and the narrative text in *Portrait*, they do not however fully explore the critical consequences of their findings.

The purpose of this essay is to examine the narrator and its relationship to the protagonist of the narrative text. Based on this analysis I will suggest that Stephen's story is not only told and written by Stephen himself but that the whole narrative is fabricated by him to create the image and the identity of and for himself as an artist. The ultimate aim of this essay is a critical reinterpretation of *Portrait* based on the key figure of the narrator.

There will be an initial discussion about the complexities of the narrative text in terms of narration and focalization. I will then do a close reading of a specific passage in which the presence of the narrator, the intimate relationship between the narrator and the protagonist, as well as the narrator's relationship to the whole narrative text is discerned. The analysis will then examine the title itself in detail upon which follows a discussion of the famous opening section and the equally infamous ending, which will enable a reinterpretation of *Portrait* as a great achievement of self-creation.

The narrative text of *Portrait* tells the story of a character by the name of Stephen Dedalus and describes in detail some of his experiences in childhood and adolescence but the manner in which it is narrated is both complex and perplexing. The rendering of events involves descriptions of such subtle sensations as "A film still veiled his [Stephen's] eyes but they burned no longer" (75), which imply the related experience to be the narrator's own. But confusingly Stephen is here not referred to in the first person as would be the norm but in the third person, which is indicative of the sentence being spoken by what in narratology is referred to as an external narrator.

In Bal's theory of narratology the external narrator (EN) is a term which "indicates that the narrating agent does not figure in the fabula [events] as an actor" (21), and it is generally associated with an objective narrator who refers to the characters in the third person. On the other hand, there is the character-bound narrator (CN) who is subjective and "is to be identified with a character, hence, also an actor in the fabula" (21), and who narrates the story autobiographically in the first person. Paradoxically then, the description of film covering Stephen's eyes shows that the narrator knows Stephen's experience of sensations at a first person level though it refers to Stephen as a character in the story apart from itself. It clearly identifies with Stephen although it keeps its distance and furthermore never reveals its own identity in the narration of events. Thus, the intricate blending of subjectivity and objectivity in *Portrait* results in a narration which is a complex amalgamation of a CN and an EN. Revealing its structure though is an extremely complicated task as the mode of narration constantly changes with the events described.

Monika Fludernik states two basic techniques of rendering action: "One of these uses a narrator to tell the story explicitly, whereas the other seems not to require any mediator at all" (35). The latter applies to scenic presentations of characters and events as, for example, in drama where the dialogue is spoken by the actors and

interpreted by the audience without intervention of any mediator. The dialogue form is frequently in use in *Portrait* and it lends many scenes the illusion of immediacy, as well as heightens the impression of the events taking place without any interference of the storyteller. In a slightly different way it is also the technique used in the presentation of the textual fragments on the first one and a half page of *Portrait*, which in fact resembles the mode of presenting narrative in film, as has been pointed out by various critics. Finney, for example, in the essay mentioned in the introduction, discusses narration and focalization in this passage in the context of camera technique, the reversed point-of-view shot which is so common in filmmaking.

Another mode of narration used in *Portrait* is that of free indirect speech. It is a writing technique which leaves out the syntactic frame of indirect speech and the stretch of speech being depicted is incorporated into the flow of the narrative (Fludernik 67). For example, the direct speech "Can I bring a friend to dinner?" spoken by father, can be rendered in two ways. First as indirect speech and this would make the sentence run "Father wanted to know whether he could bring a friend to dinner". Secondly, as free indirect speech which then would be expressed as "Father asked could he bring a friend to dinner". This writing technique has consequences for analysis of narration as "This means that it is not always easy to ascertain where speech representation begins or whether we have an instance of free indirect discourse at all" (Fludernik 67). The narrator in *Portrait* is to such high degree interwoven linguistically with the identity of the protagonist that it is at times virtually impossible to distinguish its words from those of Stephen's own.

Closely related to the topic of the narrator then is the aspect of focalization. Focalization is a narratological term and is defined by Bal as "the relationship between the vision, the agent that sees, and that which is seen", or simply, "A says that B sees what C is doing" (149). In other words, there is the narrator (A) who says that the focalizer (B) sees what the focalized object (C) is doing but there are exceptions to this structural relationship. Sometimes a vision is presented in a more direct way and "The different agents cannot then be isolated; they coincide" (Bal 149). This can be observed to be the narrative structure throughout in *Portrait* where the (auto)biographical narrator (A) merges with the main focalizer Stephen (B) who interacts with the world and its people (C), the focalized objects, without any mediating narration. It is a structure that creates depth in Stephen's character as it allows him to be both focalizer as well as a focalized object. "His own self is an

invisible focalized object (he can see and discuss his own thoughts and feelings)ö (Fludernik 38). But the narrator only allows Stephen the privilege of contemplation in the story and other people are never given the opportunity of contemplating Stephen.

The narrative situation determined by the relationship between narrator and focalizer raises in the case of *Portrait* the question of reliability. Any narrator who merges with the protagonist but renders the narrative in the third person clearly has the aim of telling a subjective truth öobjectivelyö. The narrator is thus granted an enormous amount of power as it has exclusive control over themes and ideas, as well as monopoly on descriptions of events and other characters. But more importantly, it has the only say about the personality and image of the protagonist, who as it turns out could actually be the narrator himself. And all of it rendered with a mode of narration suggesting öobjectiveö truth. Thus the narrator aims to depict as realistically as possible Stephen's struggle and growth through childhood and adolescence up to the realization of his artistic calling, and a little beyond.

There is however reason to be sceptical about the fictional truth of the narrator in *Portrait* because firstly öThe main sources of unreliability are the narrator's limited knowledge, *his personal involvement*, and his problematic value-schemeö (Rimmon-Kenan 100, my italics). Secondly, it stands to reason in view of the all-powerful position of the narrator and its subjective truth presented as öobjectiveö to take into consideration the possibility of the whole story being fabricated. Stephen's development into an artist could in fact be a myth created by and about himself which he in the guise of an öobjectiveö narrator presents as reality and truth in the form of a third person novel.

Is not the common view that *Portrait* is a story about Stephen's coming-of-age, about his growing into a budding artist and taking off on the wings of Icarus ó burnt or not ó exactly the interpretation the narrator hopes to elicit? Does not the dexterity with which the narrator hides in the narrative text arouse suspicions that it is not an innocent text, that there is more to it? In the following analyses I aim to show that Stephen's story is in fact a narrative told and written by Stephen to create in the eyes of the world the identity and image of himself as an artist.

But the degree of reliability granted the narrator depends on its personal involvement not only in the narration itself but also in the relationship to the main focalizer. The intimate connection between narrator, focalizer, and narrative text is revealed in a passage at the end of chapter four at the moment when Stephen is

contemplating his relationship to words and language, opening the doors to his future, and to what he deems as his true calling in life

After having declined the offer by the director of the Jesuit school to create a career for himself within the church, Stephen is walking about aimlessly in Dublin contemplating his rejection of the proposition. "All through his boyhood he had mused upon that which he had so often thought to be his destiny and when the moment had come for him to obey the call he had turned aside, obeying a wayward instinct" (145). Stephen then passes on to an unstable bridge where he remains musing on what might have been had he accepted the offer. He has just left a life of security behind and he now finds himself at a fork in the road of his life. The event occurs shortly before the famous bird-girl epiphany and it is now that Stephen makes a discovery which will bring fundamental changes to his outlook on himself and the world around him.

He drew forth a phrase from his treasure and spoke it softly to him:

-A day of dappled seaborne clouds.

The phrase and the day and the scene harmonized in a chord. Words. Was it their colours? He allowed them to glow and fade, hue after hue: sunrise gold, the russet and green of apple orchards, azure of waves, the greyfringed fleece of clouds. No, it was not their colours: it was the poise and balance of the period itself. Did he then love the rhythmic rise and fall of words better than their associations of legend and colour? Or was it that, being as weak of sight as he was shy of mind, he drew less pleasure from the reflection of the glowing sensible word through the prism of a language manycoloured and richly storied than from the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose? (145-46)

The passage is traditionally viewed as important because it is "The crucial moment of the book, which leads to the revelation of his [Stephen's] name and calling" (Levin 51). However, beyond this observation, which incidentally is what the narrator wants the text to be about, there are other pieces of information of greater importance.

To begin with, it is possible to observe the presence of the narrator at two different points in the excerpt. The first sentence, "He drew forth a phrase from his treasure and spoke it softly to him", is not very likely to be thought or spoken by Stephen himself. Stephen would not comment on the act of coming up with a quotation the very instant it is happening but instead it is the narrator looking back at what must have taken place at that moment. The narrator describes the invisible phenomena which happened in a flash of a second in order to prepare the reader to follow the thought process leading up to Stephen's insight. It becomes even clearer if

in the passage the pronoun *ōI* is substituted for *ōhe*, a substitution which is possible at many other places in *Portrait* and still retain the impression that the sentence could have been formed in Stephen's mind. But no one would say to themselves in the moment it happens *ōI* am drawing forth a phrase from my treasure and speaking it softly to myself, hence, it is obvious that the words belong to the narrator. This is an aspect of the narration in *Portrait* which is also discussed by Seymour Chatman in *Story and Discourse*. Chatman looks at the passage when Stephen is about to perform at the theatre and goes backstage to prepare, only to find himself *ōamid the garish gas and the dim scenery* (*Portrait* 74). Chatman observes that *ōThe perceptual point of view is Stephen's, but the voice is the narrator's. Characters' perceptions need not be articulated - Stephen is not saying to himself the words 'garish gas and dim scenery'; the words are the narrator's. This is a narrator's report* (154). The second point in the passage of *Portrait* where this kind of narration can be detected is the phrase: *ōHe allowed them to glow and fade*. And as the probability of Stephen thinking to himself *ōI'm allowing them to glow and fade* is fairly small these words would not be said or thought in the moment by Stephen but they are instead, in Chatman's words, a narrator's report.

Apart from the presence of the narrator in the text, his biased attitude toward Stephen can also be detected. The phrase *ōHe drew forth a phrase from his treasure and spoke it softly to him* contains a word which clearly gives this relationship away. *ōTreasure* means wealth or in plural valuable things (*ōTreasures*) and thus Stephen digging up a quotation out of his *ōtreasure* has the implication that Stephen is in possession of great wealth. Whether a collection of poetic lines stored inside one's mind is to be regarded as something of great value, which apparently is the narrator's view, remains uncontested in *Portrait*, as other characters are not allowed to contemplate Stephen, only he them. But it does not require a great leap of the imagination to envision what Stephen's father, who at one point calls Stephen a *ōlazy bitch of a brother* (152), would think of his son's accumulated *ōwealth* had he been given the chance to contemplate the matter. Furthermore, the quotation itself *ōA day of dappled seaborne clouds* is actually a *misquotation* of a line from a Hugh Miller poem, and should read: *ōA day of dappled, breeze-borne clouds* (Gifford 219). That Stephen's misquotation is allowed to pass uncorrected by the narrator points to an empathy with the protagonist which is anything but *ōobjective*, although there is also the possibility of intended irony here. If that is the case, the question is whether it is

only at the expense of Stephen being in possession of a false treasure or as the misquotation passes unnoticed whether the narrator too gets his share from the author of *Portrait* (Joyce). Ironical or not the passage shows that the narrator cannot be viewed as the objective teller of Stephen's story it clearly aims at being.

The most important aspect of this passage though, for the purpose of this essay that is, is the content of what Stephen is saying and what this entails in terms of the narration. Stephen is musing on the poetic line he has just spoken to himself and is questioning what it is that he finds beautiful with words: "Words. Was it their colours?" That Stephen arrives at a point in his development when he needs to define to himself his relationship to language comes as no surprise as he began very early in his life to ponder the meaning of words in a serious manner. He thought at that time it was a process which would lead him to a greater understanding of the world. But here as an adolescent he realizes that his fundamental love for words has nothing to do with what the words refer to in the surrounding world. Instead, Stephen discovers that his love for language has its roots in "the poise and balance of the period itself", in other words, in the placement of the full stop and by extension the use of punctuation in written language. This revelation startles him slightly and he asks himself: "Did he then love the rhythmic rise and fall of words better than their associations of legend and colour?" And further, whether it might be the case that it is because he is near-sighted and withdrawn that he finds "the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose" more pleasurable.

It is significant that Stephen makes no attempt to find any answers to his questions but instead accepts his insight without resistance. Thus it is a fact that he is more interested in grammar and punctuation than in the meaning of words in stories and descriptions. It is also a fact that it is the contemplation of his own emotional inner life reflected in subtle language which is of importance to him. Thus, in this passage Stephen not only prepares the way for the revelation of his calling as an artist, which as mentioned above is the objective of the narrator to convey but he also more importantly implies the type of artist he will to become. Stephen will become an artist who discards the meaning of words in the real, outer world for his own inner, emotional experience "mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose."

The change that takes place in Stephen's mind at this point in his development obviously has a great impact on how he behaves and interacts with other people from

this moment on. The first manifestation of his decision to prioritize his inner experiences of reality to that of the world outside of him can be seen right after the *discovery* of his relationship to language. It is a passage which traditionally is seen mainly by critics as associating Stephen with the Greek myth of Icarus, which of course is the intention of the narrator. Stephen's thoughts drift off, taking him to mainland Europe and its great variety of people and from a distance he hears his friends calling out his name to him, teasing him in mock Greek. But his friends' appearances have now lost their significance to him and he contemplates *How characterless they looked; their words no longer affect him as he parried their banter with easy words* (147). Stephen lets himself be carried away by his imagination and begins to draw a parallel between himself and the Greek inventor Daedalus, his namesake. And using the ancient Greek to justify his chosen vocation in a state of euphoria Stephen exclaims: *Yes! Yes! Yes! He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul, as the great artificer whose name he bore, a living thing, new and soaring and beautiful, impalpable, imperishable* (149). It is unquestionable that these passages which take place at the end of chapter four signify a radical change in Stephen's behaviour. It is in the beginning of chapter five that his father calls him a lazy bitch and that his friend MacCann calls out, *Dedalus, you're an antisocial being, wrapped up in yourself* (155). Thus, by distancing himself from his friends and by fantasizing around his name, viewing it as a prophecy of his future, Stephen not only removes himself from his immediate surroundings but simultaneously also begins to live in a world of his own.

The scene with the wading girl in the water (150), which is traditionally analysed for Stephen's epiphany or its bird imagery, demonstrates with clarity how Stephen from now on will relate to other people. As Stephen is strolling along the beach feeling happy and *alone and young and wild and wild-hearted* he suddenly finds himself in front of a young girl wading in the water. He stops and stares at her legs, seeing in her *the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird*, and when she perceives his presence behind her she turns around and returns his gaze *without shame or wantonness*. They do not exchange a single word and the description of the event in the text gives the impression of a meeting between two human beings mutually and tacitly understanding each other. During this meeting Stephen works himself up emotionally into a state of extreme ecstasy and eventually shouts out *Heavenly God!* and he runs off and, *On and on and on and on he strode, far out*

over the sands. The narrator renders what took place on the beach with Stephen standing wild and wild-hearted staring at the girl's thighs exclusively with Stephen as the focalizer which results in the girl being objectified as her thoughts are not focalized. The response from her as perceived by Stephen might very well be a projection of his own feelings in the moment and considering that Stephen is in a state of ecstasy it is indeed probable.

It is not too difficult to imagine the event from the girl's point of view though, turning around and seeing an ecstatic young man in front of her who is staring at her thighs. It is not a far-fetched proposition that she only for a long time suffered his gaze and then quietly withdrew her eyes from his because she was afraid that he was a lunatic that might hurt her and did not take her eyes off him until she was certain he would not. Stephen clearly has no intention of striking up a conversation with her or asking her out. In fact he has no interest in her at all apart from the significance of her appearance to him which makes him ecstatic. The drastic change that has taken place inside Stephen since his discovery is made clear when the meeting with the woman at the end of chapter two is compared with the encounter with the young girl in the water.

However, the responsibility for Stephen's lack of interest in the young bird-like girl for any other sake but his own self-absorbed emotional response rests in fact ultimately with the narrator. It ought to be given close attention as it reveals that the narrator and Stephen share the same detached relationship to other people. Rendering the scene with Stephen as the sole focalizer the narrator unwittingly discloses his relationship to narration which involves a lack of interest in the reality of any other person but Stephen's. And Stephen's relationship to language is based on what words mean to him not what they refer to in the real world, which by extension distances him from the reality of other people too. It is at this fundamental level of being that the identity of the narrator and that of Stephen merge into one and precisely because the narrator and Stephen relate to people in the same distant and self-absorbed way. This is the fundamental reason why *Portrait* is narrated with Stephen as main/sole focalizer and why Stephen from the moment of his discovery holds other people at a distance and is viewed as wrapped up in himself.

The narrator and Stephen also share the same relationship to language. Stephen's love [for] the rhythmic rise and fall of words is reflected in the pedantic attention to details in the narration of the description of the bird-girl. The passage is

viewed by Hugh Kenner as a rhetorical exercise (the kind of thing Stephen would write on his way home) (83). And Levin sees it as a moment when Stephen dips self-consciously into his word-hoard for suitable epithets and a paragraph of word-painting which is not easy to visualize (51). Indeed, Stephen's experience of the meeting with the wading girl and the manner in which his impression of her is related by the narrator expose their interwoven linguistic relationship, to wit: Stephen's indulgence in words is very much in line with how the event is narrated. Stephen the character is thus also Stephen the narrator.

In *Portrait* then Stephen tells the story of how he was shaped and formed into an artist by the events of his childhood and adolescence. All the events and experiences in the narrative lead up to the moment of the revelation of his artistic calling. And Stephen's artistic calling is that of a writer. This is important to note because the fact that Stephen aspires to become a writer begs the question whether he is not also the author of his own story. Stephen writes his first novel and draws heavily on his upbringing because he is young, inexperienced, and incurably self-absorbed. But he writes with an attempt at objectivity and refers to himself in the third person because it lends the narrative more credibility than if it were told in the first person. And as the title of *Portrait* in fact offers this suggestion an examination of it is in place.

In the study *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* Gérard Genette states that To a greater extent than perhaps any other paratextual element, the title raises problems of definition and requires careful analysis (55). In the examination of titles there is a terminological distinction between the different parts of which the title consists. Genette's terms for those parts are title, subtitle, and genre indication. Thus in the title of Voltaire's novel *Zadig or Destiny, an Oriental Tale* the term title would be *Zadig*. The subtitle would be ascribed to *or Destiny* whereas *an Oriental Tale* would be seen as the genre indication (56). The terms can appear in the title of a work either as a whole, individually, or in combinations such as in Sartre's *Nausea, A Novel* which consists of the parts of title + genre indication (57). But in the title *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* another variation can be observed. The initial *A Portrait* is both title as well as genre indication as portrait has the implication of biography or of autobiography. And *of the Artist as a Young Man* is then subtitle as it is information which elaborates that already given in title.

The function of the title, according to Genette, is to describe the text by one of its [two] characteristics (89), the thematic and the rhematic. A simplification of Genette's discussion would be that a thematic title is directly or symbolically related to the subject matter of the text (81) whereas a rhematic title is a generic title such as *Odes*, *Satires*, *Poems*, and *Autobiography* (86). There are also mixed titles in which the element of the thematic and the rhematic are combined. Genette exemplifies with titles such as *Treatise of Human Nature* and *Portrait of a Lady* and points out that "All titles of this kind begin by designating the genre and therefore the text, then go on to designate the theme" (88-89). It is thus a category of titles into which *Portrait* also falls. Viewed in this way the beginning *A Portrait* designates the genre of the novel and *the Artist as a Young Man* the theme of the narrative. But although this analysis gives a clear indication of what the title concerns, it does not reveal the particulars of the actual wording. And, underlines Riquelme, "Title, epigraph, and journal are the gates into and out of Joyce's work" (368). Thus, a closer examination of the title of *Portrait* is called for.

The title *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* looks deceptively simple and straightforward at first glance but a further enquiry into meaning and references will reveal its complexity. The word "Portrait" has two different meanings. It is first of all "a painting, photograph, drawing etc. of a person", and secondly, for example, in a book or film a portrait of something is "a detailed description or representation of it" ("Portrait"). The first meaning suggests the portrayal of one specific character which is what Kenner reads into the title as he views the novel as a painting in words of Joyce's early years. The other meaning of "portrait" is that of a detailed description of a character seen as representative of a group of people which in the particular case of *Portrait* would be artists. Thus, both meanings are applicable to the title and the fact that it says "the artist" as opposed to the more generic "an artist" is not important. "The artist" also carries the meaning of representation as in the sentence, "The artist who wants to be successful needs to work hard". Thus, it is quite a challenge to attempt an interpretation of what kind of portrait *Portrait* is meant to draw and complicating the task even further is the use of the very word "artist" which also has two different meanings. The first is the definition of "someone who paints, draws, and makes sculptures" whereas the other refers to "someone who creates things with great skill and imagination" ("Artist"). And to make matters even worse there is yet another

meaning of the word *ōartistō* which was in use in Dublin at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Discussing what he views as the many ironies in the novel Tindall comes up against the question of what kind of artist Stephen actually is and whether in fact Stephen can be considered an artist at all. Stephen's villanelle is dismissed as a *ōmediocre poemō* when contrasted to Stephen's aesthetic theory, a comparison which leads Tindall to pay particular attention to the word *ōArtistō* in the title.

Indeed, the word *Artist* in the title may be the irony of ironies and the prime ambiguity of an ironic ambiguous portrait. Oliver Gogarty, Joyce's Mulligan, wanting to run Joyce down, says that Stephen is no artist at all; for in Ireland the word *ōartistō* means deceiver or faker. Maybe, without intending to, Gogarty has hit upon what Joyce intended. Also aware of this meaning, Joyce may have implied it with all the others. (67)

The idiomatic meaning of *ōartistō* as *ōcon artistō* opens up for viewing the narrative text as the work of a deceiver, in other words, a fabrication by Stephen. For this reading it is necessary that Stephen is the author of the novel and this is a possibility, as mentioned earlier, that is suggested in the title.

In *Joyce Effects: On Language, Theory, and History* Derek Attridge discusses the two-way relationship between deconstructive criticism and Joyce. It is enabled by the double genitive of the preposition *ōofō* which can be both subjective and objective. In other words, *ōdeconstructive criticism of Joyce* would have to be that which Joyce practices upon us as much as that which we practice upon Joyce (23). Furthermore, Attridge points out, the double genitive is something which strikes Stephen at several points in *Ulysses* showing that Joyce was well aware of the ambiguity. However, the ambivalence of the preposition *ōofō* is of particular significance for the present discussion of the title of *Portrait*.

Thanks to the same ambiguity of *ōofō*, the title *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, instead of designating a young man as he appears in a painting that is the work of his older self, might just refer to a painting *by* a youthful artist (a possibility not without critical consequences). (22)

Reading the novel as a portrait painted in words not only *of* the artist but also *by* the artist attributes the narrative text of *Portrait* to Stephen. The subtext of the title would then read: *A Description of the Childhood and Adolescence of and by Stephen Dedalus still a Writer in his Youth*. Stephen who is still a young and aspiring artist writes his first novel, an autobiography entitled *A Portrait*. The novel describes his

childhood and adolescence in an effort to convince the world that he is the great artist he sees himself as. It is a recognition he does not yet have from the world but which he hopes to achieve through the publication of his realistic and truthful novel. And yet he unwittingly reveals himself as a manipulator and a fabricator of the narrative at the beginning and at the end of the novel.

The first section of the first chapter is arguably the most quoted and analysed passage of the whole narrative text of *Portrait*. Traditionally it is viewed as important because "Many of the motifs that help make *A Portrait* dense and coherent are stated in the first two pages." It reveals Stephen's "delight in all the five senses" and introduces key words such as "road, cow, water, woman, flower, and bird" (Tindall 86). Kenner too views the section to "enact the entire action in microcosm" and here "An Aristotelian catalogue of senses, faculties, and mental activities is played against the unfolding of the infant conscience" (33). The "infant conscience" is an important point as the passage generally is viewed as presenting with its textual fragments and its simple sentences the conscience level of a child. Mitze M. Brunsdale, for example, claims that "Joyce established a revolutionary fictional technique of "double vision" with the deceptively simple opening of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*" (56).

Brunsdale argues that the opening line "Once upon a time..." which belongs in traditional fairy tales narration and "appears without quotation marks" gives the impression of the author directly addressing his audience. This in turn "re-creates a familiar childhood experience and immediately allows Joyce's audience to identify with "the nice little boy". And "Joyce's ellipses then shift the storytelling point of view abruptly to Stephen, reflecting the child's sudden precocious awareness of the difference between fiction and reality" (56-57). But whether the short paragraphs of the opening section can be viewed as fragments taken from the conscience of an infant is questionable because the narration is not as innocent as its immediacy initially gives the impression of being.

The opening of *Portrait* displays an intricate relationship between the narrator and the focalizer, hence, detailed analysis is required to separate them. The narration presents textual fragments seemingly without any intervention on part of the narrator in order to depict a baby's and a child's perception of the surrounding world. But a close reading reveals that there is a point at which the narrator, an older Stephen, can be detected adjusting the story to suit his objective which is to create the image of himself as having been born an artist. It is the following paragraph:

He was baby tuckoo. The moocow came down the road where Betty Byrne lived: she sold lemon platt. (5)

The crucial information to pay attention to here is not that Stephen's father told Stephen a story when he was an infant and so planted in him the seed of love for language because this is exactly how the narrator wants the text to be read. What is important is the first of these sentences because in essence it says that Stephen is able to perceive his identity as baby tuckoo as an infant. This inconsistency sets off a row of questions and Finney rightly asks "When did Stephen realize that he was a baby tuckoo? At the time his father told the story? Or a little later? Or only now that as an adult he is telling the story? Is this the experience of Stephen at the time he heard the story? Or is this an explanation by the adult Stephen of how that experience originated?" (135). It is not feasible in my view that Stephen as a baby could form the concept of himself as baby tuckoo. Thus the connection must have been made at a later stage; hence the sentence is a reconstruction of the experience as opposed to an actual experience related in the moment.

There is in the opening section another, clearer example which shows the presence of the older Stephen, and which is also used by Finney in his analysis:

When you wet the bed first it is warm then it gets cold. His mother put on the oil sheet. That had a queer smell. (5)

The first sentence is deceptive as it very well could be the language of a child as it is simple and without punctuation, for example, a comma after "warm" (Finney 136). But also the word order points to it being spoken by a child as an adult would probably say "it is first warm". The narratorial "slip" to observe though is the use of the pronoun "you" because, as Finney points out, "The isolated occurrence of the use of the second-person is enough to signal the presence of a different voice. 'You' has the force of 'one'." To generalize about experience is an adult trait and Finney draws the conclusion that "the entire narration is being rendered in the voice (to be distinguished from the focus) of an adult narrator" (136). Although there is no way of knowing how much of an "adult" Stephen is at the time of composing his novel, he is at least old enough to narrate and write at a very advanced level of English. Stephen proves furthermore to be a dexterous manipulator of texts as he manages to hide his presence in the narrative to such a high degree that he almost renders himself invisible. Stephen's exceptional talent for working with language in combination with his vivid imagination and need for confirmation open up for the possibility of the

narrative being manipulated and fabricated. And it is in fact in the fantasy world of the fairy tale that Stephen's story begins.

Marguerite Harkness in *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man: Voices of the Text* actually discusses the narrative text in the context of a fairy tale (36) based on the opening lines.

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming along the road and this moocow that was coming along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo.....

His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face.

As opposed to Brunsdale's view of this piece of text as clear to the reader who immediately will understand that s/he is supposed to assume the mentality of a child, Harkness points out, correctly in my view, that the opening lines are quite bewildering to the adult reader. The question marks concern the first three lines which together make up a classic fairy tale formula and which promises a children's story. But as *Portrait* is not such a story, as it is by now a classic book "The opening immediately disrupts our expectations" (36). Although Harkness does not mention the fact that the initial paragraph appears ambiguously without quotation marks, it is implied in the discussion about the confusion which the unidentified voice behind the words gives rise to.

Harkness suggests that "One way of making sense of this story is to take the cue from the opening and assume that this story is to be like a fairy tale" which "will have a way of making possible the impossible or making tolerable the intolerable" (37). Harkness then proceeds to analyse the fairy-tale elements in the text by incorporating, convincingly in my view, important events of *Portrait* into the classical fairy tale formulaic narrative. For example, children in fairy tales are punished if they misbehave and could be eaten by wolves, and Stephen is very much threatened by eagles pulling out his eyes already in the beginning of the story (39).

Thus as Stephen is writing his novel he unconsciously discloses the fantasy world he actually lives in as an aspiring, unrecognized, yet talented writer. And fantasy, Sheldon Brivic points out in an illuminating essay on Stephen's delusions, is a level of the imaginary which "allows us to accept the limits of reality". And, Brivic continues, citing the Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek, "true art involves manipulating censorship of the underlying fantasy of a representation" in such a way as to reveal the radical falsity of the fantasy. And *Portrait*, Brivic

observes, "demonstrates the illusion of fantasy, primarily because each chapter concludes with a solution, giving Stephen Dedalus a strong sense of identity that later turns out to be no more than a delusion" (69).

Pressurized by the surrounding world to make something out of himself after having declined the offer of a career within the church Stephen's output is meagre and mediocre. The deep need for success and artistic recognition leads him to experiment with form and narration in his first novel entitled *A Portrait*. But "The goal of this narrative is a truth that is constructed and evanescent" (Brivic 72). That is why at the end of all the five chapters there is a feeling of triumph which never lasts. It is a manufactured story which is fabricated in order to win over a hostile world which has no faith in him as an artist. Stephen does not receive confirmation of his artistic aspirations at any point or from anyone in the story. Manipulation of the truth at first becomes a necessary evil to him. Fabrication permeates increasingly his view of himself and his life as he must keep holding on to his dreams to become the great artist he sees himself as, despite disappointments and backfired projects.

But the journey on which Stephen has embarked from the moment of discovering his calling has brought him the life of a recluse. And "The reality Stephen encounters through his aesthetic is a projection of fantasy in which beauty consists of structures in the mind" (Brivic 75). And the bird-girl scene discussed above is a perfect example of this. Paradoxically, the more perceptive Stephen becomes as to the truth about himself and the world the further he is projected into the world of fantasy, into a world of his own. It is a state of being of which the form of the diary is an expression.

Stephen's diary entries have caused a lot of consternation and controversy over the years amongst critics. But in a study of the complex relationship between narrator and protagonist in *Portrait* Kershner launches the suggestion that

whereas the diary itself is Stephen's immediate voice, what we experience in *A Portrait* is a selection from and a situating of that diary: Stephen's words, in this perspective, are merely *objets trouvés* embedded in a narration which, as in interior monologue, has become tacit. (605)

The proposition that *Portrait* has its origin in Stephen's diary entries in fact implies that Stephen is the writer of the novel. Kershner's brilliant suggestion does not only take into account that Stephen is a recluse jotting down his impressions and feelings in his diary but it also accounts for them appearing at the end of the narrative. The

writing form of the diary entails non-closure and as Stephen is still struggling he does not know what tomorrow may bring. That is why *Portrait* can only finish the way it does: on the note of the *dream* of achieving greatness.

There is no closure to Stephen's story and no possibility for an ultimate definition of his character but these are not technical flaws as some critics would have it. On the contrary, they are the very triumph of his toil as a writer because he *is* the artistic expression of *Portrait* itself. To say along with Harkness (and there many such critics) that "Stephen is doomed" (110) is to completely misunderstand the objective of the whole novel. Stephen's aim is ultimately to create an identity for himself and by himself as a great writer and at the same time present this image to the world as based on a true story. His is the ultimate act of self-creation, heralding the new age of individualism, narcissism, and obsession with personal image so massively important and prevalent in post-WWII mass culture. The only question is what kind of artist this makes Stephen.

Tindall's discussion above on the double meaning of the word "artist" contains another observation concerning the diary entry of 26 April and the phrase "to forge in the smithy of my soul" (224). There is also a double meaning of the word "forge", and "Plainly", observes Tindall, "what Stephen means is to create things in the manner of Daedalus, the Grecian smith. But this word has another less creditable meaning as for example "in the sense of forging checks" in which the meaning is that of a "deceiver or faker; and Stephen gives himself away again" (67).

But the whole novel being either a serious manipulation of the truth or a complete fabrication, turning Stephen in one sense into a con artist, does not in any way diminish Stephen's great achievement. "Fantasy shapes reality at its foundation, so that the nascent aspect of fantasy is the source of creative vitality and even of strength", argues Brivic (76) and it is hard to disagree. Stephen has reached his objective with the novel and thus his self-creating work is a resounding success. How else to explain that his narrative text remains discussed to this day, almost one hundred years after its composition?

And the present essay is written as a contribution to the world-wide debate about *Portrait*. It is Stephen's discovery that the associations of words relating to the surrounding world have no meaning to him but that it is his inner emotional response to them that matters which distances him from reality and from other people. Through analysis of the opening section of the novel it is revealed that Stephen's story can be

read as a fairy tale. Furthermore, it is shown that he manipulates truth and reality by putting adult words and concepts into the mind and mouth of himself as an infant. As an adult he is an ivory tower writer with a meagre output who fabricates the truth about his life and sets it down in his diary which is then used as material for his novel. But he has to live up to his claim of having been born an artist and in an effort to convince the world and possibly himself he sets out to write a novel entitled *A Portrait*. His novel will serve mainly two purposes for him: to receive acclaim and recognition as a great artist and to create the image and identity of himself as that very artist. Stephen achieved both.

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