



УДК: 821.111.09-31 Џојс Џ.

Примљено: 24. септембра 2010. године

Прихваћено: 20. октобра 2010. године

Оригинални научни рад

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‘I IS ANOTHER’: HUMANISTIC CONCEPTION OF IDENTITY AND EXISTENTIAL OPTIONS IN JAMES JOYCE’S *A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN*

This paper aims at presenting and examining Joyce’s first novel entitled *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* which introduces us to the life and artistry of Joyce himself. In addition to this, the special emphasis will be placed on the intellectual growth of the fictional counterpart of Joyce himself, Stephen Dedalus who, for the sake of embracing his true vocation as an artist guided by the unflinching devotion to both truth and beauty, exiles himself from the stifling conventionality of his homeland – Ireland. Envisioning the culture of Ireland as imbued with a series of “nets” embodied in nationality, church, and family which restrain the initial stimulus of his soul, Joyce’s alter ego refuses to bow down before the authority of any institution other than the authority of his art. Much of this paper has been inspired by the work of humanist philosopher Erich Fromm, whose ideas have prompted me to view Joyce in the light of the great Humanist tradition focusing on man’s innate capability of creating valid ethical criteria he/she is to live by.

Key words: humanistic ethics vs. authoritarian ethics, culture, revolt, artistic vocation, imagination, language, exile.

“I shall try myself against the powers of the world. All things are inconstant except the faith of the soul, which changes all things and fills their inconstancy with light. And though I seem to have been driven out of my country here as a misbeliever, I have found no man yet with a faith like mine.”

James Joyce, in a letter to Lady Gregory, 1902¹

¹ See: *A Letter to Lady Gregory, 4 December 1902*, in: *Collected letters of James Joyce*, ed. Stuart Gilbert, Vol. III, The Viking Press, pp. 268.



It is impossible to fully examine and comprehend Joyce's *Portrait* without the previous consideration of the very basic ideas of humanistic ethics. What defines the great tradition of humanism is essentially the faith in man's reason, imagination, and autonomy as the vital backbone and crucial impetus for the awe-inspiring accomplishments of humanity for the last few centuries. According to Erich Fromm, a German social psychologist, psychoanalyst and humanist philosopher, Western culture has been justifiably proud of its immense confidence in the strength of man's natural potentialities who has, by virtues of his reason, managed to master nature and secure himself the opportunity to live in a dignified and productive fashion by providing the necessary material conditions. Nevertheless, modern age is distinguished by man's growing uneasiness, bewilderment, and powerlessness. On the one hand, Fromm claims that man has been able to subdue nature to his own advantage thus becoming its master and simultaneously gaining remarkable knowledge about matter. On the other hand, man's existence is filled with the sense of insecurity and insignificance both in his individual life and in society, which is further aggravated by his ignorance "with regard to the most important and fundamental questions of human existence: what man is, how he ought to live, and how the tremendous energies within man can be released and used productively" (Fromm, *Man for himself*, 1949: 4-10). The distressing feeling of modern man's moral confusion may be related to that which T. S. Eliot had called "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy that is modern history".² Eliot was referring not only to the rise of atheism, but also to the rejection of religious authority and replacement of the Christian God with new "gods", "the abstract intellectual forces like Dialectic and the earthly values like Money" (Pericles Lewis 2006: 19-27).³ Fromm sees these dislocations as originating in the departure from the principal ideas of the Enlightenment. Namely, the Enlightenment period of the eighteenth century Europe gave expression to the idea of man's power and dignity, providing him with the energy and valour he needed for the purpose of fulfilling "the fondest hopes of mankind and the achievement of the greatest happiness for the greatest number" (Fromm 1949: 4).

Humanistic concept of man's inherently good nature shared by the philosophers of the Enlightenment has incited man's hopes and beliefs that he could live using his own reason and intelligence rather than depending on God or religion, as a means of formulating viable ethical judgements in distinguishing between good and evil. This idea is the quintessence of Humanism. In contrast to it, anti-humanistic views of human nature have arisen with the emergence of the Modern age. According to disciples of anti-humanistic ethics, man is seen as a creature dependent upon the authority of the state and church, and therefore unable to come up with valid moral standards, the very source of which are the State and Church. One of the defining characteristics of Modernity is its tendency towards dismantling and deconstructing the very idea of heroism and greatness. All the great figures that may have appeared to be legendary, those heroic figures are inexorably being undermined and deflated by the culture's persistent suspicion of them. The era we are living in is the era of privation, scarcity, or as F. S. Fitzgerald had beautifully articulated it in his novel *The Great Gatsby*: the era of "shrinkage and of thinning briefcase of enthusiasm" (F. S. Fitzgerald 1993: 115). This

² See: Pericles Lewis, "Religion", in: *Modernist Literature and Culture*, eds., David Bradshaw and Kevin J. H. Dettmar, Blackwell, USA, 2006, pp. 19–28.

³ See: Pericles Lewis, "Religion", in: *Modernist Literature and Culture*, eds., David Bradshaw and Kevin J. H. Dettmar, Blackwell, USA, 2006, pp. 19–28.



is also the era of suspicion. Freud once emphasized in one of his lectures that he had brought the plague with him – the plague being the age of fattening suspicion and deflation of man's autonomy and his intrinsic goodness.

Given the fact that man cannot live and behave without ethical criteria, his greatest strivings are invested in discovering and laying foundations for those criteria, and the only path to answering the question of the meaning of his existence is through reason upon which moral patterns can only be based. However, the notion of man's nature has been subject to changes over centuries. Western thought is permeated with two opposing outlooks on human nature. Many philosophers and theologians in the past discussed the issue of human nature, and the controversy with regard to man's essential goodness/evilness may be seen as originating from the thought of: Socrates, Augustine, Pelagius, Thomas Aquinas, Pico della Mirandola, Luther, Calvin, Nietzsche etc. Whereas followers of humanistic ethics insist on man's inborn goodness, their opponents, i.e. the representatives of the philosophy of authoritarianism tend to oppose this view by adhering to the conviction that humans are essentially "infected" with the following evil traits: aggressiveness to their fellow men, envy, laziness, and jealousy. This sinister characterization is apparently calculated so as not to leave much room and hope for man's goodness. Socrates's philosophy centered on the idea that man's errant actions derived from his ignorance. Socrates thus equated vice with error. Yet in the Old Testament we find the disturbing idea that the history of humanity "started with an act of sin" (Fromm 1949: 211). This idea argues that all human beings are essentially sinful as a result of the original sin, i.e. Adam's fall. Accordingly, many theologians, in particular Augustine and Pelagius, cherished adverse interpretations of Adam's fall. Augustine held man's nature to be infected with evilness resulting from the fall. In fact Augustine suggested that not only are human beings placed and created in a horrifying environment, but that they also take an active role in contributing to their own viciousness. Pelagius opposed Augustine claiming that Adam's sin did no harm to other human beings but himself. He thus denied Augustine's doctrine of original sin by posing his belief in man's incorrupt powers as Adam's powers were before the fall. This battle was unfortunately won by Augustine, thereby determining and blackening man's mind from that time onwards. The thinkers of the Renaissance revived the belief in the idea of man's dignity and power, which was yet again undermined and darkened by Luther's and Calvin's doctrines which proposed the theory of man's powerlessness in performing good works. In order to be saved from evil embodied in man's pride, in their view, man needs to be filled with the keen sense of guilt and unquestioning submission to God.

The Enlightenment philosophy and the liberal thought of the nineteenth century and in particular the thought of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, viewed man as a dignified and powerful being, i.e. innately good and incorrupt. This idea has been again deflated in our modern culture where the concept of man's innate wickedness has been imposed and propagated by the authoritarian systems which conceive of themselves as having supremacy over the individual. The authoritarian systems tend to be perceived as omnipresent and omnipotent, whereas common man is conceived of as being worthless and helpless, and as such, expected and obliged to obey and bow down before rulers.

Joyce is very significant here, for his novel that is to be examined in the remainder of this paper deals not only with the intellectual formation of Stephen Dedalus (Joyce's alter ego), but also with those aspects of civilization or culture (in Joyce's case the culture of



Dublin-Ireland), which tend to oppress the individual, to disrupt the very notion of the self, as Lionel Trilling puts it: to make him/her “behave worse and suffer more than does some less developed state of human existence” (Trilling 2004: 266)⁴. Drawing on Freud’s theory, Trilling poses his own theory saying that what lies at the heart of civilization is the infliction of pain of the “instinctual renunciation” in favour of “security of civilized life” (Trilling 2004: 267). It is evident that Trilling’s argument centers around the fact that civilization essentially stifles and annihilates instinctual gratification, man’s emotional freedom and love. In other words, it diminishes man’s innate human qualities by drying up his inborn instincts and original feelings of love and friendship.

Modern literature is, in Trilling’s view, dedicated to the conception of the self. Speaking of the functions of literature in modern age, Trilling broaches the subject of culture which is “in the modern sense of the word a relatively new idea” (Trilling 2004: 263). Since literature has to do with truth, its primary function is exhausted in conveying to us the truth of and about the self, about its condition of existence and those stages of its development, which are defined by “its quarrel with its society and its culture” (Trilling 2004: 270). In this respect, Trilling defines literature as subversive for it explores and expresses the discontent of the self with civilization.

In the light of the aforementioned, I will therefore make an attempt at depicting Stephen Dedalus’s gradual discontent with the culture of Ireland in which he had grown up. In his eyes, the culture presents a force crushing out the lives of people who are inevitably implicated in it and thereby subject to its potentials to impair functioning of their ego and superego. Stephen Dedalus recognizes this and makes a forceful and scathing indictment: “When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.”

(James Joyce *Portrait* 1996: 231)

Joyce was not just critical of the culture of Ireland; his critique was also directed at the evils of Empire as found in Dublin at the turn of the century. Joyce’s point was that Ireland had once deserved the name of “Island of saints and sages”, but had deteriorated monstrously under British rule: He wrote:

“The economic and intellectual conditions that prevail do not permit the development of individuality; the soul of the country is weakened by centuries of useless struggle and broken treaties, and individual initiative is paralyzed by the influence and admonitions of the church, while its body is manacled by the police, the tax office and the garrison. No one who has any self-respect stays in Ireland, but flees afar from Ireland weighed down by multiple duties, serving both God and Mammon, letting herself be milked by England. In time, perhaps, there will be a gradual reawakening of the Irish conscience.”⁵

Joyce’s optimism about the renovation of the Irish culture is beautifully articulated and solidified by Stephen Dedalus at the end of *Portrait* who proclaims his yearning to “forge in

⁴ See: Trilling, Lionel, “On the teaching of modern literature”, “Freud and Beyond Culture”, in: *Literature, Culture, Identity: Introducing XX century Literary Theory*, Lena Petrović, Niš, Prosveta 2004.

⁵ See: *Collected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Stuart Gilbert, The Viking Press, 1996.



the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race” (Joyce *Portrait* 1996: 288). Even though Joyce (and his alter ego Stephen Dedalus) found it impossible to come to terms with the dominating and menacing forces of the Irish culture, and chose exile in order to devote himself to his artistic vocation, this statement reflects one powerful truth about Joyce himself: that he could not exist without close bonds to Ireland no matter in what part of Europe he resided. It is known that Joyce spent most of his life away from his beloved Ireland, living in Europe although longing for his homeland and recreating it in obsessive ways in his writings. Even if Joyce embraced his absence and banishment as a way of life, it was by bringing Ireland with him in his memories. He never ceased writing about it, and in his later life, when asked if he would go back to his homeland, he replied: “Have I ever left it?”

Now that the topic of exile has been broached, it is worth defining and discussing it. Edward Said gave particular attention to the pressing concern of exile and the life of man in exile. In his essay “Reflections on Exile” Said defines exile as an issue “strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience and the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted”⁶.

Further on, Said touches upon the life of James Joyce and writes: “James Joyce chose to be in exile: to give force to his artistic vocation. In an uncannily effective way – as Richard Ellmann has shown in his biography – Joyce picked a quarrel with Ireland and kept it alive so as to sustain the strict opposition to what was familiar. Ellmann says that “whenever his relations with his native land were in danger of improving, Joyce was to find a new incident to solidify his intransigence and to reaffirm the rightness of his voluntary absence”.⁷ Said is actually referring to the middle chapter of Joyce’s *Portrait* which vividly stages Stephen Dedalus’s return to the faith, to the order and embrace of Roman Catholicism after falling into sin by sleeping with a prostitute. Nevertheless, what follows Stephen Dedalus’s taking of communion at the end of chapter 3 is the story of how he comes to renounce his faith in the Catholic Church, the very church to which he has returned. In Chapter 3, we, as readers, witness the full force of Jesuit eloquence in a series of sermons on hell calculated to terrify anyone who even dared to disobey the rules of church. In fact, each of those sermons insists on the inherent sinfulness of humanity. Then, as if to demonstrate his own power to resist that eloquence, Stephen Dedalus sighs the following words with a profound resolution: “Non Serviam: I will not serve.”

(Joyce, *Portrait* 1996: 133)

The citation ‘I is Another’ suggests a kind of profound epiphanic moment in which one comes to grasp one’s true identity and nature. It is inspired by Edmund Wilson’s critical study *Axel’s Castle*, especially the last chapter in the study entitled “Axel and Rimbaud”. The title *Axel’s Castle* is reminiscent of a novel by Villiers de L’ Isle-Adam, in which the fictional hero, Axel, seeks escape from society only to live in self-sufficient isolation in a crenellated fortress. According to Wilson, this fantastic prose poem inspired not only the aesthetic idealism of the French Symbolist poets (Stephane Mallarme, Paul Verlaine, Charles

⁶ See: Edward. W. Said, “Reflections on Exile”, pp. 137, source: http://www.dartmouth.edu/~germ43/pdfs/said_reflections.pdf

⁷ See: Edward. W. Said, “Reflections on Exile”, pp. 145, source: http://www.dartmouth.edu/~germ43/pdfs/said_reflections.pdf



Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud) of the nineteenth century but also the attitude behind each of the six contemporary writers (W. B. Yeats, Paul Valery, T. S. Eliot, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein) whom Mr. Wilson subjects to critical evaluation in the study I am referring to. The Symbolist movement in France was a reaction against the scientific temper of the mid-nineteenth century mind as reflected in the Naturalist fiction and the Parnassian poetry. It corresponded very closely to the Romantic movement which actually gave birth to Symbolism. Both the Symbolists and the Romantics rebelled against the ideas brought about by the expansion of scientific knowledge, in particular by the rise of physics and mathematics, and mechanistic philosophy which had its roots in biological experimentation in the nineteenth century. The last chapter of Wilson's study represents the reevaluation of the six modernist writers that have already been mentioned, with a special emphasis on the possible directions contemporary literature will take in the near future. There are, according to Mr. Wilson, two alternative courses for the modernist writers, i.e. heroes of their works to follow: Axel's and Rimbaud's. Axel's course involves cherishing the increasing individualism to the point of apotheosis, cultivation of one's own private fantasies and chimeras in the face of contemporary realities, and the incarceration in one's own dark tower which has characterized all the successors of Symbolism. Rimbaud's writing and poetic fate suggest the second alternative: withdrawal from twentieth-century industrialism for the sake of the cult of the primitive and the childlike. Rimbaud's scheme for breaking loose from the confinements of European culture proved far more efficient than that of Axel. Namely, Rimbaud always longed for the way of life which would make a substitute for "the lost brutality and innocence of Europe" (Wilson *Axel's Castle* 1964: 226). He restlessly hankered after the life of Orient, Africa without Christianity and petty bourgeois mentality. After recognizing within himself the identity of a "Negro, and an animal", as Rimbaud liked to say, he opted for the life of ecstasy in the wilds of Africa. Rimbaud, Wilson writes, "had rejected Europe altogether – not merely society and ideas, but even the kind of sensibility which one cultivated when one tried to live at odds with it and the kind of literature this sensibility supplied" (Wilson 1964: 231).

Therefore, Axel's alternative, on the one hand, implies pure contemplation inevitably leading to confining within oneself and eventual suicide, whereas Rimbaud's course leads to a life of "pure action, flight and ecstasy". However, Mr. Wilson's conviction is that neither of these alternatives is healthy or desirable and that there should be a combination of the two visions. Joyce's Stephen seems to belong a bit to both traditions: isolation is his choice, and he looks toward Europe (which is inferred from Joyce's own life), toward what he considers to be the much broader and more liberal traditions of Europe as an alternative to the culture of Dublin in which he had been raised. Unlike Rimbaud, Stephen will never cease writing literature even though he is bent on exiting himself far away from his native land. The very nature of the artistic call requires the life of exile which, as it emerges in Joyce as his deliberately made choice, fundamentally fortifies his artistry.

Portrait is divided into 5 chapters, each marking the stage in the development of the intellect and soul of Stephen Dedalus, as well as the growth of his imagination, and in particular Stephen's gradual mastery of language as a means of bridging the gap which exists between philosophy, theology and aesthetics on the one hand, and Church, family and nationality on the other hand. Being an autobiographical novel in which Joyce framed his own develop-



ment, its hero – Stephen Dedalus is endowed with mythical connotations and symbolic role: Daedalus is the classical prototype of the artist for whom Stephen is named, and his mythical father, i.e. the father of the identity he will have discovered within himself towards the end of the novel. After having been prevented from returning to his homeland by the Crete king Minos, Daedalus, according to the legend, fashioned wings with which he and his son Icarus flew out of the Labyrinth in which Minos had incarcerated them with the beast Minotaur.

Just as Daedalus sought freedom which he eventually attained through the wings he had created, Stephen Dedalus seeks a deeply personal kind of freedom. He yearns to fly by means of his art beyond what he calls “the nets of nationality, language, and religion”, and Irish nation ruled and dominated by Catholic priests.

The 1st chapter of *Portrait* gives the image of Stephen Dedalus as a frail and sensitive boy with weak eyesight who excels in his schoolwork. He is a student at Clongowes Wood college, a primary school for boarding students run by priests of the Jesuit order about twenty miles west of Dublin. In the chapter, Stephen’s soul is only slightly individualized, he seems baffled by the language and the world around him and learns about the world through hearing, seeing, touching, smelling and tasting. His words are plain, simple and tainted with boyish sensibility. Being a passive, weak and vulnerable child, Stephen is beset by burly and foul-mouthed bullies at school he is attending. Moreover, young Stephen is presented also as a victim which is evident in the passage when he is cruelly punished by Father Dolan:

“...A hot burning stinging blow like the loud crack of a broken stick made his trembling hand crumple together like a leaf in the fire: and at the sound and the pain scalding tears were driven into his eyes. His whole body was shaking with fright, his arm was shaking and his crumpled burning livid hand shook like a loose leaf in the air. A cry sprang to his lips, a prayer to be let off...”

(Joyce 1996: 57-58)

In this vivid passage, Joyce recreates from his own experience a moment of humiliation and pain. Shortly before the beating episode, Stephen has been knocked down on a path by a boy on a bicycle causing his glasses to be shattered. Since he can’t see anything clearly until he gets a new pair, the doctor has told him not to read or write until they arrive. However, father Dolan, the school disciplinarian, accepts no excuses upon his visit to the class. Although Stephen tells him that he cannot study because his glasses are broken, father Dolan suspects the boy of playing a trick and beats him with a pandybat on each of his palms. For young Stephen, who stands at the top of his class, the beating is not only humiliating and unfair, but it also represents his first bitter experience of injustice. After Father Dolan threatens to beat him again every time he fails to do his lessons, Stephen experiences his first epiphany which urges him to protest to the rector of the school. Therefore, Joyce presents his boyhood self as a victim but a victim capable of speaking up for himself and thus quietly triumphing over injustice and overcoming his tormentors. This unjust beating also helps little Stephen become aware of the dangerous aspects of the authority of priests, and the germ of revolt against authority has already started to develop within his soul. This incident may be seen as the initial stage in Stephen’s quarrel with the Irish culture. The germ of revolt is another word for that which Trilling calls “a residue of human quality beyond the reach of cultural control”, i.e. a particular quantity and quality of experience to



resist cultural influence every man is born with. Essentially, the residue of human quality serves Stephen as a means of judging, resisting, and revising culture (Trilling 2004: 268-269)⁸.

Like the ancient prophets and Wordsworth who considered himself singled out to speak as a prophet for his time, Stephen feels that he alone has been chosen for this great artistic mission. Stephen's trademark is solitude. Though Joyce himself had a number of friends and a highly literate younger brother who practically worshipped him, the brother scarcely appears in the novel and friends become adversaries, not confidants. Joyce doesn't allow other characters in the novel much room for existence. Instead, they are depicted only as influences upon the development of Stephen's soul. The same figures appear and reappear each time in an altered way only to show the growth in the soul's view of them; and not just the growth of the soul but also Stephen's ever growing complexity of language.

Stephen cannot find or make home anywhere, least of all with his parents and siblings. Near the end of Chapter 2 we read:

“...He saw clearly his own futile isolation. He had not gone one step nearer the lives he had sought to approach nor bridged the restless shame and rancour that had divided him from mother and brother and sister. He felt that he was hardly of the one blood with them but stood to them rather in the mystical kinship of fosterage, fosterchild and fosterbrother...”

(James Joyce 1996: 111-112)

This kind of language suggests what Sigmund Freud calls “the family romance”: the child's belief that he/she descends from royal or noble parents who had been displaced by ordinary figures – foster parents, causing the child to feel antagonism towards his parents. Indeed, Stephen holds little respect for his biological father, Mr. Simon Dedalus, who appears in the novel as a pathetic, self-important figure, a bankrupt whose irresponsibility has led his family to a state of poverty and debt. Stephen will not look up to his father, and even though Mr. Dedalus is anticlerical, Stephen will exceed him by becoming irreligious toward the end of the novel. Essentially, *Portrait* tells the story of how Stephen gradually turns from his biological father to his mythic father Daedalus – the legendary artisan of ancient Crete, the maker of wings. Standing in opposition to the culture of Ireland and being disappointed in his family which should stand as a bulwark against the restrictive societal influences but doesn't, Stephen is compelled to find home in the culture of another nation (Greek), in the idealized figure from Greek mythology: Daedalus – the fabulous artificer of wings. What must be counted among Stephen's defences besides “his sense of himself as a biological fact” is his love of Greece which, in Trilling's words “intervened between him and what was bad in his own culture...” (Trilling 2004: 267-268).

Due to his burning desire to fly by the virtues of his art, he keenly feels that he cannot submit himself to any kind of institutional order. In Chapter 4, he reaffirms his faith in the Catholic church after having slept with a prostitute, but is haunted by the fact that he can never relinquish his “sense of himself as a being apart” (Joyce 1996: 183). In the same

⁸ See: Trilling, Lionel, “On the teaching of modern literature”, “Freud and beyond culture”, in: *Literature, Culture, Identity: Introducing XX century Literary Theory*, Lena Petrović, Niš, Prosveta 2004.



chapter, Stephen wonders what his life would be like if he entered the priesthood and became a Jesuit priest, but knows that “his destiny was to be elusive of social and religious orders” (Joyce 1996: 184). The key word in this whole passage is order. Let us now elaborate on the various meanings of the word, and see what the word connotes. It can signify:

a particular society of priests bound together by common vows

A set of regulations or simply a command that must be obeyed

Thus the word epitomizes everything that Stephen rejects. He cannot submit himself to any order conceived by someone else. This makes us wonder whether Stephen renounces all order. Well, my answer is certainly negative, for he is not a mindless rebel against regulations of any kind. On the contrary, as an artist in the making, he seeks to find and establish an order of his own, which is the order of his art. Because of this, Stephen strikes his fellow students as an antisocial being, for he resolutely refuses to join any group or support any cause no matter how noble it may seem. When a petition for universal peace circulates among the students, Stephen is adamant about not signing it, and one of his friends named Davin, who has already signed it, is dismayed by Stephen’s refusal to do so, and exclaims:

“You are a terrible man, Stevie, always alone”

(Joyce 1996: 229)

But in spite of his aloofness, Stephen keenly observes those around him. He replies to Davin: “Now that you have signed the petition for universal peace, I suppose you will that little copy book I saw in your room.”

(Joyce 1996: 229)

The copy book is the secret drill book the Fenians, originally called the Irish revolutionary brotherhood, a group of militant Irish nationalists founded in 1859 and bent upon the violent overthrow of the British rule. Stephen thus catches Davin in a contradiction – signing a petition for peace even while training himself to fight for nationalism. But, as Stephen won’t sign the petition for peace why isn’t he himself joining this fight? What sort of hero is this character who is actually called Stephen Hero in the original version of this book? And why isn’t he learning the Irish language, as Davin goes on to ask him, so as to play part in the revival of Irish culture, in the cultural liberation of Ireland from England? After rejecting Irish nationalism, Stephen declares:

“This race and this country and this life produced me, I shall express myself as I am... My ancestors threw off their language and took another. They allowed a handful of foreigners to subject them. Do you fancy I am going to pay in my own life and person debts they made?”

(Joyce 1996: 230-231)

For Stephen, the Irish are as much accomplices in their own subservience as they are victims of a foreign power. By being supportive of any movement, Stephen would have to forgo his own voice and pay for the “debts” of his countrymen. Stephen’s refusal to participate in the Irish cultural revival and its fight for independence is inspired by his poignant



ant awareness of what Ireland has done its champions, to those people who fought for its independence in the past. Of course, Joyce is referring to his political hero, Charles Stewart Parnell. Parnell was the leader of the Irish party in the British Parliament and the champion of the Irish home rule, widely regarded as the “uncrowned king of Ireland.” However, in 1889 his fame came to an end as it was revealed that he was having an affair with the married woman named Kitty O’Shea. As a result of this, Catholic priests of Ireland denounced Parnell who, after having been haunted out of office, died in 1891. At the time of his death, Joyce was nine years old, just old enough to grasp the impact of his death. Over Christmas dinner of the very first Chapter of *Portrait*, little Stephen witnesses a fierce argument about Parnell between Dante Riordan, the child’s governess, and John Casey, a family friend. When Dante calls Parnell a “traitor” to his homeland and insists that the priests “were right to abandon him, and that they were always the true friends of Ireland,” Casey sighs one example after another to show how the Catholic Church has repeatedly undermined Ireland’s struggle for independence and betrayed its champions (Joyce 1996: 42-43). Casey’s thrilling speech makes an indelible impression on little Stephen who will thus associate priests and the Irish with betrayal, for he sees Parnell as “a victim among traitors.” This surely helps us realize why he won’t support the national revival. When Davin asks him why he won’t join the fight for Irish independence, Stephen echoes Casey’s words, and says:

“No honourable and sincere man has given up to you his life and his youth and his affections from the days of Tone to those of Parnell, but you sold him to the enemy or failed him in need or reviled him and left him for another. And you invite me to be one of you. I’d see you damned first...Do you know what Ireland is? Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow.”

(Joyce 1996: 231)

Ireland, in other words, devours her own children, in particular those who fight for its freedom. Bitter as it is, this scathing denunciation interestingly enough might be compared to the words of Saint Stephen, the first Christian martyr for whom Joyce’s Stephen is named. Appointed by the apostles to care for the widows of Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem, St. Stephen was arrested by the Jewish elders for preaching on behalf of Christ. Endowed with spell-binding oratorical powers, St. Stephen served the poor and preached the people about Christ leading many people to embrace the faith of Christ. The high priests of the Temple were jealous of St. Stephen’s accomplishments, and accused him of blasphemy. Speaking in his own defence, Stephen argued that the Jewish people had repeatedly rejected and ignored the words of their own prophet and that they had now betrayed Christ. For saying this, St. Stephen was dragged out of city and stoned to death without any trial. So, the name “Stephen” calls to mind not just the first Christian martyr, but also a man of eloquence, i.e. a man who dared to criticize his own people for betraying their own prophets. Joyce’s Stephen is himself a victim and martyr of sorts, as we have seen, but in this novel we also see him becoming a man of eloquence who will dare to reveal to Ireland the truth about itself in all its bitterness and beauty.

To accomplish this task, Stephen must master English, the language of Ireland’s masters, and his lessons begin with the very first words of the novel:



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

(Joyce 1996: 7).

These are the words read aloud to Stephen by his father. The very first thing that Stephen experiences are the words of a story, and language thus takes a privileged place in his world. In fact, the first thing he remembers doing is using language, using it in a song. When he hears the song about “wild rose blossoms on the little green place”, he sings: “O, the green wothe botheth” (Joyce 1996: 7)

Notice what happens here – he is lisping, of course, but he is also composing something new by rearranging the words he has just heard, i.e. taking “the green” from “the place” and attaching it to “the roses”. Later on, remembering this song, Stephen tells himself: “But you could not have a green rose.” And then he adds: “But perhaps somewhere in the world you could” (Joyce 1996: 13). And that somewhere is of course the imagination. Gifted with powerful imagination, Stephen uses language and colours to create a world around him. In the life of the mind anything is possible, and in this story of Stephen’s life language and reality become one. Now we are faced with the complex issue of language. It is no accident that Stephen first reminisces about the words of a story. Stories help humans give meaning to their existence. According to Edward Bond, stories we tell endow life with meaning becoming thus the “source of judgement” (Bond 2004: 390)⁹. He sees stories as the structuring force of our minds, pointing out that “it isn’t reason that makes us human, but imagination.” The moment when Stephen first uses language accords with the birth of his sense of self-consciousness. Bond’s point is that it is the self-consciousness sustained by language that promotes both change and our ability to respond to change. Not only do stories give meaning to our lives, they are also the origin of our (Stephen Dedalus’s) desire for justice. Bond further explicates that desire for justice appears first in the child and makes it necessary for it to learn to be human and to speak. Stephen likewise uses language so as to express his desire for justice, i.e. his sense of his “right to be” within the world of injustice and scarcity, which is Ireland in Joyce’s case. Furthermore, Stephen is intent upon creating a narrative of his nation whose aim would be to urge the renaissance of the conscience of his race. As an artist who loves language, he needs to take a complete command of language and make it his own so that he could speak “justice without the corruptions and distortions that come from adapting to authority” (Bond 2004: 390-394).¹⁰ Had Joyce’s hero yielded to the dominating forces of his background, he would have never been able to assert his own independence and do justice to his fellow people by recreating and “forging in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race” (Joyce 1996: 288).

Words by themselves can be menacing or frightening. Stephen is “blinded by fear and haste” when father Dolan calls him a “lazy little schemer.” He is also terrified when he sees

⁹ See: Bond, Edward. “Our Story”, “Language”, in: *Literature, Culture, Identity: Introducing XX century Literary Theory*, Lena Petrović, Niš, Prosveta 2004.

¹⁰ See: Bond, Edward. “Our Story”, “Language”, in: *Literature, Culture, Identity: Introducing XX century Literary Theory*, Lena Petrović, Niš, Prosveta 2004.



the word “foetus” cut into the desk of the anatomy theatre at his father’s old school. A feeling of tremendous fear and guilt suffuses Stephen when he hears the priest evoking in glowing colour the torments of hell. Apart from petrifying Stephen, words sometimes mistify him. Knowing that Protestants liked to ridicule the epithets used for the Virgin Mary such as “Tower of Ivory” and “House of Gold”, Stephen asks himself “how could a woman be a tower of ivory, or a house of gold? Who was right then?” (Joyce 1996: 40). But one day Stephen learns the answer by observing a girl named Eileen who lives near him. Eileen, he sees, “had long thin cool white hands because she was a girl. They were like ivory; only soft. That was the meaning of *Tower of Ivory* but Protestants could not understand it and made fun of it. One day he had stood beside her looking into the hotel grounds... She had put her hand into his pocket where his hand was and he had felt how cool and thin and soft her hand was... And then all of a sudden she had broken away and had run laughing down the sloping curve of the path. Her fair hair had streamed out behind her like gold in the sun. *Tower of Ivory. House of Gold*. By thinking of things we could understand them.” (Joyce 1996: 48)

This is Stephen’s conclusion: by looking at people, places and things through the window of language, or in this case through the framework of metaphor, Stephen comes to grasp both the language and the world around him. But there is more than metaphor and virginity in the passage I have just quoted. Though Eileen’s ivory hands and her golden hair suggest epithets used for the Virgin Mary, she puts her hand into Stephen’s pocket, which is a potentially erotic gesture. This gesture subtly initiates a process whereby Stephen’s reverence for the virgin gradually gives way to his fascination with the whore, with sexual violation and transgression of purity with lust.

The prospect of sexual experience stirs in Stephen a paradoxical combination of feelings. At the end of Chapter 2 he is aroused by lust and, paradoxically, foresees the loss of his own virginity as a sacred right of initiation. At the same time, he sees himself as a sexual aggressor, wanting to force another into sinning with him:

“He wanted to sin with another of his kind, to force another being to sin with him and to exult with her in sin. He felt some dark presence moving irresistibly upon him from the darkness, a presence subtle and murmurous as a flood filling him wholly with itself.”

(Joyce 1996: 113)

And even as he imagines taking a woman by force he feels himself sexually invaded. Indeed, he feels like a child nestling in the arms of his mother who gently kisses him, and he envisions the moment of sexual intercourse as a holy encounter wherein weakness and timidity and inexperience were to fall from him:

“In her arms he felt that he had suddenly become strong and fearless and sure of himself.”

(Joyce 1996: 114)

If one compares this ending of Chapter 2 with the endings of Chapter 1 and 3, one can see how all 3 Chapters fit together. Chapter 1 establishes the innocence of Stephen which is vindicated when he appeals to the rector of the school. In Chapter 2 he falls into lust, but in Chapter 3 he is spiritually revived by the retreat or a programme of prayer and preaching highlighted by



the frightening sermon on the punishments of hell and the torments of the damned. At the end of this Chapter 3 Stephen confesses his sins to a priest and takes communion. He thus reaffirms his faith in God and in the purity of the Virgin Mary and discards the bestiality of stinking goatish lust and embraces Roman Catholicism. So, in its first three Chapters, *Portrait* gives: innocence, sin, repentance and reconciliation to God. Nevertheless, shortly after Stephen takes communion and confesses his sins, he is asked by the director of studies at Belvedere College to consider entering the priesthood. He refuses. Stephen cannot serve the order of religion, cannot follow its rituals, cannot heed the rules of any society or the regulations of any institution. Immediately after this episode, Stephen walks to the North Bull island, and finds a number of other boys swimming and shouting his name. He experiences yet another epiphany upon his seeing the image of Daedalus flying in the sky. This epiphanic moment marks Stephen's most complete denial of a life in the priesthood and his most powerful immersion in the life of an artist:

“Stephanos Dedalos! Bous Stephanoumenos! Bous Stephaneforos!...Now, as never before, his strange name seemed to him a prophecy...Now, at the name of the fabulous artificer, he seemed to hear the noise of dim waves and to see a winged form flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air. What did it mean? Was it a quaint device opening a page of some medieval book of prophecies and symbols, a hawklike man flying sunward above the sea, a prophecy of the end he had been born to serve and had been following through the mists of childhood and boyhood, a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being?”

(Joyce1996: 192)

Joyce's answer to this question is the emphatic “Yes! Yes! Yes!” (Joyce 1996: 193). Stephen's soul has now discovered the goal towards which it has been proceeding – the goal of life suffused with the celebration of beauty and devotion to truth. His soul now ready for flight, it has been released from its manacles.

Harry Levin wrote of Joyce: “With the self-dedication of the priest he (Joyce) took the vows of the artist” (Levin 1963: 51-52). We should elaborate on this statement and try to grasp its meaning. Well, it is true that Roman Catholics believe that at the moment of consecration in the mass, the priest turns bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Turning this ritual into a metaphor for artistic creation, Stephen yearns to be “a priest of the eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of ever-living life”. A striking example of this transmutation comes at the end of Chapter 4, when Stephen catches sight of a solitary girl wading in the sea. Unlike the prostitute of Chapter 2, she does not rouse him sexually. Instead, Stephen sees her through a veil of metaphor as “a strange and beautiful seabird” (Joyce 1996: 196). Seeing in the form of “the angel of mortal youth and beauty with ivory thighs and slate blue skirt”, the girl represents for him a mortal embodiment of the Virgin Mary. For Stephen, idealized figure is an object not of lust, but of an enraptured contemplation. She provokes in him what he later calls an “esthetic emotion wherein the mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing” (Joyce 1996: 196). His imagination thus transmutes the girl, “the daily bread of experience”, into something transcendent. Having listened to sermons on ugliness in Chapter 3, he makes his own sermons on beauty in the last chapter.

Presenting to us this new religion of art, Stephen clearly shows that he is supersaturated with Catholicism, the aspect of Irish Catholicism Joyce himself was glad to abandon: a Father



Church which he viewed as harsh and repressive. But as I have already indicated, Stephen's mythic father is the ancient and legendary artisan for whom he is named – Daedalus, maker of the Crete Labyrinth and wings with which he flew away from it back to his true homeland.

Daedalus symbolizes Stephen's aspiration to soar, his yearning to fly beyond what he calls "the nets of religion, nationality and language". At the same time, Dedalus exemplifies Stephen's ambition to create a universe of words or as he says at the end – "to forge in the smithy of his soul the uncreated conscience of his race" (Joyce 1996: 288).

In the final words of the novel where 3rd person narrative gives way to 1st person diary entries, Stephen nearly merges with Joyce himself. Just as Daedalus built the labyrinth of Crete, Joyce will soon assign himself a task of recreating the labyrinth of Dublin in *Ulysses*. Having begun with the picture of his biological father, and then progressed to all the religions fathers who educate and discipline him, he ends by invoking his mythical father – the father of the identity he has discovered within himself:

"Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead."

(Joyce 1996: 288)

Although Stephen, in order to become an artist, opts for the life in exile, it would be wrong to conclude that Joyce sees an artist as a necessarily isolated figure. On the contrary, Joyce imposes upon Stephen the very artistic goal and responsibility of being the "voice" of the community he has voluntarily alienated himself from. In the words of Stephen at the end of the novel, we recognize his belief that the Irish culture will always comprise an integral part of him, for it created and shaped his identity. Stephen understands his artistic vocation in terms of his servitude primarily to his art, to beauty and truth which he sees as akin, and then to his nation and its yet unborn conscience. Joyce beautifully reinforces Fromm's view of man as an autonomous and dignified being whose inherent quality is the drive towards his sense of himself as a "man for himself." Fromm's idea is that the structure of the character of a mature and fully integrated individual, i.e. the "productive character" ultimately represents the source and basis of virtue for every man, and that vice is reflected in the indifference toward himself. The affirmation of man's truly human personality along with his love for himself are the noblest values cherished by humanistic ethics, the devotee of which was undoubtedly Joyce himself.

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„ЈА, ТО ЈЕ НЕКО ДРУГИ“: ХУМАНИСТИЧКА КОНЦЕПЦИЈА ИДЕНТИТЕТА И ЕГЗИСТЕНЦИЈАЛНЕ ОПЦИЈЕ У ПОРТРЕТУ УМЕТНИКА У МЛАДОСТИ ЏЕЈМСА ЏОЈСА

Резиме

Џојс је један од најзначајнијих романописаца прошлог вијека и уједно поборник велике традиције хуманистичке етике. Циљ рада је критичка анализа и сагледавање процеса сазријевања главног јунака Џојсовог *Портрета*, Стивена Дедала, у свијетлу хуманистичке етике. Наиме, основни принципи Хуманизма посматрају индивидуу у њеном духовно физичком тоталитету, вјерујући да је човјеков циљ да, према ријечима Ериха Фрома, „буде човјек“ и да је услов за постизање тог циља да буде прије свега „човјек за себе“. Стивен Дедал отјеловљује Фромов тип човјека продуктивног карактера, у смислу постепеног ослобађања од тзв. „мрежа“ ирског друштва представљених у виду стега националности, породице и религиозности које претендују да пониште његову индивидуалност, до њиховог потпуног одбацивања зарад афирмације његовог истински људског *Ја* кроз умјетнички позив. Осим тога, може се рећи да је Стивен Дедал (сам Џојс) оличење правог, истинског интелектуалца који живи у самонаметнутом егзилу, и који је, према ријечима филозофа Жилијена Бенде „чувар и носилац независног просуђивања, који није лојалан ничему до истини.“

Кључне ријечи: хуманистичка етика, ауторитарна етика, култура, револт, умјетнички позив, имагинација, језик, егзил.



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‘I IS ANOTHER’: HUMANISTIC CONCEPTION OF IDENTITY
AND EXISTENTIAL OPTIONS IN JAMES JOYCE’S
A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN

Summary

James Joyce represents one of the most significant novelists of the twentieth century and an adherent of the great tradition of humanistic ethics. The purpose of this paper is to critically examine, primarily in the light of humanistic ethics, the process of the artistic coming of age of the main character of *Portrait*, Stephen Dedalus. The basic principles of Humanism tend to view man in his physical and spiritual totality, believing that man’s fundamental aim is to “be man” and that the major prerequisite for achieving that aim is to be “man for himself”. Stephen Dedalus epitomizes Fromm’s type of man of productive character, in the sense that he gradually frees himself from the “nets” of Irish society represented in the form of constraints of nationality, family, and religion which he sees as threatening forces bent upon annihilating his own individuality. Stephen Dedalus manages to accomplish true affirmation of his individuality only through artistic vocation. Moreover, it could be argued that Stephen D. (Joyce himself) stands for the epitome of a genuine intellectual living in self-imposed exile and who is, according to the words of philosopher Julien Benda, a guardian and a bearer of independent thought who is loyal solely to truth.

Key words: humanistic ethics vs. authoritarian ethics, culture, revolt, artistic vocation, imagination, language, exile.