

JAMES JOYCE

A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man

The story, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, was a portrait that explored the progression through life that Stephan Dedaelus and James Joyce both took. This book was written as a third person autobiography, and it explored Joyce's life. He used different names, but he kept most of the main details the same. His search for the role that artist played in his life was an ongoing struggle for Stephan throughout the novel. His alienation from family, friends and society was a problem that Stephan had because of his views on life and art. He struggled greatly with his dilemma between religion and art for most of his life, because society and family wanted him to take up religion, while he wanted to express himself freely in the world that he was in and therefore he chose art. His desire for this independence from other people's standards plagued him for most of the novel and he needed to go through all of these experiences in order to find himself these were all a part of his journey that he needed to take to discover himself, and develop his own individual consciousness. Therefore, Stephan Dedaelus' pursuit for his own self-discovery was compromised by many struggles with his role as the artist, his alienation from society, his conflict between religion and art, and his desire for personal independence and freedom as an individual

Stephan's search for the role that the artist plays in his life is an ongoing struggle throughout the novel that eventually leads to his own self-discovery. It starts with his childhood, and continues throughout his life. Since Stephan was a little boy, before he could talk, he was interested in sounds and the power of the spoken word. He had a great interest for words and it

showed. Especially in the first chapter when Dante was telling him that birds would pick out his eyes if he did not apologise, and Stephan took this and changed it into a little rhythmical song or stanza. Stephan emphasized the importance of art, especially in the literary sense, in his childhood because he took many negative aspects of his life, and he turned them into a poetic ensemble and subsequently transformed them to happier thoughts. At school, the dean questioned his desires to become an artist, and he posed this question that really helped Stephan in his search.

You are an artist, are you not, Mr. Dedaelus? Said the dean, glancing up and blinking his pale eyes. The object of the artist is the creation of the beautiful. What is beautiful is another question. (Page 185)

The dean posed this question, and Stephan thought about it afterwards and he realised that this was the key to finding the role that the artist played in his life. There were also the three important attitudes that Stephan had about art. "To discover the mode of life or of art whereby your spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom." (Page 213) These three attitudes were: Art as a vocation or a calling, where he felt that his calling to art was so strong that he could not shun it, and even if he had to go through loneliness, poverty, or exile, he would still have to follow his calling as an artist. Art as flight was the second attitude where he saw imagination as a refuge away from reality, and poetry became his way of expressing the bad things in his life and transforming them into beautiful words. Art as a religion was the third attitude, where he saw himself as a priest of imagination rather than the traditional and accepted priest of the Catholic Church. All of these things contributed to Stephan's search for the role of the artist in his life. The role that the artist played in the life of Stephan Dedaelus caused many struggles for him, and all the hardships that he experienced led to his self-discovery.

Stephan's alienation from society came as a direct result of his pursuit of self-discovery and independence. He had many different factors in his life that led to his alienation, not only from society, but also from his family, and friends. Stephan made many choices in his life that added to his already growing alienation from society. However, it was not only society that began to shun him, but also his family and friends. When Stephan considered art as a vocation, family, friends, and the community all tried to talk him out of it. However, he did not listen to them, and was then alienated from his family, as well as society. He told one of his friends this as they were talking him out of his decision.

You made me confess the fears that I have. But I will tell you also what I do not fear. I do not fear to be alone or to be spurned for another or to leave whatever I have to leave. And I'm not afraid to make a mistake, even a great mistake, a lifelong mistake and perhaps as long as an eternity too. (Page 203)

He then further parted his relationships with his parents when he decided not to listen to his father anymore and to reject his authority. He did this because Stephan found out about his dad's drinking problem and called his dad a drunken, incompetent failure, and therefore was further alienated. Upon his decision not to side with god and the religious aspects of life, and to take up art instead, caused alienation from his mother because she was a devout catholic and it was insulting to her that her son would defy her authority. The community where Stephan resided for most of his childhood was also very religiously attached. Due to his constant upbringing with religion, he said this as his way of questioning authority.

Is baptism with a mineral water valid? How comes it that while the first beatitude promises the kingdom of heaven to the poor of heart the second beatitude also promises to the meek that they shall possess the land? Why was the sacrament of the Eucharist instituted under the two species of bread and wine if Jesus Christ be present body and blood, soul and divinity, in the bread alone and in the wine alone? Does a tiny particle of consecrated bread contain all the body and blood of Jesus Christ or a part only of the body and blood? (Page ???)

Every decision he made against the church, and every sin he committed, the community would get involved and try to get him out. However, he rarely took their advice and therefore was alienated even more from society for being different and wanting to explore new ideas of the world, as well as his role as the artist. All of his decisions that he made throughout his life all contributed to his alienation from friends, and family. Stephan's alienation from society allowed him to pursue his own desires, and although it was at the cost of his acceptance to society, it all lent a great deal toward finding himself and opening more doors to his self-discovery.

Stephan's struggle between religion and art showed the contrast of society vs. personal independence that caused much difficulty for Stephan in his search for self-discovery. It all started with his childhood upbringings with religion, and his childhood interest in words. Throughout Stephan's childhood, religion had been engrained into his mind as the last word. His mother was a devout Catholic, and his father followed religion very strictly as well. All throughout his childhood, he was exposed to religious events, the clergy, and even the idea of priesthood. However, all of these things never seemed more important to Stephan than art. He wanted to be free from religion, and he proved it to people that this is how he thought about religion.

The soul is born, he said vaguely, first in those moments I told you of. It has a slow and dark birth, more mysterious than the birth of the body. 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, and religion. I shall fly by those nets.
(Page 203)

His desire to follow art, however, contradicted the teachings he had learned throughout his preceding life. His innermost desire was the one thing that his religion did not conform with. He started to look at his desires and conformity, but his continuous striving for independence turned his head from religion to art. He expressed his feelings about art many times to teachers,

friends, and family. He said this to Lynch: "Art, said Stephan, is the human disposition of sensible or intelligible matter far on aesthetic end." (Page 207) This decision would turn out to be the most important decision in Stephan's life. He had to choose between priesthood, and becoming an artist. His choice was to become an artist and this decision caused his alienation, as well as finding the role of the artist in his life. It was also seen as a forbidden thing for the Irish, and the government condemned all artists in the country, so this was an even more difficult decision because he would have to leave Ireland to continue his life as an artist. He experienced many different dilemmas and situations that made him choose a side between religion and art and it hindered his life and self-discovery. Stephan's struggle with art versus religion challenged his limits to how far he would go for his own self-discovery. He experienced social standards versus his own personal desire for independence; however, the choices he made were beneficial to his path to self-discovery.

Stephan's desire for independence and freedom from other people's wishes and standards came as a result of his struggle between art and religion, and his consequent choice, which caused him to ponder about whether or not art was his freedom or whether he needed to start with a clean slate on life. He had many views on his own personal liberty, and the point that was made clear in the novel was that, "This race and this country and this life produced me, he said. I shall express myself as I am." (Page 203) This was one of the more eventful things relating to Stephan's desire for independence was his love affair with Eileen. Him and Eileen were very good friends as children, and as they grew up, he wanted to marry her. However, there was one big problem. She was a protestant and he was a Catholic. This was strictly forbidden for him to marry her, and when he had the chance to kiss her, he didn't, and it was all over. Even though Stephan had four sisters, he wasn't comfortable with women, and he did not know how to act

around them. Upon his family's arrival in Dublin, he met a girl named Emma, who was attracted to Stephan. He could not act, when she gave him the chance, and then she was gone. These were liberating steps that he did not take. This all led to his nights he spent in the red light district. He did this because he saw that every time he sinned, he felt more liberated than ever, and he wanted to keep on sinning. He picked up a prostitute and had his first sexual experience. He continued with his sins because they made him feel free, and that was what he was trying to do all of his life. He had always been searching for ways to gain freedom and independence, and he found that in sinning. His choices that he made with art versus religion also liberated him. Even though no one else wanted him to take up art, he did anyways and he realised that it was the right decision. Now, the hardest part was trying to find out whether art was really for him, or whether he should return to his home and conform to religion as a priest. One of the things that Stephan knew about himself, but never had heard from another person was put best into words by his friend Temple. He said, "He's the only man in this institution that has an individual mind." (Page 200) This was what Stephan wanted to be, and he admired Temple for telling him that in front of the dean at the university, because it showed his true personality. Desire for independence and freedom was the single most important motivation for Stephan. His desire for independence drove him to take the course of action that he did, and it also aided in his decision-making processes. All of these decisions, however led to many hardships as well for Stephan, however, they also led to his self-discovery by taking huge leaps into his own world.

With all the experiences Stephan experienced, with his role as the artist, his alienation from society, friends, and family, his conflict between religion and art, as well as his desire for independence and freedom, he was able to find his place. After experiencing each one of these aspects of his life, he was better able to understand who he was, and thus, opened his eyes to his

own self-discovery. James Joyce told a story of his life through a third person view of his own life. He transformed his own life story and experiences into this fictional character named Stephan Dedalus. Joyce made interesting views of his own life throughout the book, and he emphasised that in order to know who you are, and truly what your place on earth is, you must step back, take a look at it all, and decipher all your decisions and experiences that have shaped you into who you are today. IT was a masterful piece of writing that gave you a sense of personal understanding with the character because of how well it was described and Joyce tried to make it that way so that we could all understand his message, and so that we could all look at our lives from a third person, like Joyce, and we can discover who we truly are!