

The Priest of Eternal Imagination:
Joyce, Dedalus, and Epiphany

*“O! In the virgin womb of the imagination
the word was made flesh.”*

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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, 1902

As the social and moral order of the 19th century seemed to be unraveling, a dissolution confirmed by the First World War, a tremendous number of authors felt a demand to construct their own values from the only material given them—the events of their personal lives. Out of the 19th-century tradition of the *Bildungsroman* arose a sub-genre: the *Künstlerroman*, or artist-novel. By the early 20th century, the artist-novel had become the form *de rigueur* for the budding novelist in America and Europe, a trend observed by William York Tindall when he asserted that “from 1903 onwards, almost every first novel by a serious novelist was a novel of adolescence” (cited in Beebe, 4). Authors as diverse as Henry Miller, Lawrence Durrell, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann, and D.H. Lawrence extolled in their debut novels the virtues of the artist’s life—and yet the notion of what it meant to be an artist was different for each of them. Thomas Wolfe—whose *Look Homeward, Angel* is an attempt, similar to Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, to represent the development of the artist—defends his semi-autobiographical novel with this definition of fiction: “Fiction is not fact, but fiction is fact selected and understood, fiction is fact arranged and charged with purpose” (Wolfe, xv). This statement is the banner under which all *Künstlerroman* authors rally.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man contains one of the most famous artistic prescriptions in modernist fiction: “The artist,” says Stephen Dedalus, James Joyce’s alter ego, “like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails” (*P*,

215). Though many have taken this as Joyce's own conception of the artist, another of Stephen's definitions is far more consistent with Joyce's works, with his methods of composition, and with the spirit of the *Künstlerroman*: the artist as a "priest of eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life" (221).

Strongly connected with the priestly conception of the artist is Stephen's theory of the epiphany, which is fully outlined only in *Stephen Hero*. For Joyce as well as Stephen, the man of letters is a collector and transcriber of epiphanies. The epiphany is thus a fundamental component of Joyce's own conception of the essence of the artist and his vocation to live by beauty and to construct his own values.

In his essay "A *Portrait* and the *Bildungsroman* Tradition," Breon Mitchell attempts to show how Joyce's novel both conforms to and contrasts with the tradition of which it is a part and to which it is a response (as almost any *Künstlerroman* is bound to be). The essential characteristic of earlier *Bildungsromans* is the depiction of a young protagonist growing toward the ability to live in society: "The young man must encounter life, and be formed in that encounter" (Mitchell, 62). The paragon of the form, according to Mitchell's account, is Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, which portrays a young man's progression toward fitting into bourgeois German society. Mitchell argues that while Stephen moves toward a similar sort of conformation in the first three chapters of *A Portrait*, the final two chapters of the novel show a young man growing apart from society. After Stephen abandons the notion of becoming a priest in the Catholic Church (the place in society toward which he has been progressing), the only role he can accept is that of the artist, an identity requiring self-definition and the abandonment of the

decayed social order. As Mitchell argues, “[W]hile *A Portrait* retains almost every essential feature of the *Bildungsroman*, it frees its hero from the traditional goal of integration into society” (74).

Departing from Mitchell’s observations, we see that the struggle for a sense of freedom and artistic individuation is the distinctive characteristic of the *Künstlerroman*—which is why, as claimed above, almost any *Künstlerroman* is both a part of and a response to the *Bildungsroman* tradition. Whereas 19th-century authors depicted characters attempting to fit into a social and moral order, 20th-century authors faced with the disintegration of that order were implicitly faced with creating their own, individually constructed, orders within their fictions.

To further determine *A Portrait*’s place in the *Bildungs-* and *Künstlerroman* traditions, it is helpful to follow Mitchell’s example by returning to Joyce’s essay “A Portrait of the Artist,” the germ of the final work, which Joyce submitted to John Eglinton and Fred Ryan’s journal *Dana* in 1904. More than the reworkings that followed from it, “A Portrait of the Artist” is the relatively direct statement of its author. Although he approaches his subject in the abstract and authoritative second person, portraying the younger self ironically at times, the self portrayed is much more clearly Joyce’s own. Joyce does not obscure himself behind a fictional protagonist *per se*, although he does externalize his own experience somewhat by referring to himself only in the third person, as “the artist.”¹ This essay provided not only the general outline and basic materials (certain motifs and particular lines of prose) for both *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*, in it Joyce established several ideas which prove integral to his conception of the artist’s identity and how to portray his development.

Two of these fundamental notions are the denial of an “iron, memorial aspect” of the past—for “the past assuredly implies a fluid succession of presents, the development of an entity of which our actual present is a phase only”—and the idea that the portrait should not be “an identificative paper but rather the curve of an emotion” (POA, 257-8). Both ideas prefigure the epiphanic structure Joyce later developed as a solution to the problem of depicting the artist’s development with fluidity. As guiding principles inherent in *A Portrait*, they demanded that Joyce revise the traditional form of the *Bildungsroman*. As Mitchell concludes:

[T]he traditional narrative perspective of the *Bildungsroman*, the mature man reflecting upon the past, did not allow for any but the “iron, memorial” aspect of time remembered. What was needed was a narrative technique which could accommodate itself to change in the central figure while maintaining distance (Mitchell, 70).

Aiding the fluidity of the portrayal is what Mitchell calls the “imitative texture” of *A Portrait*, which allows the character to be apparent in the narrative while giving the author control. The primary narrative technique Joyce uses in the novel, Mitchell observes, is *erlebte Rede* (narrated monologue) combining the effect of direct experience with impartial narrative. Joyce lets Stephen’s style—at turns archaic, medieval, Catholic, or romantic, and often overblown—“spill over” into the narration of events themselves, thereby balancing narrative perspective and narrative depiction while at the same time making the verbal style of the character ironic. This, Mitchell claims, “allowed him to both tell and show his story” (72).

The technique of telling while showing allows Joyce to create an effective portrayal of the fluidity of Stephen’s development. By creating the impression of a “fluid succession of presents,” Joyce rids his novel of a narrator who “looks back” on his past. Indeed, the seeming immediacy of the narrative leaves the reader with an impression of a

Godlike author. However, Joyce's professed desire to overcome the past's "iron, memorial aspect" and depict "the curve of an emotion" provides, in the first place, the impetus to write himself out of his mostly autobiographical fiction.

Given this context, it is easy to see in what ways Stephen relates to Joyce. As an ersatz Joyce, Stephen embodies the facts, "arranged and charged with purpose," of Joyce's artistic struggle. The novel, in the words of Thomas Grayson, "serves to exorcize Stephen from the personality of Joyce, thereby permitting the emergence of the artist" (cited in Staley, 16). The converse of this relationship, however, is less apparent: while simultaneously purging from the author all his youthful elements, Stephen also becomes a constitutive element of the author's own identity as an artist. While Joyce's own experience is the foundation for Stephen's character, the relationship between them is established only once Joyce gives shape to those experiences as fiction. The experiences that mold Stephen's character, insofar as they are reconfigurations of Joyce's own, preexist him. But in transforming them into the experiences of a protagonist, the author responds to them, simultaneously investing himself in and abstracting himself from his alter ego. Stephen is, then, at once a preservation and an annihilation of what makes the artist an artist—a way of isolating the artist's former self in the timelessness of his work.

In the *Künstlerroman*, there exists a particular type of relationship between the author and his young protagonist struggling to become an artist: the author has a vested interest in the presentation of his alter ego. Specifically in *Künstlerromans* about writers, there is often the sense that the young person's development leads him to a point from which he himself is capable of narrating the novel we have just read.ⁱⁱ The protagonist's development is complete insofar as he may turn back and accomplish the work his creator

has completed. This connection alone reveals a marked difference between the *Künstlerroman* and other genres that presume from the start a more tenuous relationship between author and protagonist. It also becomes the source for critical fascination with biographical details and the applicability of the protagonist's opinions to the work of the author.

But is it appropriate or useful to compare biography and manuscripts—and should we allow the results of such comparisons to affect our reception of Stephen, or our understanding of his relationship to Joyce? In the introduction to *Joyce Annotated*, Don Gifford argues that relying on outside material—such as “A Portrait of the Artist” and *Stephen Hero*—as sources for interpretation violates the artistic unity of *A Portrait*. Taking the point further, he adds that knowledge of the history of Ireland is more useful to the critic reading Joyce than exhaustive familiarity with biographical details. That Stephen's refusal to complete his Easter duty is more fully dramatized in *Stephen Hero* is inessential to a study of *A Portrait*, wherein the event is only referenced after the fact. Whether the character of Cranly is based on John Byrne, with a dash of Oliver St. John Gogarty, matters little; the important thing is how Cranly functions within the novel. Gifford's caution, however, demands a kind of new-critical methodology that misses many of the subtleties of Joyce's work. Indeed, in practice the warning is rarely heeded, nor can it be if we wish to understand all the implications and to feel the full impact of Joyce's final text. The gains reaped in violating Gifford's hermeticism typically outweigh the losses of what he considers to be critical impurity.

To begin with, Joyce is a peculiar case. His awareness of his archive and of the importance of criticism, as well as his tendency to cannibalize his own work by reusing

old poems and sketches, allows and perhaps even demands that we indulge in looking beyond the so-called integral work. Noting that all cultural productions remain works in progress even after they are completed, M. Keith Booker argues that the difficulty of Joyce's work tends to demand that readers turn almost immediately to criticism in order to understand it: Joyce "was intensely aware of the important role that criticism would play in the reception of his work, and he often seems to have designed his texts as gold mines for enterprising critics" (Booker, 3). Whether or not Joyce purposely designed them with such an end in mind, he certainly delighted in the fact that his work would keep the critics occupied.

Moreover, the results of referring to the earlier versions has dramatically improved readings of *A Portrait*, if for no other reason than that they have problematized easy answers to our questions about the novel and have even provided us with new issues to investigate. Wayne Booth notes that

Joyce himself was always explicating his works, and it is clear that he saw nothing wrong with the fact that they could not be thought of as standing entirely on their own feet. The reader's problems are handled, if they are to be handled at all, by rhetoric provided outside the work (Booth, 325).

He further remarks how the novel was never read ironically until the publication of *Ulysses*, and ironic readings did not become popular until after the appearance in 1944 of the *Stephen Hero* fragments, in which the author's commentary is often openly and acerbically ironic. Though the question of irony in *A Portrait* is brought to the fore by glances outside the text, this in no way means the issue was not already present in the novel.

Similarly, the "straight" readings of many scenes in the novel are illuminated by such backward (and in the case of *Ulysses*, forward) glances. Comparative analysis of

drafts and the finished product, by attending to omissions and alterations within the narrative, highlight the techniques that Joyce developed and mastered during the writing process. And often we would have a shallower understanding of certain scenes were it not for the fuller access to them that the archive provides: e.g., Stephen's aforementioned refusal to perform his Easter duty or the scorn he feels for Emma in Chapter V, which is more fully appreciated if we know of the offer he makes her in *Stephen Hero*.ⁱⁱⁱ

One might counter here that in the case of an epiphany, it is better *not* to know of the elaborated circumstances in which it occurs, that Joyce intended a particular aesthetic experience for which the omissions made are requisite. The observation that the omissions are important is correct, but the assumption that knowing further details ruins the effect is unconvincing. Indeed, it would seem that noting certain absences can only add to our understanding of Joyce's use of the epiphany.

Another caveat—one which relates more directly here to our reading of the novel—is that of S. L. Goldberg:

[I]t is always dangerous to judge a writer's work by his own theories—we tend, only too easily, to beg the most relevant questions; and these dangers are particularly acute when, as in Joyce's case, the theories appear as an integral part of a complex work of art. ... [But] if we are prepared to follow them patiently and critically, they lead us directly towards the preoccupations and the forms of his imagination (Goldberg, 64).

Debates over Joyce's relationship to his alter ego often concentrate on Stephen's theory of the lyric, epic, and dramatic, which he presents in Chapter V of *A Portrait*, and on the villanelle he composes shortly after presenting this theory.^{iv} Such debates illustrate how difficult it is to say whether or not a character's statement is the author's own—especially in a work in which the author so assiduously attempts to cover his own tracks. While Stephen's theory of the lyric, epic, and dramatic—whether ironic or not—

does not manifestly guide Joyce's writings as a whole, his theory of epiphany is applicable to all of Joyce's works and even to his own methods of composition (for Joyce kept his own book of "Epiphanies," which he later used in composing his novels). Moreover, the "preoccupations and the forms of imagination" the theory of epiphany underscores are essential to any thorough understanding of Joyce's artistic mission.

Before expounding on his theory of the lyric, epic, and dramatic in *A Portrait*, Stephen first explains to his classmate Lynch that truth and beauty, though not precisely the same, are certainly akin to one another. Truth consists in "the most satisfying relations of the intelligible" while "beauty is beheld by the imagination which is appeased by the most satisfying relations of the sensible" (*P*, 208). Thus, both truth and beauty consist in perfect correlations of parts (observations and facts in the case of truth, and form and structure in the case of beauty). As the mechanisms of the intellect lead various individuals to apprehend a singular mathematical truth, the mechanisms of the sensorium lead them to experience structurally similar aesthetic moments.

In both *A Portrait* and *Stephen Hero*, Stephen insists on investigating these apprehending faculties of the imagination as a way to discover the essential characteristics of aesthetic experience. Before commencing his analysis of epiphany in *Stephen Hero*, Stephen demands that another classmate, Cranly, "Consider the performance of [his] own mind when confronted with any object, hypothetically beautiful" (*SH*, 288-9). Again, in *A Portrait* he overtly declares it necessary first to "understand the frame and scope of the imagination, to comprehend the act itself of esthetic apprehension" before outlining the results of that act (208).

In both versions of the argument, Stephen first dismisses possible foundations of aesthetic experience to account for the variability of aesthetic judgments. In *A Portrait*, he confronts one type of biological model:

—The Greek, the Turk, the Chinese, the Copt, the Hottentot, said Stephen, all admire a different type of female beauty. That seems to be a maze out of which we cannot escape. I see however two ways out. One is this hypothesis: that every physical quality admired by men in women is in direct connection with the manifold functions of women for the propagation of the species. It may be so. The world, it seems, is drearier than even you, Lynch, imagined. For my part I dislike that way out. It leads to eugenics rather than to esthetic. It leads you out of the maze into a new gaudy lectureroom where MacCann, with one hand on *The Origin of Species* and the other hand on the new testament, tells you that you admired the great flanks of Venus because you felt that she would bear you burly offspring and admired her great breasts because you felt she would give good milk to her children and yours (*P*, 208-9).

The fact that different civilizations, as well as different individuals, do not agree in their aesthetic judgments of an object is no reason to dismiss the notion that their aesthetic experiences are similar.

Stephen uses a similar strategy in *Stephen Hero* to arrive at the same observation. But there he takes a different tack by undermining not biology but the acceptability of tradition as a foundation for aesthetics.

—No esthetic theory, pursued Stephen relentlessly, is of any value which investigates with the aid of the lantern of tradition. What we symbolize in black the Chinaman may symbolize in yellow: each has his own tradition. Greek beauty laughs at Coptic beauty and the American Indian derides them both. It is almost impossible to reconcile all tradition whereas it is by no means impossible to find the justification of every form of beauty which has ever been adored on the earth by an examination into the mechanism of esthetic apprehension whether it be dressed in red, white, yellow or black. We have no reason for thinking that the Chinaman has a different system of digestion from that which we have though our diets are quite dissimilar. The apprehensive faculty must be scrutinized in action (*SH*, 288).

Though echoes of this argument against tradition remain—in the mention of Greeks, Chinese, and Copts—Stephen never directly confronts this other potential “way out” in *A Portrait*.

It is important to note how in the *Stephen Hero* version of the argument, instead of attacking biology Stephen uses it to strengthen his point. If digestion (a biological process) is identical across cultural boundaries, why should the internal mechanisms involved in apprehending beauty be different? Tradition, like diet, is merely the surface of a process that runs deeper than cultural codes. This earlier version of the argument also draws a comparison between the apprehension of beauty and consumption. The apprehending consciousness takes in objects and mentally digests/analyzes them, almost as though eating them with the senses.

But Stephen's conclusion in both *A Portrait* and *Stephen Hero* is essentially the same, his preferred hypothesis being

that, though the same object may not seem beautiful to all people, all people who admire a beautiful object find in it certain relations which satisfy and coincide with the stages themselves of all esthetic apprehension. These relations of the sensible, visible to you through one form and to me through another, must therefore be the necessary qualities of beauty (*P*, 209).

The process of aesthetic apprehension, which Stephen characterizes as the “gropings of a spiritual eye,” occurs in three stages (*SH*, 288). The mind first “divides the entire universe into two parts, the object, and the void which is not the object” (289). This division establishes the object's “integrity” or wholeness. Analysis of that integrity follows, and as the mind “considers the object in whole and in part, in relation to itself and to other objects” it explores the balance, form, and structure of the object, discovering it to be a “definitely constituted entity” (289). Finally:

After the analysis which discovers the second quality [symmetry] the mind makes the only logically possible synthesis and discovers the third quality. This is the moment which I call epiphany. ... [W]hen the relation of parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognize that it is *that* thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance (289).

Compared to the account that appears in *A Portrait*, the *Stephen Hero* account much more clearly summarizes this third stage of aesthetic apprehension. Stephen declares that, though at first the concept had confused him, he has come to realize that Aquinas' "*Claritas is quidditas*" (289). The object's "whatness" springs forth as "radiance." The spiritually groping eye achieves focus, and "The moment the focus is reached the object is epiphanised. It is just in this epiphany that I find the third, the supreme quality of beauty" (289).

An epiphany is dialectically constructed in the mind: *integritas* (wholeness), thesis; *consonantia* (symmetry, harmony, or rhythm), antithesis; *claritas* (clarity, radiance, *quidditas*), synthesis.^v The synthesis achieved raises perception to a transcendent level. As Irene Hendry Chayes notes, Stephen's theory of epiphanies is essentially a secular inversion of mystical experience, in that it suggests mystical revelations are in fact aesthetic experiences.

By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments (*SH*, 288).

Here we find not only an elaboration of Stephen's definition of aesthetic experience but also a hint at Stephen's definition of the artist. While anyone can experience the beauty of an object or a memorable phrase, the artist is he who records these moments, thereby preserving and potentially transmitting them to others. Now, if we re-invert this model, taking aesthetic moments as mystical revelations, we see the appropriateness of Stephen's later conception of the artist as a priest of eternal imagination.

Though a similar account of aesthetic apprehension appears in *A Portrait*, Stephen never attaches the name “epiphany” to the final stage of the process, nor does he comment on the man of letter’s need to collect and preserve such moments and phrases. However, the residual imprint of this conception as it appears in *Stephen Hero* can be detected throughout *A Portrait*.

The argument in *A Portrait* proceeds directly from Aquinas’ aesthetics.

Aquinas says: *ad pulcritudinem tria requiruntur, integritas, consonantia, claritas*. I translate it so: *Three things are needed for beauty, wholeness, harmony and radiance*. Do these correspond to the phases of apprehension?... (*P*, 212).

Stephen’s rhetorical question underscores the importance of his earlier requirement that “the most satisfying relations of the sensible must therefore correspond to the necessary phases of artistic apprehension. Find these,” he says, “and you find the qualities of universal beauty” (211).

Stephen then defines each of Aquinas’ terms in turn. A hypothetically beautiful object is present either in space (if it is visible) or in time (if it is audible).^{vi} Therefore, the first stage of apprehension must involve detection of “a bounding line drawn around the object to be apprehended” (212). One perceives it as *one* thing—this is its *integritas* or wholeness. The object as aesthetic image is “first luminously apprehended as selfbounded and selfcontained upon the immeasurable background of space or time which is not it” (212).^{vii} Next, “led by its formal lines,” the observer balances “part against part within [the object’s] limits” (212). Now the object is no longer just one thing but a *thing*. It is the sum of its components. This is its *consonantia* or harmony, revealed in the “rhythm of its structure” (212). Finally, after the mind makes “the only synthesis

which is logically and esthetically permissible,” the object is seen as *that* thing which it is: Aquinas’ *claritas* is the object’s *quidditas* or whatness.

The mind in that mysterious instant [when the aesthetic object is conceived in the imagination] Shelley likened beautifully to a fading coal. The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure, a spiritual state very like to that cardiac condition which the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani, using a phrase almost as beautiful as Shelley’s, called the enchantment of the heart (213).^{viii}

The stasis Stephen refers to here fulfills another of his aesthetic requirements: “beauty expressed by the artist cannot awaken in us an emotion which is kinetic or a sensation which is purely physical. It awakens, or ought to awaken, or induces, or ought to induce, an esthetic stasis, an ideal pity or an ideal terror,^{ix} a stasis called forth, prolonged and at last dissolved by what I call the rhythm of beauty” (206).

Chayes’s “Joyce’s Epiphanies” analyses Stephen’s theory of the epiphany from *Stephen Hero* and investigates how this theory is put into practice by Joyce himself. Chayes distinguishes four types of epiphany employed in Joyce’s writing: 1) the unattached epiphany, which has no commentary or narrative context and which has no relation to anything outside itself; 2) suggestive or guiding epiphany, which is experienced either through the character or within the reader and for which some narrative context is supplied (in some cases this type of epiphany gives Stephen guidance, e.g., the Seaside Epiphany); 3) the pure *quidditas* epiphany, in which the whatness of the moment is self-reflexive and unattached to a perceiving consciousness; and 4) the character epiphany, in which a character is deconstructed and then reassembled using only a few significant and revelatory details.^x

Though somewhat useful as a categorization, Chayes's analysis overlooks the problem of how experience is to be depicted, a problem for which Joyce's/Stephen's theory of epiphany seems to provide no explicit solution. The aesthetic moment Stephen describes occurs (and occurs for anyone) in experience—but once the man of letters has touched upon the *quidditas* of the thing, it is his duty to transcribe and preserve the “delicate and evanescent” moment. Yet we never receive in *Stephen Hero* an explanation of how (or whether) the experience is passed on to an audience. An epiphany is obviously distinct from the depiction of it—yet the artist's record should ideally reproduce the effect in the mind or senses of someone else. Despite the fact that her categorization implicitly deals with Joyce's representative techniques, Chayes does not comment directly on this problem of mediation. Nor does she recognize that her observation on the inverted mysticism of the epiphany is integral to Stephen's notion of the artist as a priest of eternal imagination.

In *A Portrait*, Stephen does attempt to extend experience to the realm of representation. Via his short discourse on Aquinas, he extends his examination of “the act itself” beyond aesthetic apprehension to a theory of the lyric, epic and dramatic forms of literary art, widely regarded as Stephen's most important theoretical attempt. The perceived importance of this second theory may spring from the fact that Stephen develops it himself, without the assistance of Aquinas. For, as he says, “When we come to the phenomena of artistic conception, artistic gestation and artistic reproduction I require a new terminology and a new personal experience” that go beyond Thomistic aesthetics (*P*, 209).

Beauty, according to Stephen's model, does have something essential about it—that is, it preexists the experiential process (one that is similar for all persons, though they apprehend beauty within different forms) that unravels it. But beauty is always experienced through the process of epiphany, or radiant revelation of whatness. The man of letters or any artist, however, goes the extra step by preserving the experience and reproducing it for an audience. It is this reproduction to which Stephen's second theory is addressed. Here is where Stephen begins to approach the production side of art, the side of re-creation after apprehension.

“The image [in this case, a representation of an aesthetic moment], it is clear, must be set between the mind or senses of the artist himself and the mind or senses of others” (*P*, 213). The beautiful object—epiphanically transformed into a mental image—must be transferred to another mind. The lyric, epic, and dramatic forms, the three basic modes of transference, each hold a distinct position between the artist and his audience.

In the lyric, “the artist presents his image in immediate relation to himself”; in the epic, “he presents his image in mediate relation to himself and to others”; and in the dramatic, he presents it “in immediate relation to others” (214). The lyric consists in an outcry, a pure expression of individual emotion: “He who utters it is in fact more conscious of the instant of emotion than of himself as feeling emotion” (214). The epic develops out of the lyric once the artist reflects upon himself, sees himself as the center of “an epical event,” and depersonalizes his narrative enough to push the “centre of emotional gravity” to a point where it is “equidistant from the artist himself and from others” (214-5). When the vitality of the artist's personality, flowing around the characters of the narrative, finally infuses them “with such vital force that he or she

assumes a proper and intangible esthetic life” (i.e., when each character is epiphanized) the level of drama is achieved (215).

The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak. The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in and reprojected from the human imagination. The mystery of esthetic like that of material creation is accomplished. The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails (215).

Critics have tried to extend Stephen’s theory—especially his notion of the Godlike artist—to Joyce’s oeuvre, but with little success. There is certainly no analogous relation between the three types of literary art and the works of Joyce. Indeed, all of his works strive toward dramatic detachment. But even as they do, Joyce’s self-references (such as the playful moment in *Ulysses* when Molly Bloom cries out his name), settling of scores with former friends,^{xi} and thinly veiled autobiographical sources betray the effect of complete detachment. Perhaps we should call his actual technique “dramatic-lyric” (“Even in literature, the highest and most spiritual art,” says Stephen, “the forms are often confused” (*P*, 214)), in that Joyce writes himself entirely into his work, yet in such a way as to obliterate any traces of having done so—knowing all the while that there will be those who will follow the narrative breadcrumb trail back to the author.

Again, we return to the notion that Joyce’s relationship with his protagonist is mediated by his own experience as preserved in Stephen. Once fictionalized and externalized in his alter ego, that transformed experience identifies him as an artist and informs his vocation. The process is self-fulfilling, in that the reconfiguration of the struggle to be an artist results in the artist’s birth.

One imagines a young James Joyce as the type of boy who, as he is seeing, doing, and experiencing, is simultaneously narrating these things to himself; a boy for whom life

itself is mediated by his own narrative feedback. Similarly, whereas the Lynches and Cranlys of the world live in relative immediacy to events, Stephen is forever charging and arranging life as it occurs—writing epiphanies in his mind even before he commits them to paper.^{xii} Indeed, the theory of epiphany only truly makes sense if one understands life itself to be experienced epiphanically from the first. The priest of eternal imagination then is he who presciently regards each evanescent moment as a potential instance of radiant revelation and who reads the world with an expectation of finding in it some hidden sign.

Stephen thus becomes a kind of filter—a way of reading and organizing the world, imbuing it with meaning while only seeming to find it already there. Stephen as the “epiphany producing device” (Booth’s blunt but not entirely inaccurate way of putting it) is the organizing principle of the novel. Everything may be passed through him, from the highbrow to the popular to a shout in the street, and it isn’t necessarily his commentary about each event or observation which is illuminating—very often, it is simply the fact that he has experienced it.^{xiii}

“Just as a self-portrait by Rembrandt shows us both what the artist looked like at a certain stage of his life and how well he was able to paint at that age,” Mitchell writes, “Joyce’s *Portrait* depicts and demonstrates Stephen’s gradual development toward the priesthood of eternal imagination” (Mitchell, 72). However, Mitchell fails to stress the important distinctions between Rembrandt’s portrait and Joyce’s. While Rembrandt’s is an image of himself at the time of its composition, Joyce’s is not. Whereas Rembrandt’s reflects directly the present appearance and skill of the artist, Joyce’s is mediated by the experience of having developed beyond the image he intends to portray, and his prior

experiences are externalized in a fictional alter ego. His character is a reconstruction of the past as a “fluid succession of presents,” each of which must be projected and portrayed, and all of which add up to the complete portrait.

In any *Bildungs-* or *Künstlerroman*, the writer must have already attained to the level toward which his protagonist tremblingly progresses, and his perspective on that younger self’s struggle is necessarily tinged with the irony of experience. The relationship between Joyce and his protagonist is cyclic: the author’s experiences speak to him; he responds by forming them into a narrative world inhabited by his protagonist (the artist’s avatar in that world); the narrative world and the protagonist in turn speak back by giving order and meaning to the author’s experiences, preserving them in an abstracted and distanced version of the artist while extricating and annihilating them in the artist himself, for he has moved beyond that stage of his struggle. Mitchell’s analysis implicitly recognizes this.

Ten years later Joyce was able to write from a new perspective, looking back with increased maturity upon struggles of the artist as a young man in the process of formation. ... The author may reflect the stages of growth of his central figure in the very words he employs, but he himself will always stand above and behind such a style. ... He can disappear behind this life only after he has lived it (65).

But to say simply that Joyce disappears behind “this life” is to ignore the fact that he must first transform and project his own.

If in the *Künstlerroman* there is a distinct implication that the author has experienced, in one way or another, the events he depicts—and that in depicting personal experience, he contributes to his own sense of himself as an artist—then he is never truly above or beyond that experience. Although, as Mitchell and Chayes show, Joyce can employ techniques to make it appear as though he is absent, we always implicitly recognize his connection to Stephen. Indeed, Stephen’s own language betrays the fault of

the artist-as-God model: “The esthetic image in the dramatic form is life *purified in and reprojected* from the human imagination” (*P*, 221; emphasis mine). The unseen God of creation simply creates; the artist behind the *Künstlerroman* is invisible only because he is obscured by his skillful projections.

One possible source for Stephen’s notion of the artist as a detached Godlike entity (an idea Joyce took from Flaubert^{xiv}) occurs early in Chapter II of *A Portrait*. As the Dedaluses are being forced from their home in Blackrock and relocating to Dublin proper—the event which first makes clear to Stephen his father’s financial straits as the family begins their plunge into poverty—Stephen consciously begins to detach himself from the world around him.

He was angry with himself for being young and the prey of restless foolish impulses, angry also with the change of fortune which was reshaping the world about him into a vision of squalor and insincerity. Yet his anger lent nothing to the vision. He *chronicled with patience* what he saw, *detaching himself from it* and testing its mortifying flavour in secret (*P*, 67; emphasis mine).

His bitterness at this turn of events does not taint his perceptions of his environment. Yet it is his bitterness, presumably, which causes him to want to separate himself from the humiliating and disagreeable circumstances. It is precisely from this point that the Godlike point of view takes over within Stephen himself.

Before the scene, there is a certain immediacy to the narrative. That is, things happen and Stephen’s overtly reacts, or else we are privy to his private questions about events. Because of the family’s change of fortunes, he disengages himself from the world. Hereafter, especially in the scene which directly follows (which is in fact a reworking of one of Joyce’s own epiphanies^{xv}), there is an even more pronounced distance between Stephen and the events that unfold. This is the moment, *in utero*, that supplies him with the emotional need for such a notion as the artist as God.

Yet the fact that Joyce, as narrator, seems conscious of the pathos of this need, and the fact that he can depict such a change, illuminates an awareness of the immature impulse of such distancing. Indeed, when Stephen presents the notion, Lynch surlily replies, “What do you mean... by prating about beauty and imagination in this miserable Godforsaken island? No wonder the artist retired within or behind his handiwork after having perpetrated this country” (215). Despite the emotional need for such detachment, which may have contributed at first to Stephen’s longing for the life of the priest, his later vision of the artist’s life—cast still in the mold of priesthood—emphasizes not the power of detachment or Godliness, but the power of the holy office: command and willful transformation.

Indeed, Stephen arrives at his priestly conception of the artist while composing his villanelle—the thought arises from artistic action rather than theoretical speculations. That the poem is itself a reconfiguration of recent experience (his seeing Emma, and his dream of a temptress who is “the lure of the fallen seraphim,” an embodiment of all women, all sin, and the multitudinous experiences he has abandoned the priesthood to explore) illustrates how the artist is more priest than God, using his commanding powers to vivify or to ensoul dull matter rather than to create it *ex nihilo*. In his biography, Ellmann notes that Joyce was often concerned that he was not creative enough, that he merely adapted material from life—yet his practice is entirely consistent with Stephen’s notion of the transforming priest of eternal imagination.

In conceiving of the artist as a priest of eternal imagination, Stephen implicitly suggests that just as a Catholic priest consecrates the Host by commanding the Holy Spirit to enter and transmute it into the body of Christ, the artist (as a sort of priest)

transmutes “the daily bread of experience [a hypothetically beautiful object or moment] into the radiant [epiphanized] body of everliving life” (*P*, 221). The metaphor further implies that the transubstantiated Host (the preserved aesthetic moment) is passed by the priest to his congregation (the audience). Finally, as the account of aesthetic apprehension in *Stephen Hero* suggests, the aesthetic moment transferred is consumed by the mind or senses of the audience, as is the consecrated Eucharist by the congregation.

In the *Künstlerroman* and outside of it, perceiving order in the world, meaning and value in one’s life, requires reflection: backward glances at the spider web of experience woven by the “fluid succession of presents.” (And in looking back, who can help but regard himself ironically?) The accumulation and presentation of experiences within an artistic framework—in Joyce’s case, the establishment of epiphanic patterns—results in the creation of a microcosmic system of associated values.

Indeed, the gradual development of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* from article to discarded draft to a rigorously condensed and objective novel parallels the progression of the young man from callow youth to artist. Biographically and textually, despite minor alterations and obfuscations, Stephen’s journey and Joyce’s—and even the text’s—are the same. *A Portrait* is a palimpsest containing or implying a multitude of vestigial elements from Joyce’s earlier essay and first draft, as well as from his record of personal epiphanies. Comparing these earlier pieces to their final form not only underscores the importance of the changes Joyce made in rewriting, it also reveals *A Portrait* to be an artifact of Joyce’s own artistic struggle. The novel is not merely a fictionalization but also a *spiritual manifestation* of its subject matter. It is unto itself an epiphany, “an apparition,” of the artist.

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For the sake of easy reference, I have cited from the versions of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (abbreviated here as *P*), "A Portrait of the Artist" (POA), *Stephen Hero* (*SH*), and Joyce's epiphanies appearing in a single edition:

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ⁱ Here the definite article "the" becomes, in a sense, indefinite. It is not one particular artist (himself) about which Joyce writes but rather "the artist" in general.

ⁱⁱ Most of the *Künstlerromans* about writers listed above concord with this observation. Maurice Beebe briefly makes a case for its accuracy in his history of the artist-novel, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce*. Noting that the story usually ends before the hero is an accomplished artist, he writes: "Narrative development in the typical artist-novel requires that the hero test and reject the claims of love and life, of God, home, and country, until nothing is left but his true self and his consecration as artist." He cites *A Portrait* and *À la recherche du temps perdu* as two artist-novels in which the protagonists develop to a point where they are capable of composing their own narratives. I would add to the list Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*, and Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, among others.

ⁱⁱⁱ For more on Emma's character in *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait*, see Chayes, p. 364.

^{iv} Cf. Booth and Scholes.

^v The episodes of the novel also proceed dialectically: build-up to epiphany, epiphany, return to a miserable condition but with a greater level of maturity. The opening chapters depict the process of individuation, the separation of the self from world. The middle section includes an analysis of Stephen as an individual. Finally, the epiphany of Stephen's becoming an exiled artist concludes the novel.

^{vi} "Audible" here also applies to something that can be read. This temporal-spatial argument echoes Lessing's *Laocoon*, which Donovan mentions in passing when he interrupts Stephen and Lynch. Lessing stays on Stephen's mind throughout the scene, for moments later Stephen criticizes him for using statues as

an example in his aesthetics. (Note, Lynch refers to the Venus of Praxiteles as a work of art which inspires desire—at least, it inspired him to write his name across its buttocks.)

^{vii} This conforms with a phenomenological model. Cf. Husserl's account in *Ideas—General Introduction to Phenomenology*:

In perception properly so-called, as an explicit awareness, I am turned towards the object, to the paper, for instance. I apprehend it as being this here and now. The apprehension is a singling out, every object having a background in experience. Around and about the paper lie books, pencils, inkwell, and so forth, and these in a certain sense are also “perceived,” perceptually there, in the “field of intuition”; but whilst I was turned towards the paper there was no turning in their direction, nor any apprehending of them, not even in a secondary sense. They appeared and yet were not singled out, were not posited on their own account. Every perception of a thing has such a zone of background intuitions or background awareness, if “intuiting” already includes the state of being turned towards, and this also is a “conscious experience,” or more briefly a “consciousness of” all indeed that in point of fact lies in the co-perceived objective background.

^{viii} Many critics have commented on the apparent (and potentially ironic) inappropriateness of Stephen's reference to Luigi Galvani: the Italian physiologist used the phrase “to describe the momentary cessation of a frog's heartbeat when a needle is inserted in its spinal cord” (Gifford, 254). However, the frog aside, Stephen's comparison is apt in that the process of aesthetic apprehension is a dissection by the mind of forms and structures, resulting in a heart-stopping moment of radiance.

^{ix} Stephen defines pity as “the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the human sufferer.” Terror, he says, is “the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the secret cause” (*P*, 204).

^x This fourth type is unnecessary. The sort of character depiction Chayes categorizes as a type of epiphany is, in fact, simply synecdochic character treatment. Gestures, clothes, and so on become defining elements of the character, and they later stand in as affective suggestions. But clothes, mannerisms, habits always define character, and this technique is used in most novels of the modernist period and earlier. Joyce simply uses this technique to particularly strong effect in his epiphanies.

^{xi} Ellmann's biography, *James Joyce*, contains innumerable examples of story details Joyce intended as paybacks to the Dubliners he felt had slighted him.

^{xii} Even before writing them in his mind, Stephen *reads* his world as though it were a book. Cf. pp. 224-5 of *A Portrait*, where he tries to read the augury of a flight of birds: “Symbol of departure or of loneliness?” (226). See also, the “Telemachus” episode of *Ulysses*, in which Stephen peruses the “signatures” of time and nature on the beach.

^{xiii} See R. B. Kershner's *Joyce, Bakhtin, and Popular Culture*, which attempts to show how popular literature makes its way into the heteroglossia of Joyce's work.

^{xiv} See Anderson's note 215.15, p. 537, in which he quotes a letter from Flaubert to Leroyer de Chantepie: “*L'artiste doit être dans son œuvre comme Dieu dans la Création, invisible et tout-puissant, qu'on le sente partout, mais qu'on ne le voie pas.*”

^{xv} See p. 68 of *A Portrait* and pp. 268-9 in the “Epiphanies” section of the Viking Critical Edition. The scene is an example of an epiphany only lightly reworked by Joyce before he added it to the novel. Aside from slight narrative elaboration of the broken sentences of the epiphany, the only significant change in rewriting was the inclusion of fictitious names—“Jim,” referring to Joyce himself, becomes “Stephen.”