

## **Aspect of Modernism in the novel "A portrait of the artist as a young man"**

Modernism is a movement referring to the art, poetry, literature, architecture, and philosophy of Europe and America in the early twentieth-century. Scholars do not agree exactly when Modernism began--most suggest after World War I, but some suggest it started as early as the late nineteenth century in France. Likewise, some assert Modernism ended with World War II or the bombing of Nagasaki, to be replaced with Postmodernism, or that modernism lasted until the 1960s, when post-structural linguistics dethroned it. Others suggest that the division between modernism and postmodernism is false, and that postmodernism is merely the continuing process of Modernism. Under the general umbrella of Modernism, we find many art movements such as surrealism, formalism, and various French movements. Professor Frank Kermode further divides modernism into paleo-modernism (1914-1920) and neo-modernism (1920-1942). However, these divisions are hardly agreed upon by historians and critics. In general, modernism is an early twentieth-century artistic movement, marked by the following characteristics: (1) the desire to break away from established traditions, (2) a quest to find fresh ways to view man's position or function in the universe, (3) experiments in form and style, particularly with fragmentation--as opposed to the "organic" theories of literary unity appearing in the Romantic and Victorian periods.

The modernists were writers who changed from the "typical" way of writing that had come before them. They often wrote novels in the first person, and they fragmented them, sometimes rearranging the order of the events. Joyce was especially fond of the "stream of consciousness" style in which the narrator gives the reader a view of the inside of his/her mind. Like other writers of his time, Joyce tried to show how to bring some order out of the anarchy that was typical of the world post-World War I.

James Joyce was a modern novelist and he talk about freedom of humanity and most of his themes were based on universality. His writings concern with the individuality rather than a society. He had fully grasp on his writings and modern writings techniques. 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man' is a nearly complete rewrite of the abandoned Stephen Hero novel. It is largely autobiographical, showing the process of attaining maturity and self-consciousness by a gifted young man. The main character is Stephen Dedalus, Joyce's representation of himself. In this novel, some glimpses of Joyce's later techniques are evident, in the use of interior monologue and in the concern with the psychic rather than external reality. He had mentioned stream of conciousness, symbolism, imagism, impressionism, expressionism, existentialism, marxism, feminism and psychoanalysis in his novel. He had also used concept epiphany in his novel 'A portrait of the artist as a young man'.

His love of language was instrumental in his experimental writing that used mythology, literature, and history to create an innovative language using symbols and various narrative

forms. Joyce's intellectualism and creativity has been compared to that of Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud, whose contributions to mankind are historical.

We discuss **Feminism** that is used by James Joyce in his novel, we come to know that Stephen comes from the impact of woman in his life as he tries to find a way through politics, religions and the influential people of Ireland. As the novel comes to life, Stephen is able to control his emotion, except when it comes to women. In their company, Stephen turns up his **"valve"** at once and **"opened the spiritual-heroic refrigerating apparatus."**

As a young man, Stephen is comforted by the presence of his mother around him since she is the one who gave birth to him. She protected and loved him. Stephen feels safe around her for the comfort that he receives from her. However as young boy, Stephen goes through the phallic stage. It is where Stephen realizes his mother's differences. With the phallic stage, comes the idea of castration based on the Psychoanalytic Criticism and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, **"Around ages of four and five, the child develops a strong desire for genital contact with the parent of the opposite gender, desire that is forced out of consciousness by the fear of castration..(Brivic281)"**. The fear of becoming less of a man frightens Stephen. Even after he left his mother's wings and inscribes in one of the best Jesuits school in Ireland, Stephen's perception of castration did not come to an end.

James Joyce uses another modern aspect that is **Marxism**. 'A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man' is a reflection of the Irish Society in a Marxist point of view. Here, James Joyce gives his readers a clear picture of the final years of 19th century Ireland and the factors of which he thinks is the reason for the decay of his people and country: religion and death of the proletariat.

Catholicism, as portrayed in James Joyce's novel, has a strong hold on the Irish government and society. And as seen in the novel, part of Stephen Daedalus's development is his awakening to the influence of religion- personally and socially. Being raised in a devout Catholic family, Stephen immediately follows the moral teachings of the church. However, as he enters adulthood, he realizes the strict conformity of the church that binds his free and idealistic spirit.

**"Each of his senses is brought under a rigorous discipline. It surprised him however to find that at the end of his course of intricate piety and self restraint he was so easily at the mercy of childish and unworthy imperfections"**.

Also, Stephen finds that the political power of the church is rather harmful than helping. In a Christmas dinner with his family, he realizes the influence of the Catholic Church over the death of the Irish king Parnell.

**"Let him remember too, cried Mr. Casey to her from across the table, the language with which**

**the priests and the priests pawns broke Parnell's heart and hounded him into his grave. Let him remember that too when he grows up".**

The novel presents a great debate about the power of the Catholic Church over Ireland. At one side, the non-conformist argues that the church only attends to the spiritual need of a person and not to hear election addresses.

However at the other side of the spectrum, those who favor the Catholic influence but that the church only does its duty of warning the people. The argument seems to last throughout the book with no apparent conclusion until the fifth chapter. Here, Stephen takes the side of the former: He agrees that nobody is a true moral- that the priest is not as innocent as his speech.

Therefore, everyone must have an equal right in forming his/her own political opinions- and must not be hindered by social constraints.

**"This race and this country and this life produced me, he said. I shall express myself as I am".**

A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man is a Marxist social mirror in 19th century Ireland. It presents the readers a picture of social and political ills during their time and suggests solutions for cure. As much as it is revolutionary, it is also still relevant at the present.

Without having a choice, a person's freedom is limited or there is no freedom at all, and these choices make Stephen realize his freedom. Among the existentialists, Sartre emphasizes on freedom the most **"I am indeed an existent who learns his freedom through his acts, but I am also an existent whose individual and unique existence temporalises itself as freedom, ... I am condemned to be free"**. For him, whatever we do is an act, that demonstrates our freedom, a freedom that we cannot evade, that is why he reaches the paradoxical conclusion that we are **"condemned to be free"**.

Stephen also decides to practice his freedom and chooses not to hide behind the objective values of his peers and the way they regard their teachers and he decides to stand for himself. When Stephen goes to the rector's room to correct the injustice he suffered on the hand of one of his teachers, he finds his friends waiting for him and they gather around him to cheer him for standing up for himself, in one of what Joyce calls **"epiphanies"**, which are a sudden realization or revelations at the end of each chapter, **"The cheers died away in the soft grey air. He was alone. He was happy and free"**. Stephen has his moment and he asserts himself in his school society as a unique character. But aside from all that, he realizes that he alone can do anything to assert his individuality. He also feels alone and alienated from the rest of his fellows because he has chosen to do what no one else has done. As he realizes his loneliness, he also feels happy because he has the choice of changing and making the suitable choices in his life. Stephen also feels free because by practicing his will, he no longer feels involved in his society

or its customs, he realizes that he can break free from what tries to shape him and moulds him.

When talking about **existentialism**, Sartre says that **"existence comes before essence"** by which he means "that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surge up in the world—and defines himself afterwards". It is not the physical existence which Sartre and other existentialists are worried about. Nor it is the person's gender, colour, or social class that are of interest to the existentialists. It is how a person defines himself to assert his individuality. According to Sartre **"Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself"**.

This idea of existence is what occupies Stephen's mind. He is not worried about his physical existence, nor is he worried about his physical death, "He had not died but he had faded out like a film in the sun. He had been lost or had wandered out of existence for he no longer existed. How strange to think of him passing out of existence in such a way, not by death but by fading out in the sun or by being lost and forgotten somewhere in the universe". He thinks of his existence in terms of making something out of his own life. He doesn't want to be a nobody that will **"fade"** away and no one remembers, but he wants to exist always in the memory of the universe. The play at the school gives Stephen his first hand experience with the taste of art. The moment he has a taste of it, he can never stop and the only thing he would do is look for more, **"Now that the play was over his nerves cried for some further adventure. He hurried onward as if to overtake it"**, the play showed him what he really liked and that he is on the right way. As an existentialist, Stephen realizes that with the freedom to choose his way of life and the way to identify and make himself comes commitment and responsibility towards his chosen path that must be clear in his actions.

Another aspect, which is mentioned by James Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is not the most celebrated work of James Joyce as a novelist. Symbolically, Joyce weighs the choices that are available to Stephen in terms of the color of roses, **"White roses and red roses: those were beautiful colours to think of ... But you could not have a green rose. But perhaps somewhere in the world you could"**. Stephen can choose one of two things, nationalism or religion. These are what the two colors symbolize, the two ways by which his countrymen live, as shown during the Christmas dinner when these two choices are also represented by his father and Dante. But Stephen is thinking of a third choice symbolized by the "green rose". He doesn't want to choose either this or that.

Actually, Stephen wants to look for other choices in life because he wants to be an individual person. Even though the **"green rose"** does not exist in Ireland, Stephen is determined to find it somewhere else in the world. The matter of which of the available choices is brought up again when his friend asks Stephen whether he kisses his mother or not before going to bed, Stephen wonders what choice he should make. It seems both of the available choices are not satisfactory neither to him nor to his society. Another symbolic reference to choices is made by

the colors green and maroon which Dante has on her brushes "**He wondered which was right, to be for the green or for the maroon**". The matter of which way to choose in life seems limited to him because both are the choices presented by society and they are both not his own, therefore they do not satisfy him.

The stream-of-consciousness technique is a revolutionary modern technique which has tried to transform the art of narrative almost in every respect. By calling consciousness a stream, James meant that human consciousness is something fluid; it is an unbroken current of feelings, impressions, fantasies, half-formed thoughts, and awareness in general. Consciousness is a continuity like time, and it is independent of time. At any given instant of time, an individual's consciousness may not be entirely concerned with the present. He may be living through an experience of the past or fantasizing about the future. The clock of subjective consciousness is independent of the mechanical clock-time. The stream-of-consciousness novelist tries to render the consciousness of his characters in its fullness without the least authorial intervention and without ordering it into logical, lucid, and even grammatical narrative. James Joyce is the greatest of the stream-of-consciousness novelists. His first novel 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man' (1916) is quite autobiographical but at the same time objective. It tells us how the hero, Stephen Dedalus, found his vocation as an artist after experimenting with religion and politics.

Another aspect of modernism, which mention in his novel is **symbolism**. The association of flight with Stephen's experience stems from his affiliation with **Daedalus**. Stephen envisions his soul flying on metaphorical wings of his own construction; like Daedalus. **Bird flight** represents the freedom of Stephen longs for, that he's feeling particularly antsy. For example, when Stephen watches the birds wheeling above in Chapter Five and asks, "**What birds were they?**" Joyce clearly ties his protagonist's unrest to the erratic patterns the birds weave in the sky. Birds are a sign of the mysterious, distant future he sees for himself – in the ancient world, divination by observing the flight of birds was a common practice, and Stephen makes reference to it, seeking meaning in the birds he observes.

From the very first page, **music** is constantly in the background. It's not Stephen's primary artistic passion, so it never really steps to the foreground, but it's always a lingering presence. Music appears at several key points. For example, when he is about to leave the Director's office in Chapter 4th, the priest's "**mirthless**" response to a sudden burst of music from the street shocks Stephen, making him realize that he could never become a priest himself. Later in the chapter, Stephen imagines an "**elfin prelude**" that expresses his excitement at the prospect of going to university. For Stephen, music is tied to a level of non-verbal, almost primal experience of emotion. It relates to his more intellectual poetic activities.

The **image of the skull** is very present in Stephen's interactions with his Jesuit teachers,

emphasizing the deathly and passionless character he eventually comes to recognize as a sign of the priesthood. The skull is a commonly used Christian symbol; it represents Golgotha, the supposed location of Christ's death.

**Colors** plays a substantial role in Chapter One – the colors green and maroon are associated with Parnell and Michael Davitt, two leaders of the Irish nationalist movement. Though the two colors seem to be in harmony at first, Stephen remembers Aunt Dante cutting the green velvet off and telling him that Parnell is a bad man. This confusing episode, and the arguments between Dante and Stephen's father that follow, represent "**politics**" to him at this stage of childhood. To Stephen, the two colors represent conflict and, when Fleming colors a world map with green and maroon, Stephen wonders "**which was right, to be for the green or for the maroon.**" We also see the red and white teams in the Wars of the Roses-themed math competition. Again, color represents conflict and opposition. Though it's a symbol that doesn't come up as obviously in the rest of the text, it highlights the idea of visually representing an ideological conflict, which is very important to Stephen as a child because of his limited understanding of those abstract differences.

The **use of epiphanies** is another modern technique used in James Joyce's 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man' and his other works is unique in that it takes what would normally be considered a mundane, ordinary event and shapes it into something that acts as a revelation not only to the character who witnesses it but to the reader as well. While epiphanies are rather prominent in Joyce's Dubliners, the same case applies to 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'. In this work by Joyce, Stephen Dedalus experiences many "**coming-of-age**" moments in which the benefits and hardships of maturing are gradually revealed to him. Each epiphany accompanies the idea that an event can entirely change one's outlook on life in a matter of seconds.

The first example of Stephen's epiphanies is at the Christmas dinner. "**It was his first Christmas dinner and he thought of his little brothers and sister who were waiting in the nursery, as he had often waited, till the pudding came**".

Stephen's departure from the dinner table after this argument foreshadows what would be a pattern in Stephen's growing independence as the story progresses. Stephen's progression from a small child to the artist is marked by his wanting "**to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld**".

