

“Out of Mere Words”: Linguistic Placements, Displacements, and Replacements in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Thesis:

In this article I argue that Joyce uses a device, which I have labeled as linguistic “displacements” and “replacements,” to demonstrate the ways in which various social groups and institutions attempt to affect the individual through language.

Abstract:

James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, while seemingly simple both thematically and structurally, is a deceptively complex novel which embodies *the* major development in Joyce’s fiction— Joyce’s movement past realism and into modernism. When reading *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, readers are painfully aware that language, philosophy, and references are functioning at a level above their, and usually the characters’, understandings. In contrast, *Portrait* is almost universally relatable. Due to its episodic construction, as well as the fact that the narrative focuses initially on Stephen as a child, *Portrait* exhibits some of Joyce’s most insightful observations about the shifting nature of language as well as how it functions on a societal level. Through parallel incidents in each of *Portrait*’s five chapters, Joyce shows the tendency of people and institutions to “displace” Stephen through language. Which in this case is meant to indicate an attempt to position Stephen, either consciously or unconsciously, through language or to place him in a certain role, the good Catholic, the good Irishman, the good son, the artist. Displacements may be thought of as a type of mental or psychological shift, which generally takes the form of a hallucination, a nightmare, or a contemplative daydream. Following these displacements, Joyce shows how Stephen uses language to reposition, or “replace” himself. Essentially, after being displaced, Stephen attempts to return to his previously held belief, although he often finds it insufficient. Stephen must subsequently modify his position in order to accommodate the new information, interactions, and understandings that he acquires.

Keywords:

James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Modernism, Language, Narrative Theory

**“Out of Mere Words:” Linguistic Placements, Displacements, and Replacements in
*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man***

James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is a deceptively complex novel which embodies *the* major development in Joyce’s fiction, Joyce’s movement past realism and into modernism. When reading *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* readers are painfully aware that language, philosophy, and references are functioning at a level above their, and usually the characters’ understandings. In contrast, *Portrait* is almost universally relatable. However, *Portrait*’s approachability does not make it any less complex, as James Naremore commented, “To understand *Portrait* we must stand close to it at times, distinguishing the strokes of the brush, and we must step back from it at other times, offering a judgment of how the texture serves the meaning of the whole design.”¹ The subtlety and deceptive simplicity of *Portrait*’s style and structure are truly what make it a masterpiece in its own right.

In the opening chapter of *Portrait*, Stephen sees the world around him as a strictly segmented hierarchy. What Stephen notices even as a young child is that every sect of society has its own distinct language: religion, politics, poetry, even third grammar. Words, and the secret knowledge that they represent, distinguish between the initiated and the uninitiated. Stephen initially views language as a uniting force—the soldering which allows the individual links to form a greater chain of being—which might afford him the opportunity to navigate the respective levels of society. However, during the events of the novel Stephen finds, through interactions and contemplation, that language is not the social glue that it seems to be. Rather, language is constantly in flux, constantly changing, and constantly being controlled by its users. Language is not a monolithic institution, nor is it the embodiment of ideologies and power, as

¹ Naremore, James. “Style as Meaning in *A Portrait of the Artist*.” *James Joyce Quarterly* 4 (1967): 332.

some Marxist critics have suggested. In many ways language is humanity's oldest tool. As such, language is very similar to Andrew Feenberg's subjectivist view of technology. People have the ability to make subtle decisions in regards to language, but these subtle changes in the means lead to an unforeseeable change in our goals. Language is the medium which determines our existences. Like our world, our language has been affected unknowingly by our ancestors and the effects are only noticeable after a prolonged period of time. Instead of being the ocean in which everyone swims, language is like a canyon: the seemingly insignificant movements and decisions that take place over time create a path that eventually appears to be its natural form, an indisputable path.

Through parallel incidents in each of *Portrait's* five chapters, Joyce shows the tendency of people and institutions to displace Stephen through language. In this case "displace" is meant to indicate an act of attempting to position Stephen through language or to put him in a certain role, the good Catholic, the good Irishman, the good son, the artist. These displacements are not inherently malicious, or even conscious, acts on the part of those doing the displacing—often the others are not aware that they have displaced, or tried to displace, Stephen. Think of children who use the phrase, "I love you," to manipulate their parents. These children are not evil or manipulative; they are simply using the subconscious appeals which they have picked up on from observing social interactions. Displacements may be thought of as a type of mental or psychological shift, which generally takes the form of a hallucination, a nightmare, or a contemplative daydream. Following these dislocations, Stephen uses language to replace himself. Similarly, "replacement" is not an inherently rebellious or conscious action. Nor do I intend to imply the existence of a "proper place" this is not the point. There is no *proper* place for Stephen, there are just the *different* places which various people want him to occupy. Joyce

demonstrates the tendency of language to displace Stephen and shows his attempts to reassert himself through speech.

Traditionally, writers have two primary options regarding how they emphasize their message: clarity or repetition. Joyce rarely chose clarity, but he never mentioned a significant issue just once. Since Joyce could not clearly show many of the abstractions which he was critiquing, he attempted to repeatedly demonstrate interactions with the aspects of life which people become oblivious to with age. Joyce sought, through repetition, to exhibit the beliefs, assumptions, and oddities which underwrite every aspect of human society. There are multiple parallels, both explicit and implicit, throughout all of Joyce's work. So, I would like to note that this paper does not claim to, nor does it attempt to, chronicle the seemingly infinite parallels between the respective chapters of *Portrait*. There are multiple episodes which, for the sake of concision, I must omit or refer to only in passing. On that note, my focus will be to demonstrate two primary incidents in each chapter of *Portrait*, one in which Stephen is displaced by language and one in which Stephen replaces himself through the use of language.

I: Noises.

Because it presumably chronicles Stephen's earliest conceptions and interactions with language, Chapter I presents the simplest understanding, but arguably the most confusing picture, of how language functions. Numerous critics have noted that Stephen's earliest notions of identity occur as his father christens him "Baby Tuckoo" and as he alters a song in order to take ownership of it. Similarly, I will argue for the sake of this paper that this earliest identity formation also serves as Stephen's initial "placement" through language.²

² Singer, Thomas C. "Riddles, Silence, and Wonder: Joyce and Wittgenstein Encountering the Limits of Language." *Critical Essays of James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Eds. Philip Brady and James F. Carens. London: G. K. Hall & Co., 1998. 243-264. Print.

Traditionally, language has been conceived as our attempt to label the world, to conceptualize the abstract, to differentiate ourselves from the other, or as a means to reach a higher plane of existence. Many scholars have noted and analyzed Stephen's shifting understanding of language within the respective chapters of *Portrait*, and, to a lesser extent, the effects which language has on Stephen. The research has been varied and beneficial to any critical understanding of Joyce. However, current scholarship seems to assume that language is either a means to a greater end, or a representation of social institutions. The problem, as some scholars have noted,³ is that language does not mediate experience, and language does not connect us with reality. For Stephen, and Joyce, language *is* reality. Reality is constructed for Stephen, and he reconstructs it for himself, through reading, hearing, and speaking *words*.⁴

Like Adam in Genesis, Stephen's initial understanding of language is primarily concerned with the referential qualities of language.⁵ Stephen believes that every word simply represents a person, place, action, sensation, etc. Subsequently, Stephen struggles to reconcile the simple rules of language with the fluidity of usage. Like many children, Stephen's understanding of language is rooted in basic reasoning. As such, the majority of Stephen's struggles are similar to the issues which many linguists ascribe to second language learners: multireferential, onomatopoeic, sensory, situational, and metaphorical.

Stephen contemplates a startlingly wide variety of topics in Chapter I including: the imagery of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the multireferential qualities of the word "belt," the onomatopoeic sensation of "suck," the different interpretations of words, the conflicts between the language of politics and the language of religion, the structure of the universe, and why certain words are identified with images and colors. Choosing one specific incident in

³ Mahaffey, Vicki. *Reauthorizing Joyce*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) 66.

⁴ Kershner Jr., R. B. "Time and Language in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*." *ELH* 43.4 (1976): 604-619. *JSTOR*. Web. 11 October 2014. 241.

⁵ Doherty, Gerald. *Pathologies of Desire: The Vicissitudes of the Self in James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008) 21.

which Stephen is displaced by language is a particularly difficult task for Chapter I given that there are more than twenty incidents in Chapter I where Stephen appears overtly displaced by language. However, for the sake of brevity my analysis focuses on Stephen's contemplation of the "smuggling" incident.

As the scene returns to Clongowes readers are presented with what many critics claim is the most subconsciously impactful event to happen to Stephen in Chapter I, the "smuggling" episode. As the boys huddle in small groups, they discuss the expulsion of a group of their peers. While attempting try to get to the bottom of the incident, the students suggest a variety of causes. Cecil Thunder claims it is because the boys "fucked" some cash from the rector's room (*P* 41). Wells maintains it is because the boys drank altar wine (*P* 41). But the climax occurs when Athy says that the expelled boys were caught "smuggling" in the square with Moonan and Boyle one night (*P* 43). This word elicits a powerful reaction from all of the boys. Stephen goes on to reflect on the word smuggling and the reaction which it elicits: "Stephen looked at the faces of the fellows but they were all looking across the playground. He wanted to ask somebody about it. What did that mean about smuggling in the square? Why did the five fellows out of the higher line run away for that? It was a joke, he thought" (*P* 43). Here, Stephen is both surrounded by peers, yet at the same time he is excluded from the conversation. The word and reaction to smuggling has mentally displaced him, so that he has to step back and remove himself from the situation, in order to contemplate the reason smuggling elicits such a strong reaction. Due to both the situation and nature of Stephen's contemplation, many critics have examined implicit theme of homosexuality

As Stephen contemplates the words, "suck," "belt," "kiss," not to mention his analysis of the wash room and the differences between rough and nice—presumably masculine and

feminine— it is hard not to see Stephen as concerned with, or at least partially aware of sexuality. The idea that there are homosexual themes underlying *Portrait*, and especially Chapter I, is almost undeniable. Joseph Valente is perhaps the best known advocate of this position. In his watershed article, Valente examines the psychological and social interactions which underlie all of Stephen's actions in *Portrait*. In his analysis of the smuggling incident, Valente asserts that Stephen is involved in "homosexual energies" regardless of whether or not he understands them:

...it establishes a basis on which to overcome an inveterate critical assumption—an Enlightenment prejudice really—that because Stephen does not fully grasp the implications of the "smuggling" scandal until later on, he is not really party to the homosexual energies circulating among the Clongowes students as they remember or recount the "crime" and anticipate the similarly titillating punishment.⁶

The purpose of Valente's argument is to demonstrate how traditionally marginalized discourses unconsciously affect society. Valente makes a crucial observation; Stephen is undoubtedly affected by the shift in tone following the smuggling incident. Similarly, Stephen may well be subconsciously affected by these events. But, to assert that Stephen, a boy who is not yet six years old, is somehow complicit in an abstract homosexual understanding is a larger leap in logic than I am comfortable with. As such, Valente overestimates Stephen's complicity in the presumed sexual undertones of the incident.

Stephen is undoubtedly physically present for this exchange. However, because of his contemplations about smuggling, Stephen is mentally absent. For one thing, no dialogue is directly attributed to Stephen during the entire smuggling episode.⁷ Additionally, Stephen is depicted as the listener throughout the scene: "The fellows were all silent. Stephen stood among them, afraid to speak, listening. A faint sickness of awe made him feel weak. How could they have done that?" (*P* 42). Rather, this incident is an example of how Stephen is displaced by

⁶ Valente, Joseph. "Thrilled by his Touch: Homosexual Panic and the Will to Astray in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*." *James Joyce Quarterly* 31:3 (1994): 167-188. 173.

⁷ Pages 41-51 in Anderson and Ellmann's edition (sometimes cited as lines I.1150-I.1410)

others' use of language. As the boys seem to tiptoe around the subject, Stephen's mind is absent. Stephen remains with his peers physically, but mentally Stephen might as well be across the universe. I may be marginalizing the very effects which Valente sought to showcase as marginalized, but focusing on perceived homo-erotic undertones of this incident causes any analysis of *Portrait* as a whole to become distorted. As such, I feel that a foregrounding of sexuality misses the mark. Like Derek Attridge, I tend to feel: "If there is a sexual meaning to be read into it...it can only be as a wink on the part of the adult author to the reader."⁸

As mentioned previously, Stephen attempts to use language in order to orient himself multiple times in Chapter I. The opening sequence, the universal list inside of Stephen's geography book, and his discussion with the rector all function as incidents where Stephen attempts to replace himself through language. However, to properly see the effects of language on Stephen we must focus on one of the most underexamined sections of *Portrait*: the dormitory episode.

The impetus behind much of the action in Chapter I which is not provided, but is frequently alluded to is Wells pushing Stephen into a ditch. Not only does the incident seem to have social and psychological repercussions for Stephen, it is also the presumed cause of Stephen's illness. When the physical and mental effects of Wells' assault begin to manifest themselves, Stephen becomes increasingly alienated, both socially and psychologically. As the day progresses, Stephen's level of homesickness rises in conjunction with his presumed fever. This is evident through his repeated contemplations of home and his yearning for maternal contact. Like so many children, when Stephen is sick he longs for the security and warmth of his mother and his bed. As Stephen prays and climbs into bed, he is depicted, both verbally and narratively, in stark similarity to his infancy and his earliest memories of wetting the bed:

⁸ Attridge, Derek. *Joyce Effects: On Language, Theory, and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. 63.

He had to undress and then kneel and say his own prayers and be in bed before the gas was lowered so that he might not go to hell when he died. He rolled his stockings off and put on his nightshirt quickly and knelt trembling at his bedside and repeated his prayers quickly, fearing that the gas would go down. He felt his shoulders shaking as he murmured:

God bless my father and my mother and spare them to me!

God bless my little brothers and sisters and spare them to me!

God bless Dante and Uncle Charles and spare them to me!

He blessed himself and climbed quickly into bed and, tucking the end of the nightshirt under his feet, curled himself together under the cold white sheets, shaking and trembling. But he would not go to hell when he died; and the shaking would stop. (P19)

For Stephen, praying has a similar effect to repeating a mantra. Stephen uses speaking and repetition as a form of psychical grounding. As his imagination runs roughshod over his mind, Stephen attempts to ground, or center, himself by focusing his attention on reproducible, verbal effects. It is only after his ritual prayer is completed that Stephen is finally able to go to sleep.

This type of attempt to center, or “save,” himself through language is evident again in the infirmary episode. During this scene, Stephen is still suffering both mentally and physically from the ill effects of Wells’ prank. After a brief conversation, Athy displaces Stephen with his riddle. As discussed in the smuggling incident, Stephen is physically with Athy, but becomes mentally dislocated. Stephen is still in the bed next to Athy’s, yet the riddle causes Stephen’s mind to wander and wonder at the nature of language. However, Stephen manages to recenter himself through language. This time instead of being the language of the church, it is the language of music:

How beautiful and sad that was! How beautiful the words were where they said *Bury me in the old church yard!* A tremor passed over his body. How sad and how beautiful! He wanted to cry quietly but not for himself: for the words, so beautiful and sad, like music. The bell! The bell! Farewell! O farewell! (P 24-25)

Here, more overtly than in the dormitory episode, it is clear that the words’ meanings are not Stephen’s primary concern. Derek Attridge analyzes the role of repetition and meaning in the initial section of *Portrait*, but his observations are no less true for this incident, “...words are

progressively emptied of their meaning through repetition, rhyming and rhythmicization...”⁹ The meaning is static, and eventually the words become devoid of meaning. For Stephen, the beauty and sadness of the words are not a result of the death fantasy they depict; rather, they are sad and beautiful because of the emotions they elicit in him.

II: Names.

In Chapter II Stephen becomes more aware of how language affects him; as such, he begins to recoil from religion in favor of literature. Stephen obviously feels that his position at the beginning of Chapter II is insufficient, as he seeks to “meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld” (*P* 66). Stephen seeks to escape the confines of his mind and join public life. Fittingly, it is an interaction with a public discourse which displaces Stephen during his trip to Cork. During the train ride, and the entire trip to Cork, Stephen’s perceptions parallel closely with his time at Clongowes. Stephen prays in conjunction with the rhythmic repetitions of the train. Through praying, Stephen is hoping to recenter himself:

...he prayed that the day might come quickly. His prayer, addressed neither to God nor saint, began with a shiver, as the chilly morning breeze crept through the chink of the carriage door to his feet, and ended in a trail of foolish words which he made to fit the insistent rhythm of the train... (*P* 90)

Here, it becomes apparent that it is the act of praying which affects Stephen. The relief does not come from praying to God. The relief comes from speaking; from giving substance to his thoughts. Again, the act of repetition has stripped the words of all meaning for Stephen. His understanding of this fact is clear because he does not feel the need to direct his prayer towards anyone—the mere act of praying is sufficient. However, this prayer does not provide sufficient closure for Stephen.

⁹ Attridge, 69.

During their time in Cork, Stephen's father attempts to dislocate Stephen through the use of language, he sings nationalistic songs, remarks on the differences in accents, and attempts to bring Stephen with him into a reverie of his youthful glory days. Again, Mr. Dedalus' attempted displacement is not a malicious act; Mr. Dedalus sees the trip as an opportunity for a sort of fraternal bonding. Yet, Mr. Dedalus fails to dislocate Stephen with his language. In fact, Stephen is not wholly displaced until he finds the word "*Foetus*" carved repeatedly into a desk. The markings cause Stephen to experience a vision: "A vision of their life, which his father's words had been powerless to evoke, sprang before him out of the word cut in the desk" (*P* 92). The question now becomes: Why does the word *foetus* evoke such a radical response in Stephen?

Joyce's decision to use the word *foetus* is significant for a variety of reasons, not the least of which because it belongs to numerous discourses. Obviously the word has a multitude of sexual implications, for both men and women. Due to the location of the carvings, a desk in the anatomy theatre at Queen's College, *foetus* may have educational, religious, and colonial connotations. Etymologically speaking, *foetus* is an early form of Latin borrowing from Greek. Joyce could have easily decided to use the anglicized spelling of fetus. This seemingly insignificant aspect signals an unrecognized linguistic heritage. It is also foreshadows the eventual conflict between the church and Stephen's later identification with Daedalus.

In his remarkable book, Robert Spoo provides a thorough analysis of this scene. Spoo similarly notes the striking intensity, and the almost physical nature, of Stephen's displacement, from which father must shout to recall him.¹⁰ But, Spoo attributes this to language's ability to function as a portal to history: "Stephen conjures up several such historical scenes in *A Portrait*, and these point toward a more insistent use of verbal exhumations as prolegomena to historical

¹⁰ Robert Spoo. *James Joyce and the Language of History: Dedalus's Nightmare*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994. 52.

knowledge in Joyce's later fiction."¹¹ Certainly there are historical aspects to Stephen's vision. But, the primary function of *foetus* is that it belongs to a generational discourse—it is part of a dialogue between those long gone and those yet to come. *Foetus* is a distinctive aspect of the discourse of manhood.

This dislocation is both a communal and a deeply private experience for Stephen. Obviously it is private due the fact that he becomes trapped in a vision created by his own mind. It is a deeply communal experience in that Stephen joins a discussion with a group of peers who he had yet to recognize: "It shocked him to find in the outer world a trace of what he had deemed till then a brutish and individual malady. His recent monstrous reveries came thronging into his memory. They too had sprung before him, suddenly and furiously, out of mere words" (*P* 93). Stephen is obviously upset to see the private language of his thoughts expressed in a public forum. Although Stephen spends the remainder of his time in Cork alienated in personal reflection, this dislocation does not have a negative effect on Stephen. He may be upset, but there is also a sense of relief in seeing what he had presumed were exclusively his sinful thoughts expressed by another. He is unable to discuss this displacement with his father, yet his father is a member of the discourse community which has dislocated him.

Following his encounter with the words on the desk, Stephen spends the remainder of his time in Cork being flooded by flashbacks to a half-remembered childhood. As the two leave Queen's College, they see a team of cricketers—mirroring the "pick, pock, puck" of the smuggling episode as well as the close of Chapter I. While his father attempts to revive the phantoms of his past, Stephen's hallucination grows to the point that he feels himself fading out of existence. As Stephen treks around the city with his father, he is again both physically present and mentally absent.

¹¹ Ibid, 53.

In order to end his hallucinatory contemplation, Stephen attempts to replace himself through the use language. Like his hierarchy and his prayer in Chapter I, Stephen replaces himself with a repetition of words which try to boil existence down to its essential qualities. Stephen tries to escape his membership in the generational discourse by contemplating society's relation to the individual and how society identifies the individual:

— I am Stephen Dedalus. I am walking beside my father whose name is Simon Dedalus. We are in Cork, in Ireland. Cork is a city. Our Room is in the Victoria Hotel. Victoria and Stephen and Simon. Simon and Stephen and Victoria. Names. (*P* 95)

Again, Joyce shows an instance of Stephen finding solace in seemingly insignificant words. This time, Stephen focuses on the nature of names, rather than on specific social structures. This development is important because readers are shown the increasing roles that societal and public perceptions play in Stephen's concerns. Additionally, names are representative of our public selves, but Stephen is also contemplating whether or not names properly represent our selves—whether or not society's perception of the individual is sufficient. Stephen is essentially contemplating his own ability to define himself.

Although this contemplation provides Stephen with some peace of mind, what finally recenters Stephen, and allows the Cork episode to come to an end, is a repetition of Shelley's "To the Moon." Here, Stephen centers himself in a discourse which he has chosen, or thinks he has. As opposed to Irish nationalism, manhood, and Catholicism which are his birth rights, Stephen finds comfort in a literary tradition which is neither his father's nor his church's. Stephen's literary prayer succeeds in replacing himself, as opposed to his failed prayer on the train. In the final section of Chapter II Stephen echoes the generational issues. Like his father, Stephen is talented enough to win a prize, but also like his father he quickly blows through the money. The generational conversation initiated by *foetus* comes to fruition as he embraces the prostitute. Stephen consciously enters the discourse of Irish sexuality.

III: Confess!

In Chapter III Joyce demonstrates the physical effects of language on Stephen in arguably the most spiritual chapter. Similarly, the priest's main purpose of the sermon is to help his congregation to gain a better understanding of the spiritual suffering of hell through physical sensation and imagination (*P* 130). The major displacement in Chapter III occurs as Stephen is displaced from center stage of the narrative. Chapter III demonstrates a linguistic displacement of Stephen, but it also provides a narrative displacement. The focus of the narrative fluctuates between the sermons and Stephen's responses. This narrative shift forces readers to empathize with Stephen by alienating both. Rather than showing Stephen's response, the narrator forces readers to infer how the sermons affect the sensitive, young character they have come to know. The hell sermons are utterly alienating not only for Stephen, but also for readers. Practically every reader of *Portrait* will mention the extent to which reading the sermons affected them.

The respective sermons displace Stephen in different ways. Following all of the sermons readers are shown Stephen surrounded by others, yet he is unquestionably isolated. After each, respective sermon readers are shown incidents where Stephen is visibly and mentally displaced. All of his hallucinations—the contemplation on the letters of Dublin, his marriage to Emma, his classroom daydream about the phantoms of history, his fear of entering his room, and his nightmare about the goat-creatures—are expressed as concerns involving language.

The retreat as a whole obviously affects Stephen, but the sermon which most affects Stephen is the description of the company of the damned and the company of the devils. The priest centers this sermon around the evils of rhetoric and how they affect us: Eve fell because Satan poured his evil rhetoric into her ear; Adam fell because he was too weak to resist Eve; humanity heard but refused listen to the words of Jesus; and all of the damned are inevitably

reminded of this by the devils in hell. It is here, in hell with the damned, that the priest demonstrates how language affects the living and the dead. While discussing the nature of the damned, the priest constantly relates their torment through the loss of language. The fallen are stripped of the qualities which made them human: language, reason, and relationships. God has made them utterly bestial.¹² The damned are able to talk; however, God has robbed them of the ability to communicate: “The damned howl and scream at one another, their torture and rage intensified by the presence of beings tortured and raging like themselves. All sense of humanity is forgotten” (P 126). The priest goes on to discuss the triple sting of conscience in which all repenting in hell is shown to be useless. Language is turned from a means of relief to a means through which God may compound the torture of the damned. The priest does not directly state it, but the real torture of hell that he describes is a torture of perpetual isolation.

Following this displacement, Stephen attempts to reestablish himself through the only means the Catholic Church allows for, the act of confession. Although numerous critics have noted that Stephen attempts to restore himself through the existing hierarchy of the church,¹³ what critics have failed to acknowledge is the thematic significance of articulation. After the sermons, Stephen prays three times: with the congregation, before going to bed, and after his nightmare. However, Stephen fails to receive any peace of mind until after his nightmare when he audibly prays. Immediately after the sermon, the priest leads the church in a recitation of the act of contrition. While the priest recites the prayer, the boys respond. However, Stephen’s voice is explicitly absent, “Stephen, *his tongue cleaving to his palate*, bowed his head, praying *with his heart*” (P 138 emphasis added). Upon returning to his room, Stephen stands in silence at his door contemplating the voices, faces, and eyes which seem to occupy his room. Then, Stephen

¹² Doherty, 112.

¹³ Ibid, 115.

reverts to a child-like self, as with Chapter I, when he silently kneels and prays before crawling into bed. Following his nightmare and the subsequent fit, Stephen finally submits to the demands of Catholicism and audibly prays. This prayer symbolizes that by replacing himself through the language of the Catholic Church, Stephen is essentially forfeiting his individuality.

But even this personal annunciation is an insufficient concession. In order to receive grace Stephen must face his worst fear; he must share his sins with another. He must be with his confessor both mentally and physically. According to the Catholic doctrine which constructs his existence, Stephen must provide a public declaration of his sins: “Confess! He had to confess every sin. How could he utter in words to the priest what he had done? Must, must. Or how could he explain without dying of shame?” (*P* 143). For Stephen, the most terrifying aspect of repenting is vocalizing his thoughts and actions. For Stephen the act of speaking, or admitting to sins, is far worse than performing sins or contemplating sins because speaking of sins is to make them public; to make your thoughts somehow known and tangible. As Stephen’s perception of language up to this point would state, there are not multiple ways to interpret speech, unlike thoughts and actions.

It is only after confessing his sins to a priest that Stephen receives the words of absolution. Like the song during the infirmary scene in Chapter I, Stephen remarks, “How sweet and sad!” the sounds of the words are. After hearing “the grave words of absolution,” Stephen feels that his soul has reverted to its childish purity. Stephen’s perceived victory is a result of his utilizing the structure and language of the Catholic Church to reaffirm his position in the hierarchy. In Chapter IV the theme of confession continues as Stephen’s Confessor continues to have him relive these sins long after he has repented.

IV: Words.

As readers, and presumably the narrator, have come to expect Stephen's spiritual fulfilment does not last. Stephen gradually feels that the rituals and confessions which had previously brought him absolution have devolved into mere habits, and he slowly begins to recognize that the church's identification for him is insufficient. The Director tries to cement Stephen's placement by tempting him with the possibility of entering the order of the Jesuits. However, this instance is not the major dislocation of the chapter; rather, it is another failed attempt at dislocation, much like his father's in Chapter II. Stephen is tempted, like Eve, through another's use of language and promises of secret knowledge: "He listened in a reverent silence now to the priest's appeal and through the words he heard even more distinctly a voice bidding him approach, offering him secret knowledge and secret power" (*P* 162). The Director's temptation does incite a vision within Stephen's mind, but Stephen consciously resists the Director's poisonous eloquence as well as his attempt at placement.

Following this minor victory, Stephen contemplates his relationship with language. Stephen comes to the realization that the church is not what has always given his life purpose; rather it is the church's use of language which has created this illusion. By rejecting the church in favor of the dissonance of the city, or the "disorder, the confusion and misrule of his father's house" (*P* 169), Stephen consciously resists being displaced. So, Stephen attempts to locate himself. After repeating the phrase: "—A day of dappled seaborne clouds," Stephen slips into a contemplation about his lifelong relationship with language:

Words. Was it their colours? ... Did he then love the rhythmic rise and fall of words better than their associations of legend and colour? Or was it that... he drew less pleasure from the reflection of the glowing sensible world through the prism of a language many-coloured and richly storied than from the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose? (*Portrait* 171)

Stephen is not merely trying to determine why he has always liked words; he is also performing the deep personal and societal reflection which being an artist requires. This thought is largely a repetition of the same concerns which Stephen expressed as a child, although here it is much more developed and intelligible. But, as we can see, Stephen is still affected by the same discourse that affected him as a child.

Stephen's reveries are interrupted by the calls from his peers. While running shirtless they try to engage Stephen in their games: "—Stephanos Dedalos! Bous Stephanoumenos! Bous Stephaneforos!" (*P* 173). Again, Stephen is physically present, and his peers interact with him, but he is mentally absent. This is in stark contrast to his peers who are defined by their physicality. Unbeknownst to his peers, their calls dislocate Stephen into the world of artistic expression. These calls evoke a vision of fate or destiny which is strikingly similar to the visions produced by both the hell sermons and the Director. In many ways Stephen is both displaced and replaced through language in this scene. He is displaced because he allows the world around him to contribute to how he identifies himself. However, he also replaces himself because he does not allow his peers to determine his place in society. It is here that suddenly Stephen sees his name as a prophecy. Regardless of whether this scene functions as a replacement of a displacement, Stephen uses his new identity of an artist, and the language that accompanies it, to dislocate someone else—the "bird-girl."

Like the smuggling episode, Stephen's interaction with the bird girl is one of the most contentiously debated scenes in all of *Portrait*. Critics like Steven Centola find this scene extremely positive due to the belief that it signals Stephen's newfound ability to alter and manipulate images: "The dominant images, the bird and the color white, also no longer have a negative connotation, for Stephen does not associate them only with the Catholic Church and the

fear and punishment connected with the Church and these images in his mind.”¹⁴ For some critics, and readers, this scene signifies a type of artistic transcendence for Stephen. This epiphanic scene can certainly be read optimistically, but as with all Joycean epiphanies, it is tinged with irony. As such, many critics consider Stephen’s treatment of the bird girl as a major step backwards because he uses the same systemic language, which has plagued him, to displace another, to a position which he wants her to occupy. Joseph Valente contends that: “His fetishistic (which is to say implicitly misogynistic) overvaluation of the bird girl’s physical presence follows a correspondingly aversive over reaction to the physical presence of his unclothed schoolmates.”¹⁵ In all actuality Valente’s interpretation of this scene is much closer to the truth of the matter. Valente is absolutely correct when he stresses the importance of physical presence. In this scene, Stephen is again physically present, but mentally absent, as opposed to his friends and the girl which are defined by their physical presence. Additionally, Stephen literally transforms the girl into an artistic object. So for all intents and purposes, Valente is correct. With the exception that Stephen’s “objectification” or displacement is not an inherently vicious action.

Like so many scenes in *Portrait*, the bird girl incident is both a success and a failure for Stephen. He successfully controls language, rather than being controlled by it. Yet, this also needs to be considered a failure for Stephen because regardless of whether he intended to or not he subjects the girl to the use of language which has traditionally affected him.

V: Away!

In the final chapter, Stephen is increasingly dislocated by the language of politics. Stephen’s peers discuss home rule, communism, and speaking Gaelic. Yet, most readers and

¹⁴ Centola, Steven R. “‘The White Peace of the Altar’: White Imagery in James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.” *South Atlantic Review* 50.4 (1985): 93-106. *JSTOR*. Web. 15, August, 2015. 102.

¹⁵ Valente, 185.

critics focus on Stephen's conversation with the Dean of studies. During their conversation, the two experience several failures to communicate. Stephen and the Dean struggle between the literary or marketplace tradition of language, distinguishing between the multiple meanings of words, and the accidental use of puns. Yet, the most widely regarded instance of confusion takes place during their tundish/funnel conversation. The Dean considers the unknown word to be an Irish idiom, but Stephen later finds it to be an etymologically Anglican word. Many feel that the tundish incident is the closest *Portrait* gets to wrestling Anglo-Irish relations. Interestingly, Stephen does not immediately realize the extent to which the Dean dislocates him, much as he does not understand the extent to which Catholicism has shaped his thinking.

When Stephen begins to realize the implications of the interaction, he begins to understand just how much language—his medium of choice, the material of his consciousness—is dictated by others:

—The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master* on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language. (*P* 194)

This comment has been picked up and understood in a variety of ways, primarily in terms of post-colonialism. The problem with an exclusively post-colonial interpretation of this episode is that it overshadows the primary struggle occurring within Stephen's mind: The struggle of language.

When examined closely, Stephen's analysis of his relationship with the Dean is almost entirely off the mark. The problem with Stephen's theory is that for the Dean, English is also an acquired speech. Any language is an acquired speech. Its users always inherit a system which they neither developed nor accepted. English, not Latin or Gaelic, *is* Stephen's native tongue. The Dean has little more influence on the English language than Stephen does, which is apparent

in his confusion over tundish. As Chapter V progresses and readers are shown Stephen's interactions with Irish nationalists, it becomes clear that Stephen is by no means as fervently nationalist as this quote might initially suggest. Rather, in this instance, Stephen is possessed by the traditional narrative of Ireland. As Stephen notes about one of his later snide remarks: "— The thought is not mine, he said to himself quickly. It came from the comic Irishman in the bench behind" (*P* 198). Regardless of whether he likes it or not the language of the Irish has shaped his thinking, just as the language of the British and the language of Catholicism. Through the remainder of *Portrait*, Stephen maintains the possibility of freedom and originality through language, but in *Ulysses* Stephen must come to the begrudging acceptance that cultural, political, and religious colonialism has occurred.

Like in Chapter III, the narrative focus shifts, and this shift is accompanied by Stephen's primary act of replacement in Chapter V, his journal. For the last few pages of *Portrait*, the narrator, who has told roughly ninety percent of the narrative up to that point, is no longer allowed to mediate the reader's interpretation of Stephen. By the narrative switching to Stephen's journal, Stephen conceives his final action in the novel as a linguistic rejection of society's accepted narrative. Of course, Stephen, like Joyce, seems to believe that the only effective way to critique society and the only way in which to portray it requires the artist to be outside of that society. Even in his rejection of his social and linguistic heritage, Stephen remains completely obsessed with it.

Obviously, Stephen's journal is tinged with both Stephen's usual Romanticism and Joyce's usual irony. However, by insisting on finishing his own story, as opposed to letting the narrator continue, Stephen believes that he finishes his rebellion. Towards the end of *Portrait*, Stephen believes much like he did when he was a child, that if he can control language, and resist

being controlled by it, he will be free to express himself. And subsequently, free of the structures which have used language to limit him. Only in *Ulysses* will Stephen begin to comprehend what he only vaguely notices in *Portrait*: that he will never be able to reject society, or even its history and language, because both of them comprise his entire existence.

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