

*Doğuş Üniversitesi Dergisi, 2002/6, 37-49*

## **CRISIS OF IDENTITY IN A *PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN***

**Ali GÜNEŞ**

*Kafkas University*

**ABSTRACT** :This paper examines two opposing views in terms of the construction of identity in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. First, Joyce sees the complex sense of historical forces, social institutions, culture, religion and politics as influencing both the perception and behaviors of individuals in the late nineteenth-century Irish society. Through the views of his fictional character, Stephen Dedalus, therefore, Joyce criticizes the "nets" of the Irish society, which limit individuals, never letting them express themselves freely. Secondly, the paper focuses upon the shift in the sensibility and perception of Stephen Dedalus. This shift enables him to expand psychologically and transcend not only beyond the actual experience of the physical world for an ideal view of life but also beyond the fixity of the traditional perception of identity. The paper suggests that Stephen Dedalus is a modernist character: he seeks his own identity and meaning in the complexity of modern experience through art, rather than accepting the identity given to him by traditional society and culture.

**Keywords:** *Politics, realism, subjectivity, modernism, identity*

**ÖZET** : Bu makale, James Joyce'un *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* adlı romanında kimlik oluşumu ile ilgili iki zıt görüşü irdeler. Yazar, ilk önce sosyal kurumları, kültür, din ve politikayı toplum içinde bireyin davranışlarını etkileyen bir karmaşık ilişkiler bütünü olarak görür. Dolayısıyla, Joyce, romanın baş kahramanı Stephen Dedalus'un görüşlerini kullanarak bireylerin kendilerini özgürce ifade edebilmelerini engelleyen 19.yüzyıl İrlanda toplumundaki sosyal kurumları eleştirir. Makale, daha sonra Stephen Dedalus'un toplum ve kendi kimliği ile ilgili görüşlerinin değişmesine ve geleneksel kimliğinin ötesinde modernist bir kimlik kazanmasına yardımcı olan öznellik (subjectivity) görüşü üzerinde yoğunlaşır. Geleneksel dünya görüşünü kabul etmeyen Stephen Dedalus, sanatı kullanarak kendi kimliğini ve dünya görüşünü kendi kendine bulmaya çalışır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Politika, gerçeklik, öznellik, modernizm, kimlik*

The view of subjectivity has stirred up an important critical attention with regard to the representation of thought, feeling and emotion in the novels of James Joyce (Woolf, 1948: 190-95; Stewart, 1960: 19; Kettle, 1969: 301-14; Thornton, 1999: 103-30). Such attention also includes *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) where characters have imaginative or inner qualities (Crump, 1992: 223-40). In the novel, Stephen Dedalus is caught up in his own private or inner consciousness; he strives to create the ideal world of his own as visionary and free from the "nets" of the blunt Irish society, which constrain and confine him deeply (Joyce, 1961: 327). The novel seems to represent various complex experiences of Stephen that are sometimes contradictory to each other. Joyce tries to bring these contradictory views into harmonious unity throughout the novel. The constant vacillation of Stephen from one experience to another as well as a strong tendency towards subjective

experience or self-creativity might undermine the basis of autonomous, self-contained traditional identity. Like Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf, Joyce disparages and abandons the narrow traditional notion of self in favor of a fragmented and unstable view of self; he represents Stephen as visionary and fluid within the complexities of his modern experiences in *A Portrait*.

In the novel, Joyce emphasizes imaginary vision, creativity and sensibility. These qualities may enable the artist to perceive the meaning of life beyond actual experience. Joyce attempts to develop such qualities in *A Portrait*, yet critics have been generally ambivalent in their views: is Stephen different from the characters that realist writers portrayed in their fiction? They compare the novel to William Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1850), the subtitle of which is *The Growth of a Poet's Mind*. Weldon Thornton, for example, considers Joyce's *A Portrait* "within the context of the genre it so exemplifies - the Bildungsroman", that is, a novel that deals with the psychological and emotional development of its protagonist, tracing his life from inexperienced youth to maturity (1999: 65). He argues that Joyce represents Stephen as withdrawing into his inner world, yet such experiences are not very common in *A Portrait* when it is compared to *Ulysses* (1922). In Thornton's view, Joyce, like Wordsworth, may focus upon the progress of Stephen's life from childhood to maturity in a linear narrative (1999: 70). Moreover, John Paul Riquelme makes a similar comment upon Joyce's narrative strategy in *A Portrait*. He suggests that "there is little or no transition from one situation to another", so that Joyce, according to him, does not represent Stephen's life as diverse and fluid (Riquelme, 1993: 117). Furthermore, J. I. M. Stewart considers Stephen "a highly unified creation" in *A Portrait* (Stewart, 1960: 19). For these critics, therefore, Joyce follows a realist linear narrative and constructs a recognizable view of character when he pursues closely the development of Stephen. In her famous essay "Modern Fiction" (1919), however, Woolf, though ambiguous regarding his success, singles out Joyce as the most notable modernist writer (1966: 330). In her view, he abandons the methods of realist writers. As a modernist writer, Joyce, like Woolf, attacks realist writers and finds their methods and techniques useless for representing reality and character in modernist fiction. The dissatisfaction of modernist writers with realist writers derives mainly from the fact that they constructed their characters by telling observable facts about a character's dress, appearance, social and material circumstances; they tried to represent reality and life as true and convincing. Modernist writers believe that the close attention to outside facts prevents the writer from looking at other aspects of reality and life. Like other modernist writers, therefore, Joyce overthrows the traditional methods and techniques of novel writing. Woolf identifies Joyce as "spiritual", in which he frees modernist fiction from "the accepted style" of his predecessors (1948: 189). Woolf asserts that Joyce "is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of...[the] innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain" (1948: 190). What she may suggest is that Joyce is the writer as "free man" who bases his work "upon his feeling and not upon convention" and whose fiction supplies "no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style" (1948: 189).

This paper examines two interacting views in terms of the construction of identity in *A Portrait*. First, Joyce sees and represents the complex sense of historical forces,

social institutions, culture, religion and politics as influencing obviously the behaviors and perception of individuals in society. He observes culture, politics and religion as irrational and brutal organisms, which crush and destroy the qualities of the private world such as love, sympathy, warm relations and art. Through the views of Stephen, therefore, Joyce criticizes the “nets” of the late nineteenth-century Irish society, since these “nets” produce not only human identity, but they also prevent individuals from expressing themselves freely. Thus, Stephen desires profoundly to run away from the constraint of these “nets”. Secondly, the paper focuses upon “the quick of [Stephen’s] mind” in *A Portrait*. Like Woolf, Joyce searches for “the dark places of psychology” through “the quick of the mind” (Woolf, 1948: 191-2). Joyce may chase the development of Stephen, yet he does not give a full picture. Unlike a realist novel, *A Portrait* ends when Stephen is halfway through his development. Moreover, Stephen strives constantly and imaginatively throughout the novel “to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race” (Joyce, 1961: 367). In Stephen’s desire to meet “for the millionth time the reality of experience” as fluid and spontaneous, Joyce might successfully undermine the basis of a predetermined identity and represent the richness of personality. This richness allows the self to go beyond itself in the complex process of time’s fluidity. Stephen thus rejects what shapes and limits his perception and life in the traditional Irish society, so that he moves constantly from one perception to another for “a new scene” or “a new wild life” in the process of re-constructing and re-working his own identity (232, 303). Hence we do not really know what happens to Stephen in his pursuit of “the reality of experience” after the age of twenty. In *A Portrait*, it may be suggested that Joyce as a modernist writer explores the arbitrary representation of reality and life, the conflict between social values and human desire for transcendence and the tension between fixed identity and the unstable self.

In *A Portrait*, Joyce represents a new view of character and explores the role of art in society. In doing so, he, like other modernist writers, avoids direct narration in the novel that used to be the main narrative technique in a typical nineteenth-century realist novel. He develops a new view of narrative as fluid and flexible. In this new narrative technique that he developed further in *Ulysses*, Joyce vacillates constantly between outer narrative and inner investigation of his characters’ thoughts without the intrusion of connecting links. Each dialogue begins to interweave with narrative or descriptive writing, and thus the reader may find himself attending at one and the same time to a conversation between characters and to what is going on in their minds. Like Woolf, Joyce does not cut himself off completely from the external world, yet the process continues simultaneously all the time: he unites the fictional with the actual world more convincingly by being as flexible as possible in narrative. Unlike Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), therefore, Joyce does not start *A Portrait*: “Stephen Dedalus was born in February 1882 in Rathgar, Dublin, the eldest son of John Simon Dedalus”. There is no clear and direct statement in the life story of Stephen. Instead, the first section begins with the voice of Stephen’s father who tells a bedtime story. The second section gives the description of a school playground swarming with boys (177). Moreover, Joyce does not give Stephen’s rejection of Catholic Church, his family and country through a direct statement, yet the reader learns it through the lives and views of his fictional characters as well as

through the views of the characters about each other. In *A Portrait*, therefore, Joyce not only uses Stephen to show his own rebellion against the restraint of social institutions and conventions, but he also embodies his own interpretation of the kind of life when Stephen desires strongly to escape beyond his unsatisfactory and fragmentary relationships with society, religion, politics and culture through the interrelation of vision and art.

In *A Portrait*, Joyce represents the world of politics, nationalism and much of culture with some discourses, images and myths showing that they constitute and rule the conditions of individual existence. Nationalism, culture and religion are profoundly dominant elements in the social life of late nineteenth-century Ireland. They stultify and restrain individuals. Hence the traditional, national and religious values in Irish society apparently influence young Stephen's early perception and development. When the novel begins, Stephen is a small boy at the age of six. He attends Clongowes Wood College, a Jesuit Boarding School, which is haunted by the ghost of Irish rebels. Moreover, the living shadow of Parnell, Irish political leader, falls across his awakening consciousness. In his boyhood, Stephen sees his elders as bitterly divided in their consciousness in terms of religion and politics. At his first Christmas dinner table during the Christmas vacation, for example, he listens silently but vigilantly to Mr. Casey, Uncle Charles, Dante, his father and mother while they are talking and arguing about religion and politics. There are bitter disputes between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Dante is a widow who was brought into the Joyce household to be a governess. She is a fierce partisan of the clergy. In his early life, Stephen is influenced by her religious views. As a devout catholic, Dante thinks that priests must warn the people, direct their lives and tell them "what is right and what is wrong" (195). In her view, a priest is "the apple of God's eye". Also "God and religion [are] before everything" (201). Moreover, Dante thinks that religion must shape social and political life in accordance with divine principles, yet Mr. Dedalus and Mr. Casey appear as secularist and strongly oppose her view of religion and life. They want religion not to "meddle in politics" (196). In their views, politics and religion must be separate from each other. Mr. Casey exclaims that "no God for Ireland! We have had too much God in Ireland. Away with God!" (202). Stephen watches silently their fierce arguments and listens to the language that they use. As a small boy, he becomes thrilled by their discussion, but he begins to construct his own perception by asking himself secretly some questions: why is Mr. Casey against religion? Why does Dante not like Protestants? Who is right and who is wrong? Joyce represents these fictional characters as opposed to each other, yet what is important is that he illuminates his own ambivalent views about religion and politics through his characters without a direct intrusion.

Moreover, Joyce gives further the crippling effect of religion upon Stephen's consciousness. Stephen leaves Clongowes Wood College due to the severe financial problem of his family. A friendly priest arranges for him to get a free place at Belvedere, a Jesuit day school in Dublin. Like the previous one, however, this school is also full of conventional and religious values. There he becomes interested in girls, yet he is shy and unresponsive when he is actually in close company with Emma Clerk, a girl who attracts him. His various frustrations come to a head one

night when he meets a prostitute in the street. She takes him to her room to initiate him to sex. But Stephen feels morally uncomfortable and guilty, because he considers his action a big sin in relation to religion (251). When he attends a school meeting organized in honor of saint Francis Xavier, the priest's hell-fire sermons move him to anguished self-disgust and terrified remorse: "the faint glimmer of fear became a terror of spirit as the hoarse voice of the preacher blew death into his soul. He suffered its agony...the bright centers of [his] brain extinguished one by one like lamps" (257-8). The meeting brings about a religious crisis as well as a kind of disturbance in Stephen's consciousness. He feels as if the preacher talked of him; he thinks, "against his sin, foul and secret, the wrath of God was aimed". The preacher's knife "had probed deeply into his disclosed conscience, and he felt now that his soul was festering in sin" (260). After listening to the sermon on death, hell and judgment, Stephen becomes very frustrated. Then he goes to his room and wants to be alone. When his frustration increases due to his feeling of sin and guilty, his mind is filled with darkness and despair under the gloomy views of Catholic doctrines. He longs for getting rid of his aggravation. In order to assuage the confusion of his feeling, he strives to pray secretly in his room. But Stephen is unable to abstain himself from what the priest has told of sin, hell and judgment. The bodily unrest, chill and weariness encompass his thoughts and feeling; Stephen longs for soothing urgently his agitated feeling. Eventually he looks for a church to confess to his sin. He does it. His confession comforts him psychologically, and thus he feels himself at ease due to the view that he is purified of the psychologically crippling effect of sin. Stephen finds peace again in his feeling: "he knelt...sinless and timid: and he would hold upon his tongue the host and God would enter his purified body...Another life. A life of grace and virtue and happiness! It was true. It was not a dream from which he would wake. The past was past" (284).

This view of "another life, a life of grace and virtue and happiness" leads to religious tendency in Stephen. He endeavors to remodel his life in line with the pattern of perfection taught by the Church. He thus devotes himself to the religious life under a strict self-discipline that denies his most powerful aspirations towards a new life and beauty: "every morning he hallowed himself anew in the presence of some holy image or mystery. His day began with a heroic offering of its every moment of thought or action for the intention of the sovereign pontiff and with an early mass" (284). Stephen feels that his sinful soul is purified and raised up from its weakness. Thus, he believes that every bounty such as wisdom, understanding and knowledge will descend upon him as long as he dedicates himself to the divine love of God. "Gradually, as his soul was enriched with spiritual knowledge, he saw the whole world forming one vast symmetrical expression of God's power and love. Life became a divine gift for every moment and sensation..." (286). For him, the complexity of life no longer exists. The divine meaning in all nature granted to his soul is complete and unquestionable. Then he is offered, "to join the order" to be a priest (292).

When he grows up, however, Stephen comes to realize that his future cannot be in subjection to an ordered system as in Church. In his view, the Irish Catholic Church is provincial, narrow and hostile to what he considers important: "freedom and justice". Gradually, therefore, his soul becomes unable to harbor religious principles

or views for any time though he forces his lips to utter them with conviction. It gives rise to a view of crisis in Stephen, since he thinks that the fixity of religious rules both confines individuals and cripples their feelings. Hence a sense of sickness and “unrest” begins again “to irradiate” his being and consciousness: Stephen gathers his impressions of religion and priesthood as well as of the division which religion and politics have brought about in the consciousness of Irish people (295). At once, “a feverish quickening of his pulses followed...and a din of meaningless words drove his reasoned thoughts hither and thither confusedly” (295). Thinking himself as “the Reverend Stephen Dedalus, S. J.” extremely disturbs him in the sense that many years of order and obedience will restrain what he considers important: “the expansion of life” and “his freedom” (296). While walking before the Jesuits’ house in Gardiner Street where the priests generally live, he contemplates and recalls the voice of priest offering him to join the order, yet he feels that “his soul was not there to hear and greet it...and he knew now that the exhortation he had listened to had already fallen into an idle formal tale” (296).

Moreover, Stephen's weariness of life becomes more obvious when he starts university. He views the life offered to him as stagnant, dull and painful, so that he hopes of better things in life. As soon as he leaves his father at a public house, for example, Stephen walks towards the river and sea. There he perceives other aspects of life different from what he is offered:

The university! So he had passed beyond the challenge of the sentries who had stood as guardians of his boyhood and had sought to keep him among them that he might be subject to them and serve their ends. Pride after satisfaction uplifted him like long slow waves. The end he had been born to serve yet did not see had led him to escape by an unseen path and now it beckoned to him once more and a new adventure was about to be opened to him. It seemed to him that he heard notes of fitful music leaping upwards a tone and downwards a diminished fourth, upwards a tone and downwards a major third, like triple branching flames leaping fitfully, flame after flame, out of a midnight wood. It was an elfin prelude, endless and formless; and, as it grew wilder and faster, the flames leaping out of time, he seemed to hear from under the boughs and grasses wild creatures racing, their feet pattering like rain upon the leaves. Their feet passed in pattering tumult over his mind, the feet of hares and rabbits, the feet of harts and hinds and antelopes, until he heard them no more and remembered only a proud cadence from Newman:

- Whose feet are as the feet of harts and underneath the ever-lasting arms (298).

Stephen's views are fluid; they are “leaping”, wave-like, then flames, racing creatures. All these views suggest the variety and diversity of his perception of life. In the moment of the vision on the beach, therefore, he sees his destiny as manifest; he realizes his destiny; Stephen hears his name, Dedalus, called out, and the name seems to be prophetic:

At the name of the fabulous artificer, he seemed to hear the noise of dim waves and to see a winged form flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air...a hawk like man flying sunward above the sea, a prophecy of the end he had been born to serve and had been following through the miss of childhood and boyhood, a symbol of the artists forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being...(301)

Stephen thus becomes “elusive of social or religious order” (296), because he notices gradually that both “religious order” and Dublin, which are the tangible and centers of his nationality, have failed to provide him with a vision of reality corresponding with his own experience. He seeks a vision beyond the actual experience of life; it is adventurous, mysterious and flying. Eventually he tells his classmate, Cranly, that he “has lost the faith” (359). It shocks Cranly.

That Stephen “has lost the faith” derives mainly from the fact that religion suppresses and confines individuals within its certain and authoritative rules. In his views, these rules make them unable not only to express themselves freely, but they also prevent individuals from seeing other facets of life as well as other beautiful things beyond them. Hence Stephen wants “the mind of man independent of all religion” and of the pettiness, treacheries and vindictiveness of Irish nationalism and politics (324). Through his representation of Stephen, Joyce shows us his own break up with the Catholic Church, but he also encounters the loss of a world of public values. David Daiches argues that the major pre-Jamesian novelists such as Fielding, Richardson, Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, Trollope, Hardy and Meredith tend to leave us with a sense of public significance, a sense that objective moral judgment is both possible and necessary, a sense that the norms of their fictional worlds share a common ground of public values, but Daiches continues to assert that modernist writers, James, Conrad, Ford, Lawrence, Joyce and Woolf, tend to leave us adrift, to cut us off from judgments based upon shared moral standards in society. In Daiches’s view, modernist writers cannot share a common solution to the problems of the twentieth century, yet each pursues their own unique solution to their modern experiences by showing us that it is not possible to build up a common view of life (Daiches, 1967: 5). Dorothy Van Ghent makes a similar comment:

In a time of crisis, traditional values no longer seem to match at any point with the actualities of experience, and when all reality is therefore thrown into question, the mind turns inward on itself to seek the shape of reality there - for the thinking and feeling man cannot live without some coherent schematization of reality. Here at least - in one's own memory, emotion and thought - is empirical ground for such an investigation (1953: 263).

These two views may suggest that a modernist novel, unlike a traditional one, leaves the reader adrift when there is no publicly shared common ground. Thus, it will be impossible for the reader to reach a final judgment of both reality and life. Van Ghent continues to argue that the date 1914 for Joyce's *A Portrait* conveys its own apparent implication: it marks “a time of shocking disclosure of the failure of the social environment as a trustworthy carrier of values” (1953: 263). Indeed, Joyce develops a view of the alienation of the artist in the complexity of the early twentieth century. For him, the artist must be outside all the conventions and all normal society. This view has two reasons. First, those conventions and society that Joyce found in Dublin represented a “paralysis”, a dead set of gestures having no meaning in terms of genuine human experience. Secondly, the artist must be outside society in order to be objective: he must be objective if he is to adopt the peculiar microcosmic view, which is the way that enables Joyce, like Virginia Woolf in *Orlando* (1928), to solve the complex modern problems. Therefore, Stephen as a

modern artist yearns for remaining outside and thus critical of “nets” of society without integrating himself into its limiting and narrowing rules. He rejects them deeply and thoroughly. Moreover, as an outsider he is also disinterested in rituals and moral values, which confine and manifest to his life a form, a unity and direction. However, Joyce's views, like that of Woolf, do not imply a turning away from the politics and social issues of his own time. When Stephen gains psychologically more freedom and becomes bolder in his mind, he turns round on politics and religion to question the status quo and its social code that control him. For him, therefore, “a retreat...signifies a withdrawal for a while from the cares of our life, the cares of this workaday world, in order to examine the state of conscience, to reflect on the mysteries of holy religion and to understand better why we are here in this world” (Joyce, 1961: 256).

Joyce makes use of his fictional character, Stephen, both to explore an oppositional way of perceiving the world to that of religion and nationalism and to offer a modernist representation of personality as complex, diffuse and unfixed. Stephen's fluid uncertainty is the opposite of Dante and Cranly's coherent views of life, religion and politics. The uncertainty and complexity of Stephen's view derives predominantly from his deep concern about life. Indeed, the novel explores the culturally determined view of life in the early decades of the twentieth century. As he explains to his friend, Davin, Stephen desires to escape from this dim view of Irish culture:

This race and this country and this life produced me...The soul is born...It has a slow and dark birth, more mysteriously than the birth of the body. When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, and religion. I shall try to fly by those nets (327).

Joyce focuses upon two such “nets” in terms of the construction of identity in society. On the one hand, he emphasizes that they are prescribed specific rules in the late nineteenth-century Victorian Irish society, which shape individuals as autonomous and fixed. Individuals have to admit a particular identity given to them by society and culture, and thus they are not allowed to be free to determine their own lives, to express themselves freely, but the existing “nets” of society force them to accept what they are given. In this respect, Joyce's representation of Dante and Cranly becomes not a mere debate of their individual views but a wider consideration of the structure of Irish society and of its politics, a consideration focused on the issues of individual identity, politics and religion. On the other hand, Joyce endows young Stephen with a strong desire to transcend this culturally determined view of life; he enables his character to gain the expansion of his views by directing his passion and energy towards another quality of life, a quality which is related to the visionary imagination or the inner (subjective) world as in the Romantics. Thus, this quality provides Stephen with the means of enlarging and going beyond a psychologically restricted sense of life. He endeavors to gain intellectual freedom or what he calls “aesthetic intellection” by forsaking “absurdity which is logical and coherent” and embracing “one which is illogical and incoherent” (314, 359): Stephen “wanted to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld” (p. 222).



The view that Stephen favors “unsubstantial”, “illogical and incoherent” in life suggests clearly a modernist perception of identity as fluid and uncertain. This view of life as “fluid and impersonal” frees him from the enclosure of the fixed self. It gives Stephen an understanding that the largeness will suffice for him to harmonize the spiritual and fleshly sides of his nature with the outer world. Moreover, it will also enable him to rise above the vulgarity of his environment, particularly above the “nets” of society: “A new wild life [sings] in his veins”, and he cries, “to greet the advent of the life that had cried to him” continuously (301, 303).

Stephen's view of “a new wild life” rejects the “race” and “country” that strive to construct him. For the sake of this “new life”, indeed, he refuses decisively what constrains him. Thus, he speaks frankly of his rejection when his friend, Cranly, asks him about his “point of view” of life:

Look here, Cranly, he said. You have asked me what I would do and I would not do. I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use - silence, exile and cunning...I will tell you also what I do not fear. I do not fear to be alone to be spurned for another or to leave whatever I have to leave. And I am not afraid to make a mistake, even a great mistake, and a lifelong mistake and perhaps as long as eternity too...I will take the risk...(362).

Clearly Stephen demands freedom, in which he can be creative as an artist. Having rejected his home, country and church, therefore, he remains outside of the dominant cultural, political and religious “nets” of society. In *A Portrait*, the Romantic yearning for such a utopian “new wild life” becomes a dream of change for Stephen. Throughout the novel, Stephen is presented to us with an “intimacy and immediacy” (Stewart, 1960: 18). He often feels himself “drifting amid life like the barren shell of the moon” (Joyce, 1961: 245). He seeks privately a new view of life that will soothe his complex and anxious feelings. The reader thus chases him through the stages of breakdown and increasing confusion in his external environment as he sees the inherited values as shattering; Catholic Church loses its authority over his emotion. When he starts Clongowes Wood College in chapter I, for example, Stephen finds himself amid Irish nationalists, who had rebelled against the British presence in Ireland. But he becomes disturbed due to the fact that the politics has divided people enormously. In his view, they always stay within the vicious circle of argument and division without transcending themselves for the beauty of life. This view of politics both pains and makes him feel himself “small and weak”. What Stephen longs for in life is to become “like the fellows in poetry and rhetoric” as free even though “that was very far away” (184). In the next three chapters, therefore, Joyce represents Stephen in a way that he abandons Irish nationalism, politics and religion:

He mistrusted the turbulence and doubted the sincerity of...comradeship, which seemed to him a sorry anticipation of manhood. The question of honor here raised was, like all such questions, trivial to him. While his mind had been pursuing its *intangible phantoms* and turning in irresolution from such pursuit he had heard about him the constant voices of his father and of his master, urging him to be a gentleman above all things and urging him to be a catholic above all things. These voices had

now come to be hollow sounding in his ears. When the gymnasium had been opened he had heard another voice urging him to be strong and manly and healthy and when the movement towards national revival had begun to be felt in the college yet another voice had bidden him to be true to his country and help to rise up her language and tradition. In the profound world, as he foresaw, a worldly voice would bid him raise up his father's fallen state by his labors and, meanwhile, the voice of his school comrades urged him to be a decent fellow, to shield others from blame or to beg them off and to do his best to get free days for the school. And it was the din of all these hollow sounding voices that made him halt irresolutely in the pursuit of phantoms. He gave them ear only for a time but he was happy only when he was far from them, beyond their call, alone or in the company of phantasmal comrades (236).

In the quotation, Joyce clearly represents the whole condition of Stephen as a modernist character. Stephen is not coherent and fixed, yet he constantly vacillates between the “hollow sounding” voices, which desires him to be like a person that society demands and his own chase of “the intangible phantoms” or “another voice” that will lessen his oscillation in life. Hence Stephen is unable to establish a stable and harmonious view of life throughout *A Portrait*. This suggests his fragmentation as he fluctuates constantly between these two desires. Through this representation, Joyce, like Woolf, shows us that human identity is not something that can be grasped and described easily. Stephen is not only unknown to himself but also to those around him. His life is entangled in his desire, frustration and intense awareness of the complexity of life. After reviewing and examining his own life with regard to the hollow sounding voices of his father, his school friends and country, Stephen comes to realize that cultural and religious values of Irish society cannot be solutions to his perception of life. Thus, he must deny the hollow sounding voices other than the “intangible phantoms”. The image of Stephen's vision as 'intangible phantoms' cannot be described as it is simultaneous, poetical and incommunicable in words, yet what is important for him is to assert what he is through these “intangible phantoms”. He refuses the hollow sounding voices of what limits him, so that he realizes the need to escape these voices of nationalism, politics and religion. On the other hand, the views of “a new wild life”, “intangible phantoms” and “another voice” fascinate him; he feels that he may get rid of the tutelage of the Jesuits as well as of the mental separation and division only by taking refuge in these views. Stephen's yearning for “a new wild life”, “intangible phantoms” or “another voice” in a free world projects an image of another life and identity in a perfect future.

For the “another voice” of life, therefore, Joyce focuses upon the subjective experience of his character, which transforms his life into art. The fragmentation and vacillation is a basic condition of Joyce's artistic creativity, since he is in the process of re-constructing and re-working these fragments into “the essence of beauty” (306): “to live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life” (303). Like Woolf, Joyce sees the task of the modernist writers as creating out of fragments. In *A Portrait*, for example, Stephen explains Joyce's view of art to Lynch:

We are right...and the others are wrong. To speak of these things and to try to understand their nature, and having understood it, to try slowly and humbly and constantly to express, to press out again, from the gross earth or what it brings forth, from sound and shape and colour which are the prison gates of our soul, an image of

the beauty we have come to understand - that is art...Art...is human disposition of sensible or intelligible matter for an aesthetic end (330).

“The object of the artist”, Stephen explains, is to create “beautiful” (314). The “aesthetic intellection” or art means not only Stephen's way of life but also a criticism of the life he has known so far. Through art, he desires to analyze and perceive life aesthetically. Having moved outside himself and the boundaries of politics, nationalism and religion of Irish society, Stephen perceives “his soul...in flight” (301). The creative impulse enables Stephen not only to escape from the bleak vision of life but also to represent “a progressive attempt to build a free self out of the plethora of influences, impulses and discourses which [he] experiences” (Brown, 1989: 36). The view of “a free self” not only subverts the basis of fixed identity, but it will also provide him with imaginative or poetic understanding of his world and life, a “mode of life or of art whereby...[his] spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom” (Joyce, 1961: 361).

The imaginative and poetic inspiration to apprehend life and reality permeates Stephen's thoughts throughout *A Portrait*. Joyce endows him with the creative impulse to escape from the bleak vision of the present moment caused by his anger: “the causes of his embitterment were many, remote and near. 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” (223). The imaginative vision thus enables him to find a world of peace and harmony when he is impatient with the meanness and sordidity of his country, family, religion and nationalism. As a child at Clongowes Wood School, Stephen likens “nice sentences” in “Doctor Cornwell's Spelling Book” to “poetry” (179). Moreover, Stephen, unlike other boys, likes and writes poetry on the flyleaf of his geography book about the universe. Through the vision created by poetry, he longs for transcending the actual universe and seeks a new relation or life beyond it:

What was after the universe? Nothing. But was there anything round the universe to show where it stopped before the nothing place began? It could not be a wall but there could be a thin line there all rounds everything. It was very big to think about everything and everywhere. Only God could do that. He tried to think what a big thought that must be; but he could think only of God. God was God's name just as his name was Stephen (183-4).

In addition, when he is at the university college in Dublin, Stephen constantly reads the poetry of the past, the poetry of Aristotle, Plato and Aquinas (306, 314, 331-2) as well as the poetry of Romantic poets, Lord Byron and Shelley, in which he not only becomes able to stand back from life and to achieve a symbolic distance from the limitation of self, but he also imagines and desires to find a sense of unity and harmony under his uncertain, fragmented and confused feelings (pp. 226, 246, 335). Stephen is profoundly influenced by the views of these poets. For him, they were highly imaginative, poetic and creative, which enabled them to catch “the beauty” as “the splendor of truth” in their writings (331). For example, Stephen writes, “some essay about beauty” (334). In his essay, he tries to create “universal beauty” and poetic harmony just as Aquinas represented in his writings, especially in *Summa*

*Theologica*. While explaining the meaning of the beauty to Lynch, Stephen appears clearly excited by Aquinas's views of universal beauty and wholeness: "...the most satisfying relations of the sensible must...correspond to the necessary phases of artistic apprehension. Find these and you find the qualities of universal beauty. Aquinas says: *Three things are needed for beauty, wholeness, harmony and radiance*. Do these correspond to the phases of apprehension?"(334). Like Aquinas, Shelley retains a significant fascination for Stephen as an imaginative poet. Stephen is deeply involved in a continuous reading of Shelley throughout *A Portrait*. When he perceives the external world as chaotic and fragmented, Stephen "repeated to himself the lines of Shelley's fragments: Art thou pale for weariness / Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth, / wandering companionship..." (246). Moreover, Stephen refers to Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (1840) while describing the mind of the artist to Lynch:

The artist feels this supreme quality when the aesthetic image is first conceived in his imagination. The mind in that mysterious instant Shelley likened beautifully to a fading coal. The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the aesthetic 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 aesthetic pleasure...(335)

Through the poetic vision or aesthetic apprehension, the artist becomes "like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails" (337).

The poetic vision and aesthetic apprehension becomes very important for Stephen, providing him with the capacity to escape both the limitation of his home, country, church and agony in an age, which Woolf describes in *The Years* (1937) "loosened screws and made the whole apparatus of the mind rattle and jingle" (1968: 261). Moreover, this vision makes him bold and enables him to gain freedom, in which he will be able to express himself freely, rather than accepting what he is ascribed by society and its culture.

In *A Portrait*, the representation of Stephen becomes a means for Joyce to represent a view of self in crisis in the early decades of the twentieth century. He does not represent Stephen as complete and coherence throughout the novel. Stephen is continuously seen either as revolting against the cultural, political, family and religious establishment in the late nineteenth-century Irish society or as fragmented and fluid in his desires of freedom, intellectual beauty and harmony. But he is unable to get them within the existing values. Hence Stephen is a whirlpool where all possible descriptions are broken down, and all his struggles are not to find himself in any pre-given framework of life. He rejects all ideological, cultural and religious pressures and "nets" of society to express himself freely, because these traditional values demand a sense of identity, which is limited, fixed and static with boundaries surrounding people. Stephen thus isolates himself extremely from society, which fails to be an objective, stable validation to inherited structures of belief, yet he prefers "to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld" (Joyce, 1961: 222). The view of "the unsubstantial image" disrupts clearly the boundaries of "logical and coherent" worldview of life

(359). Instead of the identity and meaning constructed by traditional values, Stephen strives to discover his own vocation as subjective in life: he tries to find out his own meaning of life by means of intellectual analysis, rather than accepting blindly the “nets” of society. In *A Portrait*, Joyce suggests that the traditional stability of character dissolves and disappears, giving way to a view of identity as indeterminate, unfinished, insubstantial, vague and inconclusive in accordance with the varying and complex modern experience.

#### REFERENCES

- CRUMP, I. (1992). “Refining himself out of existence: the evolution of Joyce's aesthetic theory and the drafts of *A Portrait*”, *Joyce in Context*, Vincent J. Cheng and Timothy Martin (eds), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- DAICHES, D. (1967). *The Novel and the Modern World*, Chicago: Phoenix Books.
- JOYCE, J. (1961). *The Essential James Joyce*, London: Jonathan Cape.
- KETTLE, A. (1969). “The Consistency of James Joyce”, *The Pelican Guide to English Literature: The Modern Age*, Boris Ford (ed), Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- RIQUELME, J. P. (1993) “*Stephen Hero, Dubliners, and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: styles of realism and fantasy”, *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*, Derek Attridge, (ed), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- STEWART, J. I. M. (1960). *James Joyce*, London: Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd.
- THORNTON, W. (1999). *The Antimodernism of Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press.
- VAN GHENT, D. (1953). *The English Novel: Form and Function*, London: Harper Torchbooks.
- WOOLF, V. (1948). “Modern Fiction”, *The Common Reader: First Series*, London: The Hogarth Press.
- (1966), “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown”, *Collected Essay*, Leonard Woolf (ed), Vol. 1, London: Chatto & Windus.
- (1968), *The Years*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.