

James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is a novel of complex themes developed through frequent allusions to classical mythology. The myth of Daedalus and Icarus serves as a structuring element in the novel, uniting the central themes of individual rebellion and discovery, producing a work of literature that illuminates the motivations of an artist, and the development of his individual philosophy.

James Joyce chose the name Stephen Dedalus to link his hero with the mythical Greek hero, Daedalus. In Greek myth, Daedalus was an architect, inventor, and artisan. By request of King Minos, Daedalus built a labyrinth on Crete to contain a monster called the Minotaur, half bull and half man. Later, for displeasing the king, Daedalus and his son Icarus were both confined in this labyrinth, which was so complex that even its creator could not find his way out. Instead, Daedalus fashioned wings of wax and feathers so that he and his son could escape. When Icarus flew too high -- too near the sun -- in spite of his father's warnings, his wings melted, and he fell into the sea and drowned. His more cautious father flew to safety (World Book 3). By using this myth in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (*Portrait of the Artist*), Joyce succeeds in giving definitive treatment to an archetype that was well established long before the twentieth century (Beebe 163).

The Daedalus myth gives a basic structure to *Portrait of the Artist*. From the beginning, Stephen, like most young people, is caught in a maze, just as his namesake Daedalus was. The schools are a maze of corridors; Dublin is a maze of streets. Stephen's mind itself is a convoluted maze filled with dead ends and circular reasoning (Hackett 203):

Met her today point blank in Grafton Street. The crowd brought us together. We both stopped. She asked me why I never came, said she had heard all sorts of stories about me. This was only to gain time. Asked me, was I writing poems? About whom? I asked her. This confused her more and I felt sorry and mean. Turned off that valve at once and opened the spiritual-heroic refrigerating apparatus, invented and patented in all countries by Dante Alighieri. (Joyce 246)

Life poses riddles at every turn. Stephen roams the labyrinth searching his mind for answers (Gorman 204). The only way out seems to be to soar above the narrow confines of the prison, as did Daedalus and his son. In *Portrait of the Artist*, the world presses on Stephen. His own thoughts are melancholy, his proud spirit cannot tolerate the painful burden of reality. In the end, he must rise above it (Farrell 206).

At first, Stephen does not understand the significance of his unusual name. He comes to realize, by the fourth chapter, that like Daedalus he is caught in a maze:

Every part of his day, divided by what he regarded now as the duties of his station in life, circled about its own centre of spiritual energy. His life seemed to have drawn near to eternity; every thought, word and deed, every instance of consciousness could be made to revibrate radiantly in heaven... (Joyce 142)

Throughout the novel, Joyce freely exploits the symbolism of the name (Kenner 231). If he wants to be free, Daedalus must fly high above the obstacles in his path.

Like the father Daedalus and the son Icarus, Stephen seeks a way out of his restraints. In Stephen's case, these are family, country and religion. In a sense, *Portrait of the Artist* is a search for identity; Stephen searches for the meaning of his strange name (Litz 70). Like Daedalus, he will fashion his own wings -- of poetry, not of wax -- as a creative artist. But at times Stephen feels like Icarus, the son who, if he does not heed his father's advice, may die for his stubborn pride (Litz 71). At the end of *Portrait of the Artist*, he seems to be calling on a substitute, spiritual parent for support, when he refers to Daedalus

as "old father, old artificer." (Joyce 247), (Ellman 16). Even at Stephen's moment of highest decision, he thinks of himself as a direct descendant of his namesake Daedalus (Litz 71).

Stephen's past is important only because it serves as the fuel of the present. Everything that Stephen does in his present life feeds off the myth of Daedalus and Icarus, making him what he is (Peake 82). When he wins social acceptance by his schoolmates at Clongowes, he does so by acting deliberately in isolation -- much as Daedalus in his many endeavors: "They made a cradle of their locked hands and hoisted him up among them and carried him along till he struggled to get free" (Joyce 52). When he reports Father Dolan to the Rector, he defends his name, the symbol of his identity (Peake 71):
It was wrong; it was unfair and cruel: and, as he sat in the refectory, he suffered time after time in memory the same humiliation until he began to wonder whether it might not really be that there was something in his face which made him look like a schemer and he wished he had a little mirror to see. But there could not be; and it was unjust and cruel and unfair.
(Joyce 47)

The myth's pattern of flight and fall also gives shape to the novel. Each chapter ends with an attempted flight, leading into a partial failure or fall at the beginning of the next chapter. The last chapter ends with the most ambitious attempt, to fly away from home, religion, and nation to a self-imposed artistic exile (Wells 252): "Welcome, O life! I go 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 247). By keeping his audience in doubt as to whether Stephen is Icarus or Daedalus, Joyce attains a control that is sustained through the rhythm of the novel's action, the movements of its language, and the presiding myth of Daedalus and Icarus (Litz 72).

Stephen Dedalus is not Joyce's alter-ego, but another paralyzed victim of the Dublin environment (Kenner 229). Stephen's environment is what confines him to a world lacking in creativity and innovation: "He wandered up and down the dark slimy streets peering into the gloom of lanes and doorways, listening eagerly for any sound. He moaned to himself like some baffled prowling beast." (Joyce 93). Stephen's ultimate rebellion is a classic example of a young person's struggle against the conformity demanded of him by society (Grose 242). The young Stephen possesses a childish faith in his family, his religion, and his country. As he matures, he comes to feel these institutions are attempting to destroy his independent spirit. He must escape them to find himself (Ellman 15).

Stephen alone continually discards the scripts or plans he has been handed. Dutiful son, docile student, repentant priest -- he refuses all of these titles in the name of creativity. Stephen's ancient namesake did much the same, rejecting the classical society of ancient Greece, and opting for a more unconventional life as an artist (Brandabur 161). Stephen's spiritual struggle is one involving the acceptance or rejection of this ordered other world (Farrell 207).

Stephen's rebellion is directed against numerous opponents. One is his father, Simon Dedalus. As Stephen discovers that his father is a drunken, ineffectual failure, much in contrast to the Daedalus of myth, he rejects his authority:

Stephen watched the three glasses being raised from the counter as his father and two of his cronies drank to the memory of their past. An abyss of fortune or temperament sundered him from them. His mind seemed older than theirs: it shone coldly on their strifes and happiness and regrets like a moon upon a younger earth. No life or youth stirred in him as it had stirred in them. He had known neither the pleasure of companionship with others nor the vigour of rude male health nor filial piety.
(Joyce 89)

Even though Stephen may envy his father somewhat, he is constantly trying to prevent himself from accepting even the most casual and insignificant suggestions

of his companions and his environment (Peake 78).

Stephen also rejects the bonds of a religion that restricts his natural impulses. From the beginning, the consciousness of Stephen Dedalus is dominated by the presence of the church and its priests (Adams 235). Catholicism imposes a burden of guilt that weighs him down. He must "admit" and "confess" and "apologize" (Joyce 2) even when he feels innocent. By rejecting Catholicism, Stephen is also rejecting his devoutly religious mother. Stephen needs an arena adequate for his talents, seeing no future for himself unless he rebels, contradicting the long-standing customs of his country (Farrell 207).

Stephen's rebellion is also directed against his native land. Dirty, backward Ireland destroys any of its children who show creativity; it is, he says, "a sow that eats her farrow." (Joyce 176). His classmates attempt to reform Ireland through political action and promotion of native literature. Stephen rejects these attempts as futile and backward-looking: "Old phrases, sweet only with a disinterested sweetness like the fig seeds Cranly rooted out of his gleaming teeth." (Joyce 227). Instead, Stephen abandons Ireland and looks toward the continent (Farrell 208).

To be complete, Stephen must fill the void created by his rebellion, and create his own character. Sadly, the result is the character study of an arrogant, unhappy egotist, an intensely self-absorbed young man. An egotist is interested only in the self, and is intensely critical of other people and the world. This can be said of Stephen, who feels superior and finds it hard to care for others, even for his own family (Litz 72). It is equally hard for him to accept affection or love from others:

His lips would not bend to kiss her. He wanted to be held firmly in her arms, to be caressed slowly, slowly, slowly. In her arms he felt that he had suddenly become strong and fearless and sure of himself. But his lips would not bend to kiss her.

(Joyce 94-5)

From his early school days on, Stephen is at the edge of group life, observing himself. As he grows older, he becomes even more absorbed in his own ideas until he finally withdraws from his familiar surroundings (Brandabur 159).

In contrast, it is also Stephen's acceptance of his own sinfulness that sets him free. Guilt and fear of punishment keep him in a sterile, pale world of virtue where he is always hounded by the pressure to confess, admit, or apologize (Drew 276). By committing a mortal sin of impurity and falling from grace like Adam from Paradise, like Lucifer expelled from Heaven, or even like Icarus from freedom, he is thrust back into the earthly world of the senses, a world that releases his creative powers (Booth 227):

Could it be that he, Stephen Dedalus, had done these things? His conscience sighed in answer. Yes, he had done them, secretly, filthily, time after time and, hardened in sinful impenitence, he had dared to wear the mask of holiness before the tabernacle itself while his soul within was a living mass of corruption. How came it that God had not struck him dead?

(Joyce 131)

Stephen will sin again and again, but instead of confessing he will write. Stephen's metaphoric descent into hell, like his ascent into an aesthetic heaven, is private, uniquely vouchsafed him by a higher power (Pope 114). Stephen is the son of Dedalus, and what the son of Daedalus did was fall. It seems clear that Stephen sees himself as a figure who, even if he heeds his father's advice, will eventually fly too high and fall (Kenner 231).

Living in the earthly world, Stephen fears many things. He has a fear of water (also giving allusion to Icarus' demise) since he views it as an emblem of his own futility. Ironically it is the seaside epiphany, where he sees a beautiful young girl, which awakens him to the demands of life (Litz 68): "She passed now dancing lightly across his memory as she had been that night at the carnival ball, her white dress a little lifted, a white spray nodding in her hair." (Joyce 213) Once Stephen can no longer remain at ease in the role of an artist, he can begin to be human (Brandabur 164).

Stephen's pride is also a cause of his isolation. From the beginning, pride -- a mortal sin -- keeps him away from others (Drew 276). He yearns for "order and elegance" in his life. He feels superior to his family and to his peers. He feels superior to his country, and consequently attempts to improve it (Hackett 203). In the end, pride drives him to lonely exile. Increasingly Stephen denies his actual family in Dublin so as to assume kinship with his eponymous family in Greece: Began with a discussion with my mother. . . Said religion was not a lying-in hospital. Mother indulgent. Said I have a queer mind and have read too much. Not true. Have read little and understood less. The she said I would have to come back to faith because I had a restless mind. This means to leave church by backdoor of sin and reenter through the skylight of repentance. Cannot repent. (Joyce 243)

In essence, Stephen becomes less and less Dedalus, and more and more Daedalus (Ellman 16). Is Stephen's pride justified by his talent? Is it merely selfish? Has pride driven him to a fall, as it did Icarus and Lucifer? Joyce uses uncertainties like these to involve his audience in the changing themes of the novel.

In *Portrait of the Artist*, a mature artist looks back over his youth, perceiving what was significant to his development, estimating what was vital and what was transitory in that evolvment (Peake 56). Using this to his advantage, Joyce extends and intensifies Stephen's alienation, for the overpoweringly monotonous and constrictive society in which he resides provide him the best conditions under which he can best work (Beebe 163).

Thus, by observing and graphically depicting what confines man, how man overcomes this confinement, and how man lives once he is free, James Joyce discusses the motivations and the outlets for human expression. Like Daedalus and Icarus, Stephen Dedalus assumes the role of a persecuted hero, who must overcome his personal weaknesses and the oppression of his environment to gain spiritual enlightenment.

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